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Universalities in Crisis: Parenthood and Paternity at the End of the Line

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An abstract of a dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
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Abstract

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Responding to the ongoing debate over the influential twentieth century French sociologist Philippe Ariès's "Parental Indifference Hypothesis," this inquiry takes as its object the question of whether or not parental mourning for deceased children is a human universal or instead a matter of cultural contingency. In terms of the multiple disciplinary perspectives this dissertation deploys, and the number of global literary traditions it surveys, the breadth and depth of this investigation into parental child loss is unprecedented. Reading texts written in over a dozen languages in scores of genres over the course of nearly three millennia, I juxtapose efforts to arbitrate the universality of parental mourning as an empirical question with a wide range of literary representations of child loss, with a particular emphasis on texts (canonical and otherwise) produced by authors who have personally lost children themselves. I also demonstrate how ostensibly objective discourses surrounding the question of parental mourning, from the neurosciences to attachment psychology to anthropology and more, are fundamentally motivated by a set of normative preoccupations that have properly philosophical implications for any thinking of universality itself. The dominant Western notion of universality, I argue, hinges upon a model of the human capacity to know the experiences of others and of the transmission of knowledge across generational boundaries that is ultimately structured in terms of personal legacies, parental lineages, and patriarchal inheritance. Yet even rigorously philosophical writers on universality have joined centuries of poets and diarists and epitaph inscribers in insisting that their personal experiences of losing children remain fundamentally incommunicable. I take this paradox seriously and propose a rethinking of universality in terms of universally shared experiences of loss and vulnerability that nonetheless remain radically singular.

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Acknowledgments

This dissertation is preoccupied with the question of legacies and influences that are at once abstract and personal, emotional and intellectual, pedagogical and familial, singular and yet universal. A recurrent theme is that such distinctions are far less rigid than we might often think, and that measuring the impact of others – both present and absent – on our lives and work defies easy accounting and communication. It thus only follows that exhaustively thanking everyone who helped bring this project into being would be as impossible as fully articulating the depth and meaning of each of those individual relationships: when it comes to expressing true gratitude, as with true mourning and true love, words ultimately and inevitably fall short. Nonetheless, while acknowledging this inevitable insufficiency of such expressions, I must thank those without whose influence, patience, attentiveness, and care none of this would have been possible.

First and foremost, I thank my committee. From the start, my Chair and Advisor, Jill Robbins, challenged me to produce an ambitious project above and beyond my own, more modest initial plans; her feedback and influence as an erudite reader and meticulous hermeneutician proved invaluable to that process. John Dunne's deep commitment to dialogue between the humanities and the sciences, to radically questioning the concept of experience, and to engaging with texts beyond the Western canon, was essential throughout, as were his tireless advocacy on my behalf and his trenchant advice on dealing with the various (figurative) demons that arise during the dissertating process. Above all, I owe an incalculable debt of gratitude to Shoshana Felman, whose mentorship over the course of the past eight years has provided me with a model of rigorous close-reading, committed pedagogy, and sympathetic attunement to those vital things that authors and students alike

cannot fully speak or write, but manage to convey – or at least suggest – regardless. It has been a rare honor and a formative privilege not just to simply know such brilliant people, but to study and work under their direction.

I am also deeply grateful for the influence of other teachers and administrators at Emory. Robert Paul of the Emory Psychoanalytic Institute and ILA provided me with superlative source material, counsel, and an unparalleled askesis in reading with a clinical psychoanalytic eye. At the Institute, I am likewise thankful to have studied with Steven Levy, Andrew Furman, Shannon Croft, Mickey Nardo, Ralph Roughton, Jane Yates, and Yudit Jung, all of whose clinical insights into the psychodynamics of attachment, mourning, trauma, parenthood, and more have been vital to my work. Outside the Institute, but still at Emory, I am honored to have worked with Wendy Farley, who first introduced me to Schleiermacher, and with Bob McCauley, whose influence on this project encompasses both exposing me to Colin Turnbull's work on the Ik and to the multi-disciplinary literature cataloguing human universals. I am also thankful for the administrators – Dean Lisa Tedesco, Senior Associate Dean Cathryn Johnson, and Assistant Deans Rosemary Hynes and Ulf Nilsson – who helped support my research through an LGS Fellowship. Within the Comparative Literature Department, Alian Teach saved the day for me so regularly, and with such deceptive effortlessness, that I remain in awe. Collaborating with Jason Francisco, formerly of Visual Arts, helped ground and maintain my sanity as I work, and the acutely humane counsel and fundamental kindness of Elena Glazov-Corrigan of CPLT and Kevin Corrigan of the ILA buoyed me through the darkest moments of grappling with both this dissertation and more besides: *sed me per hostis illi celer denso pauentem sustulerunt aere.*

Beyond Emory, other teachers deserve recognition not just for their direct and substantial impact on this project itself, but for fundamentally shaping how I learned to write

and read as a scholar. Evelyne Ender, my advisor during my time at Harvard, offered feedback on multiple aspects of the dissertation project, generously gave me key source material, and has remained an inspiration as a scholar and human being for well over a decade. Eyal Peretz, with whom I also studied as undergraduate, gave me a model for incisively to-the-point, hyper-precise literary critical praxis, and provided valuable feedback on my Prospectus. Eyal also solicited my translation of work by François Jullien, which turned me on to the possibility of interrogating the concept of universality on a level of meta-theoretical abstraction without sacrificing specificity or respect for difference in the process. Although I lament never having studied with her directly, the work and legacy of Barbara Johnson has been enormously influential on multiple levels in shaping not just this project, but also for my understanding of creativity, the practice and value of literary criticism, biographical attunement, and the power of words even when pushed to their limits and beyond.

On a more personal level, I owe a tremendous amount to my colleagues, fellow students, peers, friends, and others who helped me in countless ways, both directly tied to this project and otherwise. Katherine Bryant deserves my heartfelt recognition and gratitude, not just as an interlocutor – particularly regarding my neuroscientific, primatological, and evolutionary biological source material – but for much more besides. Among the members of my Training cadre at the Psychoanalytic Institute, Stefanie Speanburg consistently supported and impressed me with her brilliance and compassion, and provided priceless advice in approaching the dissertation process. Phil Klay and Nicholas Edwards also contributed crucially to this effort through offering much-needed editorial advice on my Schleiermacher Chapter and general material assistance, respectively. By the same token, neither this project nor my PhD would have been completed without the unflagging trust,

empathy, and insight of Ellie Cale. In a very different way, Louis Martin and Faizal Patel also kept me sane throughout my time in Atlanta and beyond, and my affection and gratitude for them is as close as I have come to knowing what love between brothers might be like.

Finally, I owe thanks to my partner and to my family. A brilliant scholar in her own right, Abby Kluchin is also the best editor I have ever had: she trudged through multiple drafts of this manuscript (to the point where any infelicities that remain are my fault alone) and endured interminable hours of my ruminating on its contents (no matter how disturbing) all while showing me indefatigable care and support. Moreover, it was in fact an excerpt of this text, which I delivered as a paper at a conference where Abby was my respondent, that led us to first cross paths in a meaningful way: the paradox is not lost on me that, from an endeavor this grim and shot through with premature endings and heartbreak, a new horizon of possibility and hopes for a happy future with my soon-to-be wife should be born. For their part, throughout my time in graduate school, my parents, Joseph Blanchfield, Anna Pieczara-Blanchfield, and my sister, Bernadette Blanchfield, have shown me bottomless generosity, patience, and love. I cannot overstate my appreciation and indebtedness to my family for this and for so much more besides. I dedicate this dissertation to them, to Daniel Blanchfield (1960-1979), to Giovanni Bellissimo (1986-2006), and to the others – too many others to count, too many to name. May they and the ones they have left behind achieve some measure of peace.

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Introduction

1. *Twinned Questions*

Two questions, each deeply related to the other. First, what is it *like* to lose a child? And, second, what does it *mean* to lose a child?

What is it like to lose a child? What is it like to go from bringing a human being into the world to then witnessing them leave it? What is it like to be a parent and then no longer to be one? Common sense suggests that the experience of losing a child is doubtless different for everyone, or at least as varied as there are different ways of being a parent and of having a child. Perhaps mothers experience the death of their children differently than do fathers; perhaps the experiences of adoptive parents are different still from those of biological ones. Perhaps the experience of losing a child depends largely on the circumstances of their death, on their age, on whether or not they have siblings, or even on whether they are a boy or a girl. Perhaps, ultimately, the experience of losing a child is unique for every parent, as singular as their particular relationship to the individual child in question. And yet – one seems compelled to insist – we *must* be able to venture something about what it's like to lose a child, if only that it must be horrible. Stipulating some sort of response to such a paradigmatically tragic event feels urgently necessary even as the mind reels from contemplation or questioning, and perhaps precisely because it does. If someone tells you that their child has just died, the instinctive, socially prescribed response is "I'm so sorry!" not "So how does that make you feel?" But whence this urgency, why the force of this taboo?

Like few other things, imagining the experience of losing a child provokes a strong affective reaction. This response implies operations of identification in two different senses of the word: first, an identification *with* a person (the bereaved parent), and second, the identification *of* an experience (the loss of a child). Whereas the first sense of identification is more psychological, an example of sympathy – a consoling, commiserative relation to a person who is suffering – the status of the latter identification, which seems to involve identification as a kind of denomination of another person's experience, is more problematic. For if 'sympathy' is technically speaking a gesture of "feeling-with" that does not require directly participating in the exact same circumstances as the person with whom you sympathize, understanding *what* they are experiencing seems to presume an *empathetic* operation – a "feeling-into," a vantage of insight into their interiority, a shared perspective on their affective landscape. True empathy, in other words, involves knowing what someone else is going through because you've had the same experience yourself. But in the modern era, child mortality is lower than it has ever been, at least in the developed world.[1] And yet even as the number of parents who have actually lost a child has, comparatively speaking, grown exceedingly small, the loss of a child has come to be near-archetypally figured as "every parent's worst nightmare."[2]

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[1] A brief analysis of this data, garnered from the United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, Population Estimates and Projects Section's World Population Prospects Report, appears in Chapter One below.

[2] A Google search performed on June 29, 2014 yields just under seven million distinct hints for "parent's worst nightmare," of which four million involve in occurrences of the word "loss" or "death"; only three hundred thousand involve "abuse." A Google Ngram search, which tracks the scanned contents of 3.5 million books published in English since the 1500s, shows a marked, consistently upward-trending spike for "parent's worst nightmare" beginning in the 1980s, while a search on the Corpus of Colloquial English, a 450 million word corpus of texts (largely news articles) extending from 1990-2012, reveals that the top collocates for "parent's worst nightmare" are death, loss, cancer, and murder – followed considerably behind by abuse, kidnapping, and running away.

"Every parent's worst nightmare." The phrase itself embodies a series of paradoxes. Per the implied logic, losing a child is a terror that haunts every parent, and yet it threatens each in what is perhaps the most private, shadowy phenomenon of interior life – as a bad dream. Moreover, unlike a phobia, which has a specific, granular trigger, and afflicts only certain people, this nightmare, at once abstract and singular, is readily attributed to *all* parents, even by people who do not themselves have children or who never will. Even if the term "nightmare" is a mere trope, lacking much in the way of actual descriptive content and instead functioning as an easy synonym for "a horrifying ordeal," it still *does* carry certain connotations – not least that losing a child is an event the emotional contours of which we seem driven to frame in universal, negative terms. When it comes to considering what it is like to lose a child, then, the distinction between identifying-*with* in a sympathetic mode and identifying-*what* in an empathetic one grows decidedly blurred, and a rhetoric of *universality* comes to the fore.

It is here that asking the first question – *What is it like to lose a child?* – transforms into the second: *What does it* mean *to lose a child*? The implied referent of this question (namely, what does it mean to whom?) is deliberately obscure, since meaning is at once a matter of individual experience, cultural construction, and, from certain philosophical perspectives, an issue of transcendent, absolute truths. Questioning what it means to lose a child implicates determinations of meaning on all these levels. The tendency of those who have never lost a child nonetheless to describe that experience, however tentatively, suggests that there is something at stake for them behind the scenes, a collective investment that drives people to stipulate what that losing a child *must* be like. Pinning down what the loss of a child means for a parent thus appears to hold meaning for yet other people, and perhaps for our culture as a whole. As Chapter One below addresses, research also shows that, for different cultures

over the course of history, the loss of a child has meant very different things. But the correlative implication – that the experience of what it is like to lose a child may be different to the point of unrecognizability depending on a parent's cultural and historical context – is a subject of heated dispute. This dispute extends beyond vagaries of cultural constructions to raise properly philosophical questions. Although bereaved parents themselves frequently describe the loss of a child as an encounter with a kind of meaninglessness (which is itself a paradoxically meaningful trope), for several academic disciplines and literary genres, the death of children functions as a nexus for various debated meanings, and, on a more philosophical level, as a flashpoint for contesting the scope and constraints of what meaning-making itself can encompass. This dissertation argues that, in all of these domains – from personal testimonies to sociological inquiries, from historical surveys to poetic elegies – the twin questions of what it is like to lose a child and what it means to lose one are intimately bound up with what could be termed "the problem of universality," and that attempts to sound these questions out inevitably unfold along that problem's axis.

This dissertation investigates parental mourning of deceased children precisely as a way of engaging the problem of universality. By "the problem of universality," I refer to the open question of whether or not various experiences, attitudes, and practices can be reasonably stipulated as "universal" to all humans, that is, as occurring more or less ubiquitously and eternally among human societies and individuals irrespective of the contingencies of historical moment and cultural context. Parental mourning of deceased children is salient to the problem of universality for several reasons. *Empirically*, the question of whether or not parents grieve for dead children in ways that are recognizable across variations in history and culture has been a live anthropological and sociological debate since the work of the influential French historian Philippe Ariès (1914-1984). Ariès famously

postulated a "parental indifference hypothesis" whereby parental grief for deceased children is held to be a time-bound, culturally specific phenomenon that emerged with a decrease in child mortality rates in the Early Modern era and only came into its own during the nineteenth century with the advent of Romantic ideologies of emotion and a related "Cult of Childhood." For Ariès, parental grief for deceased children is not a human universal, but instead ultimately determined by demographic and cultural contingencies. As I will address in my first chapter, Ariès' hypothesis has been intensely contested since he first articulated it in the 1960s, and various twentieth-century case studies that appear to put his claim to the test have themselves provoked intense backlash.

Framing the question of parental mourning for deceased children in light of the problem of universality also manifests as a *conceptual* problem. Insofar as the problem of universality paradigmatically involves making claims about the experiences of others and thinking through what features of interior life can be named and communicated in the first place, the experience of losing a child presents the remarkable example of an event that is pervasively and paradoxically thought of and talked about as 'unthinkable,' universal precisely in its singularity, unimaginability, and incommunicability. Granted, the extent to which we can accurately grasp the thoughts of others and truly appreciate their subjective experiences itself represents an open-ended question, variously articulated, in analytic philosophy, as "the problem of other minds" (Blackburn 201-213; McGinn 119-137; Chalmers 101-103) or as "the problem of intersubjectivity" in both continental philosophy (Husserl 89-148; Gadamer 275-287; Habermas 355-356) and psychoanalysis (Benjamin 33-46; Stolorow 393-399; Bohleber 799-823). But whereas the problem of other minds seems comparatively low-stakes, for example, when considering asymmetrical differences in the subjective perception of objects, or in assessing ambiguities that may disrupt the shared

understandings necessary for communicative action, confronting the possibility of radical differences between how different parents may experience the death of their children inevitably seems to challenge bedrock beliefs about morality, existence, and human nature itself. Two sommeliers may quibble over whether a vintage of fine Burgundy carries notes of plum instead of berry without the ontological stability of the lifeworld hanging in the balance, and a Department of semioticians can puzzle endlessly over what, exactly, a Dean *really* meant to say in her latest communiqué without the edifice of language coming to a screeching collapse. But if a parent who has just buried a child appears to indifferently shrug off the experience with a, "Hey, no big deal," they are liable to be condemned as an inhuman monster or dismissed as traumatized, broken. Our investment in the idea that the experience of parental mourning over deceased children is a universal phenomenon appears undeniably motivated, in a particularly urgent way.

The intensity of this motivation – its normative force – suggests something more than just sentimentality, something beyond the admittedly plangent worry that, if we humans can't agree that losing a child, of all things, isn't horrible for everybody, then what else could we possibly agree on? This dissertation argues that the motivation to stipulate that parental mourning for deceased children is a universal phenomenon derives from resistance to a certain antinomy lying at the heart of the problem of universality itself, a crisis in any thinking of universality that is uniquely precipitated by the loss of children. I claim that contemplating the death of a child reveals how acutely the problem of universality implicates our assumptions about and hopes for the communication of experience and the transmission of knowledge in general, across generational lines in particular, and, most importantly, beyond the limit of individual experience that is death. In this schema, children represent the inheritors of human experience, vouchsafing its universal value by

guaranteeing its future transmission. Their death represents a crisis that implodes foundational Western metanarratives about the intelligibility and transmissibility of knowledge and experience. And yet, as I ultimately argue, while the death of a child can be seen as the death of any thinking of universality, as even the death of universality itself, it can also inaugurate a transfigured understanding of universality – a complicated and paradoxical universality that involves the communication of experiences of loss that remain radically and irreducibly singular even as they are shared, a kenotically emptied, tenuous universality operating under the signs of vulnerability and loss.

2. *Methodology and Terminology*

Since this inquiry is a comparative venture that critically reads a variety of texts from a wide range of literary traditions and disciplinary fields alongside one another, it is vital to set out working definitions for certain key terms, however seemingly straightforward they may seem. Defining these terms is done best as responses to a series of questions.

What do I mean by universality? The words "universality" and "universal" activate a suite of well-trodden, often contradictory associations for different readers. For classically trained philosophers, the terms track a debate extending backwards from Aquinas to Ockham to Abelard to Boethius to Porphyry and beyond, encompassing a genealogy of inherited distinctions that ultimately arises from a debate between Platonic Realism and Aristotle's system of natural kinds – essentially a dispute over the doctrine of forms versus

the concept of formal causes.[3] For contemporary philosophers in the Anglo-American tradition, the term 'universality' activates an ongoing debate over questions of nominalism, realism, and predication, all essentially terms of art,[4] whereas their Continental colleagues have spent much of the early 2000s contemplating 'universality' by way of an extended engagement with the writings of Saint Paul, whose *Epistle to the Romans* they read as provoking various re-understandings, at once theological and political, of what it means for an event to be truly significant, of the possibilities for radically reconfigured collective identities, etcetera.[5] In a rather different vein, recent work by the comparative philosopher François Jullien, most notably in his *De l'universel, de l'uniforme, du commun et du dialogue entre les cultures* (2008), has provocatively contested whether or not "the universal" is itself a recognizably universal concept operative in various major intellectual traditions over the course of world history.[6]

Although the analysis of the problem of universality undertaken in this dissertation ultimately does bear philosophical implications – having to do with our assumptions about human nature and investment in the transmission of knowledge over and against death – the

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[3] For an overview of this tradition, see, in English, James Moreland's authoritative survey, *Universals* (2001), and, in French, Alain de Libera's *La querelle des universaux* (1996); Paul Spade (1994) provides an excellent anthology of primary source materials, with a particular emphasis on the Medieval era.

[4] For more, PF Strawson's edited collection *Universals, Concepts and Qualities* (2006) samples many voices in this discussion, while DM Armstrong's multi-volume *Universals and Scientific Realism* (1980) remains influential.

[5] This discussion has been inaugurated by a trend in Biblical scholarship known as the "New Perspective on Paul." For a survey of that trend, see Sanders (1977) and Dunn (2007). The go-to texts within the Continental tradition are Badiou's *Saint Paul : La Fondation de l'universalisme* (1998), Zizek's *The Puppet and the Dwarf* (2003), and Agamben's *The Time That Remains* (2005). The work of these thinkers are in turn surveyed and assessed in their theological implications in Caputo and Alcof's *St. Paul Among the Philosophers* (2009) and Milbank et al.'s *Paul's New Moment* (2010).

[6] I am deeply sympathetic to Jullien's account, which, although it does not directly interface with my analysis in this dissertation, in large part has inspired my own approach to the question of the phenomenon of parental mourning as kind of paradoxical universal – that is, as a universal which is defined through a constantly self-displacing relationship to radical singularity. My own, annotated translation of the key chapters of Jullien's *magnum opus* has previously appeared in the Yearbook of Comparative Literature (Volume 55, 2009.)

technical sense of "universality" it deploys as a point of departure is closest to that used in an ongoing conversation over so-called "human universals," a conversation that at once involves anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists. Human universals, in this sense, are things that all humans (or at least groups of humans) can be said to have, experience, or engage in. As cognitive scientists Robert Wilson and Frank Keil put it, "human universals comprise those features of culture, society, language, behavior, and psyche for which there are no known exceptions to their existence in all ethnographically or historically recorded human societies" (383). As Wilson and Keil's definition indicates, these universals can be inferred by sounding the findings of a multiplicity of disciplines encompassing anthropology, historical research, sociobiology, and more. Donald Brown, an influential anthropologist, has spent decades assembling precisely such a catalogue of universals, and offers an extensive list of them in his magisterial *Human Universals* (1989/1991). Brown's catalogue brings together items ranging from individual behaviors to cultural norms to philosophical concepts to psychological states to material objects and more. His list includes:

> Mother-father incest taboos; gift-giving; economic inequalities; crying; metonymy; metaphor; logical operators (and, if, not, part/whole); right-handedness as population norm; special speech for special occasions; dance; language; spears; face (word for); facial expressions; males engage in more coalitional violence; thumb-sucking; tickling.
>
> (Brown 435-439)

In the scholarship on human universals, catalogues such as these effectively constitute a kind of minimal checklist for what it is to be human. Indeed, for his part, Brown insists that no cultures exist or ever have existed *without* evidencing them. The paradox here, of course, is that such lists of human universals, which are ostensibly the product of inductive assessment, nonetheless make universal, essentializing claims while relying on a dataset which is inevitably incomplete. Not only have countless cultures existed in the past, only to die out leaving behind precious little evidence of their ways of life, despite contemporary

efforts at conservation, the list of the world's remaining "uncontacted tribes" grows shorter by the year.[7] By the same token, moving from inferences from limited data about individual groups of humans to broader generalizations about *all* humans *everywhere* often reveals more about the describer and their epistemological presuppositions than it does about the specific cultures being described. Indeed, reading much of the literature on human universals, especially lists like Brown's, one is reminded of Jorge-Luis Borges's famous anecdote about a fictitious Chinese Encyclopedia (the so-called "Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge") which appears in his essay on the English philosopher John Wilkins (1614-1672), a philosopher who himself attempted to create a universal language that could descriptively encompass all possible entities in the world. Borges's apocryphal Encyclopedia features a bestiary taxonomizing all the world's animals into eccentric, whimsical categories – "Those that belong to the Emperor; Mermaids; those that, from a distance, resemble flies" – an assemblage that, taken together, is at once exhaustive and yet preposterous (Borges 231). For Michel Foucault, Borges's fictional encyclopedia famously represented a parable of the contingency of all epistemological categories, an object lesson in the inherent folly of attempting to think in universal terms.[8] With a perspective similar to and yet also different

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[7] A case in point: in February of 2011, Brazilian officials released aerial photographs of members of a previously unknown and unnamed tribe discovered living in a remote region of the Amazon along the Peruvian border. Despite the best efforts of the Brazilian government to protect this group from all outside interference, including ethnographic research (a longstanding national policy), only six months later reports surfaced that the entire tribe had disappeared, apparently wiped out by drug traffickers. Jen Quraishi, writing in *Mother Jones* on August 11th, 2011, noted succinctly that aerial footage now revealed ragtag patrols of men wandering through the area toting submachine guns, and that, on an expedition into the region "authorities found a backpack with a broken arrow inside it and a 20kg package of cocaine nearby."

[8] From Foucault's Preface to *The Order of Things*: "This book first arose out of a passage in Borges, out of the laughter that shattered, as I read the passage, all the familiar landmarks of my thought – our thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography – breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things, and continuing long afterwards to disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old distinction between the Same and the Other... In the wonderment of this taxonomy, the thing we apprehend in one great leap, the thing that, by means of the fable, is demonstrated as the exotic

from that of Foucault, this dissertation brackets the *empirical* question of what resolving what specific human universals might exist (or even if any exist altogether) in favor of interrogating what is at stake in the *discourse about* human universals, and questioning what assumptions and ideological commitments are at issue in the debate over whether or not parental mourning for deceased children is a human universal in particular. It is thus key for these purposes to note that, in his list of universals, Brown also includes the following:

> Childcare; childbirth customs; childhood fear; classification of kin; beliefs about death; beliefs about fortune and misfortune; death rituals; emotions; empathy; family (or household); father and mother; separate kin terms for inheritance rules; preference for own children and close kin; self distinguished from other.
>
> (Brown 435-438)

Moreover, in updating the 1989 version of *Human Universals* to its latest edition, Brown adds several other salient items, most notably "attachment" and "fear of death" (439). And yet it is precisely the universality of some the items on this list that Ariès's parental indifference hypothesis provocatively contests, with the pushback to his claim in turn revealing how rapidly debates about human universals can blur the boundaries between description and prescription, between neutral observation and moral judgment. As I will argue below, the intensity of this debate stems from the fact that questioning whether or not children are mourned universally not only challenges pervasive modern assumptions about human nature but also throws into crisis the fundamental metanarrative that underwrites any thinking of universality in the first place: the presupposition that ideas and experiences can be transmitted and shared in the first place, across time and place, through lineages over generations, and, above all, over and against death itself.

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charm of another system of thought, is the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking that." (xvi)

What do I mean by children, and what do I mean by parents? These questions are deceptively simple. "Child" is a word of Germanic origin, with the Old English *cild* originally meaning a "fetus, infant, unborn or newly born person," and which ultimately appears to trace back to a Proto-Germanic word for "womb" (Buck 105). In this sense, the word "child," at least in English and its Germanic cognates, bears a strong etymological linkage to the facts of maternal gestation and parturition and occupies some of the semantic space more contemporarily denoted by "baby," with the expansion of the scope of "child" to encompass older offspring (with a general cut-off around the age of puberty) standing as a later development (Buck 106). Yet while the etymology of "child" is closely bound up with concepts of pregnancy and motherhood, the term "parent" – both a verb and a noun in English – is not: the Latin *parens* can at once mean "father" or "mother" or even simply "ancestor" (Glare 1295-1296). While "child" can only be traced back to a putative Proto-Germanic root, the etymology of "parent" reaches further back and is more broadly attested across the Indo-European languages, with historical linguists ultimately proposing a form of the root verb **pere*, hypothesized to mean "to produce, procure, bring forward, bring forth," and which is also the root of the Latin and English "prepare" (Buck 104).

This dissertation deploys flexible, idiosyncratic definitions for what constitute a child and what constitute a parent. This is necessary because the materials that I sample below, in which people mourn dead children in a variety of cultural contexts, include their mourning not just fetuses and babies (stillborn or successfully carried to term), but also toddlers, "tweens," teenagers, and even young adults.[9] Moreover, the children in question are not

[9] "Adult" is itself a term which could warrant pages of glossing in its own right, but which, for simplicity's sake, and with a nod to the conventional legal wisdom, we can simply say means someone older than eighteen. For more on the historical evolution of the conceptual boundaries between childhood and adulthood in Western Culture, see Ariès's *Centuries of Childhood* (1965) and Hugh Cunningham's *The Invention of Childhood* (2012).

always the direct biological offspring of the people who mourn them – they can be their stepchildren or adopted. The parents themselves are not always heterosexual pairs of a mother and a father, and, in one or two key cases (including that of Sigmund Freud, who comes up in Chapter 3) they are not even technically "parents" of the children in question at all, but grandparents.

True to the original etymology of the term, then, the working definition of a parent this dissertation offers, then, denotes parenting as a *function*. In other words, I define being a parent as an older human being who is centrally involved in the bringing-forth into the world of another, younger human being, one way or another, and in overseeing its growth, again, one way or another, while having a vested interest (at least *prima facie*) in its wellbeing and future, all in ways that are different from how a total stranger might relate to that child. Likewise, I define a "child" as the corollary of this definition of a parent: the child is the younger human being who is brought forth into the world by an older one, the one whose growth is dependent on them, and whose living into the future, for better or worse, their parent is (again, *prima facie*) invested. In a way that is at once obvious and yet also profound, then, parent and child reciprocally define each other, an insight that has occurred to figures as far-flung as the influential French psychoanalyst Maud Manoni (1923-1989), whose seminal insight from working with children is often summed up in the suggestive dictum that "the child is the symptom of its parents" (Mathelin 3-5; 45-49) and the many bereaved parents who articulate the loss of their child as a kind of inversion, a collapse in self-definition. Writing of the death of his daughter, the Welsh poet Goronwy Owen (1723-1769) laments: "Orphaned is her father, with a crushing wound in his pierced and broken heart, in inconsolable distress — how well I know, bound down with my yearning for her!" As Owen suggests, in a very real sense, just as much as a parent produces a child, so too does the child,

by the fact of her existence, produce the parent. Their reasons for being, so to speak, are interdependent at multiple levels.

With the relationship between parent and child conceived in this way – as a reciprocal, functional definition – the crisis that is losing a child takes on a particularly plangent form: when, by dying, a child ceases to be a child, the parent ceases to be a parent, too – and yet they themselves continue to live. And so we might articulate another, less complicated but no less reciprocal way of defining both child and parent, a definition that is also a fundamental metanarrative we will encounter below, and that turns on how both child and parent are "supposed" to relate, asymmetrically, to the possibility of the other's death: a child is the person who is supposed to grow into an adult and ultimately bury their parents – and never the other way round.[10]

That said, I need to stipulate two important, related caveats. First, although a great many of the testimonials I will read below, including several of what I believe are the most articulate, philosophically sophisticated, and moving, will be those of women – bereaved mothers – I am also making a conscious attempt to focus sustained attention on accounts of mourning by men. This emphasis on *paternal* experiences of loss has less to do with the practical reality that, as we will see in Chapter Two, the bulk of contemporary resources for aggrieved parents (in the way of self-help books and websites) appear to be specifically targeted at mothers instead of fathers, but as a reaction to what I take to be a pernicious cultural construction of contemporary Western masculinity that discourages male

[10] Willie Nelson, singing hauntingly in his single *Grave Digger* (UMG, 2007), puts this proposition simply. Reading off a catalogue of epitaphs' dates and names, he gets to a woman whose two only children both died in the Second World War, and then observes: "Now, you should never have to watch your only children lowered in the ground / I mean, you should never have to bury your own babies."

expressions of vulnerability and grief.[11] Moreover, and considerably more importantly, I take up the issue of paternal mourning in relation to the problem of universality precisely insofar as I argue that the crisis which the death of a child precipitates strikes at the heart of foundational Western metanarratives that are thoroughly patriarchal in character. Indeed, as I argue below, for a man to lose a child, and a son in particular, challenges patriarchal fantasies of controlling one's family's fortunes, and, on a philosophical level, runs counter to the assumption that the sharing of experience and transmission of intellectual legacies are primarily a matter of male succession, a lineage of inheritance and succession that operates solely or at least primarily between men alone. Second, I am deliberately setting aside my investigation of the universality of parental mourning for deceased children from a consideration of attitudes towards elective abortion, insofar as this is a topic that has already received extensive treatment by scholars elsewhere[12] and which, given its fraught political and legal ramifications, would deserve a more intensive standalone treatment.

What do I mean by mourning? The stability of mourning as a concept and its contours as an experience across time and place are precisely some of the open questions at stake in the chapters that follow, and over-defining the term at the outset thus risks question-begging. Even choosing a particular *locus classicus* for a definition of mourning is daunting: in his *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Robert Burton (1577-1640), for example, interchangeably uses "mourning" and "grief" to express the feelings accompanying the death of a loved one,

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[11] For more on this, see academic works by Theweleit (1989), Berlant (2011), M. Moss (2012) and D. Moss (2012). In rather different vein, Kimmel (2013) offers a compelling perspective on the quandaries of expressing male vulnerability in contemporary America.

[12] For more on this issue from a feminist perspective, see Barbara Johnson's seminal essay, *Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion* (1986) and research by Goodrum and Keyes (2009); for a rather different, cross-cultural take, see Wilson (2009), who investigates the Western adoption of Buddhist mourning practices for aborted fetuses and miscarried babies.

offering numerous citations from the Greek and Latin canon, as well as from the Psalms, where various figures express such sorrow, and presenting all these as species of 'melancholia' (Burton 165-170 *passim*). Taking a rather different approach, Charles Darwin, himself no stranger to the experience of losing a child (as we shall see below), offers a descriptive account of mourning in bereaved mothers in his *The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals* (1872). Writes Darwin:

> When a mother suddenly loses her child, sometimes she is frantic with grief, and must be considered to be in an excited state; she walks wildly about, tears her hair or clothes, and wrings her hands. This latter action is perhaps due to the principle of antithesis, betraying an inward sense of helplessness and that nothing can be done. The other wild and violent movements may be in part explained by the relief experienced through muscular exertion, and in part by the undirected overflow of nerve-force from the excited sensorium. But under the sudden loss of a beloved person, one of the first and commonest thoughts which occurs, is that something more might have been done to save the lost one. An excellent observer, in describing the behaviour of a girl at the sudden death of her father, says she "went about the house wringing her hands like a creature demented, saying 'It was her fault;' 'I should never have left him;' 'If I had only sat up with him,'" &c. With such ideas vividly present before the mind, there would arise, through the principle of associated habit, the strongest tendency to energetic action of some kind. As soon as the sufferer is fully conscious that nothing can be done, despair or deep sorrow takes the place of frantic grief. The sufferer sits motionless, or gently rocks to and fro; the circulation becomes languid; respiration is almost forgotten, and deep sighs are drawn.
>
> (Darwin 80–81)

Sigmund Freud, in his seminal 1915 essay *Mourning and Melancholia*, describes the experience of grief as part of a 'work of mourning' that moves by various stages from denial of the death of the loved one to (ideally) an ability to form new emotional attachments while still integrating a meaningful memory of the deceased. Like Burton, Freud notes the close similarities between mourning and melancholia (what later mental health professionals gloss as depression), and, like Darwin, notes the elements of "irrationality," fixation on the lost object, and self-blame that accompany such grief at its most florid:

> The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all

> activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment. This picture becomes a little more intelligible when we consider that, with one exception, the same traits are met with in mourning. The disturbance of self-regard is absent in mourning; but otherwise the features are the same. Profound mourning, the reaction to the loss of someone who is loved, contains the same painful frame of mind, the same loss of interest in the outside world—in so far as it does not recall him—the same loss of capacity to adopt any new object of love (which would mean replacing him) and the same turning away from any activity that is not connected with thoughts of him. It is easy to see that this inhibition and circumscription of the ego is the expression of an exclusive devotion to mourning which leaves nothing over for other purposes or other interests. It is really only because we know so well how to explain it that this attitude does not seem to us pathological.
>
> (Freud 243-244)

The most recent version of the standard textbook of contemporary psychiatry, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition* (DSM-5) parallels Burton and Darwin by cataloguing a list of behaviors and attitudes associated with grief at its most acute, which it classifies as modes of "reactive distress," including "a yearning to be with the deceased; social identity disruption; a desire to die to be with the deceased, a feeling that life is meaningless; marked difficulty accepting death; self-blame, etcetera," and noting the similarity (in DSM-speak, differential diagnostic co-morbidity) of these symptoms with those of other conditions like PTSD and Major Depressive Disorder (790-793). Much as Freud observes that "it is really only because we know so well how to explain [mourning] that this attitude does not seem to us pathological," the DSM-5 notes a complicated tension between when such grief is "normal" and when it strays into pathological territory. Indeed, in its section on "Conditions for Future Study," which includes items like Caffeine Use Disorder, Internet Gaming Disorder, and Neurobehavioral Disorder Associated with Prenatal Alcohol Exposure (728), the DSM-5 proposes a new pathology, "Persistent Complex Bereavement Disorder" (PCBD). Persistent Complex Bereavement Disorder (also known as "traumatic grief" or "prolonged grief disorder") "is distinguished from normal grief by the presence of

severe grief reactions that persist at least 12 months (or 6 months in children) after the death of the bereaved" (790). Yet while the DSM-5 suggests that the frequency of PCBD is comparatively low (estimated to affect less than ten percent of bereaved persons), as Chapter Two below will amply evidence, parents of deceased children frequently report severe disturbances of grief for *years* after the death of their children. Classifying their suffering as "pathological" seems dubious at best. Moreover, and significantly for our purposes, the DSM-5, for all its efforts to improve on its predecessor's highly problematic approach to "Culturally Bound Syndromes,"[13] nonetheless situates its claims about the distinctions between "normal" and "abnormal" in terms that, while allowing for some cultural variation, are decidedly universal in scope:

> The symptoms of persistent complex bereavement disorder are observed across cultural settings, but grief responses may manifest in culturally specific ways. Diagnosis of the disorder requires that the persistent and severe responses go beyond cultural norms of grief responses and not be better explained by culturally specific mourning rituals.
>
> (DSM-5, 791)

The DSM thus offers an ostensibly descriptive account of "normal" versus "pathological" mourning while also implicitly presupposing a capacity for the diagnosis to be fully portable, prescriptively applicable[14] across all cultural boundaries. This suggests, once again, that most accounts of what "normal" grief "does" look like are very much perspectivally embedded,

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[13] For more on this, see articles by Guarnaccia and Rogler (1999), Mezzich et al. (1999) and, above all, Patricia Gherovici's masterful *The Puerto Rican Syndrome* (2003).

[14] The psychiatric pun here is fully intended. Indeed, as the DSM-V went to press, there was intense backlash from bioethicists and mental health practitioners who targeted its elision of "normal" grief symptoms into "pathological" ones – a diagnosis the DSM's editors claimed could be made as early as *two weeks* after a bereavement. According to these critics, the move towards a "medicalization of grief" was in fact driven by pharmaceutical companies eager to increase clinicians' prescribing patients psychiatric medication and nothing more. Writing in *Psychology Today* on January 3, 2013, psychiatrist Allen Frances observed that: "After forty years and lots of clinical experience, I can't distinguish at two weeks between the symptoms of normal grief and the symptoms of mild depression – and I challenge anyone else to do so. This is an inherently unreliable distinction. And I know damn well that primary care doctors can't do it in a seven minute visit. This should have been the most crucial point in DSM 5 decision making because primary care docs prescribe 80% of all antidepressants and will be most likely to misuse the DSM 5 in mislabeling grievers."

fraught with pre-conceived expectations, and often veer into discourses that are much more about saying what form proper grief *should* take while pathologizing the forms that it should not.

Given these pitfalls, then, it makes sense, for our purposes, and perhaps rather anti-climactically, to start by tentatively defining mourning as an experience of intense sadness that follows in the wake of a loss – and then, by assembling accounts from enough real people who have actually suffered such losses, to let the grievers speak, as best as possible, for themselves.

3. *Chapter Summaries*

Chapter 1: Grief, A Human Province

This chapter approaches the relationship of parental mourning for deceased children to the problem of universality by first asking what constitutes grief in the broadest sense possible. With the goal of ultimately narrowing in on the "parental indifference hypothesis" proposed by Philippe Ariès, which questions the status of parental mourning as a human universal, I survey the perennial debate over whether or not grief over lost offspring is recognizably unique to humans in the first place. This controversy encompasses not just accounts of animal behavior proposed by biologists and ethologists, but also paleontological speculations about the evidence for grief experiences among our extinct hominid ancestors. My objective is not to litigate the empirical question of whether or nor animals or other members of the genus *homo* experience or experienced grief when faced with the death of their young – a conundrum that I think is ultimately unresolvable – but instead to perform a discursive critique that reveals how discussions of grief in non-human or almost-human

animals inevitably rest upon untested assumptions about the universality of grief in humans more broadly. In other words, I argue that whether writers take the tack of claiming that humans share a capacity for parental grief "like their fellow animals" *or* whether they reserve "true" parental grief uniquely to *homo sapiens*, either position is just as much about safeguarding essentially normative universality claims about mourning in humans as it is about objective observation of the natural world. Following this survey, I then outline Ariès's hypothesis, which disputes the universality of parental grief among humans cross-culturally, and present the numerous vehement objections, methodological and otherwise, that have been consistently raised against it since the 1960s. Here, too, my goal is not to adjudicate the empirical validity of Ariès's hypothesis – which, like the dispute over non-human grief, I take to be unresolvable – but instead to highlight how its very contentiousness illustrates the stakes of the problem of universality by unpacking the manifestly *motivated* dimension of his critics' reactions. For better and for worse, many of the responses to Ariès's hypothesis, I argue, ultimately operate on the level of faith claims, invoking assumptions about human morality, empathy, and goodness remarkably similar to those made in disputes over theodicy. Finally, I compare the controversy over Ariès's parental indifference hypothesis to the critical receptions of several controversial texts that document a series of traumatic episodes in the twentieth century: a harrowing ethnographic account of a tribe in Uganda undergoing famine-induced collapse, testimonials describing the fate of children in a Nazi concentration camp during World War II, and a semi-autobiographical account of life in a North Korean penal colony. Although they have not previously been discussed in light of Ariès's hypothesis, these texts, all of which have been immensely controversial, offer ambiguous evidence both in favor of his hypothesis and against it, while the strident, often condemnatory responses they have engendered further

demonstrate the moral and epistemological fault lines activated by when the universality of parental mourning is thrown into question.

Chapter 2: Typologies of Grief

This chapter turns from reading debates over the question of parental mourning as it manifests in anthropological, biological, and sociological discourses to investigating materials that are more straightforwardly identified as literary in nature. In particular, I survey a series of texts from a wide range of linguistic traditions, literary genres, and historical periods, sampling poems, prose pieces, letters, and memoirs originally composed in languages as far flung as Classical Latin to Literary Chinese to Old Norse to Renaissance English to Nineteenth-Century French. All of these texts feature parents reacting to the death of their children, and while are some are anonymously authored or fictional, many can be traced to historically identifiable authors writing in the wake of the deaths of their real-world children. While assembling such widely-varied texts must necessarily sacrifice depth of analysis in favor of breadth of scope, my goal in so doing is to highlight certain similar, repeated features which begin to emerge from considering them alongside each other – a catalog of features that appears remarkably similar across time and place. These *typologies of grief* encompass a suite of images, ideas, and expressive gestures that include an attenuated narrative of the circumstances leading up to the child's death, and an emphasis on the spectacle of a child's suffering as agonizing, particularly in light of the child's being figured as innocent and fragile. After the child's death, these typologies include a vocabulary of "shattering" and a transformed relation to the minutiae of everyday life, which is variously figured as now being meaningless, unreal, or precariously contingent. Particularly salient for our purposes are also pervasive invocations of the *incommunicability* or *inexpressibility* of the experience of losing a child, and, secondly, repeated articulations of how such a loss involves

a kind of crisis of temporality, not just for the dead child, whose death is by definition an "untimely" event, but for their parents, whose understanding of and investment in the future are radically reconfigured. Not all the texts surveyed display these typologies equally, by any means, and some depart from them considerably. Moreover, although I frequently juxtapose these older texts with reflections by modern-day parents who have lost their children and who have written about their experiences on the internet and elsewhere, my goal is not to supply evidence against Ariès's hypothesis *per se*. That is, I am not trying to argue *empirically* for parental mourning for deceased as a universal phenomenon. Instead, by assembling these typologies – which draw on a considerably broader cultural linguistic corpus than any previous scholarly effort[15] – I am attempting to arrive at a kind of working outline of what parental mourning *might* look like if we were to conceive of it as sharing at least *some* common features across those cultures where parents have documented the experience through writing about it.

Chapter 3: Paternity and Universality at the Grave of Schleiermacher's Son

Given that the models of philosophy and the transmission of knowledge addressed in Chapter 3 are themselves markedly patriarchal, this chapter offers a case study of one particular figure, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), whose influence often provokes explicit metaphors of paternity. This image of Schleiermacher as the "father" of a number of disciplines is as well warranted historically as it is thematically apt given his vision of the transmission of knowledge and historical experience as an inheritance of paternal legacies –

[15] This study owes an immense debt of gratitude to Robert Woods, Professor of Geography at the University of Liverpool, whose magisterial *Children Remembered: Responses to Untimely Death in the Past* (2007) surveys Early Modern to Victorian materials from the US, Britain, and France. Woods's book is pathbreaking, and not only does his analysis of Ariès inform much of Chapter One below, his presentation of numerous English-language poems and memoir materials was extremely helpful in my selection of materials for this chapter.

and also given what is arguably his status as the "father" of modern notions of universality, psychological, philosophical, and theological. Yet as this chapter argues, the concept of fatherhood in Schleiermacher's oeuvre, his model of the transmission of knowledge as a paternal enterprise, and the status of Schleiermacher himself as a figurative father must be understood as provocatively disrupted by Schleiermacher's unfortunate fate as a literal one. In this chapter, I read Schleiermacher's longstanding engagement with the concept of fatherhood in its philosophical, religious, and personal dimensions as reaching climactic expression in his sermon over the grave of Nathanael, his only son, who died at the age of nine. I read this sermon as the articulation of and response to a crisis that is at once inextricably philosophical, religious, and personal in its implications for Schleiermacher. My ultimate claim is not just that this perspective sheds new light on key *topoi* in Schleiermacher's oeuvre, and on an underexplored dimension of his biography, but also that it directly implicates and transforms his vision of universality and the communicability of universal human experiences. I argue that Schleiermacher's sermon reconfigures the problem of universality in light of the lived, affective stakes of paternity and pedagogy themselves, poignantly exemplifying the fragile, fraught endeavor that is the transmission of knowledge and personal legacies across generational lines.

Conclusion: Universalities in Crisis

This conclusion combines our disciplinary and literary surveys and case studies and puts them to work by addressing their significance for the specifically *philosophical* implications of the question of whether or not parental mourning for deceased children is a human universal. Concentrating on the Western tradition, this chapter argues that the death of a child represents a *crisis* in a fundamental metanarratives about how both philosophical

knowledge and personal experiences "should" be transmitted, about how they can be meaningfully communicated, and why such knowledge and experiences are valuable in the first place. Beginning with Walter Benjamin's essay *The Storyteller* (1936), I address how Benjamin offers a model for the transmission of life experience that hinges on a linear succession of generational inheritance, a metanarrative encapsulated in a paradigmatic deathbed scene. This is a metanarrative that the death of a child fractures just as much as does the shift in modern attitudes towards death and dying which Benjamin's essay condemns. I then turn to a reading of one the foundational texts of Western philosophy, the Platonic dialogue *Phaedo*, which dramatizes the death of Socrates. I argue that the merit which that dialogue attributes to philosophy as an *ars moriendi*[16] presupposes a model of the inheritance of knowledge between philosopher and student that is explicitly framed as a *lineage of inheritance* extending from parents to their children, and which simultaneously forecloses and is haunted by the terrifying prospect of a child's death severing this chain of transmission. Taken together, I argue, Plato's and Benjamin's models for the transmission of philosophical knowledge and personal experience represent a fundamental and deeply attractive metanarrative, vouchsafing that abstract wisdom and personal experience alike have universal value because they can be communicated to others, despite the fact of individual death, insofar as such communication can happen in an orderly fashion at the end of a full life. Thus it is precisely the death of a child that throws this orderly process into a shambles – and where the typologies of *incommunicability* and a *collapse of futurity* observed in Chapter Two take on their fullest and most philosophically troubling significance as symbols of a crisis for any thinking of universality as such. I unpack the full significance of this crisis by turning to the reflections of Ralph Waldo Emerson as he grapples with the death of a

[16] Skill at dying, or the art of learning how to die – what Montaigne, after Cicero, asserts as the proposition "*Que philosopher, c'est apprendre à mourir.*"

beloved child. Emerson frames the implications of that event as threatening the very idea that personal experience can be communicated at all and challenging the assumption that what knowledge anyone can offer can be passed on after their own death. The fear at stake, I argue, is that rather than teaching us how to die, philosophy, when confronted with a dead child, offers only a literal dead-end: the realization that, as Emerson puts its, "I grieve that grief can teach me nothing" (236). I close with a coda that attempts to recuperate the idea of universality by appealing to a universality structured around the ubiquity of human loss – that is, to the universal fact of human life that everyone inevitably does and will lose other humans who are dear to them. I claim that acknowledging the universality of this feature of the human condition does not preclude conceding that every individual's experience of loss is as radically singular as the personhood of the person for whom they may grieve. I label this reconfiguration of universality centered on radically singular loss a *kenotic* universal, a universal emptied of any transcendent pretensions, and suggest how this possibility is tantalizingly hinted at by several examples across various traditions. In each of these cases, I argue, there is an experience of heart-wrenching grief, activating many of the typologies explored in Chapter Two, but also something else: a work of mourning that honors the past while also moving forward into the future through an excruciating practice of openness to and communication with others that unfolds precisely along the axis of a universal vulnerability to loss.

Chapter 1: Grief, a Human Province

1. The Qualia of Animal Loss

What is now the modern Republic of Georgia boasts a rich tradition of folktales and oral poetry that stretches back to the early Middle Ages. Prominent in this canon is a poem entitled *The Young Man and the Leopard* (*Moq'me da vepkhvi*), which is of Medieval origins, and which Georgian schoolchildren are taught to recite from memory to this day (Tuite 120). This poem tells the story of a "bare-cheeked youth" who goes hunting ibexes in the mountains only to stumble upon a cave, where he is ambushed by a leopard.[17] They fight and kill each other, the leopard's claws piercing the young man's chain mail even as his Frankish blade penetrates the creature's chest. When the hunter's mother learns of his death, she is distraught, and the image of his final battle with the beast haunts her dreams.

> As she slept, the ghosts appeared
> now of the leopard, now of her son.
> Now the leopard seemed to rip
> the iron bodice off her son;
> now it seemed her son was winning,
> flinging the leopard head over heels.
> And, strange to say, after such dreams
> she would awake with sobs and tears.
>
> (Bosley 183)

To a contemporary reader, the mother's dreams of the death of her child may not, in truth, seem so strange, but what follows certainly is: she awakes, realizes her kinship in grief with the mother of the leopard, and vows to set off into the mountains to commiserate with the

[17] The exact identity of the creature in question is the subject of some dispute – the Georgian *vepkhvi* may be read as either a Persian leopard (*Panthera pardus saxicolor*), which used to be comparatively common in the Caucasus until it became endangered in recent times, or it could be a tiger, presumably of the Caspian subspecies (*Panthera tigris virgate*), which were always uncommon, and now are extinct, but are a recurrent image in Georgian literature (Tuite 120-121).

animal. The stanzas that close the poem are remarkable enough to cite in both of the only available English translations:

At times she would think, 'Who ever heard of any son whom no mother reared? Perhaps the leopard's mother too is, like me, crying day and night. I shall leave and go to her and give her comfort in her grief, so that she tells me all her tales and I shall tell her of my son, for she is sorrowing for her son, killed without pity by the sword.'	And then she would think: 'Without mother No child enters this world. It is likely that this leopard's mother Is grieving as sorely as I. I will go, yes I will see her, And bring her words of compassion. She will tell her son's story And I will tell her of mine. For he too is to be mourned Cut down by a merciless sword.'
(Bosley 183)	(Tuite 34)

The mother's response to awakening from her traumatic dream is depicted as at once involving logic and affect, a pairing of critical reasoning with a surge of empathy. Specifically, her fellow-feeling across species boundaries operates thanks to a kind of syllogistic reasoning, with some premises given and others left implicit. If all sons/children are given-birth-to/reared by mothers, and if all mothers (presumably) feel sorrow at the death of their offspring, then the death of the leopard-child *must* produce a correlative grief in his leopard-mother that is akin to the human mother's own.

This reasoning has a certain appeal, and the image of the bereaved mothers – one human, the other not – united and comforting each other in grief is certainly touching. But there's a willful character to the mother's logic, too, a triple series of assumptions: that maternal begetting entails maternal rearing, that maternal rearing in turn entails maternal mourning in the event of a child's death, and, finally, that these characterizations hold true not just for all human mothers, but for animal ones as well. Bracketing the question of the universal applicability of these characterizations to humans for the moment, we must note that they certainly don't appear to hold true for all non-human animals, however much we

might wish them to. Leopards, like many other big cats, can and do abandon, attack, and even eat their own young – to the particular horror of those humans who work with them closely, and whose human expectations of proper parental care such behavior apparently confounds. Indeed, after a series of such episodes at the Toronto Zoo, involving lions, tigers, and a polar bear, zoo officials released a statement to media describing the experiences as "traumatizing" for zoo staff. As reported in the December 11th, 2011 issue of the *Toronto Star*, the zoo's senior veterinarian, Dr. Graham Crenshaw, was "reticent to discuss the issue," but, when pressed, insisted that applying human expectations to animal parenting was misguided: "Anyone who works with wild animals knows this isn't uncommon or a reflection on this zoo, or zoos generally," he told reporter Donovan Vincent. "It's animals. Some animals do better than others." Granted, biologists concur that animal infanticide does occur in the wild, frequently as a response to resource scarcity – in times when hunting is poor, or just after giving birth, for example, a carnivore mother may eat the weakest of her litters not only to have fewer mouths to feed overall, but also to replenish herself after the massive caloric expenditure of giving birth and nursing. Yet Crenshaw's motivation to disclaim his zoo's moral or legal culpability for such deaths by claiming that, in so many words, 'animals will just be animals,' is also clearly targeted at rebutting the claim by animal rights advocates, who in turn blamed those deaths on the simple fact of confinement in zoos – that is, on human meddling. According to such critics, the "natural" stressors responsible for animal infanticide in the wild, (i.e., a scarcity of prey due to disease, inhospitable climate, etcetera), are precisely things that zoos, which feed their animals regularly, claim to compensate for – and yet such killings continue. As one activist told the *Star*, "Zoos have created different kinds of stressors for the animals because they haven't evolved to cope in that small environment." Each position – that of zoo officials and

that of anti-zoo activists –seems to mirror the other: from the first perspective, animal parents defy human expectations by killing their young because they are animals, not humans; conversely, from the other, animal parents kill their young because they have been forced to behave in ways that animals shouldn't by humans – and the humans responsible for this are being "inhumane" for putting them in that position. Both positions thus fundamentally turn on assumptions (however differing) about what parenting – both human and animal – "really" entails, or what, at least, it should universally look like for each. And as we shall see, time and again below, questioning how animal parents relate to their offspring when they die is inevitably bound up in implicit claims about the universality of such behavior among humans as well.

"Perhaps the leopard's mother too is, like me, crying day and night." Whether or not an animal parent feels grief for its dead young is a question that has vexed observers of the natural world for centuries – while also not preventing them venturing definitive answers. To an extent, this tendency to speculate is attributable to two problems, one pragmatic, the other philosophical. On a pragmatic level, hypotheses about mourning among animals depend on piecemeal data – notes from fieldwork commonly filed as "Personal Observations" ('Pers. Obs.') in the pages of scientific journals. Attempting to answer the question of "How do animals experience grief?....is it at all like the sorrow we feel when a loved one dies?" (202) science writer Anne Morell offers an extensive catalogue of such observations:

> Crows have been known to place twigs and leaves next to a companion crow's body; a fox who found its mate dead was seen doing the same thing; wolves were once observed burying the carcasses of their two-week old pups; mother giraffes linger, sometimes for days, near their dead calves; and elephants cover the remains of a companion with sticks and dirt and then stand ground.
>
> (Morell 205)

Similarly, Morell reports the findings of Ron Appleby, an Australian ethologist studying dingoes:

> [A dingo] mother had five pups about three months old, and one was dying. It lay prostrate on the ground, crying and convulsing, possibly from a snakebite, while the mother wandered nearby. Occasionally she returned to sniff her pup; sometimes she whimpered to him, apparently distressed by his suffering.
>
> (Morell 206)

After the pup died, Appleby reports that the mother lingered around, "whining softly at times and raising her hackles" (Morell 206-207); eventually she picked the pup up and carried it away in her jaws. Yet Appleby, who videotaped the entire episode, remains unsure whether or not the mother dingo actually realized her offspring was dead, as opposed to merely sleeping or otherwise just temporarily out of commission. As Morell admits, the mother dingo may simply have been "hedging her bets" and adopting a wait-and-see strategy, taking her pup with her on the off chance it perked up. "Even though he smelled like carrion, there was a small chance that he may have healed, grown up, and reproduced, ensuring that her genes survived," Morell writes (207). This appeal to genetic exigency is frequently invoked when scientists talk about how animals respond to the death of their offspring or mates: finding a mate, gestation, and giving birth demand an immense investment of time and caloric energy, and so prematurely abandoning offspring or a mate would be counter-adaptive, wasteful. But even if everything comes down to an caloric-energistic calculus and a drive to transmit genes, scientists persist in referring to such animals as "grieving," "bereaved," and even "mourning," as does Morell in writing about "laysan albatrosses—large, monogamous seabirds—[that] are known to mourn for a year or two if they lose their mate [and which] sit dejected among the gregarious breeding pairs on Midway Atoll, where the birds gather to nest, as if uncertain of their purpose" (Morell 204).

Ascribing an existential crisis to a bird may strike the reader as something of a reach, as might many other descriptions of animal grief that attempt to render their behavior in human terms. To her credit, Morell owns this fact candidly, and acknowledges the temptation to make such ascriptions more broadly:

> Of course, these observations, as affecting as they are, do not tell us how an animal is mentally processing something such as the discovery of another's remains or the loss of a lifelong partner or child. They also depend largely on serendipity—on someone being on hand to record the event. And then they are open to any of a number of interpretations, since we humans readily project our own thoughts and emotions onto others.
>
> (Morell 204)

To some extent, of course, and insofar as they follow Institutional Review Board (IRB) ethical guidelines in the process, scientists can compensate for the serendipity factor by staging controlled experiments. The findings from these are consistently equivocal. For example, experiments wherein elephants are presented with the bones of both their relatives and members of their herd versus those of other, random elephants, indicate that they spend an equal, apparently random amount of time examining both – suggesting that may just be interested in bones and corpses in general, rather than "caressing" the remains of deceased individuals whom they may have known (King 59). Yet such stipulations have not prevented popular media from leaping to conclusions, as does a January 30, 2013 article in *The Guardian* that leads with the bold headline *Elephants Really Do Grieve Like Us* and follows it with an immediate emotional appeal to what all human readers "must" feel: "The pictures of a baby elephant in Borneo, nudging and nuzzling the body of its dead mother in obvious distress and bewilderment, cannot fail to move us." The force of this appeal seems to derive from more than the fact the writer in question, James Honeyborne, is also a documentary filmmaker who just happens to be hyping a recent six-part miniseries, *Africa* (narrated by Sir David Attenborough). It also seems to hinge upon the ideological pull exercised by that

telltale "us." For who is this "us"? Well, presumably it is all readers or viewers, all humans, really, who "cannot fail" to be "moved" by relating to what they and the author are primed to assume is the display of an animal doing something all humans (presumably) can relate to, namely, mourning a loved one. The spectacle of animal mourning, itself quite possibly merely a projection of anthropomorphic expectations, is thus deployed in order to consolidate a collective investment in a universal vision of humanity and human experience. In other words, by extending the universality of grief to animals, we cement our claim to the universality of that experience among ourselves.

On a more philosophical level, the problem with investigating whether or not animals grieve or mourn "like we do" stems from the fact that what happens inside an animal's consciousness is inaccessible to us humans in a very fundamental way. The influential philosopher of mind Thomas Nagel is best known for illustrating this problem in his seminal 1974 essay *What is it Like to Be a Bat?* Without getting into the terms of art specifically at issue in this piece (which involve ongoing disputes among cognitive scientists and philosophers of mind over concepts like reductionism, physicalism, the mind-body problem, and the like), simply dwelling on the thought experiment implied by his essay's title is productive: as human beings equipped with a particular suite of perceptual senses and physical capacities, we honestly can't venture the foggiest notion of what it truly is "like" to be a bat – we have no first-hand experience of what it's like to flap a pair of leathery wings and fly, no first-hand experience of navigating space in the pitch dark through echolocation alone. In the vocabulary of the philosophy of mind, we have no grasp of the *qualia* of being a bat. Daniel Dennett succinctly glosses qualia as "an unfamiliar term for something that could not be more familiar to each of us: the ways things seem to us" (Dennett, *QQ* 1). If quanta is the term for units of *quantitative* data, qualia are the stuff of *qualitative* data – in other words,

quanta deal in numerical metrics, in objectivity; qualia deal in experiences, in subjectivity. If quanta can be counted, qualia must be described: ask "how many?" or "how long"? and you are asking for an answer in terms of quanta; ask "what is X like?" and you are asking for an answer in terms of qualia. Yet as the "qualities of experiential states," (Dennett, *CE* 17) qualia are fundamentally "ineffable, intrinsic, private" (Dennett, *QQ* 3), unfolding in the first-person perspective. When it comes to understanding the experiences of our fellow humans, the nuances of qualia can certainly be a problem when it comes to certain experiences (for example, understanding what it is like to be pregnant, what it is like to experience a schizophrenic break, or what it is like to suffer particular kinds of pain[18]) but we can at least rely on language to communicate our subjective experiences to one another, however imperfectly. But when it comes to animals, however, the linguistic gap separating us from them makes such communication impossible. Animals cannot tell us about the qualia of their experiences – we can only observe their behaviors at a considerable remove, whether in labs or outside them, and then draw inferences and levy hypotheses. And when it comes to the open-ended question of animal grief, it is precisely this frustrating gap between what we can observe and what we want to know that encourages us to make anthropomorphic projections, to supply as an answer to the question of "What is it like for this animal to lose its offspring?" the reply to another question, an overdetermined one that we're already

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[18] For an object lesson, at once whimsical and perverse, in both the challenges and pitfalls of trying to catalogue qualia in a scientific mode, consider the work of entomologist Justin O. Schmidt, who has endeavored to be stung by some 150 of the most venomous insects known to mankind and then rigorously rank the experience of each, producing what has come to be known as the Schmidt Pain Index. The Scale runs from 0 to 4, with sting of a Yellow Jacket (*Dolichovespula*) getting a 2.0, and being described as "Hot and smoky, almost irreverent. Imagine WC Fields extinguishing a cigar on your tongue"; the South American Bullet Ant (*Paraponera clavata*) gets a 4.0+, and is described as "Pure, intense, brilliant pain. Like walking over flaming charcoal with a 3-inch nail in your heel." Schmidt has said that, in an attempt to deal with the sting of the bullet ant, he chugged whiskey until he passed out, but woke still in agony. The pain persisted for some twelve hours. (See Batts 2007 and Grabianowski 2011).

predisposed to answer in a universalizing way, namely: "What is it like for a human to lose a child?"

With the qualia of animal grief remaining incommunicable, the observations of scientists generally betray an anthropocentrism that takes one of two forms: either a naïve, anthropomorphic ascription of human characteristics to animals, or a quasi-moralizing, hygienic operation whereby "grief" becomes a noble, sensitive activity narrowly reserved to civilized humans and denied to mere animals (and, occasionally, to "primitive" or "uncivilized" persons). In each case, what is ultimately at stake is just as much about making universal claims about humans as it is about making claims about animals. Thus, in the former camp, some authors find kinship with animals in grief as giving humans philosophical solidarity in our universal mortality. As Morell writes, "Death is an end, a nevermore. It is the hardest part of life for the living, something it seems our fellow animals know. In our evolved feelings of grief, we are all members of the animal kingdom" (208). Likewise, for Barbara King, the spectacle of animal grief can function as a practical balm for human mourners: "May it bring genuine comfort to know how much we share with other animals? I find hope and solace in [these] stories. May you find hope and solace in them as well" (376).

In the latter camp, Charles Darwin, in his *Descent of Man* (1871), ties the inscrutability of animal grief to the question of the universality of mourning among humans in a rather bleaker way:

> Who can say what the cows feel, when they surround and stare intently on a dying or dead companion? That animals sometimes are far from feeling any sympathy is too certain; for they will expel a wounded animal from the herd, or gore or worry it to death. This is indeed the blackest fact in natural history, unless indeed the explanation which has been suggested is true, that their instinct or reason leads them to expel an injured companion, lest beasts of prey, including man, be tempted to follow the troop. In this case their conduct is not much worse than that of North

> American Indians who leave their feeble comrades to perish on the plains, or the Feegeans, who, when their parents get old or fall ill, bury them alive.
>
> (73-74)

Darwin's analysis merits some extended consideration, not just because his take on mourning resembles that of Ariès (insofar as both take mourning as a kind of luxury, predicated on material security), nor simply because, as we shall see in Chapter 2 below, Darwin himself had intimate personal knowledge of experiencing the loss of a child, but because Darwin's approach to both animal and human suffering prefigures many of the paradoxical features that mark research on the topic to this day. Darwin's *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872) attempts to situate expressions of human emotion within the framework of a model wherein humans and animals exist on a common continuum of creaturehood.[19] In particular, Chapter VII of his text, entitled *Low Spirits, Anxiety, Grief, Dejection, and Despair*, focuses on observable behaviors among mammals including the shedding of tears, wailing, and various facial expressions (such as the "obliquity of eyebrows under suffering" and "the depression of the corners of the mouth"), all of which Darwin ultimately takes as indices of involuntary responses to somatic discomfort, fear-induced agitation, or hunger. Darwin's dataset includes not just direct observation of animals in the wild, and second-hand stories of zookeepers and travelers, but also anthropological surveys of "primitive" cultures, reports from insane asylums, and observations of his own children. Thus we find passages like the following, on the baleful "inspirations" of one his own children:

> With one of my infants, when seventy-seven days old, the inspirations were so rapid and strong that they approached in character to sobbing; when 138 days old I first noticed distinct sobbing, which subsequently followed every bad crying-fit. The respiratory movements are partly voluntary and partly involuntary, and I apprehend that sobbing is at least in part due to children having some power to command after

[19] I am indebted to correspondence with animal studies and affect theory scholar Donovan Schaefer for much of this analysis.

> early infancy their vocal organs and to stop their screams, but from having less power over their respiratory muscles, these continue for a time to act in an involuntary or spasmodic manner, after having been brought into violent action. Sobbing seems to be peculiar to the human species; for the keepers in the Zoological Gardens assure me that they have never heard a sob from any kind of monkey; though monkeys often scream loudly whilst being chased and caught, and then pant for a long time.
>
> (Darwin 166)

As the above paragraph indicates, for Darwin, the shedding of tears– "lachrymal excretion" accompanied by "occipital agitation" – is a particularly contentious matter. Darwin vacillates as to whether or not elephants "truly" cry, or if this is just a function of other exertions (like trumpeting)[20] and struggles at length as to whether or not monkeys can be said to "sob" or "weep" or "cry," classing anecdotal evidence for such behavior as decidedly shaky.[21] Extending his observations from animals to "primitive" tribes and humans confined to mental institutions, Darwin does note that "savages weep copiously from very slight causes" (155), and that "persons born idiotic likewise weep; but it is said that this is not the case with cretins" (156). He ultimately proposes a biological mechanism for such behavior that involves the diffusion of stress responses throughout the nervous system, [22] and which

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[20] "In the Zoological Gardens the keeper of the Indian elephants positively asserts that he has several times seen tears rolling down the face of the old female, when distressed by the removal of the young one. Hence I was extremely anxious to ascertain, as an extension of the relation between the contraction of the orbicular muscles and the shedding of tears in man, whether elephants when screaming or trumpeting loudly contract these muscles. At Mr. Bartlett's desire the keeper ordered the old and the young elephant to trumpet; and we repeatedly saw in both animals that, just as the trumpeting began, the orbicular muscles, especially the lower ones, were distinctly contracted." (Darwin 167)

[21] "There are very few animals which contract these muscles in a prolonged manner, or which shed tears. The *Macacus maurus*, which formerly wept so copiously in the Zoological Gardens, would have been a fine case for observation; but the two monkeys now there, and which are believed to belong to the same species, do not weep. Nevertheless they were carefully observed by Mr. Bartlett and myself, whilst screaming loudly, and they seemed to contract these muscles; but they moved about their cages so rapidly, that it was difficult to observe with certainty. No other monkey, as far as I have been able to ascertain, contracts its orbicular muscles whilst screaming." (166)

[22] "Children, when wanting food or suffering in any way, cry out loudly, like the young of most other animals, partly as a call to their parents for aid, and partly from any great exertion serving relief. Prolonged screaming inevitably leads to the gorging of the blood-vessels of the eye; and this will have led, at first consciously and at last habitually, to the contraction of the muscles round the eyes in

genealogically links "civilized" human expressions of sorrow simultaneously with infantile expressions of hunger, "primitive" human expressions of distress, and animal responses to pain:

> Through steps such as these we can understand how it is, that as soon as some melancholy thought passes through the brain, there occurs a just perceptible drawing down of the corners of the mouth, or a slight raising up of the inner ends of the eyebrows, or both movements combined, and immediately afterwards a slight suffusion of tears. A thrill of nerve-force is transmitted along several habitual channels, and produces an effect on any point where the will has not acquired through long habit much power of interference. The above actions may be considered as rudimental vestiges of the screaming-fits, which are so frequent and prolonged during infancy.
>
> (Darwin 197)

But while in humans, the involuntary behaviors activated by such "nerve-force pathways" may have atavistic, evolutionary roots, and may manifest somewhat similarly in our primate relatives[23] as well as in infants and "savages" alike, the capacity for higher-level "melancholy thoughts," like the capacities for genuine "sobbing," "crying," and "weeping" are the province of humans alone: "weeping…must have been acquired since the period when man branched off from the common progenitor of the genus Homo and of the non-weeping

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order to protect them. At the same time the spasmodic pressure on the surface of the eye, and the distension of the vessels within the eye, without necessarily entailing any conscious sensation, will have affected, through reflex action, the lachrymal glands. Finally, through the three principles of nerve-force readily passing along accustomed channels—of association, which is so widely extended in its power—and of certain actions, being more under the control of the will than others—it has come to pass that suffering readily causes the secretion of tears, without being necessarily accompanied by any other action." (Darwin 176)

[23] To whom, incidentally, Darwin is willing to grant the possibility of affectionate attachment: "Many kinds of monkeys, as I am assured by the keepers in the Zoological Gardens, delight in fondling and being fondled by each other, and by persons to whom they are attached. Mr. Bartlett has described to me the behaviour of two chimpanzees, rather older animals than those generally imported into this country, when they were first brought together. They sat opposite, touching each other with their much protruded lips; and the one put his hand on the shoulder of the other. They then mutually folded each other in their arms. Afterwards they stood up, each with one arm on the shoulder of the other, lifted up their heads, opened their mouths, and yelled with delight." (Darwin 215)

anthropomorphous apes" (154).[24] Like many modern scholars on the topic of animal grief, then, Darwin compensates for the inaccessibility of the qualia of animal consciousness by supplying external, observational data – oftentimes second-hand. He then proposes explanations for that observational data that, he claims, hold explanatory power for similar behavior in humans, all while also trying to preserve certain features of grief as unique to homo sapiens. In other words, Darwin's foray into accounting for animal grief is just as much about understanding its manifestation in humans, and the closer Darwin gets to considering humaniform creatures – towards contemporary apes and our hominid ancestors – the more forced his insistence on distinguishing between them and us, even as the distinctions on which that difference turns (between "sobbing" and "weeping," between "agitation" and "grief") grow all the more vague. As we shall see below, when it comes to considering modern primatologists' and anthropologists' takes on parental grief in both primates and our hominid ancestors, Darwin's dilemma is paradigmatic.

2. Toward the Human, Within the Human

On September 2, 2008, a piece by science writer Natalie Angier appeared in *The New York Times*. Entitled *Do Animals Grieve Over Death Like We Do?*, Angier's consideration of

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[24] Although I will explicitly treat Darwin's personal correspondence in Chapter 2 below, it is difficult, while reading his reflections on the uniquely human claim to "melancholy thoughts" and a genuine capacity to cry, to not think of an April 18, 1851 letter his wife, written as Darwin watched his favorite daughter die. "It is much bitterer & harder to bear than I expected— Your note made me cry much—but I must not give way & can avoid doing so, by not thinking about her. It is now from hour to hour a struggle between life & death. God only knows the issue. She has been very quiet all morning, but vomited badly at 6 A.M. which, however bad, shows she has more vital force than during two previous days. Sometimes Dr. G. exclaims she will get through the struggle; then, I see, he doubts.— Oh my own it is very bitter indeed.—". Written some twenty years after this event, which scarred Darwin for life, his on privileging human grief in *The Expression of Emotion of Man and Animals* is suggestive indeed.

animal grief begins, quite similarly to James Honeyborne's piece in *The Guardian*, with an appeal to putatively universal human emotions and experiences:

> As anybody who has grieved inconsolably over the death of a loved one can attest, extended mourning is, in part, a perverse kind of optimism. Surely this bottomless, unwavering sorrow will amount to something, goes the tape loop. Surely if I keep it up long enough I'll accomplish my goal, and the person will stop being dead.

Angier goes on to tell the story of Gana, an 11-year-old gorilla at the Münster Zoo in Germany, whose three-month-old baby, Claudio, died of an apparent heart defect. For days after Claudio's passing, Gana refused to surrender his corpse to zookeepers, clutching him to her body and pursing her lips toward his lifeless fingers. Such behavior, Angier concedes, may appear to some observers as evidencing universal commonalities between humans and our primate relatives, including an awareness of mortality and the pain of maternal grief. But in fact, for Angier, the universality in question – what humans and primates share – is something rather different: "Elaborate displays of apparent maternal grief like Gana's may reveal less about our shared awareness of death than our shared impulse to act as though it didn't exist." Noting that adult gorillas don't linger by the bodies of their dead adult comrades, and in fact often leave sick or injured adults behind to die while the troop moves on, Angier goes on to invoke the by-now-familiar argument that holding on to a dead child as long as possible makes evolutionary sense given the possibility, however miniscule, that the child may revive, quoting a primatologist who speculates that Gana may just have been thinking her baby was comatose: "We're talking about primates who have singleton births after long periods of gestation… Each baby represents an enormous investment for the mother." Rather than being an example of the heart-rending, all-too-human spectacle of a mother who just 'can't let go,' behavior like Gana's is merely an artifact of evolution – an energistic gambit that, somehow, maternal DNA will get passed on.

It turns out, however, that Angier's motivation extends beyond exploding saccharine anthropomorphic projections onto gorillas. In fact, although the issue doesn't come up in her *Times* piece, Angier is an outspoken atheist and the recipient of the Freedom from Religion Foundation's 2003 "Emperor Has No Clothes Award," which she accepted by delivering a speech entitled *But What About the Tooth Fairy, Mom? Raising a Healthy God-Free Child in a Hopelessly God-struck Nation*. In her atheist advocacy, Angier takes specific issue with the claim of some religions to promise life after death. In an essay entitled *My God Problem – and Theirs*, she argues that a religious conviction in life after death is more or less directly analogous to Gana's ostensible belief that Claudio might somehow come back to life: it is a kind of folly, evolutionary understandable, but folly nonetheless. Writes Angier: "I don't believe in life after death, but I'd like to believe in life before death. I'd like to think that one of these days we'll leave superstition and delusional thinking and Jerry Falwell behind. Scientists would like that, too" (134). Lamenting the death of a child, whether human or animal, is of course understandable, Angier concedes, but such behavior in animals is an object lesson not in a universality of *pathos* between us and them, but rather in a shared evolutionary legacy which it behooves us as civilized, rational humans to overcome.

Five years later, in a June 2013 article, again in *The New York Times*, a different science writer took precisely the opposite stance. Written by Maggie Koerth-Baker, this piece, entitled *Want to Understand Mortality? Look to the Chimps*, again begins with an appeal to putatively human emotions and expectations, this time narrating the dying moments of a chimp named Pansy, who died at the age of 50 at a zoo in Scotland. "She passed in a way most of us would envy — peacefully, with her adult daughter, Rosie, and her best friend, Blossom, by her side." Pansy passes away in a deathbed scene that is straight out of Ariès or (as we shall see) Walter Benjamin's *The Storyteller*, surrounded by her family and watched over

by her offspring. Pansy was also, however, being watched over by humans. As Koerth-Baker writes, "When the scientists at the park realized Pansy's death was imminent, they turned on video cameras, capturing intimate moments during her last hours as Blossom, Rosie and Blossom's son, Chippy, groomed her and comforted her as she got weaker." Koerth-Baker sees in this behavior evidence supporting the existence of human universals, drawing on the work of evolutionary anthropologist Brian Hare to postulate that "Further observation [of such scenes] might help us identify the substrate beneath human culture. Take the grooming of the dead, for instance. All human cultures address the cleaning of dead bodies in different ways…but all of them do something to cleanse corpses." But here, again, turning to primates to appeal to human universals only goes so far, and leaves much up to projection: much as Angier cannot truly know whether or not the bereaved Gana actually thinks that her child might come back to life, or if she simply can't bear to let go of him, the behavior of Pansy's companions is also inscrutable – their grooming of her dying body may be just as much a matter of hygienic reflex as it is an activity of comfort-giving or saying goodbye.[25] Here as with other animals, the spectacle of death is frequently a site of anthropomorphic projection, with the question or character of any human-style grief being very much in the eye of the beholder.

But if the temptation is strong to frame arguments for human universals, one way or another, in relation to observations of contemporary primates, the tendency to do so when reviewing archaeological investigations into our archaic hominid ancestors is pervasive.

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[25] It is striking how much more such speculations appear to be encouraged by observing primates over and above other animals, a tendency presumably emboldened not just because of their humaniform shape, but also by their evolutionary proximity to modern humans. Indeed, while writers like Koerth-Baker can draw parallels between primates grooming dying companions and the work of human undertakers, I have yet to find a single writer who, describing how naked mole rats (*Heterocephalus glaber*) seal off their dead in specially dug chambers of their warrens (clearly for hygienic reasons, given that they seal off latrine chambers when full in the exact same way), refers to such an activity as a "burial."

Nowhere is this more evident than in speculations over how extinct members of the genus *homo* dealt with death. Indeed, while modern primates do not bury their dead, the archaeological record clearly shows that a variety of ancestral humans, including *Homo erectus* and others, engaged in what appear to have been oftentimes elaborate burial practices throughout the Middle Paleolithic (300,000 – 30,000 years ago; Chase and Dibble 272-275). Even more provocatively, it appears that Neanderthals (*Homo neanderthalensis*) were digging graves for their dead and marking their bodies with a red ochre pigment (the purpose of which is entirely unknown) some 250,000 years ago (Roebroeks et al 1889-94); likewise, excavation of a Neanderthal grave in Shanidar, Iraq, dug some 60,000 years ago, has revealed a corpse that was buried and then left with bouquet of flowers placed on its chest (Solecki 180-181). Most germane to our purposes, it appears that, for some prehistoric humans, and even more for Neanderthals, especial attention was paid to the burial of children. A Neanderthal infant burial dating from at least 70,000 years ago has been discovered in Syria (Akazawa 129-142), and digging beneath a 50,000 year-old pile of rocks in a Spanish cave has revealed several Neanderthal adults and children, their arms gingerly folded into identical positions, panther paws placed nearby.[26] But none of these sites compare to the discovery of the grave of a child, buried some 25,000 years ago in a cave just north of Lisbon, Portugal. This child, known as the Lapedo Child, died of uncertain causes somewhere between three-and-a-half-to-five years of age, and the arrangement of its corpse suggests that a tremendous amount of care and material expenditure went into its burial. The body is gingerly arranged, appears to have been fully clothed,[27] and is surrounded by a variety of valuable decorative

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[26] For this, see Jennifer Viegas's April 20, 2011 article on *Discovery.com*, which bluntly asks "Did Neanderthals believe in an afterlife?" Viegas's articles is available at: http://bit.ly/1ok6MyN.

[27] "Since both the upper and the lower surfaces of the bones were stained, we infer that the body must have been wrapped in a shroud of ochre-painted skin, whose subsequent decay caused the transfer of the mineral pigment to the skeleton and surrounding sediment. The presence of a semi-

and food items, including an arrangement of charred rabbit bones left between the child's knees and deer bones set around its sides. Likewise, although the Lagar Velho cave is fairly far from the coast, the Lapedo Child also appears to have had a seashell pendant placed around its neck, and to have been buried wearing a headdress adorned with deer teeth. But what makes the Lapedo Child even more interesting for our purposes is that, taxonomically speaking, its exact status as "human" is decidedly unclear: its bone features represent a "mosaic" of features associated with *both* Neanderthals and Cro-Magnons, who are more commonly understood to be archaic humans, and whose interbreeding with Neanderthals is an object of considerable dispute. Such discoveries have led both scholars and popular media to speculate that extinct members of the genus *homo*, including Neanderthals, may have possessed recognizable "human" universals including religion and behaviors such as art, play, and music.[28] Although no one can definitively answer these questions, much as no one can ever know exactly what those who buried the Lapedo Child felt or thought as they did so, the simple fact that such burials exist, when viewed against the presence of "care for children," "beliefs about death," and "death rituals" on Brown's list of human universals

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rigid durable wrap around the body would also have provided the empty space necessary for the post-mortem plantarflexion or downward pointing, of the child's feet." This quote and the subsequent information on the Lagar Velhosite are drawn from the writings of one of the principal excavators, João Zilhão, writing in *Athena Review*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (2008), which is available online at: http://bit.ly/1ux3zvt. For more on this site, and on the connection to Neanderthal versus human ancestry, see Duarte et al. (1999).

[28] For the issue of Neanderthal religion, see the Viegas piece above. On the topic of family in Neanderthal culture, consider the work of Spikins et al (2014), who draw upon evidence from various Neanderthal camp and burial sites. As Spikins told a reporter for *The Daily Mail* in a piece that appeared on April 10, 2014: "The traditional view sees Neanderthal childhood as unusually harsh, difficult and dangerous. This accords with preconceptions about Neanderthal inferiority and an inability to protect children epitomising Neanderthal decline. Our research found that a close attachment and particular attention to children is a more plausible interpretation of the archaeological evidence, explaining an unusual focus on infants and children in burial, and setting Neanderthal symbolism within a context which is likely to have included children…There is a critical distinction to be made between a harsh childhood and a childhood lived in a harsh environment."

puts considerable pressure on us to reconsider what assumptions shape our definitions of who and what counts as "human" when it comes to defining human universals.

3. From Attachment Styles to Brain Chemistry

Darwin and the naturalists of his era could only observe animals in zoos or in the wild, and today's archaeologists can only dig up bones and speculate about hominid social structures. Meanwhile, contemporary investigations into whether or not parental mourning of deceased children is a human universal necessarily encounter two comparatively new fields of research that bear on the question: attachment theory and the cognitive neurosciences. Although the fundamental concerns of this dissertation are ultimately not empirical, briefly touching upon the findings of these fields as they appertain to the problem of parental mourning is important insofar as even a quick survey reveals how committed these discourses are to making essentially universal claims – and to blurring the line between objective description and normative prescription.

The development of attachment theory is historically associated with the work of noted British psychoanalyst and psychiatrist John Bowlby (1907-1990) and his student and collaborator, the psychologist Mary Ainsworth (1913-1999). Heavily influenced by the work of the Austrian ethologist Konrad Lorenz (1902-1989), the Dutch biologist Niko Tinbergen (1907-1988), and his personal friend, Robert Hinde (1923 - present), a British zoologist, Bowlby sought to draft a descriptive model for understanding the formative relationship between mother child by observing the two as a pair – in the terminology of attachment theory, as a *dyad* (Bowlby, *Interview* 321-35). Taking a cue from Lorenz, who observed attachment patterns – close relationship bonds – in birds and other animals, Bowlby

proposed a unified concept of maternal child-bonds in humans, writing in his seminal paper, *Critical Phases in the Development of Social Responses in Man and Other Animals* (1953) that "The time is already ripe for a unification of psycho-analytic concepts with those of ethology" (25-32). Bowlby, whose clinical practice involved working with "antisocial" and "delinquent children," was particularly interested in the impact of traumatic separation and maternal neglect ("deprivation") on later childhood development, and ultimately hypothesized that healthy development involved a child's transitioning from a relationship of close dependence on their maternal caregiver to ever-growing degrees of freedom from her, with the mother remaining a "secure base" throughout (Karen 26-66). Ainsworth staged laboratory experiments wherein she observed and classified the differing micro-dynamics of children's responses to brief separation experiences from their mothers, and also, in an more ethnographic mode, spent time observing parenting practices in Uganda (Karen 129-161). Together, the two co-wrote *Child Care and the Growth of Love* (1965), which, among other things, drew upon Bowlby's theories and Ainsworth's observations to propose an explicitly *universal* model for all the shapes possible caregiver-infant relationships can take, constituting an catalog of "Attachment Styles" that is used by many researchers and clinicians to this day. The universal claims made by Bowlby in particular inspired the notorious American psychologist Harry Harlow (1905-1981), working in an era well before the advent of IRBs, to conduct a series of horrific experiments with rhesus monkeys, which he variously tried raising in isolation tanks, in complete darkness (the so-called "Well of Despair"), and with substitute "mothers" that were actually dolls constructed out of paper cloth and, occasionally, prickly wire that electrically shocked the monkeys who tried to hug them (Karen 119-122). Harlow's summary of his findings, encapsulated in his paper *Total Social Isolation in Monkeys* (1965) seem, in retrospect, rather obvious: those monkeys left to fend for

themselves without any social contact regularly exhibited "autistic self-clutching and rocking" and frequently died from what Harlow called "emotional anorexia" (Harlow 92). Yet Harlow's work also seemed to validate one of the basic premises of attachment theory as it had previously been demonstrated in humans: even when provided with food and sleeping accommodations, rhesus babies *needed* their mothers (primary caretakers) to the point that they would wither if deprived of them, and would even attach themselves to prosthetic ones – although those who were made to suffer electric shocks in so doing eventually wound up catatonic or worse. Harlow, for his part, was eager to claim that his findings held universally true for attachment patterns between human parents and children, and, according to psychologist and historian Robert Karen, "wasted no time in generalizing to other members of the animal kingdom" (Karen 122), even composing a poem entitled *The Hippopotamus*, which runs: "This is the skin some babies feel / Replete with hippo love appeal. / Each contact, cuddle, push, and shove / Elicits tons of baby love."[29] The story of attachment theory then, is very much also a story about the observation of some humans begetting universal claims-making about all humans, which are in turn applied to some animals, and then to all animals, and then back to humans again.

More recently, joint work by neuroscientists and psychoanalytically inclined researchers has linked attachment theory with biological accounts, specifically involving brain chemistry, that emphasize not just the dyadic bond between mother and child in terms of the child's need for its mother, but the mother's attachment to her child as well. Together, psychoanalyst Peter Fonagy and scientist Lane Strathearn have sought to ground the

[29] Such saccharine doggerel stands in stark contrast not only with the brutality of Harlow's work, but also with his explicit attitude towards animals in general. As he told a reporter who once confronted him about his experiments: "The only thing I care about is whether a monkey will turn out a property I can publish. I don't have any love for them. Never have. I don't really like animals. I despise cats. I hate dogs. How could you like monkeys?" (Blum 92)

mother-child dyad in accounts of brain chemistry, particularly involving oxytocin and endogenous opioids (Fonagy and Strathearn 2655–2666; Nelson 437-452). But such research – particularly involving oxytocin, a so-called 'trust hormone' – is much more equivocal than popular media accounts would have many believe. Indeed, oxytocin, a hypothalamic neuropeptide, works in close relation to another, similar chemical, vasopressin, and is involved not just in activating feelings of love and trust, but also of aggression and stress (Ferris 242-53).[30] In fact, while many popular accounts have sought to pinpoint oxytocin, which is present in the brains of practically all vertebrates, as a kind of "proof" for a "universal" capacity for attachment across the animal kingdom, the reality is far more complicated, and the outlook of more rigorous science decidedly skeptical.[31] The role of oxytocin in maternal bereavement is even more ambiguous.[32] Biologically-centered narratives that attempt to stipulate universal experiences of mourning in humans and animals alike may be deeply attractive, particularly when they string together buzzwords from the latest popular science with what appear to be cutting-edge data-collection techniques,[33] but, as we have

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[30] In fact, new research suggests that oxytocin release may also play an important role in regulating in-group, out-group dynamics, and particularly in chauvinistic identifications with ideological symbols like flags. For more on this, see Ma et al. (2014).

[31] For more, see research by Viero et al. (138-156) or Smith (271-281).

[32] See Prommanart et al. (2004), Panksepp et al. (2011), and Burgoine et al. (2005).

[33] Consider Morell once more: "We share biological histories and physiologies - DNA, eyes, muscles, nerves, neurons, hormones - with other animals, and these may lead to similar behaviors, thought processes, and emotions - even about death….From a study of twenty-two wild baboon females who had lost either an infant or other close relative to a predator, scientists know that the animals' stress hormones flare for four weeks after the attack. They typically act in a "bereaved" manner, too, sitting apart from other baboons and not seeking out grooming (a behavior that has both social and hygienic benefits… [This] mourning period is a neurobiological necessity, particularly for any animal that forms close bonds with another individual. Researchers [Karen Wager-Smith and Athina Markou] note that stress can inflict "microdamage" in key areas of the brain, such as the hippocampus and prefrontal cortex, both of which are concerned with memory, emotions, personality, and planning. But the brain is not a static organ; it responds dynamically to life's events by pruning away neurons that are no longer needed and sprouting new ones. Rewiring takes time and energy, and so a period of mourning — of sleeping longer, minimizing social contact, eating less — can ultimately prove beneficial" (200-202). At first blush, this seems appealing, but the vast tracts of cortex Morell invokes, combined with the fact that fMRI technology cannot even come close to

seen, the temptation to draw universal claims from limited datasets is perennial – and often highly motivated.[34]

4. The Parental Indifference Hypothesis

A great deal of the output of the British poet William Blake (1757-1827) involves writing about children and the imagery of childhood. His magnum opus, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, is particularly in noteworthy in this respect, with thirteen of the nineteen poems that make up that collection involving descriptions of children in various experiences of bliss, suffering, toil, and repose.[35] In light of our above survey of the long history of claims-making about parental attachment as a human universal, one poem in particular stands out. Entitled *On Another's Sorrow*, Blake's poem paints a picture wherein a parent's attunement to their child's suffering takes on the form of an universal necessity – an involuntary imperative the existence of which can only be repeatedly insisted upon, never gainsaid: "Can a father see his child / Weep, nor be with sorrow filled? / Can a mother sit and hear / An infant groan, an infant fear? / No, no! never can it be! / Never, never can it be!" (60-61).

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isolating what specific memories, plans, emotions, or personality such "microdamage" might conceivably impact, combined with the simple fact that behaviors like socializing and eating *less* are decidedly unlikely to encourage neuronal rewiring, makes this analysis dubious indeed.

[34] It should perhaps be unsurprising that plentiful non-FDA approved "oxytocin" products are available for sale on the internet. Some are targeted at parents of autistic children, whose difficulties with "relating" vendors claim to alleviate. Consider, for example, the nasal spray available here, http://bit.ly/X7BrVa, which in addition to costing $70 and having dubious efficacy, also contains benzalkonium chloride, a highly toxic preservative compound. Likewise, given how frequently (predominantly male) oxytocin researchers measure "pro-sociality," "trust," and "affiliative behavior" by quantifying the lack of resistance female voles offer to aggressive mating overtures by males (See Ross et al 2009 and Ross and Young 2009) it should also be unsurprising that "oxytocin" products are marketed to men to either wear on their bodies as a cologne or as a substance with which to dose unsuspecting women in order to improve their chances of having sex with them. Consider, for example, this product, which is branded as "Liquid Trust" http://bit.ly/1q2sDKJ.

[35] Consider, for example, in *Songs*, *Holy Thursday* (67), which features parents weeping over an martyred child, or *Little Boy Lost* (79). Elsewhere in his *Collected Works*, *The Grey Monk* (105-106) takes up similar *topoi* of infantile innocence attenuated by suffering.

Against Blake's repeated assertion – "Never, never can it be!" – stands the work of Philippe Ariès and his famous "Parental Indifference Hypothesis." A French medievalist associated with the so-called "Annales School,"[36] Ariès was a pioneering chronicler of what is often called the *histoire des mentalités*, a term that, in the French context, captures more than the English "History of Ideas" and which, as a methodology and outlook, involves tracking not just the transmission and reception of high-level intellectual concepts, but also trying to describe popular cultural attitudes (*mentalités*) as well. Ariès's major works are preoccupied with understanding the character of family life from the Middle Ages through the Early Modern Era and beyond, and in particular with tracking the development of popular attitudes towards children and mortality.[37] For Ariès, these attitudes were far from static, and in fact changed radically over time in response to demographic, economic, and ecological pressures. Most famously, Ariès postulates what is widely dubbed the "Parental Indifference Hypothesis," which, simply put, holds that, historically speaking, parental attachment to children and the intensity of the grief that parents would feel when their children died have existed in inverse relation to family size, childhood mortality rates, and resource insecurity. In other words, per Ariès, during periods of history when (1) parents would have more children, and (2) those children, statistically speaking, faced higher chances of dying young, while (3) food and shelter were harder to come by, parents would attach to their children

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[36] So-called because the term refers not to an actual physical institution, but to the school of thought associated with the sociological/historical journal *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale* founded in 1924 by Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch, and which has been renamed several time since then and is now published as *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*. For more, see the relevant entry in *The Columbia History of Twentieth-Century French Thought* (9-15).

[37] This section draws heavily on Ariès's major texts: *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* (1960), translated into English as *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (1962), here abbreviated as *CC*; *Essais sur l'histoire de la mort en Occident: du Moyen Âge à nos jours* (1971), translated as *Western Attitudes toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present* (1974) and here abbreviated as *WAD*; and *Images de l'homme devant la mort* (1983), translated as *Images of Man and Death* (1985) and here abbreviated as *IMD*.

less, and correspondingly mourned them less (if at all) when they died. As Ariès puts it, "[under such circumstances] people could not allow themselves to become too attached to something that was regarded as a probable loss" (*CC* 39). In its own way, Ariès's notion of parental attachment as involving an *investment* of finite emotional energy as a risky gambit against a backdrop of finite resources and considerable material stressors echoes both Darwin's vision of "savage" cultures and contemporary primatologists's appeals to the caloric-energistic calculi that supposedly drive animal parenting and "bereavement" behaviors. Like Darwin, and like some primatologists, Ariès is also quick to suggest that his account of attachment applies not just to the cultures and periods that he specifically studies, but to all human cultures at all times, universally: "This feeling of indifference towards a too fragile childhood is not really very far removed from the callousness of the Roman or Chinese societies which practised the exposure of new-born children" (*CC* 40).

Put bluntly, then, Ariès holds that parental mourning for deceased children is not a human universal, but a culturally contingent phenomenon determined by abstract forces. According to Ariès, these pressures shape the very concept of what constitutes a "child" in the first place, and, correspondingly, determine the extent of their parents' emotional investment in them. Thus, addressing child mortality rates during the Middle Ages, Ariès writes: "Nobody thought, as we ordinarily think today, that every child already contained a man's personality. Too many of them died...This indifference was a direct and inevitable consequence of the demography of the period" (*CC* 40). Methodologically, Ariès supports his argument by comparing child mortality rates over time with contemporaneous productions of material culture, including not just graves but also memorial statues and portraits, of which there do indeed seem to have been precious few, at least during the Middle Ages and Early Modern era. Writes Ariès:

> [During these periods] No one thought of keeping a picture of a child if that child had either lived to grow to manhood or had died in infancy. In the first case, childhood was simply an unimportant phase of which there was no need to keep any record; in the second case, that of the dead child, it was thought that the little thing which had disappeared so soon in life was not worthy of remembrance: there were far too many children whose survival was problematical.
>
> (Ariès *CC* 39)

Ariès's work also employs textual analysis that emphasizes both the comparative dearth of historical documents mentioning the death of children alongside the rather striking presence of numerous documents that seem to describe such events as a matter of utter indifference – most notably in the *Essais* of Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592), who remarks, almost offhand, that he isn't quite sure how many of his children survived, and that, in any event, their loss was, put crudely, no big deal: "Et j'en ay perdu, mais en nourrice, deux ou trois, sinon sans regrets, au moins sans facherie" (Essay I.14). Although we will address the difficult question of how reliably a historical author's affective experiences can be intuited from their writings in Chapter 2 below, it is admittedly nonetheless hard for many modern readers (and certainly hard for me) *not* to be taken aback by such laconic observations of the death of children, particularly from otherwise emotionally astute writers like Montaigne.[38]

In further support of his hypothesis, Ariès argues that, as the stressors that had previously encouraged parental indifference lessened in the wake of various historical developments, the capacity for parental attachment deepened, and, in turn, so too did the intensity of parental mourning. The factors shaping these pressures are, for Ariès, varied, at once highly concrete and fairly abstract, ranging from the Industrial Revolution to new birth control technologies to Malthusian economic policies to the smallpox vaccine, all of which

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[38] Bracketing the possibility (which I think to be, in truth, rather small) that Montaigne's Stoicism is insincere, one wonders whether or not the *mother* who nursed these two (or three?) children could afford to be quite as blasé about their loss. But, of course, she did not write her memoirs – or if she did, they did not survive and enter the decidedly patriarchal canon of Western "Great Works."

simultaneously decreased family sizes, increased infant mortality, and, at least from a certain perspective, lessened periods of acute resource stress (Ariès *WAD* 65-67). These material developments in turn encouraged a shift in attitudes towards children and towards the expression of emotions in general, commonly associated with Romanticism, which reached an apogee during the Victorian era, marked as it was by "dramatic obsequies, pilgrimages to graves, a cult of remembrance, the moral rather than physical seclusion of family," and more (Woods 11-12).[39] Ariès, who views such Nineteenth Century displays as florid, even hysterical, sums them up as evidencing a new "Cult of Childhood," citing evidence from cemeteries and burial practices to support his claim:

> The deaths of children were the first deaths that could not be tolerated. Prior to the fifteenth century, children's tombs either did not exist or were very rare. In the seventeenth century, they were still rare and crude. But in the nineteenth century, the cemeteries were taken over by children. Parents evidently desired to represent their dead children in all kinds of attitudes in order to express their intense grief and their passionate desire to make their children survive in memory and in art, to exalt their children's innocence, charm, and beauty.
>
> (Ariès *IMD* 247)

Parental mourning is thus, per Ariès, a kind of sentimental luxury, much like elaborate tombs are material ones, and something that can only arise in the presence of adequate material preconditions. From this perspective, parental attachment itself isn't a universal – it's a contingency, with Blake's adamant "No, no! never can it be!" articulated even in a soot-choked London riven with juvenile workhouses, infant abandonment, and child prostitution, standing as a kind of optimistic *cri de coeur* that would have been unthinkable only a century prior when, during the last outbreak of the bubonic plague in that city (1664–66), the

[39] Echoing Benjamin, Robert Woods opposes these Nineteenth Century attitudes towards death and dying with contemporary ones, that include '[a] prohibition of mourning, grief hidden from public, unemotional self-control, [a] fear of 'cracking', [the] loneliness of hospital death, [increased use of] cremation' (12–13).

corpses of hundreds of children were being rounded up by the cartload daily and buried in ever-shallower graves around the city.[40]

Unsurprisingly, ever since it was first articulated, Ariès's hypothesis has produced fierce pushback. Although an exhaustive assessment of his critics' claims and counterclaims is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is worth observing that there is a distinct tendency not just to rely on methodological critiques, but on a certain apparent umbrage at what is taken to be the odious implications of his universal claims. On a methodological level, critics observe that Ariès's work is highly circumscribed, bearing many of the standard data-gathering assumptions that mark sociological research of his era (Woods 17–18). On a more basic level, the task Ariès sets for himself – namely, proving a negative proposition (i.e., the lack of a parental attachment) puts him on shaky ground in the first place, and drawing upon *absences of data* as support for this claim (i.e., citing the lack of Medieval portraits or graves for dead children) leaves him open to additional critique in light of new evidence. Thus, for example, one could counter-argue that perhaps Medieval parents *did* keep mementos of their children, or even give them grave markers, but that these were all made of substances that were simply too perishable to survive to the contemporary era. Likewise, Ariès's reliance on textual sources is limited. In the first place, Church records compiled by (nominally) celibate priests and writings by intellectuals like Montaigne shed little light on the experiences of a broader population that was overwhelming illiterate. Moreover, when scholars, particularly in the Digital Humanities, assess written materials produced across Europe as literacy rates increased – archives of letters and diaries unavailable to Ariès – many have reached different conclusions. The historian of Early Modern England Ralph Houlbrooke, who has undertaken such research extensively, concludes that:

[40] For more on this epidemic, the last outbreak of the Bubonic plague in Britain, which ultimately claimed over a 100,00 lives – including 8,000 people in one week alone – see Slack (1991).

> Children's deaths were, after those of marriage partners, the ones that left the deepest imprint on diaries and letters… It was well known that the deaths of infants and young children made up a high proportion of all mortality, but this did not make bereavement any less painful to an individual parent. Children's deaths were always felt to be premature. Running through the many expressions of grief at their loss is the sense of promise cut off.
>
> (Woods 58 op. cit.)

Although Houlbrooke concedes that the death of infants may have carried considerably less of an impact for Early Modern British parents than it does for modern ones, he does observe that, universally speaking, attachment bonds grew as children matured, and so, correlatively, did the force of mourning when they died: 'the growth of attachment, together with the children's acquisition of skills and distinctive individual personalities, sharpened grief' (Woods 58 op cit). Other critics, however, are unwilling to make such any such concessions, and are adamant about dismissing Ariès altogether. Thus, in her *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500 to 1900*, historian Anne Pollock writes that:

> There is no change in the extent of parental grief over the centuries and no support at all for the argument that parents before the 18th century were indifferent to the death of their young offspring… It seems as if parents grieved at the death of a baby for what that baby might have become whereas at the death of an older child they grieved not only for what that child would have become, but also for what that child had been.
>
> (Pollock 104)

Pollock's matter-of-fact claim that "there is no change in the extent to parental grief" over the course of several centuries carries a force that her "it seems as if" immediately undermines: although she may well be right, or closer to right, than Ariès, Pollock herself is working with an incomplete dataset, and wrestling with the same challenges of inferring the interior affective states of people long since dead from the traces, material and textual, that they may have happened to leave behind. But this does not stop Pollock from taking the entirety of Ariès's work to task – challenging not just his parental indifference hypothesis (3-16), but questioning his entire concept of what constitutes a family (26-30) and eviscerating

his writing on parental attitudes toward corporal punishment (261-266). Although, again, empirically adjudicating these questions is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is important to underscore the impression given reading critics like Pollock: many of his critics seem to feel not just that Ariès's work is worthy of critique but that it should be jettisoned outright and wholesale. The threat his account of the non-universality of parental mourning poses, it seems, is a flashpoint, and liable to provoke denunciation in universal terms.

Keeping in mind our survey suggesting the intense ideological motivations that can drive debates over the universality of parental mourning in other discourses, it is worth eyeing both Ariès and his critics with some suspicion. On one level, the impartial observer has to concede that, at least as far as his analysis of actual infant and child mortality rates is concerned, Ariès is spot-on. Indeed, for the centuries Ariès studies, these rates are staggering. Although data for the Middle Ages is hard to come by, estimates for infant mortality can run as high as 50%, and only 40% of all children who survived infancy could expect to reach the age of ten.[41] Even in the first half of the nineteenth century, nearly 20% of live-born infants in France died before their first birthday, while 40% died before their tenth. (Woods 36–37). During the same period in England and Wales, 20-30% of children died before the age of 1, while 30-35% would be dead by ten (Woods 44); similarly high rates appear to have been the case in Scandinavia and Germany (Woods 50–53). Throughout all these periods, rates of infanticide, abortion, stillbirths, and maternal deaths were also exceedingly high (Woods 48–50). As a simple benchmark for evaluating this data, the UN Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation's infant mortality rates for

[41] For more, see Lewis and Gowland (2007) and Boone (1986). The mortality rate for children during the Fourteenth Century's "Black Death" (bubonic plague) is even harder to assess, but estimates indicate that the disease killed anywhere from 30% to 50% of the entire European population, with some regions experiencing a population loss of nearly 85%, and that children were particularly vulnerable. For more, see Ziegler (2009).

contemporary sub-Saharan Africa and the United States are 13% and 0.8% respectively. Looking at such grim figures, it seems hard *not* to consider the possibility that childbearing was in ages past a venture fraught with traumatic emotional risks considerably beyond our contemporary ability to contemplate, and that if mothers in particular faced what were in essence a coin-flip's odds of losing their infant while giving birth (to say nothing of nearly equivalent odds of dying themselves), perhaps the emotional landscape of parenting was rather different indeed. But by the same token, from our contemporary perspective, we can also sense the political and ethical minefield such speculations activate. Midcentury scholars like Ariès can indeed sanguinely speculate that a Nineteenth Century French parent who faced 20% odds of losing their infant could "not afford to make an emotional investment" in their child, and correspondingly did not mourn their death. But imagine chatting in a university seminar or at a cocktail affair and making a similar statement about the emotional capacities and experiences of mothers in the contemporary Democratic Republic of the Congo, where mortality rates are roughly similar – the very image sets off the worst kind of alarm bells. In classic pitfalls-of-universality-discourses form, assessing whether not other parents have mourned or do mourn their children can easily be taken as assessing whether or not those parents are good ones, and whether or not their children's lives are valuable in the first place – odious and fraught calculi all.[42]

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[42] Similar taboos around questioning the universality of parental attachment appear to be activated in discourses that deal with infanticide and the murder of children. Studies show that, when a child is murdered, the most likely culprit is a parent, not a stranger, and that, by a slight margin, mothers are more likely to kill their children than fathers. Writing on the topic, Friedman and Resnick note that, among all developed nations, the US has by far "the highest rates of child homicide (8.0/100,000 for infants, 2.5/100,000 for preschool-age children, and 1.5/100,000 for school-age children)" and that, given various technical complexity of coroner and police procedures, the actual numbers are, most likely, considerably higher (Friedman and Resnick 137-138). The media and popular reception of such cases presents a fascinating paradox: on the one hand, since talk of such phenomena is taboo, case regularly go unreported in the press; on the other, occasional specimen killers, particularly mothers, are singled out as monstrous aberrations by tabloids in particular; for more on this, see

5. Attachment in Extremis

As we have seen, the debate over Ariès's parental indifference hypothesis, much like the debate over animal and early hominid bereavement, turns as much on methodological and epistemological quandaries as it does on the emotionally and ideologically fraught question of our assumptions as to human universals. Particularly for contemporary writers and scholars, questioning the prospect that parents might mourn for their children less than "we" would (or at least like to think we would) is perhaps clouded by the conditions of contemporary first-world prosperity that currently surround us – however ephemeral those might ultimately prove to be. Seen from this perspective, the question can also seem overwhelmed by methodological minutiae, by debates over how to interpret sixty-thousand year-old burial sites, over how one hard-to-pronounce neuropeptide interacts with another, or whether or not Elizabethans versus Victorians kept locks of their dead children's hair in perishable containers. But in truth we need not look too far back into history or away from home for closer examples that seem to put our assumptions about the universality of parental mourning to the test: we need only examine, briefly, several key episodes in the fifty past years – the fate of peoples forced near to extinction in the developing world, and the suffering of those in the Twentieth Century's many concentration camps and gulags. Without narrow-mindedly reducing these episodes to one another, and without flattening

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work by Finkelhor (1997). It is also worth mentioning that, when such events *do* reach the public eye, mental health terminology is frequently levied fast and loose – such parents are readily reviled as psychopaths or sociopaths, with little distinction being drawn between the terms (which are respectively technical categories of psychiatry and criminology), and despite the fact that, statistically speaking, the actual prevalence of these conditions is an object of considerable dispute; for more on this, see Ronson (2011) and work by Blair (2001). In any event, for our purposes, we can say that, when parents murder their children, collective assumptions as to human universals are challenged, and various hygienic and normative discourse are rapidly brought to bear in response.

out the complexities of each, I want to quickly survey some specimen accounts of these episodes (in East Africa, Western Europe, and North Korea). My goal is not to adjudicate the accuracy of Ariès's hypothesis, but instead to track what should by now be the familiar discursive dynamics of these accounts' receptions: in so many words, a reiteration of Blake's heated response to the prospect of parental indifference – "No, no! never can it be!"

First, consider the case of the Ik of Uganda, an ethnic group now numbering some ten thousand people who speak a Nilo-Saharan language and who today live in the mountains of northeastern Uganda along the Kenyan border. Originally successful hunter-gatherers, the Ik were forcibly displaced from their ancestral homelands first by British Colonialists, who wanted to create a big game hunting preserve, and then again, under the brutal government of Ugandan dictator Milton Obote (1925-2005), to create what is now Kidepo Valley National Park, a major source of safari tourism. Forced into a new, inhospitable environment, the Ik struggled desperately to adopt subsistence farming methods, but with little success, and soon also found themselves suffering numerous violent attacks from neighboring tribes followed by a series of devastating droughts and famines. When noted American anthropologist Colin Turnbull (1924-1994) arrived to live among the Ik for an ethnographic study that ran from 1965-1966, he encountered a society in full breakdown. Turnbull's highly controversial account of his time among the Ik, *The Mountain People* (1972), is a harrowing read. Its upshot is fairly simple: Turnbull observes the decline of Ik society to make the argument that the positive attributes we deem to be essential to human nature (attachment, family cohesion, altruism, and the like) are in fact social constructions, dependent upon material preconditions which, if absent, are shucked off in favor of Hobbesian selfishness and brutality. In Turnbull's words, the Ik, whom he frequently refers to as "the loveless people," "teach us that our much-vaunted human values

are not inherent in humanity at all, but are associated only with a particular form of survival called society, and that all, even society itself, are luxuries that can be dispensed with" (294).

Chief among these luxuries dispensed with, according to Turnbull, is anything resembling affectionate parenting, or grief at the death of child. Writes Turnbull: "[For the Ik], children are useless appendages, like old parents…anyone who cannot take care of himself is a burden and a hazard to the survival of others" (134). Against a backdrop of gross malnutrition and dissolving family units, those Ik infants who are not assessed to be too weak and left to die in the wild are fed only grudgingly and then expelled from their home and left to fend for themselves in "bands" of youths, *Lord of the Flies*-style, generally dominated by teenagers, who scavenge for scraps and "play" amongst themselves. This "play" is only nominal: "Nearly all the games concerned food, including the hunting of the smaller and weaker children with play spears and slingshots" (114).[43] Turnbull paints this emphasis on resource insecurity – on food – as dominating life among the Ik, and as overriding any impulse towards parental attachment.

> We should not be surprised when the mother throws her child out at three years old. She has breast-fed it, with some ill humor, and cared for it in some manner for three whole years, and now it is ready to make its own way. I imagine the child must be rather relieved to be thrown out, for in the process of being cared for he or she is carried about in a hide sling wherever the mother goes, and since the mother is not strong herself this is done grudgingly. Whenever the mother finds a spot in which to gather, or if she is at a water hole or in her fields, she loosens the sling and lets the baby to the ground none too slowly, and of course laughs if it is hurt.[44] Then she goes about her business, leaving the child there, almost hoping that some predator

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[43] According to Turnbull, the younger children in the band would also regularly suffer from sexual exploitation by the older ones, to the point that most children would soon learn to trade sexual availability for food" (139).

[44] Turnbull repeatedly dwells on the phenomenon of cruel laughter at the suffering of the weak, and at the suffering of children in particular. "Sitting at a *di* [a gathering place], for instance, men would watch a child with eager anticipation as it crawled toward the fire, then burst into gay and happy laughter as it plunged a skinny hand into the coals. Such times were the few times when parental affection showed itself; a mother would glow with pleasure to hear such joy occasioned by her offspring, and pull it tenderly out of the fire." (Turnbull 112)

> will come along and carry it off. This happened once while I was there - once that I know of, anyway - and the mother was delighted. She was rid of the child and no longer had to carry it about and feed it, and still further this meant that a leopard was in the vicinity and would be sleeping the child off and thus be an easy kill. The men set off and found the leopard, which had consumed ail of the child except part of the skull; they killed the leopard and cooked it and ate it, child and all. That is Icien economy, and it makes sense in its own way. It does not, however, endear children to their parents or parents to their children.
>
> (Turnbull 135-136)

The Ik do not mourn their children when they die, according to Turnbull. In fact, the episode in which Turnbull briefly believes that he is witnessing parental mourning soon turns out to be something rather different altogether.

> I had seen no sign of love, with its willingness to sacrifice, its willingness to accept that we are not complete wholes by ourselves, but need to be joined to others. I had seen little that I could even call affection. I had seen things that made me want to cry, though as yet I had not cried, hut I had never seen an lk anywhere near tears of sorrow-only the children's tears of anger, malice and hate. So it was with curious pleasure that I awoke one night to hear a distinct mournful wailing, such as heralds death. It came from Lomeja's village, and it continued, sobbing, until just before dawn. I got up feeling better than I had for a long time, hoping that I was right and that someone was actually crying over someone who had died. Outside I saw Lomeja sitting on a rock, motionless and stricken, and I knew it must be either his wife or one of his children. I was sorry that it had to be he, but still happy to have discovered that Ik can cry. I was partly right, anyway. His favorite son, Ajurokingomoi, had died during the night. Losealim had suggested burying the body the next morning. Lomeja had said *No, better bury it in the compound right away while it was dark, otherwise it would involve a funeral and, of all things, a feast. The boy was not worth it, he was only a boy*. Losealim refused, so Lomeja beat her, and it was she whom I had heard crying, because she had been so badly beaten and, on top of it, made to dig the hole. And Lomeja was looking stricken because now everyone knew that Ajurokingomoi, named after his grandfather, had died, and they would expect him to give a feast.
>
> (Turnbull 129-130)

What is being mourned is not the death of the child, but rather the cost of feeding those who will attend his funeral – the loss of food from the living mother and father's mouth.[45]

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[45] "Parents fight over a child's dead body to decide whether to risk just throwing it out and being accused by someone else of not providing the proper ritual feast, or whether to go to the trouble of scooping out a shallow grave within the compound and telling others that the child has gone away somewhere and not come back, if anyone asks." (Turnbull 197)

Rather like Darwin and his grim (and dubious) account of practices among Eskimos and Feegeeans, Turnbull's Ik, in his opinion, are simply following a kind of grim logic of resource-based necessity.

> I suppose one cannot blame him [Lomeja] or Losealim too much. They had little enough to eat for themselves, and to try to provide for parasitical relatives because their son had died would only add injury to injury. What they did does not in any way indicate that they were incapable of love. What it does indicate, as did the whole lack of family life seen so far, was that there simply was not room, in the life of these people, for such luxuries as family and sentiment and love. So close to the verge of starvation, such luxuries could mean death, and is it not a singularly foolish luxury to die for someone already dead, or weak, or old?...Yet biologically it made good sense. The children were as useless as the aged, or nearly so; as long as you keep the breeding group alive you can always get more children. So let the old go first, then the children.
>
> (Turnbull 130)

"What they did does not in any way indicate that they were incapable of love" – it merely shows, for Turnbull, that the capacity in parents for love for their children is a contingency, not a universal. As to the impulse of children to love their parents, a capacity for such attachment is evidenced – but, once expressed, it is regularly met with a brutal reception. Of all the many gruesome episodes in Turnbull's ethnography – which runs for nearly three hundred pages, and soon also becomes the chronicle of a man slipping into a traumatic depression that would dog him until his death – the story he tells of a little girl, Adupa, is, for me at least, the most upsetting.

> Hunger was indeed more severe than I knew, and the children were the next to go. It was all quite impersonal even to me, in most cases, since I had been immunized by the Ik themselves against sorrow on their behalf. But Adupa was an exception. Her stomach grew more and more distended, and her legs and arms more spindly. Her madness was such that she did not know just how vicious humans could be, particularly her playmates. She was older than they, and more tolerant. That too was a madness in an Icien world. Even worse, she thought that parents were for loving, for giving as well as receiving. Her parents were not given to fantasies, and they had two other children, a boy and a girl who were perfectly normal, so they ignored Adupa, except when she brought them food that she had scrounged from somewhere. They snatched that quickly enough. But when she came for shelter they

> drove her out, and when she came because she was hungry they laughed that Icien laugh, as if she had made them happy.
>
> (Turnbull 131)

But Adupa does not learn her lesson. She tries to share food with her family again and again, and then with the members of her juvenile band, who steal it from her.

> They set on her with cries of excitement, fun and laughter, beat her savagely over the head and left her. But that is not how she died. I took to feeding her, which is probably the cruelest thing I could have done, a gross selfishness on my part to try and salve and save, indeed, my own rapidly disappearing conscience. I had to protect her, physically, as I fed her. But the others would beat her anyway, and Adupa cried, not because of the pain in her body, but because of the pain she felt at that great, vast empty wasteland where love should have been. It was that that killed her. She demanded that her parents love her. She kept going back to their compound, almost next to Atum's [Turnbull's neighbor] and the closest to my own. Finally they took her in, and Adupa was happy and stopped crying. She stopped crying forever, because her parents went away and closed the *asak* [door] tight behind them, so tight that weak little Adupa could never have moved it if she had tried. But I doubt that she even thought of trying. She waited for them to come back with the food they promised her. When they came back she was still waiting for them. It was a week or ten days later, and her body was already almost too far gone to bury. In an Ik village, who would notice the smell? And if she had cried, who would have noticed that? Her parents took what was left of her and threw it out, as one does the riper garbage, a good distance away. They even pulled some stones over it to stop the vultures and hyenas from scattering bits and pieces of their daughter in Atum's field; that would have been offensive, for they were good neighbors and shared the same *odok* [farming space].
>
> (Turnbull 132)

In some ways, there is little one can say to gloss this other than that, from the perspective of Turnbull, parental attachment is not just not a universal, not just even a luxury, a capacity that can be activated only in the right circumstances, but also a veneer over something much more raw: a capacity for parental brutality. The horror of this implication leads Turnbull to end his ethnography with something that, to my knowledge, is unprecedented in the modern field of anthropology: a recommendation that the tribe he has spent two year studying be let go extinct: "Luckily the Ik are not numerous – about two thousand – and those two years reduced their numbers greatly. So I am hopeful that their isolation will remain as complete as

in the past, until they die out completely" (Turnbull 285). Our naïve beliefs in parental attachment, in social altruism more generally, Turnbull seems to suggest, are precarious universals, not just in how they manifest in our societies (put enough stressors on a culture and they'll vanish, fast) but also in that they exist at all – to the point that the existence of a culture like the Ik poses an almost contagious threat to our civilized moral equilibrium.

Needless to say, ever since its publication, Turnbull's account has been explosive, and engendered oftentimes brutal responses. Many of these are grounded soundly in ethical condemnation at his observational reserve, and others in very valid methodological critiques – Bernd Heine, for example, has trenchantly questioned Turnbull's knowledge of the Ik language, the accuracy of his observation of their farming practices, the reliability of his non-Ik collaborators, and more, going so far, comparing his own research in Uganda with that of Turnbull, to observe that "Turnbull's account of Ik culture turned out to be at variance with most observations we made — to the extent that at times I was under the impression that I was dealing with an entirely different people" (Heine 3). Likewise, Curtis Abraham has mounted a devastating critique of Turnbull's work, drawing upon not just interviews with Ik who were alive during Turnbull's visit, but also leveraging Post-Colonialist insights into the political context of Turnbull's research, suggesting that, ultimately, Turnbull merely saw what he wanted to.[46] But also, apart from these more methodologically grounded, academic

[46] "Ultimately the Ik saga says more about the internal hopes, dreams and aspirations of individuals like Turnbull rather than the external realities of the people they study. And on a continent like Africa where the wounds of colonialism still run deep, the psychological scar far from healed, the Ik suffer not only from the obvious inferiority complex that grips Africa as a whole but they are also bearing an extra burden of being "the most savage sub-humans on the planet" simply because of one foreigner's naivety and unfulfilled expectations. How many other Westerners like Turnbull have been similarly wrong in their interpretation of traditional cultures in Africa and elsewhere?" (Abraham 5-6). Abraham also notes that the Ik population has bounced back since the famine that occurred during Turnbull's visit, which strikes at his assessment of their society's being in a death spiral, while also noting that now, more than ever, the ethnic group is under threat, not from "moral decay," but

critiques, stand responses like Cevin Soling and David Hilbert's documentary *Ikland* (2011). For the film, the two directors and their crew travelled to Uganda on a mission to show the "real" Ik and undo Turnbull's portrayal of them as "barbarians." Bizarrely, the film ends with the director's organizing a group of confused-looking Ik into performing a theatrical performance of Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. Why, exactly, Dickens's supposedly heartwarming Christian tale is the ideal mechanism to demonstrate the "redemption" of the Ik (who, despite the presence of some nearby Christian missionaries and aid workers, have traditionally remained animists) remains rather unclear.[47] One possibility, I suspect, is that getting the tribespeople to perform a literal song-and-dance straight from playbook of Great Western Classics is a handy synecdoche for repairing the putative damage done by Turnbull not to the reputation of the Ik, but to the assumptions about universal values held by his Western readers. It is also perhaps worth wondering, if only for a moment, whose ghosts of which Christmases Past were being exorcised by this performance of a sentimental Victorian classic overseen by a pair of American filmmakers directing Ugandan tribespeople who had only came to the world's attention in the first place by virtue of their being driven to

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instead from the very real threats of the Sudan People's Liberation Army and Joseph Kony's notorious Lord's Resistance Army.

[47] Sollings's *Director's Statement*, available at http://bit.ly/1opLKiq, is itself a confusing mixture of personal projection and universality-talk. "I first heard of the Ik in seventh grade when my social studies teacher handed out photo copies of an essay written by Lewis Thomas. The paper fretted over the implications of this isolated tribe who live on a remote mountain in Uganda, and were described in a book as being malicious to absurd proportions. The Ik were depicted as wretched, loveless creatures who only feel joy when observing the sufferings of others. The horror completely escaped the class, and despite the teacher's rebukes, most of us found the article hysterical. Looking back, I realize the reason for this was because schools had transformed us into Iks. Education was fraught with brutal hypocrisy... Rather than justify their behavior behind the guise of universal relativism, Colin Turnbull insisted that these people [the Ik] were horrid barbarians. Amazingly enough, hosts of other respected individuals who read his work eagerly affirmed his sentiments. What made the Ik compelling to me, was that they were singled out as being offensive. Their capacity to generate outrage among teachers, whom I believe hold unwarranted power over students, made them heroic in my eyes. Whatever their true identity was, they were clearly subversive."

starvation first by Imperial British colonization and second by a military dictator's attempt to attract white adventure tourism.

Reading Turnbull's *The Mountain People*, and reviewing many of the debates over his conclusions, it is noteworthy that the fact that the Ik were *put by other people* into the position in which Turnbull "found" them goes almost entirely unremarked upon. Instead, Turnbull's anthropological gaze, and the gaze of many of his critics, merely views their plight as a kind of laboratory for drawing universal conclusions about human nature.[48] At which point we must acknowledge something that has been running through all the above debates about whether or not parental human is a universal human phenomenon: *pace* the massive loss of life produced by epidemics and natural calamities, human beings are extremely good at killing each other's children, and at alternately denying the grief of some parents while fetishizing the grief of others. In other words: the question of the universality of parental mourning, now more than ever, is riven with political implications.

The supposed universality of parental mourning – or lack thereof – can frequently function as a kind of political tool, deployed in a variety of configurations, even sometimes as a weapon. It has been used, among other things, to deny the humanity of parents who supposedly do not mourn their children – a move that thereby makes it considerably easier to countenance killing parents and children alike. In this spirit, General William Westmoreland, Commander of all US Forces in Vietnam from 1964-1968, famously opined, during an interview in Peter Davis' documentary *Hearts and Minds* (1974), that "The Oriental doesn't put the same high price on life as does the Westerner…Life is plentiful, life is cheap in the Orient."[49] In a slightly different vein, media and politicians can and do advance

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[49] Vietnamese civilian casualties are estimated to have numbered upwards of two million. For more on this, see Turse (2013).

narratives of parents supposedly unable to mourn that cast those parents as the victims of villainous regimes that must be overthrown. Nowhere is this tendency more visible than in contemporary Western media portrayals of life in North Korea's extensive system of *kwan-li-so*, gulags and work camps for political prisoners. If the scope of wide-scale suffering in North Korea is hard to contemplate, particularly in terms of pervasive malnutrition and starvation,[50] the intensity of the human rights abuses occurring in these facilities, which were estimated in 2011 to contain some 200,000 prisoners, is even harder to comprehend.[51] Prominent in coverage of these abuses is an emphasis on dire resource stress and recurrent description of the collective punishment[52] of entire families, including episodes where parents are forced to kill their own children. Covering a UN Commission of Inquiry into North Korean camps from Seoul on August 20, 2013, Reuters correspondents Ju-min Park and Michelle Kim, relate the testimony of one particular former prisoner as follows:

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[50] Writing in an Op-Ed piece in *The New York Times* on March 7, 2014, Joshua Stanton and Sung-Yoon Lee write that "Today, North Koreans starve to death by the dozens, maybe the hundreds…during the great famine of the 1990s, between 600,000 and 2.5 million people died of hunger." Although data from the notoriously secretive North Korean regime is hard to come by, with what numbers that do surface being regularly contested (see Lankov 2014), and although adjudicating between them is well beyond the scope of the dissertation, it does not seem coincidental that Stanton, who also has written for the conservative *Weekly Standard*, has provided support to hawkish Republican politicians on their North Korea policy statements, and who has helped shape US sanctions policy in North Korea, also writes, with echoes of Westmoreland, that "North Korea's leaders do not value human life or happiness, the essence of why we value peace itself. The same pathology — one that prioritizes military power over human life — lies at the root of its nuclear weapons program. The regime's wanton disregard for innocent life means its nuclear weapons pose a greater threat than those possessed by other nations."

[51] For more on the estimated population of the *kwan-li-so*, and their apparent growth over time, see reportage by Mark McDonald on May 4, 2011, in the *The New York Times*.

[52] Consider this ABC report, filed by Joohee Cho on February 18, 2014, which includes the story of one North Korean refugee, Kim Young-soon: "Kim Young-soon said she spent nine years in Yodok prison camp along with her parents and her four children for "gossiping" about an affair her friend had with Kim Jong-il, North Korea's former ruler and the father of the regime's current leader. "The guilt-by-association system applies to the family members. I may be the culprit, but the other six members of my family are forced to go with me to the prison camp without knowing the charge," she said. Kim's parents, 9-year-old daughter, and three sons - ages 7, 4, and 1 - all died from starvation in the camp, she said. "It is a place that would make your hair stand on end. No words would help you to understand what this place is like," she said."

> Jee Heon-a, 34, told the Commission that from the first day of her incarceration in 1999, she discovered that salted frogs were one of the few things to eat. "Everyone's eyes were sunken. They all looked like animals. Frogs were hung from the buttons of their clothes, put in a plastic bag and their skins peeled off," she said. "They ate salted frogs and so did I." Speaking softly, she took a deep breath when describing in detail how a mother was forced to kill her own baby. "It was the first time I had seen a newborn baby and I felt happy. But suddenly there were footsteps and a security guard came in and told the mother to turn the baby upside down into a bowl of water," she said. "The mother begged the guard to spare her, but he kept beating her. So the mother, her hands shaking, put the baby face down in the water. The crying stopped and a bubble rose up as it died. A grandmother who had delivered the baby quietly took it out."

Stipulating what form appropriate or "healthy" parental mourning should take in response to such trauma seems obscene indeed – certainly the mother in question was not permitted much emotional expression by the guards.[53]

Western public fascination with such narratives is marked by a pervasive need to 'get into the heads' of North Koreans – to penetrate the secrets of a populace that Max Fisher, writing in *The Atlantic*, has referred to as living in a "gulag of the mind." For such audiences, North Korean experiences of family attachment and grief are particularly fascinating, and their appetite for such stories is stoked, for better and worse, by media. Thus, when in a December 11, 2008 article *Washington Post* correspondent Blaine Harden profiled Shin Dong-hyuk, a young North Korean man who had been born and brought up in a *kwan-li-so* and who had eventually managed a daring and unprecedented escape to the South, the story

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[53] Conversely, in the wake of the death of Kim Jong-il (1941-2011), North Korea's "Fearless Leader" and "Dear Father," global media was dominated by footage of imagery of North Koreans mourning, including numerous orchestrated mass spectacles of public grief. According to some reports, including an anonymous source within North Korea cited in the January 13, 2012 *The Daily Mail*, those North Koreans who did not participate, or who did not exhibit adequately "authentic" grief were sent to *kwan-li-so*. "Authorities are handing down at least six months in a labour-training camp to anybody who didn't participate in the organised gatherings during the mourning period, or who did participate but didn't cry and didn't seem genuine," the source said. Three days later, CNN's Jiyeon Lee and Jethro Mullen relayed vehement denial of these reports from North Korean officials – who 'attributed the allegations to 'reptile media under the control' of a group of 'traitors'… connected to President Lee Myung-bak of South Korea. Of course, these same officials again insisted on the authenticity of the entire nation's being in mourning. Once again, the question of grief – authentic or compelled, reported or observed – is far from politically neutral.

received incredible attention. Harden drew upon interviews with Shin alongside preliminary drafts of a memoir Shin had begun writing while recovering from his escape in a South Korean hospital to describe camp life as marked by pervasive violence and incredible resource stress.[54] Shin's grim tale reaches its apogee when his mother and brother are executed before his eyes. Writes Harden: "An unforgettable — almost unfathomable — chapter of that story is about the execution of his mother, who was hanged in 1996, on the same day Shin's only brother was shot to death." Per Shin, their execution was the result of their supposedly planning to escape, a plot which, he told Harden, he knew nothing whatsoever about.

> Before he was taken to the square and ordered to watch them die, Shin said, he had spent seven months in an underground cell, where guards used torture to force him to talk about a supposed 'family conspiracy' to escape from the camp. Since his mother hadn't told him about such a plan, Shin said, he was startled to hear of it. His torturers also surprised him by telling him, for the first time, why he and his family were in the camp. Two of his father's brothers had collaborated with South Korea during the Korean War and then fled to the South, the guards told him. His father was guilty because he was the brother of traitors. Shin was guilty because he was his father's son. As for the escape plan of his mother and brother, Shin knew nothing. Still, the guards wanted a confession. As described in the book, they built a charcoal fire. Shin was stripped of his clothes. Ropes were tied to his arms and legs and secured to the ceiling of the cell. He was dangled over the fire. When he writhed away from the flame, a guard pierced his gut with a steel hook to hold him in place. He lost consciousness. Shin recovered in a cell with the help of a sickly older man who gave him half his food ration. Months later, when Shin walked out of the underground cell to the public square, he was joined by his father. "When I saw that place, I thought my father and I would be executed," Shin said in the interview. Instead, to his surprise, he became a spectator. His mother and brother were brought to the square. Watching his mother being hanged, Shin recalls, he was relieved it was her, not him. "I felt she deserved to die," he said. "I was full of anger for the torture that I went through. I still am angry at her."

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[54] Per Harden: "Shin describes the 'common and almost routine' savagery of the camp: the rape of his cousin by prison guards and the beating to death of a young girl found with five grains of unauthorized wheat in her pocket. He once found three kernels of corn in a pile of cow dung, he writes. He picked them out, cleaned them off on his sleeve and ate them. 'As miserable as it may seem, that was my lucky day,' he writes."

Against the backdrop of the principle of collective punishment practiced in the North Korean camps, Shin's frank confession of his anger at his mother makes a certain kind of sense, Harden observes: had she and his brother escaped, Shin would surely have been killed himself in retribution. After having fled to South Korea, though, Harden reported, Shin had come to develop deep regrets as to his feelings of anger, to mourn his mother and brother deeply, and to appreciate the value of family: "I never heard the word 'love' in the camp," Shin told Harden, "I have recently discovered that I am lonely…I realize you really need a family."[55]

Response to Shin's story in the *Washington Post* was sufficiently enthusiastic (if this is the right word) that it soon led to an English-language book deal, which Shin wrote with Harden's help; that volume, entitled *Escape from Camp 14: One Man's Remarkable Odyssey from North Korea to Freedom in the West* (2012), eventually became a bestseller. However, as Harden worked with Shin, he soon developed doubts about certain details of his story, and ultimately learned, as Janet Maslin reported in a April 11, 2012 piece in *The New York Times*, that "Mr. Shin had built his own memoir upon a gigantic lie." Specifically, Shin had not been unaware of his mother and brother's plans, or that they faced execution: in fact, he had informed on them to the camp guards himself. Writes Maslin:

> In his account Mr. Shin claimed to have been a helpless innocent witness to the execution of his mother and brother when Mr. Shin was only 14. He had indeed been helpless, and he had the torture marks to prove it. But, as Mr. Harden discovered about a year into the interviewing process for this book, Mr. Shin's original account omitted a crucial detail: He was responsible for the executions. He had snitched to a prison guard about an escape his mother and brother were planning, knowing full well that escape plans were punishable by death. Mr. Shin admitted to Mr. Harden that he had made this trade-off to get more food and an

[55] An interview with Anderson Cooper (then with CBS' 60 Minutes), Shin also observed that: "When I was in the camp I don't remember crying so much. Even when my mother and my brother were executed, I didn't shed too many tears… But now, for example, when I see videos of the Holocaust it moves me to tears. I think I am still evolving— from an animal to a human."

> easier job at school. And he said he had done it without regrets. He thought that his mother and brother deserved to die.

Striking a note that evokes at Turnbull's tales of the Ik, which place such an emphasis on food insecurity as obliterating parent-child attachments, Maslin also writes that: "[Shin] says he regarded his mother as a rival for food and was right to do so; she once beat him with a hoe for eating her lunch." Indeed, in a detail not present in his Korean memoir, or in his earlier interviews with Harden, Shin's English-language book reveals that the specific trigger that drove him to inform on his mother and brother was not just his discovery of their plans to escape, but rather the fact that his mother had dared to serve his brother – and not him – a secret meal of rice.[56]

Ethnically judging Shin's conduct is as beside the point as it is odious. Similarly, evaluating whether or not limited reports of life in North Korea's prison camps empirically support Ariès's hypotheses as to the dynamics of attachment in situations of extreme resource scarcity and the ever-present threat of death is impossible. What is noteworthy for my purposes is how the reception of accounts like Shin's is inevitably marked by what

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[56]As described in an excerpt from Part One, Chapter Five of Shin's book that appeared as an article authored by Harden in a March 25th, 2012 article in *The Sydney Morning Herald*: "On Friday, April 5, 1996, Shin's teacher told him he could go home and eat supper with his mother as a reward for good behaviour. There was a surprise when he got there. His brother, who worked at the camp's cement factory, had come home, too. Shin's mother was not delighted when her youngest son showed up. She did not say welcome or that she had missed him. She cooked, using her daily ration of 700 grams of cornmeal to make porridge in the one pot she owned. Shin ate, then went to sleep. Later, voices from the kitchen woke him. He peeked through the bedroom door. His mother was cooking rice. For Shin, this was a slap in the face. He had been served the same tasteless gruel he had eaten every day of his life. Now his brother was getting rice. Shin guessed she must have stolen it, a few grains at a time. Shin fumed. He heard that Shin He Geun had not been given the day off. He had walked out without permission. His mother and brother were discussing what they should do. Escape. Shin was astonished to hear his brother say the word. He did not hear his mother say that she intended to go along. But she was not trying to argue, even though she knew that if he escaped or died trying, she and others in her family would be tortured and probably killed. Every prisoner knew the first rule of Camp 14, subsection 2: 'Any witness to an attempted escape who fails to report it will be shot immediately.' His heart pounded. He was angry that she would put his life at risk for the sake of his brother. He was also jealous that his brother was getting rice. Shin's camp-bred instincts took over: he had to tell a guard."

should now be the familiar contours of the discourse over human universals: ideologically motivated claims that are once descriptive and normative. Indeed, in Western media coverage of North Korea, narratives of the collapse of family attachment frequently function as a kind of synecdoche for that nation's position as an outlier, a "rogue" member of the global community.[57] Much as Colin Turnbull slides from depicting the degradation of the Ik to – outrageously – advocating for their extinction as a people, such descriptions of life in North Korea regularly segue into appeals for Western military intervention and the eradication of the ruling regime. Thus, paradigmatically, in his January 29, 2002 State of the Union Address, did George W. Bush label North Korea part of his famous "Axis of Evil" – framing it as a pariah state that routinely violates universal human rights and which, both because of its supposed possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction, and because of the simple fact of its defiance of global norms, represented an imminent, contagious threat to America's national security and mission to "lead the world toward the values that will bring

[57] The appetite for these narratives extends not just to stories, however true, about life in the *kwan-li-so*, but also to dubious tales about the ruling regime's family. Thus, in late 2013, when rumors began to circulate that North Korea's new Supreme Leader, Kim Jong-un, had ghoulishly executed several of his family members in a purge that supposedly included feeding his uncle to pack of a 120 starving dogs, the story spread virally online and was even picked up by several credible print outlets. However, due journalistic diligence soon revealed that the tale was entirely fictitious. Nelson Jones, writing in a January 6th, 2014 article in *The New Statesman* entitled "Why is the media so easily taken in by stories about North Korea?" noted that "the original story [arose from a post] on the Chinese equivalent of Twitter, Tencent Weibo, dated 11 December…attributed to a satirist going by the name of Pyongyang Choi Seongho. In a further complication, it appears that the person responsible for the posting was not even the well-known satirist but rather 'a copycat account mooching off his good name,' making the story not just a spoof, but a hoax spoof." Jones quoted an Australian academic and North Korean expert who, before the story had been debunked, argued that the narrative about Kim Jong-un's uncle "sounds credible, particularly given the horror stories coming out of North Korean labor camps where dogs are fed by political prisoners." Jones, for his part, speculates that living prisoners may not actually be fed to dogs as punishment, but instead that guard dogs are fed their corpses. Of course, no one in the Western media really can say for sure what happens within the Kim dynasty or in the *kwan-li-so* – but this fact doesn't prevent them from writing sensationalized copy about both.

lasting peace."[58] Describing what this "lasting peace" should look like, Bush was quick to speak in terms of human universals – and specifically of universal parental attitudes towards children: "All fathers and mothers, in all societies, want their children to be educated, and live free from poverty and violence. No people on Earth yearn to be oppressed, or aspire to servitude, or eagerly await the midnight knock of the secret police."

Significantly, Bush's "Axis of Evil" speech specifically leveraged the ostensibly universal pathos of parental mourning for deceased children in another, frequently encountered political configuration: by deploying the image of bereaved mothers as an object of pity and as a call to arms. Thus, in describing the next target of what would be America's Global War on Terror, Iraq, and bolstering his case for that regime's possession of weapons of mass destruction, Bush invoked the image of mothers mourning their children following Saddam Hussein's nerve gas attacks on the Kurdish enclave of Halabja in 1988: "This is a regime that has already used poison gas to murder thousands of its own citizens – leaving the bodies of mothers huddled over their dead children." Slightly more than a year following that speech, the US began its invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq, an endeavor that is estimated to have cost, at a bare minimum, a half-million civilian lives.[59]

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[58] "Some governments will be timid in the face of terror. And make no mistake about it: If they do not act, America will… [America's] goal is to prevent regimes that sponsor terror from threatening America or our friends and allies with weapons of mass destruction. Some of these regimes have been pretty quiet since September the 11th. But we know their true nature. North Korea is a regime arming with missiles and weapons of mass destruction, while starving its citizens … States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world."

[59] For a rigorous public-health account of the civilian casualties of the Iraq war and subsequent occupation, see Hagopian et. al. (2013). As time passes and Iraqis succumb to chronic injuries incurred during the war, and as more effective quantitative methods are brought to bear, the predominant consensus among human rights scholars and journalists is that this number will only rise.

But this deployment of parental mourning for deceased children as at once a site of universal pathos as well as a nexus for identity claims and calls for political action far predates the Second Gulf War. Although a treatment of the expressions of mourning for the staggering number of children murdered during the Holocaust[60] is a subject that could easily occupy multiple volumes, some brief observations are merited here. Above all, it is significant that the reception of what are far and away the two most widely read Holocaust memoirs – Anne Frank's diaries, translated from Dutch into English as *The Diary of a Young Girl* in 1952, and Elie Wiesel's *Night*, published in English in 1960 – prominently involving mourning children, albeit in markedly different ways, and that the reception of these works has involved, in each case, complicated configurations and reconfigurations of claims to universal appeal, universal experiences, and specific, often troubling, political implications.

In the case of Anne Frank, her diaries were recovered, edited, and published in large part as a kind of work of mourning on the part of her father, Otto Frank (1889-1980). From the beginning of their reception in America, Frank's diaries have been assessed in terms of their "universal" power. Thus, reviewing the text in the June 15, 1952 issue of the *The New York Times*, Meyer Levin writes:

> Anne Frank's diary is too tenderly intimate a book to be frozen with the label "classic" and yet no lesser designation serves. There is no lugubrious ghetto tale, no compilation of horrors. Reality can prove surprisingly different from invented reality, and Anne Frank's diary simply bubbles with amusement, love, discovery. It has its share of disgust, its moments of hatred, but it is so wondrously alive, so near, that one feels overwhelmingly the universalities of human nature…These people might be living next door; their within-the-family emotions, their tensions and satisfactions are those of human character and growth, anywhere.

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[60] The online *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, maintained by the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, notes the following: "The Germans and their collaborators killed as many as 1.5 million children, including over a million Jewish children and tens of thousands of Romani (Gypsy) children, German children with physical and mental disabilities living in institutions, Polish children, and children residing in the occupied Soviet Union." For more, see: http://bit.ly/1apukfF.

Levin goes on to focus on Frank's specific descriptions of her family relationships, again in universal terms: "In all this there are perceptions in depth, striving toward mother, father, sister, containing love-anguish of the purest universality." For some critics, including Ruth Franklin, writing in *The New Republic*, this tendency to make Frank into a "universal victim" is part-and-parcel of a problematic "de-Judaizing" of her story. Observes Franklin:

> The story of the reception of Anne Frank's diary is a pungent case study of the way works of literature come to be understood as "universal" — which, as Francine Prose adeptly points out in her book about Anne Frank, had come to be used, in the publishing climate of the 1950s, as "the antonym of Jewish."

For Franklin, reviewing the trajectory of this de-racinating universalization of Anne Frank's story, which also went on to include a film version and a theatrical adaptation, poses a fundamental and troubling question, namely: "Are human beings so fundamentally lacking in natural empathy that a Jewish catastrophe must be universalized in order to generate feeling? Do we really seek only ourselves in the books we read?" Hyping the "universal" appeal of Anne Frank's diaries, and mourning her as a "universal victim" is thus, at least in the American context, troublingly bound up in erasing both her particularity as an individual and in effacing her identity as a Jew.[61]

The case of Elie Wiesel's *Night* is even more complicated. Wiesel's autobiographical account of his experience in Auschwitz is not just structured thematically around the loss of

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[61] Against this backdrop, it seems also noteworthy that, until Steven Spielberg's 1993 Oscar-winning historical drama *Schindler's List* (which departs from its otherwise black-and-white palette to depict a single girl in the Kraków ghetto in a red dress), the highest-grossing American film about the Holocaust, Alan Pakula's *Sophie's Choice* (1982), an adaption of William Styron's 1979 novel of the same name, centers around the trauma of losing children during the Holocaust. Styron's story is anything *but* a tale of parental indifference, with the eponymous Auschwitz survivor, Sophie Zawistowski, played in the film by Meryl Streep (who won an Oscar for her performance) being ultimately driven to suicide, haunted by the experience of being forced to choose between which of her two children will sent to the gas chamber immediately and which will be separated from her and left to an uncertain fate in the camp. In the wake of analysis like Franklin's one is forced to wonder how much of the emotional power of Sophie's story for American audiences stems from the fact that she is explicitly identified as a non-Jewish Pole.

his own innocent childhood, but is punctuated at its center by a pair of episodes in which young children are publicly executed. Significantly for our purposes, these children are presented as broken apart from their families,[62] and Wiesel's witnessing their death is linked, ambiguously, to his own experience of starvation. In the first, "a young boy from Warsaw" is publicly hung, and the prisoners are made to walk by his body. "The thousands of people who died daily in Auschwitz and Birkenau, in the crematoria, no longer troubled me," writes Wiesel. "But this boy, leaning against his gallows, upset me deeply... I remember that on that evening, the soup tasted better than ever" (123-124). In the second episode, an even younger boy is hung at the gallows. This boy is a *pipel* – a camp term for a comely boy taken under the wing of an Oberkapo – described variously as having the "face of an angel in distress" (125) and as a "sad-eyed angel" (127), and he is executed in an act of collective punishment for a supposed escape attempt. Once again, Wiesel and his fellow inmates are made to watch the execution. But the execution is botched:

> The child, too light, was still breathing… And so he remained for more than half an hour, lingering between life and death, writhing before our eyes. And we were forced to look at him at close range. He was still alive when I passed him. His tongue was still red, his eyes not yet extinguished. Behind me, I heard the same man asking: "For God's sake, where is God?" And from within me, I heard a voice answer: "Where He is? This is where—hanging here from this gallows…" That night, the soup tasted of corpses.
>
> (Wiesel, *Night* 128)

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[62] Throughout *Night*, Wiesel describes numerous scenes of expressions and experiences of family attachments as quashed by Nazi violence. When his father nears death from being brutalized by the SS, and calls out for his son, Wiesel does not answer him: "I let the SS beat my father, I left him alone in the clutches of death. Worse: I was angry with him for having been noisy, for having cried, for provoking the wrath of the SS" (13). Much as Wiesel's anger at his father arguably parallels Shin Dong-hyuk's anger at his mother, so too does his description of the sexual trafficking of children between camp inmates (presumably in exchange for food) parallel Turnbull's observation of child exploitation among the Ik (100). Although, again, drawing empirical conclusions with regards to the fate of human attachments *in extremis* is beyond the scope of this dissertation, certain parallels between these scenarios are undeniable.

Here, the angelic boy child, with no parents to mourn him, dies a death that takes on theological proportions, a stand-in for the death of God itself. But as scholar Naomi Seidman has brilliantly documented, the extensive revisions of Wiesel's memoirs from their neglected original Yiddish version (entitled U*n di velt hot geshvign*) to its French translation *(La Nuit)* to its current English edition, which is required reading in many American High Schools, is marked by a process of universalization and de-Judaization that is in many ways similar to the peregrinations of Anne Frank's text. In particular, Seidman's meticulous reading tracks Wiesel's interactions with French Catholic writer and Nobel Laureate François Mauriac (1885-1970), who encouraged Wiesel to translate and revise the Yiddish original for a French audience, who found him a publisher, and whose championing of that work put Wiesel on the path to global recognition. As Seidman demonstrates, a great deal is lost in these translations. Whereas the original is full of indictments of European indifference to and complicity in the suffering of the Jews – the Yiddish title literally means "And the World Kept Silent"(3-4) – the French and then English versions progressively tone down calls for revenge and expressions of specifically Jewish anger with political implications in favor of increasingly generic, existentialist doubt about the human condition more broadly (15-16).[63]

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[63] Wiesel's revisions sanitize other things, too. Quoting Seidman at length: "In both the Yiddish and the French, the narrator criticizes the other survivors for thinking of nothing but food, and 'not of revenge.' The following passage is taken from the Yiddish, but the French is similar: 'The first gesture of freedom: the starved men made an effort to get something to eat. They only thought about food. Not about revenge. Not about their parents. Only about bread. And even when they had satisfied their hunger – they still did not think about revenge.' But the Yiddish continues: 'Early the next Jewish boys ran off to Weimar to steal clothing and potatoes. And to rape German girls [*un tsu fargvaldikn daytshe shikses*]. The historical commandment of revenge was not fulfilled.' In French this passage reads: 'Le lendemain, quelques jeunes gens coururent à Weimar ramasser des pommes de terre et des habits – et coucher avec des filles. Mais de vengeance, pas trace.' Or, in Stella Rodway's English rendition: 'On the following morning, some of the young men went to Weimar to get some potatoes and clothes – and to sleep with girls. But of revenge, not a sign.' To describe the differences between these versions as a stylistic reworking is to miss the extent of what is suppressed in the French. *Un di velt* depicts a post-Holocaust landscape in which Jewish boys "run off" to steal provisions and rape German girls; *Night* extracts from this scene of lawless retribution a far more innocent picture of the aftermath of the war, with young men going off to the nearest city to look for

Although Wiesel's relationship to Mauriac is extremely complicated, it seems significant, too, that this reworking of the book into the version that ultimately contributed to Wiesel's winning the Nobel Prize also conformed to Mauriac's own apologetic leanings, not just as a Frenchman, but as an existentialist-Catholic who saw in the Holocaust "the death of God in the death of the child."[64] These considerations prompt Seidman, like Franklin, to ask disturbing questions about the costs of universalization, about the limits of collective empathy over identitarian boundaries, and to question, "Was it worth translating the Holocaust out of the language of the largest portion of its victims and into the language of those who were, at best, absent, and at worst, complicitous in the genocide?" (19).

In any event, Wiesel's French and English versions of *Night*, even more so than the Yiddish, present the death of a child as not just as an object of universal horror, but as an object lesson of universal proportions – a crime to be witnessed, an atrocity that demands testimonial response. Witnessing the death of the child produces a double moral imperative – both that their death never be forgotten, but also so that no such deaths ever be allowed to occur again. Wiesel struck exactly this note in his speech accepting the Peace Nobel Prize in 1986:

> I remember: it happened yesterday or eternities ago. A young Jewish boy discovered the kingdom of night. 'Tell me,' he asks. 'What have you done with my future? What have you done with your life?...This is what I say to the young Jewish boy wondering what I have done with his years. It is in his name that I speak to you and that I express to you my deepest gratitude.

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clothes and sex. In the Yiddish, the survivors are explicitly described as Jews and their victims (or intended victims) as German; in the French, they are just young men and women." (Seidman 5-6)

[64] As Seidman notes, Mauriac held a thoroughly Christological view of the suffering of children like the *pipel* and the young Wiesel himself, of whom he wrote: "Did I speak [to Wiesel] of that other Jew, his brother, who may have resembled him – the Crucified, whose Cross has conquered the world? Did I affirm that the stumbling block to his faith was the cornerstone of mine, and that the conformity between the Cross and the suffering of men was in my eyes the key to that impenetrable mystery whereon the faith of his childhood had perished?" (Seidman 11 *op cit*).

Wiesel's writerly authority, in this articulation, derives from his childhood witnessing, from his witnessing, as a child, other children suffering, and translates into a testimonial injunction which the figure of a child (a child who is at once himself, but also all children) bears witness. In that speech, Wiesel continued to deploy the figure of the child as at once a universal moral witness and object of universal moral action, stating that: "As long as one child is hungry, our lives will be filled with anguish and shame."

Elie Wiesel is hardly the only Holocaust survivor to write in these terms, to present the figure of a child as at once an-object-to-be-witnessed, as the subject of witnessing, and as a figure whose innocent suffering represents a moral injunction for witnessing and whose plight demands universal moral responsibility going forward.[65] But he is certainly the most influential. And it is thus perplexing, composing this chapter in August of 2014, to read a full-page advertisement in numerous American newspapers wherein Wiesel writes an open letter to the US public enjoining their support for the Israeli Defense Force's ongoing operations in the Gaza Strip.[66] In particular, Wiesel offers a reading of Biblical episode of the binding of Isaac on Mount Moriah (Genesis 22), wherein Abraham is tested by God, in support of the IDF's Operation Protective Edge:

> More than three thousand years ago, Abraham had two children. One son had been sent into the wilderness and was in danger of dying. God saved him with water from a spring. The other son was bound, his throat about to be cut by his own father. But

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[65] Primo Levi, in the opening to his *Survival in Auschwitz* (1959), originally published in Italian as *Se questo è un uomo* (1947), offers the following poem (the translation is mine): "Meditate che questo è stato: / Vi comando queste parole: / Scolpitele nel vostro cuore Stando in casa andando per via, / Coricandovi alzandovi; /Ripetetele ai vostri figli: / O vi si sfaccia la casa, / La malattia vi impedisca, / I vostri cari torcano il viso da voi." In English: "Meditate upon the fact that this happened: / I commend these words to you. / Carve them into your hearts / Whether standing at home, or going about in the street / Turning in to sleep, or rising from bed; / Repeat these words to your children, / Or may your house collapse upon you, / May illness befall you, / and may your dear ones, your children, turn their faces away from you."

[66] Although, the BBC's Anthony Reuben, writing on August 11th, cautioned that all casualty figures from this latest round of hostilities need to be viewed with considerable skepticism, the BBC signs off on UN figures indicating that at least 470 children (classified as youth under the age of 15) have perished thus far.

> God stayed the knife. Both sons – Ishmael and Isaac – received promises that they would father great nations. With these narratives, monotheism and western civilization begin. And the Canaanite practices of child sacrifice to Moloch are forever left behind by the descendants of Abraham.
>
> Except they are not.
>
> In my own lifetime, I have seen Jewish children thrown into the fire. And now I have seen Muslim children used as human shields, in both cases, by worshippers of death cults indistinguishable from that of the Molochites. What we are suffering through today is not a battle of Jew versus Arab or Israeli versus Palestinian. Rather, it is a battle between those who celebrate life and those who champion death. It is a battle of civilization versus barbarism.

I will not stray into the complexities of the Israel-Hamas conflict, offer observations on conditions in Gaza, or interrogate Israel's rights and responsibilities in defending itself from Hamas rocket strikes. I will, though, suggest a juxtaposition of George W. Bush's deployment of the image of mourning mothers, his observation that "all fathers and mothers, in all societies, want their children to be educated, and live free from poverty and violence," and his claim that "our enemies send other people's children on missions of suicide and murder" with Wiesel's writing the following:

> Palestinian parents want a hopeful future for their children, just like Israeli parents do. And both should be joining together in peace. But before sleepless mothers in both Gaza City and Tel Aviv can rest, before diplomats can begin in earnest the crucial business of rebuilding dialogue... the Hamas death cult must be confronted for what it is. Moderate men and women of faith, whether that faith is in God or man, must shift their criticism from the Israeli soldiers – whose terrible choice is to fire and risk harming human shields, or hold their fire and risk the death of their loved ones – to the terrorists who have taken away all choice from the Palestinian children of Gaza.

The ad campaign featuring Wiesel's open letter was paid for by an organization called the *This World: The Values Network*, which describes itself as "the world's leading organization promoting universal Jewish values in culture, media, and politics."[67] And yet the elisions that crisscross Wiesel's piece – not just between Nazis and Palestinians and Hamas and

[67] See https://thisworld.us/ for more.

Molochites,[68] nor between Abraham's knife and the hand of God and nine-kilo Qassam rockets and $18 million F-16s, but also between what "all" parents want and what "enemies" wish, between what "all" children deserve and what some actually get – suggest that, as we have seen above, time and again, when it comes to weighing the authenticity of a parent's mourning or the value of a child's life, the universal is never neutral.[69]

6. Summing Up

As should by now be clear, debates over human universals are always marked by a certain necessary particularity, and nowhere more so than when it comes to debating the universality of parental mourning. Seeking to objectively isolate what is universally human through scrutinizing the animal kingdom, it frequently turns out we are not really looking at

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[68] Whether or not worshippers of the divinity/divinities variously referred to as Moloch, Melech, Molech, etcetera, who included both Canaanites and Phoenicians, among others, actually practiced child sacrifice, is a subject of debate among scholars (for a summary of the latest archaeological findings, see Xella et al 2013). Likewise, the reading of Genesis 22 Wiesel offers is questionable both as exegesis and as history. Writing in *Religion Dispatches* on August 29, 2014, Biblical scholar and Semitic philologist Seth Sanders contests Wiesel's account of the Mount Moriah episode as signifying a decisive repudiation of the idea of child sacrifice, observing that: "The plain fact is that some narratives in the Hebrew Bible assume that child sacrifice actually works, and one law in the Torah even requires it. Worse, other narratives depict God as commanding genocide during a war of conquest, and actually punish characters for not destroying every living thing in a city that has been "ritually committed to destruction" (ḥrm in the causative)… Wiesel's reading is both irresponsible and unsound scholarship—an instance of a scholarly folk-theory about the evolution of Israel from its savage Near Eastern roots, rather than a legitimate scholarly interpretation informed by a full consideration of the sources."

[69] Indeed, further complicating the question of who can speak for what in universal terms, particularly in relation to the suffering of children in the Holocaust and contemporary Middle East, Wiesel's letter rapidly provoked a widely published response signed by some 327 Jewish Holocaust survivors and their descendants. As excerpted in *Haaretz* on August 23, 2014, the writers of this other open letter state: "We are disgusted and outraged by Elie Wiesel's abuse of our history in these pages to justify the unjustifiable: Israel's wholesale effort to destroy Gaza and the murder of more than 2,000 Palestinians, including many hundreds of children." Although mediating between their claims and Wiesel's is beyond my concerns in this dissertation, it is significant that this second letter also closes by speaking in universal terms: ""Never again" must mean NEVER AGAIN FOR ANYONE!"

creatures as they are, but only at projected assumptions of ourselves, reflected back at us. Trying to describe a universal human capacity for parental love through the clinical vocabularies of psychological theory or the technical terminology of neurochemistry, it often turns out we are simply indulging in disguised moralizing, translating Blake's poetic verses ("No, no! never can it be!") into attachment patterns and neuropeptides. And even when we own the moral impulse, when we are at our most strident, declaiming what *all* parents feel and what *all* children deserve, it frequently turns out that that we are at our most ready to cast a ballot or write an Op-Ed to the effect that, actually, some people are actually less worthy of life, and feel less suffering when those they love die, than do others.

The purpose of this chapter has not been to empirically test Ariès's parental indifference hypothesis one way or another. But before moving to the next chapter – wherein I will survey a suite of texts that *do* suggest, however tentatively, certain patterns of how loss is inscribed, across cultures and across eras, by those who can and choose to write such things down, I feel a certain obligation, having proclaimed that neutrality on this topic is essentially impossible, to say something, however tentative.

Here it is: I feel that stipulating how other human beings *should* experience loss is obscene and wrong. I feel that looking at the suffering of one group of humans when they have been pushed into situations of unimaginable extremity by yet another group of humans and taking only the behavior of the former into account as revealing essential truths about human nature while ignoring the role of the latter is facile. Surveying human behavior *in extremis* and inferring, from that, essential "truths" about human nature in general makes about as much sense as observing a group of polar bears stranded on an ever-shrinking, southwards-drifting iceberg and deducing from that what polar bears are "really" like. And this is no neutral example, either, for I fear that, as we push our world to ever-greater

resource scarcity, as we push each other towards ever greater acts of barbarism, that the temptation to pronounce what is universal to *all* humans will only serve more than ever as a guise for stipulating what *some* deserve and what *others* don't. Which is to say: asking after what is natural *to* humans is just as much about asking what environment is natural *for* humans to be properly humane to each other – which is also to ask what to ask what it is that we humans owe to one another, and what we can get away with pretending that we don't. That humans can force other humans to overcome what we might otherwise perceive as the minimal bonds of love and care is something we have known for millennia,[70] and need neither philosophers nor primatologists nor attachment labs nor fMRIs to tell us. And yet we persist in asking, time and again, that the answer be given to us anew, and always hedge, ever hedge, as though the question were simply an abstraction of taxonomy or terminology or caloric economics, and not a matter, first and foremost, of what we owe one other as beings who live and die and suffer and yearn, together and alone.

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[70] Consider, for example, the writings of Gaius Petronius Arbiter (27-66 CE) and his description, in Fragment CXLI of the *Satyricon*, of the state of affairs in the Celtiberian town of Numantia, where, in 134 BCE, Consul Scipio Aemilianus and a force of 30,000 legionnaires laid siege to the Arevaci. Describing the scene in the Arevaci settlement when the Romans finally broke through, and after most of the population had opted to commit suicide rather than be enslaved, Petronius's character Eumolpus, who has a financial stake in the matter, reflects that, after all, cannibalism, even within the family, isn't all that bad: "In stress of famine, the inhabitants of Petelia [ate each other] and gained nothing from the diet except that they were not hungry! When Numantia was taken by Scipio, mothers, with the half-eaten bodies of their babes in their bosoms, were found!" Looking back on the example of the chimpanzee mother Gana, and her child, Claudio, whose corpse she carried about on her breast (whole, and uneaten) one has to wonder if the zookeepers and commentators observing her – who, like Eumolpus, also have a financial stake in the matter – found it comforting, or at least easier, to write off her behavior as "just what animals do."

Chapter 2: Typologies of Grief

1. *Translating Writing, Writing Feelings: Methodological Concerns*

In the previous Chapter, we encountered a variety of articulations of a fundamental problem: the uncertain extent to which we can ever authentically know the experiences of other living beings, human or otherwise. Whether framed as the "problem of other minds," as the gap between sympathy and empathy, or as an axiomatic feature of the first-person givenness of subjective qualia, our capacity to grasp the experiences of others at first seems to grow only more questionable when texts enter the mix. Broadly speaking, from a literary-critical perspective, individual written texts can be understood to exist in relationship, one way or another, to various conventions of genre and style that inform how their authors compose them, and shape how their audiences (intended or otherwise) interpret them.[71] Texts are produced in specific cultural milieus, and, as artifacts, emerge at the intersection of a specific language used collectively by a given group of people and an author's personal idiolect. Texts associated with "high" culture frequently presuppose readerly knowledge of yet other canonical texts, and even ostensibly "vulgar" texts employ culturally specific idioms and rely on shared *Weltanschauungen* as a touchstone and vector for their popularity. This dependence of texts upon the cultural and linguistic peculiarities of their production poses the fundamental challenge of the endeavor of translation: although there has been a recent efflorescence of empirical research on so-called "translation universals"[72], most scholars and

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[71] Although I will lay out my own methodological approach shortly, the *prima facie* understanding of how texts are produced and received I sketch out in the sentences that follow draws upon the work of Iser (1978 and 1980), Jauss (1982), Volosinov (1986), and Bakhtin (1986 and 2009), respectively.
[72] For a survey of this burgeoning field, which largely depends on corpus-level statistical analysis, see the collection edited by Mauranen and Kujamäki (2004).

seasoned translators will agree that only the most rudimentary texts do not have features that inevitably resist rendering from their original language into another. To take a basic example, words in one language rhyme or homophonize with yet other words in that language, and laboratory studies have indicated that those echoes are activated, consciously or not, in the mind of the native-speakers as they read a text.[73] But that idiosyncratic network of lexical and phonological associations is not portable from an original to a destination language.[74] In a very real way, then, there is a truth in the anonymous Latin aphorism, *omnis traductor, traditor* ("every translator is a traitor") – or, as the phrase is more often encountered, in the exemplarily untranslatable Italian pun, *traduttore, traditore* (translator, traitor). In this sense, "true" translation is by definition impossible.

For our purposes, however, we can acknowledge this reality of untranslatability as authorizing rather than sabotaging our inquiry, for several reasons. As the previous Chapter has established, attempting to descriptively and prescriptively stipulate human universals across vast expanses of space and time is already such an absurdly ambitious endeavor that a little epistemic humility *vis-à-vis* linguistic difference is only par for the course. Indeed, as Anthony Esolen notes in his translation of Torquato Tasso's *La Gerusalemme liberata* (1581), "All translation of poetry is treacherous, but translation of poetry is so obviously absurd that the treason loses its threat" (ix). Accepting this absurdity – which is also essentially the absurdity of being an academic generalist in the 21st Century – as a matter of course, this

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[73] For more on this research – on semantic 'priming' – see work by Radeau et al (1989) and Wible et al (2006).

[74] In his 1983 lecture on Walter Benjamin's *Task of the Translator* Paul de Man famously attenuates this obstacle to trans-linguistic portability by noting the different associations and denotations of the words for "bread" in German, French, and Flemish. As de Man observes, the Germanic "*Brot*" and the Romance "*pain*" each activate a divergent suite of prosodic associations and material denotations that together inflect with singularity both the banal and quotidian experience of eating breakfast as well as the supposedly universal (*katholikós*) consumption of sacramentalized "Daily Bread" that is the performance of the Catholic Eucharist (de Man 86-87, 94-95).

Chapter will draw upon sources written in over a dozen languages (only several of which I can claim proficiency in) on five different continents and over the span of more than 2,500 years. True to Esolen's sentiment, to pretend that sampling such a diverse set of literary texts and traditions could possibly arrive at an *empirical* verdict as to the universality of parental mourning for deceased children would be absurd, hubristic at best and pernicious at worst – especially since only a tiny fraction of humans who have lived on this planet have been literate in the first place, and of these, even fewer have left behind records extensively documenting their experience of losing a child. Flagging at the outset the limits of what can be gleaned from texts in translation is thus an effective reminder against drawing hasty conclusions about human universals – a risk that, as we have seen, regularly manifests in supposedly objective, descriptive accounts instead transforming into viciously normative ones. My objective in sounding such a broadly diverse corpus thus unfolds under the sign of what could be called an *as-if* universal. In other words, instead of inferring what the experience of parental mourning for deceased children "must" universally be like through sounding a wide variety of texts, my more modest goal is instead to document how the experience of losing a child has been recurrently represented in multiple, different contexts. Doing so produces a catalogue of tropes that are surprisingly similar across contexts, and that, taken together, might help illuminate how that event is *commonly* – if not universally – experienced.

Noting the limits of what translating a text from one language to another can convey also brings to the foreground another important methodological concern: the open question of how a text can be said to "translate" or otherwise record an emotional experience in the first place, and how accurately reading texts might possibly give us insight into the affective landscapes of those who write them. On the one hand, in literary studies, naïvely reading

texts with an eye towards authorial intentionality has variously been discredited, gone out of fashion, or been a straw man all along,[75] much like the genre of literary psychobiography at its crudest.[76] On the other hand, advances in the Digital Humanities have supplanted *explication de texte*-style "close reading" in favor of corpus-level archival surveys that de-emphasize individual texts and authors in favor of broad (although frequently fecund) characterizations of trends in publication and reading.[77] A polyglot survey-level investigation into representations of the experience of parental mourning for deceased children must, it seems, navigate between these alternative, competing approaches. Instead, however, my methodology toggles between them syncretically: I pair close readings with broad samplings, and juxtapose published, formal prose with private diaries, memoirs with novels, canonical poems with confessional posts on internet messageboards, and more. Where possible, I give priority to linking given texts with the specific, historically attested child deaths that may have inspired them (or that they explicitly address), and to the biographical facts of the lives of the authors in question, but I also include samples where the precipitating cause of an actual death is impossible to verify, or where the framing is explicitly fictional. Through this flexibility, I allow for just enough latitude in cataloguing evidence to suggest that, one way or another, and in different ways, the death of a child represents a crisis in meaning-making more generally, and that this crisis in meaning precipitates texts that, in one way or another, testify to that crisis.

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[75] Without belaboring the point, the foundational texts for this discussion are Wimsatt and Beardsley (1946), Barthes (1968), and Foucault (1970). For an excellent survey of the debates over this issue, which preoccupied much of Twentieth Century Literary Studies, see Burke (2008).

[76] For a history of this genre of criticism (which extends from heights like Sigmund Freud's biography of Da Vinci and Erik Erikson's of Luther to the lows of Marie Bonaparte's biography of Poe and well beyond) see Adams and Szaluta (156-160).

[77] The inspirational text for this trend is Moretti's *Distant Reading* (2013); for critical takes on both the merits and shortcomings of "distant" approaches, see Schulz (2011) and Smallwood (2014).

My warrant for this approach stems precisely from the fact that the status of texts as definitively faithful translations of affective experiences is, I believe, deeply questionable, whether those texts are approached from the perspective of authorial intention, biographical circumstance, or as discursive artifacts. Whether chiseled into marble, inscribed on tablets, inked onto paper, or rendered in ASCII characters online, written words are not reducible to or probatively demonstrative of the affects that we might like to think inspire them, or even that they claim to express. Words can be deceptive. When, one morning in 1961, 5 year-old Phil Summerfield of Tekonsha, Michigan, awoke to discover his 8 month-old brother William lying suffocated beside him, he believed his grief-stricken mother Janice, who blamed him for William's death, as did police and the coroner, who archived her statements of bereavement. Only in 2014, when she was near death in a nursing home, did Janice confess to a reporter that she had actually deliberately smothered William – and authorities now suspect her of killing another two of her children, a pair of twins, whose deaths she also initially blamed on yet another of her children, a daughter. And yet for 54 years Janice ostensibly grieved a tragic accident, in earnest, and most of those around her believed her – to the point that Phil would tell *The Detroit Free Press* in November of 2014 that he had developed post-traumatic stress disorder and attempted suicide out of a sense of guilt. Until her near-deathbed disclosure, Janice's words appeared trustworthy, her grief, expressive – and yet now bodies have been exhumed, autopsies performed, and her reported feelings, much like her story, stand in a very different light.

Words can also be obscure, and evasive. For a reader invested in authorial intentionality, making sense of Montaigne's apparent callousness *vis-à-vis* the death of daughters whose numbers and names he appears unable to recall begs for interpretative somersaults. Questions proliferate: What does Montaigne *mean* by saying that he doesn't

remember how many children he lost, that he does so "sans regrets, au moins sans facherie" (*Essais* I.14), and does he even mean what he says in the first place? Is his studied indifference actually a lure of some kind, a deliberately implausible performance of the Stoicism he so venerates, faltering even its pretense at indifference? Of course, we have no way of knowing, not just what Montaigne "meant" but also even how many children he may have actually had, or where they might be buried. By the same token, the temptation to engage in psychobiography is likewise strong, and we could indeed speculate about how Montaigne's infantile experiences, apparent homosexuality, and traumatic near-death experience falling from a horse might have shaped his attitude towards his daughters – but all this would have no definitive outcome in terms of shedding light on what Montaigne "truly" felt. We can but cite his reported feelings, however skeptically, add them to our catalogue, and move on. The problem of other minds does not dissipate thanks to the existence of a 400-year-old manuscript that, we like to think, reflects Montaigne's candid feelings; instead, it returns with a vengeance.

Likewise, a Digital Humanities-based, statistically-driven approach falls short when it comes to inferring affect from texts on parental mourning. Consider, as an example, the diary of Ralph Josselin (1617-1683), the Vicar of Earls Colne, Essex, which is among the texts treated by Robert Woods in his *Children Remembered*. Although a man of modest means, Josselin ran both his country parish and a hardscrabble farm with dogged devotion, and recorded his day-to-day affairs in a massive diary that contains multiple entries per week, spanning the course of nearly five decades (with some interruptions). The overwhelming majority of these entries, which have been digitized and made searchable online by Cambridge University, deal with the minutiae of rural Seventeenth Century British life: the weather, planting cycles, animal husbandry, Church tithes, and the like (Woods 108-109). If

pagecount and word frequency are criteria for deciding what "matters" to an author, than these, it would follow, were the Good Vicar's central preoccupations. And yet Ralph Josselin and his wife Jane also had ten children, of whom only five lived; in addition, Jane experienced no less than five miscarriages. In terms of raw page count, these events occupies only a tiny fraction of Josselin's diary – but their description merits excerpting and reproducing in full (in their original orthography):

> *21 February 1648*
> This day my deare babe Ralph, quietly fell a sleepe, and is at rest with the lord, the Lord in mercy sanctifie his hand unto mee, and doe mee good by it and teach mee how to walke more closely with him.
>
> *27 May 1650*
> This day a quarter past two in the afternoone my Mary fell asleepe in the Lord, her soule past into that rest where the body of Jesus, and the soules of the saints are, shee was: 8 yeares and 45 dayes old when shee dyed, my soule had abundant cause to blesse god for her, and was our first fruites, and those god would have offered to him, and this I freely resigned up to him, it was a pretious child, a bundle of myrrhe, a bundle of sweetnes, shee was a child of ten thousand, full of wisedome, womanlike gravity, knowledge, sweet expressions of god, apt in her learning, tender hearte and loving, an obedient child to us it was free from rudeness of little children, it was to us as a boxe of sweet ointment, which now its broken smells more deliciously than it did before, Lord I rejoyce I had such a present for thee, it was patient in the sicknesse, thankefull in admiration; it lived desired and dyed lamented, thy memory is and will bee sweere unto mee.
>
> *2 June 1650*
> ... my deare Ralph before midnight fell asleepe whose body Jesus shall awaken, his life was continuall sorrow and trouble, happy he who is at rest in the Lord, my deare wife, ill as if she would have dyed, the Lord revived her againe for which his holy name bee praised, it was one of the most lovely corpses that ever was seene.

Josselin, ever devout, continues to praise God, even as he enumerates the charms and bemoans the suffering of his lost progeny – three of whom he and his wife lost in less than two years, and, with the latter two, in the span of less than a week. Josselin's text then returns to his parochial affairs and to documenting his expenditures as a farmer. But, of course, his family's losses are not complete.

> *15 June 1674*
> about one a clocke in rhe morning my eldest sonne Thomas and my most deare child ascended early hence w keepe his everlasting Sabbath with his heavenly father, and Saviour with the church above, his end was comfortable, and his death calme, not muche of pain til the Satturday afore. in my course this morning I read Joshua I, which had words of comfort, god making his word my counsellour and comfort. he was my hope but [for] some yeares I have feared his life, god hath taken all my first brood but Jane. lett all live in thy sight sanctified. a wett morning, the heavens for some time have mourned over us.

"A wett morning, the heavens for some time have mourned over us." On a surface level, the pivot to describing weather represents a return to one of Josselin's most frequent concerns, but here this is more than just reportage: it is gesture a saturated with affective overtones – the sky itself mourns. And any pretense that Josselin's diary is "just" a Farmer's Almanac, laconically reflecting merely prosaic, material concerns, is soon shattered decisively:

> *31 July 1675*
> This morning after two of the clocke my deare Ann in her twentieth year died with mee at Colne. a good child, following her brother to London, and from thence hither, to lie in his grave, loving in their lives and in their deaths they were not divided. lying in the same grave. twenty three yeares before god opened the grave and Mary first the eldest of that brood and Ralph the youngest after, lay in the same grave. god hath taken 5 of 10. lord lett it bee enough, and spare that we may recover strength.

"god hath taken 5 of 10. lord lett it bee enough." These are but two sentences among Josselin's tens of thousands – and yet they cut to the quick. Per Ariès' reasoning, of course, the Josselins were lucky to have gotten away with a 50% infant mortality rate, dubiously expended "affective resources" on the two young Ralphs, and should have been thankful that Ann lived as long as she did. And, indeed, per a purely statistically-driven, distant-reading-style inquiry, this prayerful invocation is of a piece with all the others that have come before it. And yet we cannot read these lines without also sensing – viscerally – that the Vicar is in crisis, that his faith itself may even be in doubt, and that what previously consoled him now leaves him empty, broken, and exhausted. In other words, close-reading this passage suggests that what his voluminous diaries *document* most *frequently* – turnips,

hailstorms, Our Fathers, and cows – is not the same as what he *cared about* most *deeply*. In other words, when it comes to reading texts for the priorities of their authors, topical frequency does not translate into affective intensity.

There is also the question of how much we can infer from texts in terms of how representative they are of cultural attitudes more broadly. This problem arises even if we bracket that certain affective experiences, encoded in language, are highly culturally specific, and impossible to translate: we might crudely lump together what Russians call *nostalghia* (as a melancholic attachment to the past that also encompasses awareness of the gap between memory and fantasy) with the Japanese *mono no aware* (a bittersweet attunement to the transience of phenomena) with the Portuguese *saudades* (a kind of yearning for an lost lover that also a kind of homesickness and bereavement) as "poignant sensations of loss" but this, native speakers assure inquirers, vastly erodes difference.[78] Even granting that the written expressions of the affective dimensions of complex, aesthetically rich and historically complicated phenomena may be untranslatable *per se*, there remains the fact that individuals are frequently quite conscious of dominant cultural expectations, and appeal to them on paper, but then behave quite otherwise – a gap between performance and reality. Sometimes this gap between performance and reality manifests even with the text itself. Writing at some point late in the first Century CE, Plutarch, the Greek biographer and Roman diplomat, offers the following advice to his wife, Timoxena, consoling her on the death of their two-year old daughter, also named Timoxena:

> Our ancient ancestral customs and rules are a better guide to the truth in these matters. People do not pour libations for their infant children when they die or perform any of the other rites that in other cases one is expected to perform for the dead, because babies have not been pervaded by earth or any earthly things. Again, people do not linger over their burial or at their grave or in laying out their bodies,

[78] For more on culturally "untranslatable" concepts and emotions, see Cassin and Apter et. al. (2014) and de Boinod (2006). For a magisterial take on *nostalghia* specifically, see Boym (2004).

> because the laws regarding death at that age do not allow it, on the grounds that it is irreligious to grieve for those who have exchanged this world for a fate, and a place too, that is better and more divine. Since mistrusting these laws is more problematic than trusting them, let us make sure that our external actions conform to their injunctions, and that our internal state is even more untainted, pure and restrained than our external activity.
>
> (Plutarch 597-598)

Plutarch then goes on to extend his invocations of the properly restrained mourning practices of generations past to exhort his wife to compose herself, perform the proper rituals, and the like. This is particularly important because the young Timoxena's death came along suddenly, while Plutarch was on a trip to Athens, and her mother's messenger missed him en route, such that Plutarch is now still several days away from their home in Chaeronea and his wife will have to handle funeral arrangements without his help. But then the letter of the staid Neo-Platonist, who is both performing his philosophy's characteristic indifference towards death while enjoining it as a course of action for his wife, takes a sharp turn, and Plutarch addresses his wife plainly: he is devastated, and knows she is too, but if she cannot keep up appearances, then he will fall to pieces as well. As Plutarch writes:

> All I ask, my dear, is that while reacting emotionally you make sure that both of us – me as well as you – remain in a stable state. I mean, the actual event is a known quantity and I can keep it within limits, but if I find your distress excessive, this will discompose me more than what has happened. Nevertheless, I was not born "from oak or rock," as you yourself know, given that you have been my partner in bringing up so many children – all brought up with no one else's help in our own home – and I know how overjoyed you were with the birth, after four sons, of the daughter you longed for and with the fact that it gave me the opportunity to name her after you.
>
> (Plutarch 585-586)

At the time of the young Timoxena's death, two of those four sons had already died – and she would be their last and only daughter. As Plutarch's letter to his wife suggests (and as we shall see repeatedly below) we should be leery of equating what people say grief *should* be like

with how they record performing it for different audiences, and, above all, with definitively representing how they actually feel.[79]

There is a final reason why, methodologically, this Chapter resists *empirically* arbitrating the universality of parental mourning for deceased children in favor of documenting its manifold *representations* in a wide range of texts and traditions. This is because, even if we acknowledge the pitfalls of translating between languages, and even if we grant the folly of naively treating texts as translating affects, we nonetheless will find ourselves confronting a catalogue of features that appears remarkably similar across time and place: notions and suggestions of affects that, in other words, *do* appear to "translate.'" These *typologies of grief* encompass a suite of images, ideas, and expressive gestures that include an attenuated narrative of the circumstances leading up to the child's death, and an emphasis on the spectacle of a child's suffering as agonizing, particularly in light of the child's being figured as innocent and fragile. After the child's death, these typologies include a vocabulary of "shattering," a transformed relation to the minutiae of everyday life (which is variously figured as now being meaningless, unreal, or precariously contingent) and a kind of crisis of

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[79] Strikingly, Plutarch says that ritual observances should only go so far, and advises in his letter a holistic attentiveness to self-care, for both him and his wife, so that they do not fall into what a modern DSM-V-friendly mental health practitioner might readily identify as Prolonged Grief Disorder: "This is certainly what happens at the beginning: only an individual lets grief enter himself; but after a while it becomes a permanent sibling, a habitual presence, and then it doesn't leave however much one wants it to. That is why it is crucial to resist it on the threshold and not to adopt special clothing or haircuts or anything else like that, which allow it to establish a stronghold. These things challenge the mind day in and day out, make it recoil, belittle it and constrict it and imprison it, and make it unresponsive and apprehensive, as if the wearing of these clothes and the adoption of these practices out of grief cut it off from laughter and light and the sociability of the table. The consequences of this affliction are physical neglect and an aversion to oiling and bathing the body and to other aspects of the daily regimen, when exactly the opposite should happen: purely mental suffering ought to be helped by physical fitness. Mental distress abates and subsides to a great extent when it is dispersed in physical calm, as waves subside in fair weather, but if as a result of a bad regimen the body becomes sordid and foul and transmits to the mind nothing benign or beneficial, but only the harsh and unpleasant fumes of pain and distress, then even those who desire it find that recovery becomes hard to achieve. These are the kinds of disorders that take possession of the mind when it is treated so badly." (Plutarch 591)

temporality, not just for the dead child, whose death is by definition an "untimely" event, but for its parents, whose understanding of and investment in the future are radically reconfigured. But above all, and most salient for our purposes, is a pervasive invocation of the *incommunicability* or *inexpressibility* of the experience of losing a child – a claim recurrent across cultures and traditions that the loss of a child is something that one *cannot* translate into other terms, something that defies communication and impoverishes language itself. And yet it is the very notion of incommunicability, of a crisis in the possibility of communication itself, which we will find bereaved parents driven apparently to communicate, again and again. The prospect of a perfectly faithful translation of a text may be by definition impossible, much as may be the prospect of truly "knowing" the feelings of another human being, but these facts no less make attempts at translation worthless than they diminish efforts to try and understand the experiences of others – to the contrary, they make both efforts all the more imperative.

2. Sampling Canons

Before turning to juxtapositions with more modern sources, and assembling our own, idiosyncratic canon for the purposes of this inquiry, it is advisable to quickly glance at some *loci classici* that feature descriptions of parental child loss. We can start, in the Western, with the Hebrew Bible, the Greek New Testament, and several examples from Greek and Roman antiquity.

At least as far as the Jewish and Christian Biblical traditions are concerned, the canonical sources that furnish examples of parental child loss are decidedly perplexing.

Consider, for example, 2 Samuel 12:15-23, where King David must face the death of his child, who is cursed because of David's role in the death of the Uriah the Hittite:

> And the Lord afflicted the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and he became sick. David therefore sought God on behalf of the child. And David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground. And the elders of his house stood beside him, to raise him from the ground, but he would not, nor did he eat food with them. On the seventh day the child died. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they said, "Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spoke to him, and he did not listen to us. How then can we say to him the child is dead? He may do himself some harm." But when David saw that his servants were whispering together, David understood that the child was dead. And David said to his servants, "Is the child dead?" They said, "He is dead." Then David arose from the earth and washed and anointed himself and changed his clothes. And he went into the house of the Lord and worshiped. He then went to his own house. And when he asked, they set food before him, and he ate. Then his servants said to him, "What is this thing that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive; but when the child died, you arose and ate food." He said, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept, for I said, 'Who knows whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live?' But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me."
>
> (2 Samuel 12:15-23, *ESV*)

The text offers us a complicated image of emotional behaviors and expectations thereof. While his son ails, David appears distraught, and certainly makes an impression on his servants, who appear to anticipate his mourning to continue or even to intensify once his child dies. Contrary to their expectations, however, David instead tidies up, prays, and eats. His response to their queries – "But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again?"— has a kind of grim matter-of-factness to it that squares with a energistic account of attachment like Ariès's: there's nothing David can do for his now-deceased child, and he literally hasn't eaten for days. And yet his behavior nonetheless appears to strike those who witness it to be abnormal, or at least inconsistent.

The case of Job as an archetype of suffering is likewise perplexing. At the start, Job has seven sons and three daughters, whom he clearly cares about:

> His sons used to hold feasts in their homes on their birthdays, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. When a period of feasting had run its

> course, Job would make arrangements for them to be purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular custom.
>
> (Job 1.4-5, *NIV*)

Although Job weathers the loss of his property, the death of his servants, and the theft of his lifestock, all imposed upon him as tests by God, it is the death of these children that appears to break his heart. When a messenger arrives to tell Job that his children have died when a house in which they were hosting one of their feasts collapsed, Job reacts violently:

> Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised."
>
> (1.20-21, *NIV*)

Yet, Job refuses to forsake God, and, in the end, not only is his wealth returned redoubled, he gets ten new kids. The text even seems to suggest that, overall, he actually traded up, since his three new daughters are gorgeous and their inherited wealth is substantial: "Nowhere in all the land were there found women as beautiful as Job's daughters, and their father granted them an inheritance along with their brothers." (42.13-15). The text also stresses that Job himself gets to live to see his descendants down to the fourth generation (42.16-17). With the threat of the erasure of his lineage, which the initial loss represented, now pacified, Job is made whole, and his previous ten children seem pretty much to have been dispensible. A similar preoccupation with the threat to parental lineages and the integrity of household hierarchies over and above the horror of losing a particular child likewise appears to animate the sins-of-the-father punishment for violating the Second Commandment,[80] the collective punishment of entire peoples who have wronged the

[80] See Exodus 20:5-6, 34:7-8; Numbers 14:18; and Deuteronomy 5:9.

Israelites,[81] and, arguably, even the Death of the Firstborn.[82] By the same token, the spectacle of children dying – ripped from their mothers' wombs – described in Hosea functions as at once a not-improbable representation of an actual historical event (namely, the Assyrian destruction of Samaria) but also a synecdoche for the collective punishment bestowed upon an Israelite Kingdom that has lost its way, forsaken its inheritance.[83] Although a thorough exegesis of Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac on Mount Moriah (Genesis 22:1-19) is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is suggestive that, here, again, the issue is more than just the fate of one child (whatever Isaac's actual age may have been) than it is the fate of a patriarchal legacy. Indeed, God not only spares Abraham's firstborn son to Sarah, the Child of the Promise, but also guarantees him an extensive patrimony: "I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me" (Genesis 22:17-18). Taken as a whole, the question of the death of a child in the Hebrew Bible is always bound up with more than just the specific issue of parental grief: it is first and foremost a crisis of tribal survival and the continuation of the legacy of the Jews as a people.[84]

Interrogating the Christian gospels on the matter of parental loss of children also yields mixed results. Bizarre non-canonical gospels like the Second Century "Infancy Gospel

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[81] Consider both the prophecy, "Daughter Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is the one who repays you, according to what you have done to us. Happy is the one who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks" (Psalms 137:8-9) and the Divine injunction ""Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys" (I Samuel 15:3, *NIV*).

[82] The text is at pains to stress that every household at every level of Egyptian society loses its firstborn male; Pharaoh's loss of his son ostensibly also costs him his heir (Exodus 12:29-30).

[83] "The people of Samaria must bear their guilt, because they have rebelled against their God. They will fall by the sword; their little ones will be dashed to the ground, their pregnant women ripped open." (Hosea 13:16, *NIV*).

[84] For a provocative and systematic take on the gendered dynamics of the practice of sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible and beyond, with an eye specifically to its role in perpetuating patrilineal power structures, see Nancy Jay's *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion, and Paternity* (1994).

of Thomas" feature a child-Christ who offhandedly murders at least two of his playmates, and, when their parents invoke their displeasure to Joseph, promptly blinds them. Only later does Jesus resurrect a friend who has broken his neck in a fall, and he does so because the child's parents suspect Jesus was responsible for his death and take him to task for it (Barnstone 398-403). Young Jesus does all this, of course, before appearing to teach Rabbis in the temple at the age of twelve (Luke 2:41-52). Turning to the canonical gospels, we can observe that Jairus, the leader of a Galilean synagogue, and his family are depicted as grieving the death of his twelve-year-old daughter; when Jesus resurrects her, they are 'astounded' and presumably grateful.[85] When Jesus saves a young slave boy on his deathbed, the reaction of the boy's parents (if any) goes unconveyed.[86] In both of these episodes, the depiction of parental loss is either skeletal or outright nonexistent: the stories are about displaying Christ's miraculous powers over death, not showcasing grief. Likewise, the Massacre of Innocents, wherein Herod of Judea orders the killing of all male children in his kingdom under the age of two, is recorded only in Matthew, is almost certainly entirely spurious as a matter of historical record, and functions primarily to allow Matthew to appeal to Hebrew proof-texts as fulfilled prophesies.[87] The event itself is descriptively bare, containing no details about the behavior or reactions of those involved, but this was no barrier to its becoming a common subject of popular narrative: Medieval artists elaborated on it luridly in a variety of media, and by the Baroque period, Giambattista Marino (1560-

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[85]This episode appears in all the synoptic Gospels: Mark 5:38–43, Matthew 9:18–26, Luke 8:40–56. In Mark and Luke, Christ both enjoins her parents to keep secret about the miracle – per the Messianic Secret conceit – and also, interestingly, tells them to get her something to eat.

[86] This episode occurs in Luke 7:1-10; Matthew 8:5-13 has the child merely paralyzed.

[87] The massacre itself takes up only one verse (Matthew 16) and the proof-texts adjacently invoked are Hosea 11:1 and Jeremiah 31:15. With the latter citation, Matthew transforms Jeremiah's image of Rachel, who died in childbirth, lamenting from within her grave the fate of her "children" (IE, for Jeremiah, the lineage of Israel in Babylonian exile) into an anagogical prefiguration of an episode of mass child murder that almost never certainly happened. As to the historicity of the event itself, see Richardson (297).

1625) would pen *La strage degli innocenti*, which spends four horrifying cantos of *ottava rima* describing children being impaled, eviscerated, cloven in twain, decapitated and the like, all while the mothers look on, weep, pray, and are eventually butchered themselves.[88]

As the above examples suggest, the spectacle of parental grief is not a potent or even frequent motif in the New Testament itself; it is largely a retroactive interpolation. Nowhere is this absence clearer than in what presumably would furnish a showcase for it: the Evangelists's depictions of Christ's mother, Mary. Three of the four Gospels have Mary present at the Crucifixion, but her reaction is conveyed in none of them. In Matthew 27:55-56 and Mark 15:40, she witnesses "from a distance." The Johannine text, chronologically the last of the four, puts her "nearby" and has Christ address her, placing her into the care of the enigmatic "Beloved Disciple" (*ὃν ἐφίλει ὁ Ἰησοῦς*), presumably John, whom he dubs her new "son" (*υιος*), addressing her, both formally and generically, as "woman" (*γυναι*) in the process (19:26-27). At this point, John, whether as writer or the unknown disciple or both, ushers Mary off-scene. Unlike Mary Magdalene or Mary of Clopas, Mary the mother of Christ does not appear in the group that brings his body to the Tomb, nor is she among those who return there at Dawn falling the Sabbath. Neither the gospels nor Acts report any encounter between Mary and Christ after his resurrection. And yet a poignant encounter between a cross-bearing Christ and Mary along the *Via Dolorosa* is a popular subject of Christian art, and constitutes the "Fourth Station of the Cross" in Catholic, Lutheran, and Anglican and Episcopalian devotional rituals, although it is not described in scripture, and likely originated as part of Franciscan pilgrimage practices during the 1340s.[89] By the same token, ubiquitous representations of the grieving Virgin Mary in both the plastic arts and

[88] I am grateful to Erik Butler for sharing his forthcoming translation of this text with me.
[89] See the entry on *The Way of the Cross* in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* at http://bit.ly/1ulhBoc.

liturgical hymns are later developments: the motif of Mary as weeping "Mother of Sorrows" (*Mater dolorosa*) traces back (at the earliest) to Italian laypeople in the 1200s, and only gains official recognition by the Church in response to the Reformation; that of Mary standing beneath the Cross (as *Stabat Mater*) dates to the 1230s; and the image of Mary cradling Christ's corpse – the *Pietà* exemplified by Michaelangelo's sculpture in St. Peter's (1498-1499) – derives from Germanic *Vesperbilder* popular during the early Renaissance.[90] On the question of how Mary grieves, or even if she does at all, the Bible itself is silent – but the impulse to depict her mourning has apparently nonetheless proven irresistible.[91]

The Greek and Roman traditions, by contrast, furnish plentiful examples of parental loss and grief. Euripides's Medea plangently describes maternity as an endeavor that is fraught with risk at every stage, with the threat of a losing a child standing as both a constant worry and utmost catastrophe, to the point where she argues it is reasonable to envy the childless.

> Often before / I have gone through more subtle reasons, / And have come upon questionings greater / Than a woman should strive to search out. / But we too have a goddess to help us/ And accompany us into wisdom. / Not all of us. Still you will find / Among many women a few, / And our sex is not without learning./ This I say, that those who have never/ Had children, who know nothing of it, / In happiness have the advantage / Over those who are parents. / The childless, who never discover / Whether children turn out as a good thing / Or as something to cause pain, are spared / Many troubles in lacking this knowledge./ And those who have in their homes/ The sweet presence of children, I see that their lives/ Are all wasted away by their worries./ First they must thing how to bring them up well and / How to leave them something to live on./ And then after this whether all their toil/ Is for those who will turn out good or bad, / Is still an unanswered question. /And of one more trouble, the last of all, /That is common to mortals I tell. / For suppose you have found them enough for their living, / Suppose that the children have grown into youth/ And have turned out good, still, if God so wills it, / Death will away with our children's bodies, / And carry them off into Hades. / What is our

[90] For more on this, see historical surveys by Jameson (1990), Martin (1998), and Rubin (2010).
[91] Mariological literature is voluminous, and traces the peregrinations, sources, and appeal of the Cult of the Virgin Mother in extensive detail; my own, perhaps crude speculation, is that imagery of the grieving mother grew in popularity in the wake of the Black Death.

> profit, then, that for the sake of / Children the gods should pile upon mortals/ After all else/ This most terrible grief of all?
>
> (*Medea* 1054-1089)

After all the efforts involved in giving birth to and rearing children, struggles in their own right, their precarious lives, Medea states, hang constantly in the balance. Reaching beyond the maternal perspective, Medea emphasizes that the possibility of the death of children represents a "terrible grief" that is a trouble "common to mortals" in general. By the same token, Book XXIV of Homer's *Illiad* is preoccupied with Priam's grief over the death of his firstborn son Hector and his efforts to recover his body. "Let Achilles cut me down straightaway—once I've caught my son in my arms and wept my fill!" Priam vows to his wife Hecuba when she warns him that venturing beyond Troy's walls to retrieve Hector's corpse will likely result in his own death (270-271). When Priam, with the help of the Gods, does eventually manage to reach Achilles, he approaches him as a supplicant—"kiss[ing] his hands, those terrible, man-killing hands that had slaughtered Prim's many sons in battle" (561-562). Priam's appeal to Achilles hinges upon his conjuring the image of the worry and fear that beset Achilles's own father back in Greece – and this empathetic appeal strikes a chord such that "overpowered by memory, both men gave way to grief" (595-596); Achilles surrenders Hector's corpse, and then two men eat together (768-740). The temporary truce – twelve days – that the men agree upon holds until a period of mourning is complete. The spectacle of parental distress is enough of an emotional touchstone for two mortal enemies to forge a truce (however temporary), and the funeral of Hector, Troy's favored son, serves as a synecdoche for the demise of his city and its people.

An entire genre of Greek and later Latin literature is devoted to the subject of mourning, and addressed to bereaved parents specifically: the *consolatio*. It is important not to confuse this with the elegy (from the Greek *ἔλεγος*, "lament") which referred initially to

poetry composed in a particular meter on any of a variety of subjects (including epitaphs) and which only became synonymous with mourning poems in the late Renaissance (Cuddon 253-255, Childs and Fowler 68-69).[92] *Consolationes* may contain elegies, like the *Consolatio ad Liviam*, a poem addressed to the wife of Augustus Caesar on the occasion of the death her of son Nero Claudius Drusus, and which is often spuriously attributed to Ovid, but not all elegies are not *consolationes*, nor vice-versa.[93] Instead, the *consolatio* is typically a formalized prose address of counsel to a third party who has lost a loved one. Often composed as a funeral oration or personal letter, the *consolatio* deploys a repertoire of various tropes that are more or less equal parts *momento mori* and therapeutic advice on how to deal with grief. JHD Scourfield outlines the paradigmatic *consolatio* structure as follows:

> Consolation proper is regularly accompanied by an expression of sympathy and by exhortation to respond to the loss in an appropriate way: the aim is ethical (concerned to shape behaviour) as much as psychological (concerned to afford comfort). Arguments commonly employed include the following: all are born mortal; death is an escape from the evils of life; time heals all griefs; the deceased was only 'lent'—be grateful for having possessed him or her. Normally grief is regarded as natural and legitimate, though not to be indulged in.
>
> (Scourfield 363)

Many of these *topoi* will be already familiar to us from Plutarch's letter to his wife, which draws heavily upon these conceits. The father of the genre, so to speak, is commonly understood to be the Fourth Century BCE philosopher Crantor, a student of Plato's whose works included a treatise "On Grief" (*Περὶ Πένθους*; in Latin, *De Luctu*) and a letter to a friend's father, Hippocles, on the occasion of the death of his son. In the wake of bereavement, Crantor strongly advocated for a practice of *metriopatheia* (*μετριοπάθεια*), a sustained moderation of the passions, and although his works are now lost to history, they

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[92] It is also important to disambiguate the elegy from the threnody (from the Greek *θρῆνος*, "dirge") which, as a Classicizing rather than properly Classical genre, is a later development, and encompasses poems like Emerson's *Threnody*, written after the death of his cherished son Waldo in 1842; we will address Emerson's reaction to Waldo's death below.

[93] For more on the Pseudo-Ovidian *Consolatio ad Liviam de Morte Drusi*, see Schoonhoven (1992).

were enormously influential throughout antiquity and into the Middle Ages.[94] Perhaps the most famous example of the *consolatio* genre are the series of letters and other texts written by Marcus Tullius Cicero on the occasion of the death of his only daughter, Tullia. Tullia died during childbirth in 45 BCE, and her passing left Cicero distraught. As he wrote his friend Atticus, "I am ruined, ruined…I have lost the one thing that bound me to life" (*"occidimus, occidimus….quam unum quo tenebamur amisimus";* DLVIII: A XII, 23). Drawing upon a library of texts, including those by Crantor, Cicero took the extraordinary step of composing an epistolary *consolatio* to himself (the *Consolatio ad Se*), which, although acclaimed as a masterpiece by contemporaries and readers throughout Late Antiquity and into the early Renaissance, has, save for a few fragments, since been entirely lost. Yet even this remarkable endeavor of translating grief into writing appears to have afforded Cicero only a temporary respite.[95]

But we need neither track the specific formulae of the *consolatio* nor even remain bound to traditions originating around the Mediterranean (whether they emanate from Jerusalem, Athens, or Rome) to come across powerful canonical representations of parental bereavement. Before moving into our catalogue of typologies of grief outright, consider four

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[94] For an overview of this tradition, which extends through Seneca and Statius to Church Fathers like Ambrose and Jerome to Boethius and beyond, see Baltussen et al (2013).

[95] As Cicero writes to Atticus: "You wish me some relaxation of my mourning: you are kind, as usual, but you can bear me witness that I have not been wanting to myself. For not a word has been written by anyone on the subject of abating grief which I did not read at your house. But my sorrow is too much for any consolation. Nay, I have done what certainly no one ever did before me—tried to console myself by writing a book, which I will send to you as soon as my amanuenses have made copies of it. I assure you that there is no more efficacious consolation. I write all day long, not that I do any good, but for a while I experience a kind of check, or, if not quite that—for the violence of my grief is overpowering—yet I get some relaxation, and I try with all my might to recover composure, not of heart, yet, if possible, of countenance. When doing that I sometimes feel myself to be doing wrong, sometimes that I shall be doing wrong if I don't. Solitude does me some good, but it would have done me more good, if you after all had been here: and that is my only reason for quitting this place, for it does very well in such miserable circumstances. And even this suggests another cause of sorrow. For you will not be able to be to me now what you once were: everything you used to like about me is gone." (DXLV: A XII, 14)

more examples, found in the canons of four, far-flung cultures: T'ang Dynasty China (618–907 CE), Skaldic-era Iceland and Scandinavia (9th-13th Century CE), Nara-period Japan (710-794 CE, and Late Renaissance Britain. Written by stylistic masters of four separate languages – Classical Chinese (古文), Old West Norse (*norrænt mál*), archaic, pre-*kanbun* Japanese, and Elizabethan English – these texts are at once indisputably artifacts of the societies that produced them, revealing various idiosyncratic priorities peculiar to those cultures, while also revealing certain shared concerns, and suggesting certain affects that, it appears, transcend the particularities of space and time.

First, consider a pair of linked poems by one of three greatest poets of the T'ang canon, Bái Jūyì (白居易,), both of which respond to the loss of his young daughter, Jīn Luánzi (金鑾子). The first in this sequence deals with her illness, death, and burial:

> The sickness came, took only ten days,
> even though we'd raised you for three years.
> Miserable tears, crying voices, everything hurt painfully.
> Your old clothes lonely on the hanger, the medicine at your bedside.
> I sent you through the deep village lanes,
> I saw the tiny grave in the field.
> Don't tell me it's three *li* away—
> this separation is till the end of days.[96]

For Bái Jūyì, three years of parenthood and the frenzied days of managing his daughter's illness juxtapose with the eternity of their separation – the vast temporal duration of which is further heightened by contrasting it to the relative spatial proximity of her 'tiny' grave (three *li* is just under a mile). Years later, Bái Jūyì is still haunted by his daughter's death, and a

[96] This translation is Arthur Waley's (2010); for the original, see 葛培嶺 (2010). Waley's rendering is largely faithful, although what he literally glosses as "the end of days" (终天), which rings with apocalyptic overtones to the Anglophone ear, is in the original Chinese, idiomatically synonymous with "lifelong" (终身).

chance encounter on the road opens a floodgate of memories. As he writes in a poem entitled "The Memory of Golden Bells" (念金銮子):

> Ruined and ill, a man of two score;
> Pretty and guileless, a girl of three.
> Not a boy, but still better than nothing:
> To soothe one's feeling, from time to time a kiss!
> There came a day, they
> suddenly took her from me;
> Her soul's shadow wandered I know not where.
> And when I remember how just at the time she died
> She lisped strange sounds, beginning to learn to talk,
> Then I know that the ties of flesh and blood
> Only bind us to a load of grief and sorrow.
> At last, by thinking of the time before she was born,
> By thought and reason I drove the pain away.
> Since my heart forgot her, many days have passed
> And three times winter has changed to spring.
> This morning for a little the old grief came back,
> Because, in the road, I met her foster-nurse.[97]

Five centuries later, the great Icelandic scholar and statesman Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241), compiler of one of the two great compilations of Old Norse poetry, the Prose Edda (the *Snorra Edda*), would gather together the oral traditions associated with Egill Skallagrímsson, a legendary Tenth Century bard, farmer, and warrior into *Egil's Saga*. A brilliant poet in his own right, Sturluson has Egill declaim the following verses after the death of two of his sons, the first lost at sea, the second, dead from illness:

> My mouth strains
> To move the tongue
> To weigh and wing
> The choice word:
> Not easy to breathe
> Odin's inspiration

[97] This translation appears in Minford and Lau (2010); for the original, see 白居易 (1967). The characters representing the name of Bái Jūyì's daughter literally mean "Golden Bells"; as a cultural symbol, the ringing of such bells is associated with temple rituals, sacred spaces, and festive occasions – like marriage, blessings, and the birth of a child.

In my heart's hinterland
Little hope there.

A leaden weight
Lies on my tongue,
I cannot sustain
The measure of a song
Odin has stolen
My heart's treasure;
I draw no succour
From the stores of my soul
The pride of my house
Is beaten to the ground
Like trees of the forest
Bowed before the storm.
How can a man rejoice
Who has borne to the grave
The bodies of his kin
From their earthly seats?
…
Our family shield-wall
Is torn wide open;
Cruel waves broke
My father's firm line.
How vast is the breach,
How empty the place
Where the sea entered
And snatched away my son.
...
The fire of a fever
Has burned up my [other] son,
Hatefully ravished
Away from our world.
Wise, he's free forever
From threat of shame,
Never can touch him
The taint of disgrace.
...
What can make amends
For the loss of a son?
What compensation
Pays for such a death?
How could I beget
Another such boy.

(Ridler 203-209)

As with Bái Jūyì's verses, a reading of Egill's lament could indeed flag various culturally specific references – from the invocations of Odin to the image of cold North Atlantic waters rushing into the breached hull of a Viking long-ship. Likewise, much as Bái Jūyì evinces a (lamentable) cultural devaluation of female children ("Not a boy, but still better than nothing"), Egill's imagery of male children as forming part of a "shield-wall" (i.e., standing besides each other and their father going into battle) depends on culturally specific expectations of masculinity and warriorship. On another level, too, Egill's appeal for compensation – "What compensations / Pays for such a death?" is also extremely bound up with specific Germanic and Scandinavian legal traditions of the *weregild* (literally, "man-price") the amount of monetary restitution owed to a family that has lost a member due to murder or negligent death; indeed, resolving the blood-price of a slain male slave is in fact a major element in the plot of *Egil's Saga*. And yet, nonetheless, both texts seem to share certain preoccupations: the notion of a loss that is irreparable above and beyond the simple expenditure of years and attachment on a child who is now no longer among the living, and a grief that persists in memory and beggars reckoning despite the mourner's best efforts to express or forget it.

Casting our net even wider, into other canons, yields yet more material for comparison – and further suggestive areas of common ground. At some point in the early Eighth Century, the Japanese poet Yamanoue no Okura lost his young son, Furuhi, to an unspecified illness. One of the major contributors to the oldest, most complicated, and most influential collections of Classical Japanese poetry, the *Manyoshu* ("The Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves"), Yamanoue no Okura's verses on this occasion have a brutal simplicity to them and merit reproduction in full. As rendered by Stephen Carter, they run as follows:

What value to me

the seven kinds of treasures
by which others set store the
precious things coveted
by the run of men?
My son Furuhi,
the child fair as a white pearl,
born of the union
between his mother and me,
used to play with us
when the morning star announced
the dawn of each new day to
stay close to the bedside
where our sheets were spread,
to frolic with us
standing and sitting.
And when evening
came with the evening star,
he used to take us
by the hand and say to us,
"Let's go to bed now"
and then, in his pretty way,
"Father and Mother,
don't go where I can't see you.
I want to sleep
right here in the middle."
And we thought, trusting
as people trust a great ship,
"May the time come soon
when he becomes an adult;
for good or for ill,
may we behold him a man."
But then suddenly
a mighty storm wind blew up,
caught us from the side,
overwhelmed us with its blast.
Helpless, distraught,
not knowing what to do,
I tucked back my sleeves
with paper-mulberry cords,
I took in my hand
a clear, spotless mirror.
With upturned face,
I beseeched the gods of the sky;
forehead to the ground,
I implored the gods of the earth.
"Whether he be cured
or whether he die, that
is for the gods to say."

But though I begged them
in frantic supplication,
there resulted
not the briefest improvement.
His body wasted,
changing little by little;
he uttered no more
the words he had spoken
with each new morning;
and his life came to its end.
I reeled in agony,
stamped my feet, screamed aloud,
cast myself down,
looked up to heaven, beat my breast.
I have lost my son,
the child I loved so dearly.
Is this what life is about?

(Carter 48-50)

Again, many of the images here have culturally specific referents: although, unlike other contributors to the *Manyoshu*, the bulk of Yamanoue no Okura's *oeuvre* evinces a fascination with concepts and images from Chinese Confucianism, the "Seven Treasures" he invokes here are a traditional Buddhist motif, and the "mirror" into which he gazes appears to suggest a Shinto ritual – it is almost as if, in his frantic beseeching of the "gods of the earth" and the "gods of the sky," Yamanoue no Okura is willing to hazard all avenues in search of any superhuman intercession that he can (Carter 49-50). By the same token, and unlike Egill, the "boat" the safety in which Yamanoue no Okura and his wife trust is figurative, as is the storm that overwhelms it. And yet the spectacle of his suffering son is as affecting as that of Bái Jūyì's daughter, and the elision of helplessness in the face of the elements with a child's fragility to illness and to hazards of faith itself operates across all three examples.

In one final example, consider the work of the great British Poet Ben Jonson (1572-1637). Jonson had three children, all of whom died before him, and his *On My First Son* (XVL in the *Collected Poems*) runs as follows:

Farwell, thou Child of my Right-hand, and Joy;
  My Sin was too much hope of thee, lov'd Boy,
Seven Years tho'wert lent to me, and I thee pay,
  Exacted by thy Fate on the just Day.
O, could I lose all Father, now. For why,
  Will Man lament the state he should envy?
To have so soon scap'd Worlds, and Fleshes rage,
  And, if no other Misery, yet Age?
Rest in soft Peace, and ask'd, say here doth lie
  Ben. Johnson his best Piece of Poetry.
For whose sake, henceforth all his Vows be such,
  As what he loves may never like too much.

Again, there is much to Jonson's poem that is specific to the time and place of its composition; it is informed by the historical particulars of the London plague that cost his son his life – and which made him but one of many bereaved parents – by Jonson's complicated and controversial relationship to Catholicism, by that faith's attitudes towards the bodily corruption, and the like. And yet, as with the laments of Yamanoue no Okura or Egill Skallagrímsson, there is a lamentation of dashed hopes for a lost child's future, and an image of a father whose future prospects, in turn, are now bleak, dessicated – chastened by loss, he vows that "what he loves may never like too much." Much as Egill's appeals to Odin come to nothing, much as Bái Jūyì's "Golden Bells" now ring as an ironic, bitter pun, and much as Yamanoue no Okura can find no help from Gods either above or below, Jonson's "O, could I lose all Father, now" doubly scans as an existential and religious crisis: Jonson is no longer a Father, and this fact brings him seemingly to flirt with condemning even God (as All-Father) to uselessness. But even more crucially for our purposes, across all these examples, is the image of the accomplished, linguistically adept adult reduced to inarticulate searching in the face of a loss. In a kind of mirror image of how Bái Jūyì's daughter dies just as she begins to speak ("she lisped strange sounds, beginning to learn to talk"), the death of a child leaves behind the poet-parent with many words, to be sure, but in an acute crisis as to

whether giving them voice is meaningful in the first place. "Rest in soft Peace, and ask'd, say here doth lie / Ben Johnson his best Piece of Poetry": burying his son, Jonson seems to say, buries his poetry, too, even as he poetically composes an epitaph for him and it both.

And it is here, above all, that our examples converge. Losing children may demand speech, it seems, and even provoke exquisite poetry, but in each case the speaker or writer can also only inevitably end on the note of what ultimately seems to be the same, impossible, existential question. "Is this what life is about?," asks Yamanoue no Okura. "What is our profit, then, that for the sake of / children the gods should pile upon mortals/ after all else/ this most terrible grief of all?" asks Medea. "What compensation / Pays for such a death?" asks Egill. Why is it, Jonson demands, "that the ties of flesh and blood / only bind us to a load of grief and sorrow"? This is a question that words do precious little good to answer – and yet, as we shall see, words come, and continue to come, propelled across time and space like the waves of radioactive static produced by a collapsed star.

3. *Typologies of Grief*

At this point, we can assemble our typologies of grief. Although there is some fluidity between the categories of this survey, we can observe the following more-or-less recurrent images, tropes, narrative devices, and more.

a. *The Passion of the Child*

One way or another, the circumstances of a child's death matter – whether that be in the narration of their specificity, witnessed firsthand, or through emphasizing that they are uncertain or unknown. There exist texts where parents are presented as ignorant of the

circumstances of their child's death but as mourning nonetheless. Martial contexts in particular provoke this imagery, with the image of lamenting parents working to various effects. As we have seen, it is the image of his own father grieving, certain (correctly) that his son will die at war, which ultimately stirs the furious Achilles's heart in the Iliad Book XIV above. The last third of Polish composer Henryk Górecki Mahler-esque masterpiece, Symphony No. 3, Op. 36, *The Symphony of Sorrowful Songs* (Symfonia pieśni żałosnych) combines the tune of a classic folk song with lyrics from a song dating from the Silesian Uprisings (1919-1921; Thomas 81). In the song, a mother mourns her son, lost in battle against the Germans: "Were my bitter tears / to create another River Oder / They would not restore to life / My son. / He lies in his grave / and I know not where / Though I keep asking people /Everywhere."[98] Whether a given language uses metaphors of maternity or paternity to describe their homeland (the French have *la mère patrie*, the Poles, *ojczyzna*, a paternal domain, and so on), the image of a child lost on foreign soil is a conceit loaded with nationalistic pathos. Parents mourning children lost at sea are likewise a frequent vignette, exemplarily deployed in Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* (1798 and 1800).[99]

When the circumstances of the child's death are known, close, descriptive attention to the spectacle of their demise is frequent. This capacity for attention to specific, real-world events co-exists with an affect of bewilderment – a sense of confusion that what is being witnessed is possible in the first place. The attention to detail simultaneously exists with a sense that the full reality of what is occurring eludes psychological grasp – unthinkability

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[98] "Chocby z mych lez gorkich / drugo Odra byla, / jesce by synocka / mi nie ozywila.
Lezy on tam w grobie, / a jo nie wiem kandy / choc sie opytuja / miedzy ludzmi wsandy." (For lyrics and translation, see the accompaniment to Zinman and Upshaw's recording with the London Sinfonietta, 1992).

[99] See in particular *Lucy Gray* and Wordsworth's contemporary *The Sailor's Mother* (1799). Wordsworth himself lost a brother, a naval Captain, at sea in 1805 (Newbold 55). We will return to nautical imagery shortly.

accompanies precision. This can occur regardless of whether the child's death is sudden and unexpected or the outcome of a long struggle. Barbara Chasen, an American psychoanalyst, describes the death of her son as follows:

> "The unutterably unthinkable has happened. My twelve-year- old son, my only child, whom I had longed for for years, was killed. We were walking on a country road after a concert, he behind me, when-he was struck by a car driven by a sixteen-year-old who had been driving six weeks."
>
> (Chasen 3)

These are the opening lines of a 8,000-word narrative; Chasen subsequently proceeds to describe the events leading up to her son's passing, and to document her own mourning, with sustained meticulousness and remarkable candor. When Bosnian-American novelist and essayist Aleksandar Hemon and his wife Teri Boyd take their nine-month old daughter, Isabel, to the doctor for a routine checkup, they go in expecting nothing: "everything seemed fine, except for her head circumference, which was two measures of standard deviation above her last measurement" (Hemon 50). Doing their due diligence, they schedule an appointment with a specialist, who diagnoses Isobel as hydrocephalic; further scans reveal a teratoid tumor. Writes Hemon:

> Its full name was, I read, 'atypical teratoid/rhabdoid tumor' (A.T.R.T.). It was highly malignant and exceedingly rare, occurring in only three in a million children and representing about three per cent of pediatric cancers of the central nervous system. The survival rate for children younger than three was less than ten per cent. There were even more discouraging statistics available for me to ponder, but I recoiled from the screen, deciding instead to talk to and trust only Isabel's doctors; never again would I research her condition on the Internet. Already I understood that it would be necessary to manage our knowledge and our imaginations if we were not to lose our minds.
>
> (Hemon 52)

Abiding with the unthinkable risks madness, and necessitates "manag[ing] our knowledge and imaginations" but it impels description and narrativization all the same. And Hemon

does indeed lay out the dizzying series of invasive tests, sudden crises, and false reprieves as his daughter succumbs, all in granular detail.[100]

Of Charles and Emma Darwin's ten children, two died in infancy, another at the age of ten. This last child, Annie (1841-1851) was, by Darwin's own admission, their favorite, the most affectionate, and the most affectionately loved in return.[101] When several of the daughters in the Darwin household caught Scarlet Fever in 1849, Annie, who had always been frail, did not bounce back, and developed a series of complicating illnesses over the course of the next year and a half. By 1851, her condition had deteriorated to the point that Charles took Annie to receive hydrotherapy in the town of Malvern from one Dr. James Gully, a professional from whom Charles had repeatedly sought treatment for his own chronic medical problems – and for which he blamed himself for passing on to Annie: "She inherits I fear with grief, my wretched digestion."[102] Emma, who was too pregnant to travel,

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[100] "Then, after she was transferred from the I.C.U. to neurosurgery, it was discovered that her cerebrospinal fluid was still not draining: an external ventricular drain was put in, and a passage for drainage was surgically opened in her brain. She had fever again. The E.V.D. was taken out; her ventricles were enlarged and full of fluid, to the point of endangering her life, and her blood pressure was dropping. Undergoing yet another emergency scan, face upward in the MRI tunnel, she nearly choked, the vomit bubbling out of her mouth Finally, a shunt was surgically implanted, allowing the fluid to drain directly into her stomach." (Hemon 54)

[101] On April 30, 1851, Darwin wrote a brief memorializing her; reading his description of parental cuddling and care it is impossible not to recollect, on the one hand, his naturalistic observations of touch among distressed animals, and, on the other, the domestic scenes conjured by Yamanoue no Okura eleven hundred years earlier. "The other point in her character, which made her joyousness & spirits so delightful, was her strong affection, which was of a most clinging, fondling nature. When quite a Baby, this showed itself in never being easy without touching Emma, when in bed with her, & quite lately she would when poorly fondle for any length of time one of Emma's arms. When very unwell, Emma lying down beside her, seemed to soothe her in a manner quite different from what it would have done to any of our other children. So again, she would at almost anytime spend half-an-hour in arranging my hair, 'making it' as she called it 'beautiful', or in smoothing, the poor dear darling, my collar or cuffs, in short in fondling me. She liked being kissed; indeed every expression in her countenance beamed with affection & kindness, & all her habits were influenced by her loving disposition." For more on Charles Darwin's relationship to Annie, see *Annie's Box* (2001), written by Randal Keynes, a descendant of Darwin's who – amazingly – discovered a box of mementos of Annie gathered by Charles and Emma while going through his ancestor's archives.

[102] These and the following quotes are drawn from Charles and Emma's letters to each other, which have been digitized and made available online via Cambridge University's Darwin Correspondence Project (http://www.darwinproject.ac.uk). The letter in which Charles, ever preoccupied with the

stayed at home in Cambridge with their other children, and Charles' letters to her display a tension that by now should be familiar: the mourning parent is impelled to describe the child's passing in detail while also acknowledging that witnessing *too* close skirts madness. For Charles, this at first takes the form of insisting that, whatever she do, Emma not come and join him at Anne's bedside: for Emma's sake, and for the sake of their other children, the mother must be shielded from Annie's decline. As he writes on April 17, in uncharacteristically clipped, broken syntax:

> She looks very ill: her face lighted up & she certainly knew me.— She has not had wine, but several spoon-fulls of broth, & ordinary physic of camphor & ammonia— Dr Gully is most confident there is strong hope.— Thank God she does not suffer at all—half dozes all day long. - My own dearest support yourself — on no account for the sake of <ou>r other children; **I implore you** [*emphasis in original*], do not think of coming here.

By the next day, however, Annie's condition has started see-sawing dramatically, and Darwin's multiple letters as she deteriorates suggest that *he* is now at his wit's end and cannot take in what he is witnessing.

> It is much bitterer & harder to bear than I expected— Your note made me cry much—but I must not give way & can avoid doing so, by not thinking about her. It is now from hour to hour a struggle between life & death. God only knows the issue. She has been very quiet all morning, but vomited badly at 6 A.M. which, however bad, shows she has more vital force than during two previous days. Sometimes Dr. G. exclaims she will get through the struggle; then, I see, he doubts.— Oh my own it is very bitter indeed.—

The specific note of Emma's to which Charles is referring is unclear – much like with Plutarch and his wife, their correspondence was carried by foot or horse, and their letters appear to have overlapped.[103] Later that day, Charles would write another short note to

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science of heritability, associates his own lifelong stomach complaints – which many scholars suggest have been psychosomatic – is dated March 27.

[103] One of her letters, dated April 17 (while Annie was still alive, but miles away) offers a glimpse into her characteristic style. "Poor little sweet child I often think of the precious look she gave you the only one I suppose. No wonder she would brighten up at your sight you were always the tenderest of human beings to her & comforted her so on all occasions."

Emma. Again, a precision of description of the suffering child coexists with a sense of utter parental bewilderment.

> She appears dreadfully exhausted, & I thought for some time she was sinking, but she has now rallied a little. The two symptoms Dr G, dreads most have not come on restlessness & coldness.— If her three awful fits of vomiting were not of the nature of a crisis, I look at the case as hopeless.— I cannot realise our position, God Help us.

"I cannot realize our position." Darwin is on the threshold of what for years later he would describe as an "insufferable grief" – and yet his descriptive powers do not fail him even as suffers it, and makes explicit its insufferable character. Charles' letters lagged as Annie lingered on for five more agonizing days; he sent ahead a close family friend to alert Emma of Annie's death before following up with a letter of his own.[104] Although coping both with his own grief, and with a relapse of his own illness, a week after her death, on April 30th, Charles managed to compose himself enough to pen a diaristic memorial of Annie, in which he at once extolled her kindness while also relating the specific moments of her passing:

> Her health failed in a slight degree for about nine months before her last illness; but it only occasionally gave her a day of discomfort: at such times, she was never in the least degree cross, peevish or impatient; & it was wonderful to see, as the discomfort passed, how quickly her elastic spirits brought back her joyousness & happiness. In the last short illness, her conduct in simple truth was angelic; she never once complained; never became fretful; was ever considerate of others; & was thankful in the most gentle, pathetic manner for everything done for her. When so exhausted that she could hardly speak, she praised everything that was given her, & said some tea "was beautifully good." When I gave her some water, she said "I quite thank you"; & these, I believe were the last precious words ever addressed by her dear lips to me.

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[104] There are palpable resonances with Plutarch – and, as we shall see, with Schleiermacher – in this letter. "I pray God Fanny's note may have prepared you. She went to her final sleep most tranquilly, most sweetly at 12 oclock today. Our poor dear dear child has had a very short life but I trust happy, & God only knows what miseries might have been in store for her. She expired without a sigh. How desolate it makes one to think of her frank cordial manners. I am so thankful for the daguerreotype. I cannot remember ever seeing the dear child naughty. God bless her. We must be more & more to each other my dear wife— Do what you can to bear up & think how invariably kind & tender you have been to her.— I am in bed not very well with my stomach. When I shall return I cannot yet say. My own poor dear dear wife."

The "insufferable grief" of Annie's passing would dog Darwin for the remainder of his life.

In the mid-2000s, Ariel Levy, an American journalist and travel writer, journeyed to Mongolia while five months pregnant with her eagerly-anticipated first child. Since she was assigned to do a brief series of interviews on an economics-related story in the capital, and was staying in a deluxe hotel, Levy's calculus of the risk was minimal, and her doctor concurred. As she documents in her November, 18th 2013, essay in *The New Yorker*, she thus first attributed her stomach pains to dysentery, and, even the next day, still believed her pregnancy was more or less on course.[105] She gives birth alone in her hotel room, caught entirely by surprise. Although she briefly loses consciousness, she nonetheless narrates the event in granular detail:

> I felt an unholy storm move through my body, and after that there is a brief lapse in my recollection; either I blacked out from the pain or I have blotted out the memory. And then there was another person on the floor in front of me, moving his arms and legs, alive. I heard myself say out loud, "This can't be good." But it *looked* good. My baby was as pretty as a seashell.

Levy has not suffered a miscarriage: her child, delivered disastrously premature, is quite alive.

> He was translucent and pink and very, very small, but he was flawless. His lovely lips were opening and closing, opening and closing, swallowing the new world. For a length of time I cannot delineate, I sat there, awestruck, transfixed. Every finger, every toenail, the golden shadow of his eyebrows coming in, the elegance of his shoulders—all of it was miraculous, astonishing. I held him up to my face, his head and shoulders filling my hand, his legs dangling almost to my elbow. I tried to think of something maternal I could do to convey to him that I was, in fact, his mother, and that I had the situation completely under control. I kissed his forehead and his skin felt like a silky frog's on my mouth.

Despite massive hemorrhaging, Levy retains enough consciousness to perform emergency

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[105] "When I woke up the next morning, the pain in my abdomen was insistent; I wondered if the baby was starting to kick, which everyone said would be happening soon. I called home to complain, and my spouse told me to find a Western clinic." Levy's essay, whence these quotations, is available online at: http://nyr.kr/1pOSpRi.

self-triage and stumble to the hotel phone and call for help.[106] She is able to reach a doctor who speaks English, whom she remembers only as a disembodied voice – in contrast to the living person she holds in her other hand.

> The voice said that the baby would not live. "He's alive now," I said, looking at the person in my left hand. The voice said that he understood, but that it wouldn't last, and that he would send an ambulance for us right away.

As Levy is rushed to the hospital, she offers a simultaneously precise narration of specific events and an acknowledgement of a proximity to madness.

> "As I lay on a gurney in the back of the ambulance with his body wrapped in a towel on top of my chest, I watched the frozen city flash by the windows. It occurred to me that perhaps I was going to go mad."

Perhaps because it so close to madness, such sustained attention to detail, however, can only persists so long – stimuli blur together as events overtake her: "In the clinic, there were very bright lights and more needles and I.V.s and I let go of the baby and that was the last I ever saw him." Aleksandr Hemon describes a similar sense of being overwhelmed by events in the last hours of his daughter's life: "What is hard to imagine is hard to remember" (Hemon 60). He is elsewhere tending to his other daughter, a toddler, when he gets a call from the hospital: Isabel has gone into terminal microseizures. Writes Hemon:

> After dropping Ella off with my sister-in-law, I sped to the hospital. I found a crowd of the LC.U. staff looking into Isabel's room, where she was surrounded by a pack of doctors and nurses. She was bloated, her eyelids swollen. Her little hands were stabbed with needles, as liquid was pumped into her to keep her blood pressure up. Dr. Fangusaro and Dr. Lulla sat us down to tell us that Isabel's state was dire. Teri and I needed to tell them whether we wanted them to try everything they could to

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[106] In contrast to her reflections on the child itself, her description of these events and her surrounds have a dispassionate, bewildered feel: "I was vaguely aware that there was an enormous volume of blood rushing out of me, and eventually that seemed interesting, too. I looked back and forth between my offspring and the lake of blood consuming the bathroom floor and I wondered what to do about the umbilical cord connecting those two things. It was surprisingly thick and ghostly white, a twisted human rope. I felt sure that it needed to be severed—that's always the first thing that happens in the movies. I was afraid that if I didn't cut that cord my baby would somehow suffocate. I didn't have scissors. I yanked it out of myself with one swift, violent tug."

> save her. We said yes. They made it clear that we would have to be the ones to tell them when to stop trying.
>
> And now my memory collapses.
>
> (Hemon 59)

This collapse of memory – where the unimaginable becomes realized, or where, to borrow Darwin's language, the insufferable is suffered – manifests in a kind of broken temporality, a surreally disjointed series of vignettes and stimuli.

> Teri is in the corner weeping ceaselessly and quietly, the terror on her face literally unspeakable; the gray-haired attending doctor (whose name has vanished from my mind, though his face stares at me daily) is issuing orders as residents take turns compressing Isabel's chest, because her heart has stopped beating. They bring her back, as I wail, "My baby! My baby! My baby!" Then there is another decision that Teri and I have to make: Isabel's kidneys have stopped functioning, she needs dialysis, and an immediate surgical intervention is necessary to connect her to the dialysis machine—there is a good chance that she will not survive the surgery. We say yes to it. Her heart stops beating again; the residents are compressing her chest. In the hallway outside, people unknown to me are rooting for Isabel, some of them in tears. "My baby! My baby! My baby!" I keep howling. I hug Teri. Isabel's heart starts beating again. The gray-haired doctor turns to me and says, "Twelve minutes," and I cannot comprehend what he is saying. But then I realize: what he is saying is that Isabel was clinically dead for twelve minutes. Then her heart stops beating again, a young resident is halfheartedly compressing her chest, waiting for us to tell her to stop. We tell her to stop. She stops.
>
> (Hemon 59-60)

A certain paradox persists here, to be sure, most notably in Hemon's description of his wife's expression as "literally unspeakable" – a figure of speech denoting the limits of speech embodied in the expression of the figure of his wife. The death of a child functions as narratogenic even as it is productive of apophatic language about how indescribable the event itself is; we shall see this pattern recur again. But what cannot be gainsaid is that, in Hemon's account as in many, many others, after the child dies, a certain threshold is frequently crossed, and the focus shifts from the anguish of witnessing the child die to the parental experience of a world ubiquitously altered in the wake of its death. If the scene of

death is bewildering, abiding in the transformed landscape of the world following it takes certain, very specific forms.

b. A Broken World, An Incommunicable Grief

The death of a child ramifies at once outwardly and inwardly. Outwardly, in the wake of a child's death, descriptions of parental loss frequently take the shape of conjuring a world the landscape and practices of which have been transformed into something contingent, alien, and incomprehensible. The experience of living in such a world is profoundly dysphoric, even nightmarish – and this corresponds to inward-looking self-descriptions of being shattered, broken, or emptied. There is traffic between outward and inward foci, to be sure, and at times the very boundaries between the interior and the exterior seem in flux, but what ultimately unites both dimensions above all is a repeated trope of *incommunicability*. What this world is like for me, the parent says, you cannot know; what I am experiencing now, I cannot use words to express. And yet still expression persists precisely, paradoxically, in invoking the limits of what can be expressed. The world is characterized in certain repeated ways, interior affects are described in various recurrent ways, and, above all, the inexpressibility of the experience itself is expressed, time and again.

In the wake of a child's death, the language of nightmares is frequent: the parent is living a horrific dream that never ends. "Can I be writing this? Is it my child who is dead?" asks Barbara Chasen. "No, this is a nightmare, and I will wake up and he will be alive and well. But every day, I keep re-realizing 'my baby is dead.' The thought of my dead child does not leave me for one minute" (Chasen 13). A support website for recently bereaved parents, *Babies Remembered*, addresses parental feelings in similar terms:

> It may feel like you are drowning and can't breath [*sic*] or are in the middle of a massive car accident trying to make sense out of words and messages that just can't

> be true. This must feel like a nightmare, and like many of us, you may keep hoping that the bad dream will be over when you wake up.[107]

Much like in a car accident or other paradigmatically traumatic accident wherein the participants' sense of time is dilated and reality itself can feel unreal, the death of a child unfolds to their parents as a dreamlike horror, an event beyond their control and comprehension. Indeed, this idea of nightmarishnesss is not just articulated by parents who suffer bereavement – it is echoed in the sympathetic responses of parents of still-living children who console them. When Barbara Chasen holds a funeral for her own son, she meets numerous colleagues who tell her as much: "parents themselves, they were traumatized by what had happened; they told me it was their worst nightmare" (Chasen 4).

If dreams are where we encounter what we otherwise might not consciously imagine, and if the prospect of losing a child makes the parental imagination recoil while they are alive, then continuously awaking to a world in which that child is dead means awaking to an unshakeable nightmare. Joe Mudd, the founder of GrievingParents.com, another online support community for parents who have lost children, had been concerned for years about the wellbeing of his 23 year-old son, Richard, who had developed a heightened risk for seizures after a rare form of sinus infection had infiltrated behind his eye socket and into his brain, requiring several high-risk neurosurgical interventions. Nonetheless, following a recovery period, Richard had persisted in attending college and living alone, and, like many college-age youths, was irregular about corresponding with his family. But when several days passed with no word from him, however, Joe grew concerned.

> On Thursday evening I sent him another text message from work to see how he was. No answer. More nerves. Then about 10pm I got a call over my radio at work to come to a phone. I looked at my cell phone and saw I'd missed a call. I didn't recognize the number. But it was from Lexington where Richard lived. I thought

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[107] For more, see http://www.wintergreenpress.org/parents/help-now.

> maybe his phone was dead again and he was calling from work or a friends place to touch base. I called the number.[108]

At the other end of the line is not Joe's son, but rather the Fayette County coroner. "And the nightmare that never ends began," writes Mudd, shifting tenses from the narrative past to an interminable present.

The idea of change in the character of time itself, of time going out of joint in the wake of a child's death, which Mudd gestures to, is common. When asked in 2007 by *The Paris Review* about the death of his son Uri, who was killed in Lebanon, the Israeli writer David Grossman replied: "It's a painful life, now. It's like hell in slow motion, all the time…Anything that is calm and safe seems to me like an illusion." Bereaved Parents, USA, a 501(C)3 nonprofit that offers support groups for parents in mourning, counsels newly grieving visitors to its webpage that:

> In the early minutes, days, weeks, months and even years of grief, we find ourselves in an all consuming grief and pain beyond description. We find it difficult to carry on our everyday lives or to think of little except our children's death. Even our once wonderfully happy memories, shared with our children while they lived, now bring us pain for a time…Bereaved parents do not 'get over' the death of our children nor 'snap out of it' as the outside world seems to think we can and should. The death of our children is not an illness or a disease from which we recover. It is a life altering change with which we must learn to live.[109]

The overwhelming character of this grief implies a timeline that disrupts the neatness of the DSM-V's normalized distinction between "normal" and pathologically "prolonged" grief.[110]

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[108] For more, see http://www.grievingparent.com/grieving/richard/.

[109] For more, see http://www.bereavedparentsusa.org/BP_NewlyBer.htm.

[110] As Bereaved Parents USA's materials suggests, surveying the burgeoning resources catered to and messages boards for bereaved parents online reveals a palpable sentiment of resistance to the normative expectations of others as to how grieving parents "should" or "should not" experience and express their grief. Thus, for example, Bereaved Parents USA offers a list of "Normal Experiences" for grievers, including "Feeling as if your spouse or other family members don't understand your grief or are not grieving as you think they should. Remember everyone grieves differently" and "Becoming very frustrated with others who expect you to be "over this" in a month, six months or a year and who say so. Or even being frustrated with yourself for expecting to be 'over this' too soon." Likewise, an information clearinghouse for parents who have lost infants,

And yet this undoing of categorical boundaries seems fitting precisely because parental narratives of bereavement are replete with reportage of feelings of "coming to pieces," and of outpourings of grief that overwhelm boundaries and disrupt social expectations. Tropes of fracturing, and particularly of *shattering*, are frequent. Barbara Chasen writes:

> In one minute he was dead, and my life was totally shattered. In the hospital when they told me he was brain dead, I realized with horror that, instead of his Bar Mitzvah, I would be arranging his funeral. Now, three and a half months since that tragic, that unspeakable day, I weep every day. I cannot believe he is dead. I cannot accept he is dead. It cannot be that I will never see him again, won't ever touch him again, or watch him grow, or have grandchildren.
>
> (Chasen 4)

When Ariel Levy returns from Mongolia, what little is left holding her together falls apart, and her anguish spills over beyond her control, proving contagious across subjective boundaries.

> When I got back from Mongolia, I was so sad I could barely breathe. On five or six occasions, I ran into mothers who had heard what had happened, and they took one look at me and burst into tears. (Once, this happened with a man.) Within a week, the apartment [my husband and I] were supposed to move into with the baby fell through. Within three, my marriage had shattered. I started lactating. I continued bleeding. I cried ferociously and without warning—in bed, in the middle of meetings, sitting on the subway. It seemed to me that grief was leaking out of me from every orifice.

Levy's anguish is not constrained by space or time or interpersonal boundaries – her emotions trigger responses in others and overflow in parallel to the fluids that leave her

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BabySteps.com, offers a helpful list of "Do's and Don'ts" for family, friends, and acquaintances of those who have lost young children: "DON'T change the subject when they mention their dead child; DON'T tell them what they should feel or do; DO encourage them to not impose any 'shoulds' or 'I should be' on themselves; DO recognize that grieving has no time limit and varies from individual to individual both in the way they express their grief and the time required to stabilize." (For more on this, see http://www.babysteps.com/rrddmn.html). The experience of being told how one "should" process the death of a child is clearly frequently taken as insulting, no matter how well the gesture may be intended. As a case in point, one bereaved parent, Patty Medley, followed the lost of her son Claye by founding a nonprofit and website named "Don't Should On Me" (http://www.dontshouldonme.org) which is dedicated to "'bring awareness to family members, friends... who just don't 'get it.'"

body, like the child and blood that it discharged, unbidden and incontrollable, intermingling in a "grief [that] was leaking out of me from every orifice." Levy tries to tell her story to those who will listen – and shares a photo of her child which she took before the ambulance came – but her trauma threatens to exceed these recourses to witnessing.

Such shattering is not restricted solely to mothers. Men, too, describe coming to pieces, some more candidly than others. Hemon is forthright about wailing for his baby, much as Yamanoue no Okura is about the physicality of his grief. For others, the experience is laid out as a crisis in terms of a sudden gap between authoritative discourses – specifically of faith – and affects for which they don't have a vocabulary. After burying his newborn daughter, the contemporary essayist Kyle Cupp describes suddenly facing a "shattered existence" and a crisis that ensues from his realizing that, despite a theological background, training as a writer, and fervent Catholicism, he cannot put the full extent of his experience to language: "My Catholicism has given me words, but by its own teaching these words fall infinitely short of the realities to which they refer." John Milton (1608-1674) lost two infant children, but his most salient memorial to a dead child, *On the Death of a Fair Infant Dying of a Cough* (1628) actually records the death of a niece, Anne, years earlier.

> Yet can I not persuade me thou art dead
> Or that thy corpse corrupts in earth's dark womb,
> Or that thy beauties lie in wormy bed,
> Hid from the world in a low-delved tomb;
> Could heaven for pity thee so strictly doom?"

Anne's death here reverberates as simultaneously inducing shock, but also as generating a question which implicates the ordering of the universe as ruled by a just God, a problem which Milton's poem more or less tries to recuperate.[111] Although it is a crude generalization,

[111] In the poem's final stanza, the speaker turns to address the bereaved mother and effectively tells her to calm down and demonstrate devout solace in hopes of either receiving a new child, or, if we take give the poem its likely fully Christian allegorical dimensions, receiving some sort of

the Western canon does show a tendency to enshrine examples of men for whom the mourning of children becomes less a matter of attachment loss and separated bodies than of theodicy and disjointed syllogisms.[112] But this is not to say to say that accounts of acute male vulnerability in the wake of child loss are nonexistent or even rare – for they are in fact abundant – instead, it is to say that the attempt to make traumatic a loss a problem of theoretical speculation can in fact testify to a profound grief which makes recourse to familiar technical vocabularies an understandable coping mechanism, and that the affectively-satured products of such endeavors frequently dead-end in total frustration regardless.[113]

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metaphorical substitution in the form of Christ. "Then thou, the mother of so sweet a child, / Her false-imagined loss cease to lament, / And wisely learn to curb thy sorrows wild; / Think what a present thou to God hast sent; / And render him with patience what he lent: / This if thou do, he will an offspring give / That till the world's last end shall make thy name to live." At which point it seems salient to note that Milton appears to have an abusive, misogynistic partner and that the parenting dynamics in the Milton household seem to have been tumultuous at best and toxic at worst. Samuel Johnson writes: "All his [three] wives were virgins; for he declared that he thought it gross and indelicate to be a second husband: upon what other principles his choice was made, cannot now be know; but marriage afforded him not much of his happiness. The first wife left him disgust, and was brought back only by terror; the second, indeed, seems to have been more of a favorite, but her life was short. The third, as Philips [a nephew of Milton's] relates, oppressed his children in his life-time, and cheated them at his death." (Johnson 114). This third wife bore Milton no children, and his relations with his three surviving daughters were consistently poor.

[112] It is worth observing that two of the most prominent literary treatments of the death of the child as a crisis in the possibility of a just God, the Grand Inquisitor sequence in Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* and the scene of the death of the child which forms the focal point for Camus's *The Plague*, unfold as transactions solely involving men as witnesses and disputants.

[113] It would be irresponsible here not to flag that Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855)'s *Fear and Trembling* (1843) cries out for extensive conversation with some of the concepts elaborated here. Kierkegaard's exegesis of Abraham's near-sacrifice of his child is replete with language of "shattering": "Thinking about Abraham" leaves the narrative voice "shattered" (33); Abraham himself "suffers all the agony of the tragic hero, he shatters his joy in the world, he renounces everything, and perhaps at the same time he barricades himself from the sublime joy that was so precious to him that he would buy it at any price" (60). Unpacking the nuances of Kierkegaard's account are beyond the scope of this dissertation, but it bears acknowledging that, for Kierkegaard, the issue of incommunicability and inexpressibility is fundamental: not only does he write pseudonymously as "Johannes de Silentio" (literally, John of Silence) but, in his account, what marks Abraham's entry into the religious is his inability to communicate – and this is fundamentally *an issue involving universality*: "Abraham cannot be mediated; in other words, he cannot speak. As soon as I speak, I express the universal, and if I do not do so, no one can understand me" (60).

Although an extensive comparison of differences in gendered dynamics of reported affects of parental grief across various traditions is beyond the scope of this dissertation, research suggests that such an inquiry would be eminently worthwhile, particularly into the comparatively neglected territory of paternal mourning. On the most basic level, a striking feature of research into online groups for bereaved parents is how frequently bereaved fathers (and mothers) speak of how men in particular are socialized to avoid expressing parental grief, and even to experience the associated affects as a stigma. Several men who have lost children have gone on to write books specifically targeted at this audience and with overcoming this stigma in mind. Barry Kluger, who lost his 18-year-old daughter in a car accident, went on to write a book entitled *A Life Undone* (2001). Describing his work to interviewer Jessica Leving, Kluger observes: "Men either hold it in, or say 'I have to keep my family together. I don't have the time to mourn, or break down; I've got other people to take care of. Maybe this book will help guys to feel comfortable with grieving.'" Likewise, on his website, GrievingDads.com, Kelly Farley, a self-described "blue collar" Midwesterner, narrates growing up in an environment that disdained male vulnerability in general:

> Men were expected to toughen up when times got rough and plow through them. There wasn't room for "weakness". When things became too much, you headed to the bar for a few hours. Nobody talked about what they were dealing with. My dad and every other male figure in my life lived by these rules.

When he and his wife Christine lost their first child, Katie, in infancy, Farley tries to follow those "rules" as best he can: "I did what I had been taught to do, I toughened up and pushed though this horrible event and the pain I was feeling. I did what every good 'man' is supposed to do; I became focused on helping Christine through this tragic event." The

couple reconsolidates emotionally enough to try having children again, only to witness their next child, Nathan, die suddenly at the age of two. At this, Farley has a breakdown. As he writes:

> I didn't want to get out of bed and for the most part I didn't for about three months. All of the pain from the loss of Noah and all of the pain I buried deep inside after the loss of Katie rushed to the surface. I couldn't cope. I called work and told them I would be gone for an extended absence. I didn't know when or if I would be back. If the job was there when I got back, great, if not, I understood. I tried to fight the grief for a short period of time, but there was no burying it this time around. The journey was extremely hard and much longer than anticipated. I eventually went back to my job after being off for several months. I would sit at my desk every morning and cry, mourning the loss of my sweet babies. I couldn't wait for the end of the day so I could escape the confines of my cubicle that continually felt more and more like a prison cell…For the first time in my life there were days I didn't care if I died. I wasn't suicidal, I just didn't care.

Largely in an attempt to make sense of his own experience of depression, and to connect with other men who have undergone similar losses, Farley goes on to write a book entitled *Grieving Dads: To the Brink and Back* (2012). But such experiences are hardly unique to the Twenty-First Century. A frequent conceit in the Early Modern era to the Romantics onward is for bereaved fathers to invoke the image of bereaved mothers as suffering "more" or with otherwise heightened intensity – a move which the canny reader might suspect functions not just to honor the real-world mother in question (itself a meaningful, if complicated, gesture in patriarchal contexts), but also to displace some of their own affect onto the relatively "safer" image of a grieving woman, expressions of whose emotionality, for better or for worse, are deemed more socially acceptable. Thus, for example, Ben Jonson offers the following epitaph to his daughter Mary: "Here lyes to each her parents ruth / Mary, the daughter of their youth; Yet, all heavens gifts, being heavens due / It makes the father, lesse, to rue" (*Epigrams* XXII). In many cases, as with Schleiermacher, as I will discuss in Chapter Three, there is a direct turn of address to the second person towards the mother, structured as a plangent emotional appeal; in others, the image of her particular grief is the subject of

descriptive fixation. Whatever the case, by speaking at or about the real mother (or image of the mother), whether through apostrophe or elegiac vignette, male writers appear to be able to talk about affects that they might not otherwise be able disclose personally experiencing – and, in some cases, plausibly express compassionate connection with their female partners in a way that also respects potential differences in their experience. Sometimes this solidarity appears more conscious than others. Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), who lost three children[114] before himself dying young, memorializes one by grounding his own grief in firm solidarity with his partner Mary's:

> *To WILLIAM SHELLEY II*
>
> My lost William, thou in whom
> Some bright spirit lived, and did
> That decaying robe consume
> Which its lustre faintly hid,-
> Here its ashes find a tomb,
> But beneath this pyramid
> Thou art not - if a thing divine
> Like thee can die, thy funeral shrine
> Is thy mother's grief and mine.
>
> (PB Shelley 503)

"Thy funeral shrine / Is thy mother's grief and mine": to Percy Shelley, for whom mourning is eminently a shared endeavor,[115] maternal grief still comes first, even in mourning a favorite son; it is the cornerstone, as it were, of the "funeral shrine." Other male writers are more invested in models of gendered grief that are oppositional or even appropriative (Milton

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[114] Tracking Percy's love affairs and the fates of his offspring and partners is a challenge for any biographer. Focusing solely on his relationship with Mary Shelley, the record of loss is considerable: not including the miscarriage Mary suffered in 1822, the couple lost three children – a daughter born alive but premature in 1815, Clara, who died at just over a year old in 1819, and William, who died that same year, at the age of three, from what scholars speculate to be either typhoid or cholera. For more on the how the death of these children may have impacted the writings of Mary Shelley in particular, and much more besides, see Barbara Johnson's magisterial *A Life with Mary Shelley* (2014).

[115] See, for example, the repeated use of "we" in *To William Shelley III*, which, although posthumously published with Mary Shelley's editing in 1839, appears to have written in sequence with the previous poem.

above serves as an example). A small handful of male authors write about how gendered *expectations* of the experience and expression grief can frustrate and destroy communication between grieving partners. American poet Robert Frost (1874-1963) and his wife Elinor had six children, of whom only two outlived them.[116] Scholars believe his lengthy piece "Home Burial" was likely composed in the wake of the death of an eight-year-old son (Parini 68-69). The poem itself presents a brutal argument between a recently bereaved mother and father: standing at the top of a staircase and looking out the window, she has observed him digging the grave outside, and speaking (she believes) too casually to a passing stranger; when he returns with the shovel, she confronts him, and tells him he is a callous man and cannot possibly overcome their grief. In turn, he accuses of her of not allowing him to express his own grief and of turning solely to other women for solace. Even though clues throughout the poem suggest that that both parties are miscommunicating on a variety of practical levels,[117] any possibility of rapprochement collapses almost immediately as the pair retrench into hardened, retrograde gendered stereotypes (he is callous, sullen; she, too emotional and headstrong; 51-55). In the selections below, the man speaks first both times:

> "Can't a man speak of his own child he's lost?"
> 'Not you! Oh, where's my hat? Oh, I don't need it!
> I must get out of here. I must get air.
> I don't know rightly whether any man can."
> …
> "You make me angry. I'll come down to you.

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[116] Elinor Bettina died at the age of three days; Elliot of cholera at eight; Marjorie in childbirth at 29; Carol killed himself at 32. Asked about these and other tragedies as an old man, Frost reportedly replied: "In three words I can sum up everything I've learned about life — It goes on." (Fitzhenry 261)

[117] To take but one example, the husband's words that so anger his wife, being spoken in the mud of digging his own son's grave, are (significantly) addressed to another man and seem, in their way, to be very much about catastrophe and the fraility of male accomplishments: "Three foggy mornings and one rainy day / Will rot the best birch fence a man can build." Nevertheless, the wife, for her part, takes this as flip talk about the weather, a disgrace to the child in the coffin still in their own home: "Think of it, talk like that at such a time! / What had how long it takes a birch to rot / To do with what was in the darkened parlor? /You couldn't care!" (53)

> God, what a woman! And it's come to this,
> A man can't speak of his own child that's dead."
> "You can't because you don't know how to speak."
>
> (Frost 52-53)

The poem ends mid-argument, with the former mother trying to flee the house, the father, threatening to attack her and drag her back if she does. Frost thus stages a scene where, in the wake of the death of their offspring, to borrow a phrase from Lacan, there is no sexual relationship, or where relations across sexual difference become impossible.

But the truth is also that, even in Frost's staging of it, the sparring couple offers parallel situations of speechlessness – each variously accusing the other of being unable to honor the other's experience, no matter what they say, or how they say it, or even if they say it all (much as the man insists his wife won't let him speak, she replies "You think the talk is all!"; 54). In a paradoxical way, the participants in Frost's deeply disturbing debate are in fact in total agreement even as they are at vehement loggerheads. They can't communicate, and each repeatedly accuses the other of communicating improperly, and yet also they simultaneously communicate to each other with crystal clarity that what they are going through is incommunicable on its own terms and that that is precisely why they cannot communicate. In other words, miscommunication between the partners indexes the incommunicability of the experience of loss itself.

This dimension – the idea of incommunicability – is key, and is not restricted to male authors. Time and again, surveying the literature, the reader encounters variations on the statement that unless one has personally lost a child, whether as a mother or a father or otherwise, *you cannot know what it is like*. The rejection of sympathy misguidedly framed as empathy is consistently voiced, and not just in popular modes like Patty Medley's "Don't Should on Me." In Shakespeare's *King John*, both clerical and royal attempts to pooh-pooh and judge a grieving mother are speedily demolished.

CARDINAL PANDULPH
You hold too heinous a respect of grief.

CONSTANCE
He talks to me that never had a son.

KING PHILIP
You are as fond of grief as of your child.

CONSTANCE
Grief fills the room up of my absent child,
Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me,
Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words,
Remembers me of all his gracious parts,
Stuffs out his vacant garments with his form:
Then have I reason to be fond of grief?
Fare you well: had you such a loss as I,
I could give better comfort than you do.

(Act III Scene 4, lines 1476-1486)

Scholars debate whether or not Shakespeare wrote this scene with the death of his only child, the 11-year-old Hamnet, prominently in mind, but the proximity of the date of the play's presumed completion (sometime in the mid-1590s) to his son's death in 1596 is suggestive (Woods 118). Whether Shakespeare is using Constance to ventriloquize his own attitudes or not, the sentiment is repeated frequently. Parental mourning cannot even be fully communicated by those who experience it firsthand, let alone dictated to them by those who haven't. Even though parents in mourning live beneath the same sun as everyone else, the landscape they inhabit is solitary and singular. "Now the sun will rise as brightly as if no misfortune had occurred in the night /The misfortune has fallen on me alone. The sun - it shines for everyone," writes Friedrich Rückert (1788-1866) in his *Songs on the Death of Children* (*Kindertotenlieder*).[118] Rückert composed these verses sometime between 1833-34, after losing two of his children to scarlet fever. The composer Gustav Mahler (1860-1911) set Rückert's

[118] "Als sei kein Unglück die Nacht geschehn! / Das Unglück geschah nur mir allein! Die Sonne, sie scheinet allgemein!" The translation, by Emily Ezust, and the original lyrics are available online at: http://bit.ly/1AY5opF.

Lieder over the course of 1901-1904, during which period he had two children; in 1907, after his eldest daughter had died, he wrote of the composition: "I placed myself in the situation that a child of mine had died… When I really lost my daughter, I could not have written these songs anymore" (Reik 315). The imaginative, creative work of re-communicating another parent's loss is retroactively unthinkable for the parent who has actually endured it.

The character of this unimaginability derives from something more than just being haunted, as a matter of course, by specific material reminders of the child's having existed, which are necessarily particular to the child in question.[119] This incommunicability, parents insist, exhausts the capacity of language to express. Mark Twain and his wife lost young two daughters; writing to a family friend after the second's passing in 1895-1896, he laments that "to communicate about such a loss would bankrupt the languages of the world."[120] If

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[119] The *ekphrasis* of a child's playthings or descriptions of sites of domestic life (like the hearth or kitchen) as now marked by their absence are recurrent triggers for grievers online and tropes recurrently deployed by writers. The contemporary Gaelic poet Áine ní Ghlinn's "In the Kitchen (For Robbie)" is representative (in Macdonald et. al.).

> I hear the hollow shovel, bleak
> against the laughter of the sun
> Sun, where shall I go now?
> The warmth of the kitchen is cold.
>
> I sense the hand once held in mine
> the train discarded in the corner
> Train, where will you go now?
> The cold of the kitchen is bare.
>
> I hear the gentle laughter, soft
> against the silence of the wind
> Wind, take me with you now
> The silence of the kitchen is forever

This is also more or less the substance of what some invoke as the "saddest shortest story in the world," a laconic advertisement often apocryphally misattributed to Ernest Hemingway: "For sale: baby shoes, never worn." (For the question of to whom to actually attribute this line, see Haglund 2013).

[120] Elsewhere, Twain makes use of familiar tropes of being adrift or at sea; much like Yamanoue no Okura, Twain uses the invocation of precarity in the face of overwhelming natural forces to dramatize his family's vulnerability to events beyond the writer's control. Writing to a friend as to

"bereavement is a darkness impenetrable to the imagination of the unbereaved," Iris Murdoch offers (37), then parental bereavement, it seems, is an even more impenetrable darkness. "Never tell anyone that you know how she or he feels unless you happen to be, just at that second, stabbing yourself with the very same knife in the very same place in the very same heart that she or he is stabbing," writes Richard Ford, "Because, if you're not, then you don't know how that person feels" (222). The *qualia* of parental grief, it seems, remain indescribable and singular in a radical way.

c. Ruined Futures

And yet, of course, as we have seen, communication continues, and bereaved parents demand to be heard. And the rhetoric they use is not singular, nor are the appeals they make. They relay their bewilderment, their confusion, their images of what it felt like to confront what they had previously thought to be unimaginable. "And how do you step out of a moment like that? How do you leave your dead child behind and return to the vacant routines of whatever you might call your life?" asks Hemon (60). They try to bridge, somehow, the disjunction between their world and the transformed world around them, to tell us how that latter seems unreal. "Now it is the beginning of spring," writes Chasen, seven months after her child's death. "How can it be that flowers are starting to bloom, that life goes on around me?" (Chasen 19). [121] They commemorate their child's past accomplishments and character in glowing detail.[122]

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how he and his wife are faring, he states, "You have seen our whole voyage. You have seen us go to sea, a cloud of sail—and the flag at the peak; and you see us now, chartless, adrift—derelicts; battered, water-logged, our sails a ruck of rags, our pride gone." Twain's full correspondence is available archived and searchable online at: http://bit.ly/1EYLkE5.

[121] Hemon notes this disjunction, which only grows more acute, early one day while taking Isabel to yet another fruitless treatment session: "One early morning, driving to the hospital, I saw a number of able-bodied, energetic runners progressing along Fullerton Avenue toward the sunny lakefront,

And they lament not just the past, but the future as well. Because with the child dies their hopes for whom that child might have been, for experiences that child might have had (or which they would experience vicariously through it). "I grieve for life's bright promise, just shown and then withdrawn," writes William Cullen Bryant on the occasion of the death of a child (1798-1878; 261). Those "promises" can be specific and generously involve the child,

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and I had a strong physical sensation of being in an aquarium: I could see out, the people outside could see me (if they chose to pay attention), but we were living and breathing in entirely different environments. Isabel's illness and our experience of it had little connection to, and even less impact on, their lives. Teri and I were gathering heartbreaking knowledge that had no application whatsoever in the outside world and was of no interest to anyone but us: the runners ran dully along into their betterment; people reveled in the banality of habit; the torturer's horse kept scratching its innocent behind on a tree." (Hemon 58-59)

[122] Consider Plutarch and Darwin on their daughters and then Chasen on her son: "She was inherently wonderfully easy to please and undemanding, and the way she repaid affection with affection and was so charming was not only delightful, but also made one realize how unselfish she was. She used to encourage her wet-nurse to offer and present her breast not only to other babies, but also to her favourite playthings and toys: she was unselfishly trying to share the good things she had and the things she most enjoyed with her favourites, as if they were guests at her very own table." (Plutarch 586). "Shaun had just been proudly graduated from the Rodeph Shalom Day School and was accepted for seventh grade at Dalton. He had a new girlfriend, Debbie, eleven, whom he had met that July at Camp Eisner. He was singing in the Metropolitan Opera Children's Chorus, and I had had the joy of seeing him in six operas, one with Pavarotti himself, on the stage of the great Metropolitan Opera. He had just earned his yellow belt in Karate. His artwork was exceptional. His comic collection was extraordinary. He wanted to be a surgeon and would have been. He was handsome, smart as can be, and full of life." (Chasen 3-4). ""From whatever point I look back at her, the main feature in her disposition which at once rises before me is her buoyant joyousness tempered by two other characteristics, namely her sensitiveness, which might easily have been overlooked by a stranger & her strong affection. Her joyousness and animal spirits radiated from her whole countenance & rendered every movement elastic & full of life & vigour. It was delightful & cheerful to behold her. Her dear face now rises before me, as she used sometimes to come running down stairs with a stolen pinch of snuff for me, her whole form radiant with the pleasure of giving pleasure." (Darwin, April 30, 1851). Even figures like Union General William Tecumseh Sherman, the man generally credited as the inventor of scorched-earth total warfare, and coiner of the dictum that "War is hell," was utterly crushed by the death of his favorite son William, and recorded his loss as follows: "Willie was then nine years old, was well advanced for his years, and took the most intense interest in the affairs of the army. He was a great favorite with the soldiers, and used to ride with me on horseback in the numerous drills and reviews of the time. He then had the promise of as long a life as any of my children, and displayed more interest in the war than any of them. He was called a "sergeant" in the regular battalion, learned the manual of arms, and regularly attended the parade and guard-mounting of the Thirteenth, back of my camp." (Sherman 835) Sherman goes even further: "Willie was, or thought he was, a sergeant in the Thirteenth. I have seen his eye brighten, his heart beat, as he beheld the battalion under arms, and asked me if they were not real soldiers. Child as he was, he had the enthusiasm, the pure love of truth, honor, and love of country, which should animate all soldiers. God only knows why he should die thus young. He is dead, but will not be forgotten till those who knew him in life have followed him to that same mysterious end." (Sherman 840-841)

or they can be rather more in the way of fantasies that glorify the parent: Chasen realizes she will never see her child flourish into manhood with a family of his own; William Sherman mourns that his son will not see his father march in triumphant glory back to Washington.[123] For others, however, the experience manifests a kind of collapse of futurity as such. "The future is a thing of the past," the bereaved narrator of Peter de Vries' 1961 *The Blood of the Lamb* remarks to himself in a novel prompted by the death of one of the author's own children (169). This phrasing strikes a deep chord when juxtaposed with contemporary research. In a 2013 study entitled, *Remembering the Past and Envisioning the Future in Bereaved Adults With and Without Complicated Grief*, Harvard researchers Richard McNally and his team report that the loss of close loved ones impacts cognitive performance not just in terms of remembering past events, but in terms of imagining the future. Specifically, people suffering from "complicated grief" have a harder time recollecting past events that involve themselves than they do events that involve their loved ones, and an easier time visualizing future events *with* the deceased (that is, events that can now never happen) than they do imagining future events *without* them.[124] As a matter of empirical psychological research, it does indeed seem

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[123] The extent to which Sherman dwells in his diaries on these fantasies is striking. As historian Thom Bassett writes: "In late October 1864, for example, as plans for the devastating march across Georgia were being finalized, Sherman's thoughts turned toward imagined praise from Willie: to be able to see Willie's "full eyes dilate and brighten when he learned that his Papa was a great general would be to me now more grateful than the clamor of millions." At the war's end, on April 5, 1865, assured of his place in history from helping to vanquish the Confederacy, Sherman wished only that Willie 'could hear & see — his proud little heart would swell to overflowing.'" Likewise fascinating is the increasingly histrionic ways in which Sherman narrates his son's death – Willy died from moving to camp with his father, on his father's own orders, and as his father records, but over the years recollection morphs into holding others to blame. For more on all this, and on Sherman's preference for his little "Soldier Boy" over his numerous other children – one of whom was born and died while his father was on campaign and whose name Sherman would only write in quotation marks, see Bassett (2013).

[124] "When imagining events that included their loved one, patients typically described landmark life events…they would say things like, we would be happy when our first child is born, when we're celebrating the day I retire, or when we finally buy our dream house. For people with complicated grief, these events with their loved ones were much easier to imagine than were events that could at this point realistically occur in their future," Rabinaugh tells interview Peter Reuell (2013). "When

that our ability to imagine the future can be threatened with breaking down when a close attachment figure dies. But the death of a child is an even more specific kind of crisis in futurity – a crisis *in* the futurity itself – a profound *wrongness* in the order of how things events are 'supposed' to be. In his *Elegy for a Still-Born Child*, Seamus Heaney writes:

> For six months you stayed cartographer
> Charting my friend from husband towards father.
> He guessed a globe behind your steady mound.
> Then the pole fell, shooting star, into the ground.[125]

As a pole star, the child makes the universe navigable, and that orientation is to the future itself. When the child dies, it takes the future with it.

4. *In a Philosophical Key*

It is understood that parents "should" not bury their children. The parent, looking on their child, may glimpse within them the prospect of their *own* death – but as part of the proper ordering of things. The contemporary poet Donald Hall is frank about this in his piece, *My Son, My Executioner*:

> My son, my executioner
> I take you in my arms
> Quiet and small and just astir
> and whom my body warms
>
> Sweet death, small son,
> our instrument of immortality,
> your cries and hunger document
> our bodily decay.
>
> We twenty two and twenty five,
> who seemed to live forever,
> observe enduring life in you
> and start to die together.

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asked for memories from their own lives," people suffering from complicated grief struggled, but when asked to recall events from the life of their lost loved one, they performed significantly better."

[125] Heaney's 1966 poem is reputedly addressed to a close friend. It is archived online in Emory's Heaney collection at http://bit.ly/1zQGTYK.

(in Dove, ed, 280)

Contemplating the death of one's own child, by contrast, is taboo. And when the child dies, what is expressed, over and over again, is a profound conviction of *wrongness*, of an inversion of the proper order. Patty Medley suggestively includes this in her list of "Should Nots": "Parents are not supposed to outlive/bury their child, it's just not what I consider the natural order of things. Personally, I have a mile long list of the 'shoulds' that started at the very early stages of my loss, while still in a complete state of shock… to present." The narrator in Wordsworth's *We Are Seven* (1798) may present the image of a *child* unable to acknowledge the number of her dead siblings, but the most profound confusion and sense of things being wrong ultimately arises from her adult interlocuter, not from her: "A simple child / That lightly draws its breath, / And feels its life in every limb, / What should it know of death?" (*Lyrical Ballads* 59-62).

In addition to being a plangent emotional plea, this is a properly philosophical question – not just taken as an iteration of the perennial existential or theological quandaries about *why* we live in a world where children suffer, but as a provocative linkage of two terms which are often not thought of together beyond those concerns: namely, the fate of the dying child and the fate of knowledge. What does the death of the child mean for the possibility of the transmission of knowledge, and for knowing the experiences of others? This question is as much existential and ethical as it is epistemological – and more than anything else, it is a question that strikes at the heart of the problem of universality. If, as our typologies of grief have indicated, the death of the child is a paradoxical universal – marked, if not universally, than with marked regularity, by an identifiable repertoire of tropes along with pervasive appeals to singularity and indescribability – then what does that mean for our thinking of universality in philosophical terms? Is there a way in which we can not just see

the death of the child as representing not just the death of universality *as such* – but as suggesting the possibility of something even more radical, namely, its transfiguration?

Chapter 3: Paternity and Universality at the Grave of Schleiermacher's Son

1. Framing the Problem: Schleiermacher as Father, Figurative and Literal

As a polymath philologist, theologian, and philosopher, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) produced foundational works in a variety of fields, and scholars across those disciplines regularly trope his influence as a kind of fatherhood. He is "the father of modern theology" (Helmer 34; Adams 66; Christian 138) and the "father" of theoretical biblical hermeneutics (Thiselton 148; Klemm 55). Schleiermacher is the "father" of philosophical hermeneutics more broadly (Palmer 97), and Hans-Georg Gadamer acclaims him as its "grandfather" (Gadamer 361). Peter Berger names Schleiermacher "the father of the disciplines of comparative religion and history of religion" and places him "at the methodological roots of what came to be known in the twentieth century as the phenomenology of religion" (Berger 138). He is also the "father" of the psychology of religion (Belzen 76), and the scope of his influence on that field is not to be underestimated (Proudfoot xii–xvi).

What is the status of this fatherhood? Acclaiming Schleiermacher as a metaphorical "father" suggests that inaugurating a field of intellectual inquiry is a particular kind of gendered, reproductive act. The father metaphor implies that disciplines are founded through an exercise of patriarchal privilege, and that their foundation testifies to the paternal potency of their male founders. Of course, troping the fact of intellectual influence and institutional legacies as a kind of fatherhood strains the paternal metaphor in a variety of ways. Unlike actual human fathers, who require not inconsiderable assistance in the production of their young, disciplinary fathers can apparently operate solo, their progeny

birthed entirely cerebrally, like Athena from Zeus' forehead. Women are unnecessary for such acts of creation, even as midwives, and their role, however real, is ignored or effaced.[126] If multiple people are involved in disciplinary procreation, academic and popular genealogies seem to prefer same-sex partnerships, and then almost only ones between men alone. The paternal metaphor falls short, too, insofar as that while flesh-and-blood human parents produce yet other human beings like themselves, figurative ones father creations that are non-living and non-human. Disciplinary fatherhood is not an act of *re*-production at all, but rather the production of something of a different order than oneself entirely.

In the case of Schleiermacher, however, the paternal metaphor is doubly and suggestively apt. First, in simple historical terms, Schleiermacher exercised his remarkable influence through work in professions that were in his time and place exclusive provinces of male authority, namely the academy and the clergy. For all his justly celebrated attunement to women and sophisticated concept of the feminine (Thandeka 304-306), Schleiermacher's success as a university professor and popular preacher leveraged his position as a powerful figure in institutions consolidated around male authority just as much as it drew upon his famous sensitivity, intelligence, and charisma. When Schleiermacher joined Wilhelm von Humboldt in creating the University of Berlin in 1809-1810, and in very concretely deciding how various disciplines would be represented at a departmental level, he did so as a man among an elite group of men, and founded an institution that would not admit women until 1908 (Lawler 20-25, Mazón 125). Despite and precisely because of the lasting, progressive

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[126] Understanding that what is at issue is the representation of credit rather than actual intellectual contributions, the general dominance of paternal metaphors in popular assessments of intellectual legacies is striking. As of May 2013, of the 186 figures on Wikipedia's *List of people considered father or mother of a scientific field*, only three are women - Florence Nightingale (1820-1910), Marie Curie (1867-1934), and Ellen Swallow Richards (1842-1911), the "Mothers" of nursing, chemistry, and home economics, respectively. A Google Search for "Marie Curie" and "mother of chemistry" yields fifty results; "Isaac Newton" and "father of physics" yields 120,000.

appeal of many his insights,[127] it is important to recall of Schleiermacher that his thought emerged and flourished within a particular and markedly patriarchal context, and in this sense naming him a 'father' is certainly apt.

Second and more importantly, the attribution of fatherhood to Schleiermacher activates what I claim is a fundamental and underacknowledged dimension of his thought: the prominent role it affords to a particular notion of paternity. Specifically, casting Schleiermacher as a disciplinary *paterfamilias* resonates deeply with his own vision of the transmission of knowledge as a matter of paternal generativity and filial inheritance. For Schleiermacher, philosophers are "fathers" to their teachings and to the words they speak in teaching them (Schleiermacher, *DP* 16), and his theory of translation dispenses with the notion of a mother tongue in favor of a *paternal* one: 'For if the writer's particular spirit is the mother of works belonging to science and art… his native language (*vaterländische Sprache*) is the father' (Schleiermacher, *BO* 143). Indeed, for Schleiermacher, canonical texts and faith itself are paternal legacies, inheritances of "thought and feeling" from one's figurative "fathers" (Schleiermacher, *OR* 11), the reception of which demand a properly filial humility (32). Indeed, for all his progressive political attitudes towards female political enfranchisement (Richardson 84) and despite the prominent role he affords women in his theological anthropology (Thandeka 299–303), Schleiermacher unambiguously saw both the

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[127] Among other things, Schleiermacher published appeals on behalf of the political emancipation of Germany's Jews (Crouter and Klassen 18), demanded expanded social rights for women (Beiser 61–62, Richardson 187), rejected exploitative labor practices in European factories and slavery abroad (Brandt 122-123), and was a robust advocate for academic self-governance, academic freedom, and freedom of the press (Redeker 98). The wide respect Schleiermacher appears to received in his own era extended to many people who had little in common with him in the way of lifestyle or creed, including the poet Heinrich Heine (1797-1856), who frequently attended Schleiermacher's sermons and recollected that: "I confess to having no special divinely blessed feelings aroused in me by his preaching; but I find myself in a better sense thereby edified, empowered and whipped up by his caustic language from the soft featherbed of flabby indifference. This man only needs to throw away the black churchly garb and he stands there as a priest of truth." (Crouter 2)

institutions of education and the communication of thought itself as operating under the sign of paternity. Indeed, as I argue below, Schleiermacher's philosophical articulation of human individuality as a matter of self-conscious relation to universality proceeds explicitly as an operation of paternity, involving a specific model of paternal authorization, generational succession, and futural inheritance. In other words, I claim that if Schleiermacher is among other things a modern "father of universality," the notion of universality that is his legacy is also fundamentally a paternal one.

But there is another concern that is provocatively activated by consideration of Schleiermacher in relation to paternity. This has to do with the fact that, like the transmission of knowledge, fatherhood itself is not a risk-free enterprise. Literal and figurative fathers are not always succeeded by a next generation of sons eager to inherit their legacy. Fathers can and do bury their children, and in 1829, Schleiermacher faced down what for most parents is unthinkable: the death of his only son, Nathanael, just before his tenth birthday and Schleiermacher's sixty-first. I claim that the remarkable sermon Schleiermacher delivers over his son's grave represents an attempt to philosophically and religiously gloss an event – the death of a son – that throws into crisis the very model which Schleiermacher has previously seen as underwriting all such modes of meaning-making. In particular, I argue that the death of Schleiermacher's son produces a crisis in his model of universality as a matter of paternity, and brings him to articulate a humbled vision of universality paradoxically centered around the non-communicable, irreducibly individual fact of loss.

Methodologically speaking, I claim that an idiosyncratic concept of paternity operates across the full range of Schleiermacher's textual productions and traverses his work across various disciplinary domains and in different writerly modes. Specifically, I argue that this model of paternity recurs across Schleiermacher's philosophical and personal writings, his

published manuscripts and his transcribed academic lectures, and his sermons and his letters alike. Attention to the recurrence of this model across the full breadth and diversity of these texts requires resisting the temptation to reduce Schleiermacher to traditional disciplinary trajectories of his influence, that is, into Schleiermacher the Hermeneute, Schleiermacher the Liberal Protestant Theologian, Schleiermacher the Romantic Literary Critic, and so forth. Against this temptation, I instead suggest a different and novel organizing frame: Schleiermacher the Father.

Reading Schleiermacher as Schleiermacher the Father simultaneously activates both the way in which his work involves a model of paternity – in other words, how Schleiermacher is a thinker of paternity and a figurative intellectual father – and the fact of his having lived as an actual father just as much as he lived as a theologian, philosopher, or literary critic. Although this frame does necessitate a brief account of Schleiermacher's life in traditional biographical terms (Section 2.3 below), and a survey engagement of the dominant themes in biographical scholarship on Schleiermacher (Section 2.1) my primary warrant for this approach derives directly from Schleiermacher's own work itself. Indeed, as I argue in Section 2.2 below, Schleiermacher not only holds that philosophical legacies can only be truly understood in relation to the biographies of the thinkers who produce them, that is, as productions that emerge organically and coherently from a total life's work of individual creativity, but he explicitly asserts that the viability of his own *oeuvre* stands or falls by virtue of its relationship to his family life and his status as a father in particular.

This is a novel and productive approach. Rather than supplanting our understanding of Schleiermacher's work, I suggest that attending to him as Schleiermacher the Father can yield dividends for re-conceptualizing his influence on several disciplines and his legacy as a thinker in general. In particular, the notion of paternity that sustains and shapes

Schleiermacher's work until Nathan's death (at which point it enters a crisis and is entirely transfigured) directly underwrites his model of universality, with far-reaching implications. As necessary background to unpacking the connection between universality and paternity for Schleiermacher, Section 3.1 below briefly summarizes the character of Schleiermacher's thought on the relationship between universality and individuality and addresses the importantly related issues of intuition, emotion, and communication, themes which famously and paradigmatically shape Schleiermacher's influential and foundational notion of the essence of 'religion.' Section 3.2 reveals the particular emphasis Schleiermacher gives to the family as a site of individuation oriented towards futurity, and then establishes how Schleiermacher frames this model as involving quintessentially paternal operations of authority and a paternal orientation towards on the future. Sections 3.3 and 3.4 demonstrate how this model cashes out in two closely related works – Schleiermacher's translation of and magisterial commentary on Plato (1799-1804) and his fictional narrative *Christmas Eve: A Dialogue on the Incarnation* (1806). Focusing in the first instance on Schleiermacher's account of Socrates' relationship with his father and the circumstances of Socrates death, and in the second on Schleiermacher's portrayal of an angelic and all-knowing child in dialogue with her father, I demonstrate how both celebrate a coherent model of paternity and paternal legacies that involves a dynamic and future-directed pedagogy in which only the death of the father/teacher is thinkable – and never that of the student/child. Yet with the death of Nathanael, described in Section 4.1, Schleiermacher must face the crisis of this model and grapple with thinking through the previously unthinkable. In Section 4.2, I offer a close-reading of Schleiermacher's remarkable sermon at his son's grave as depicting the specific consequences of this crisis. I propose that his sermon reconfigures his previous understanding of universality in terms of paternal authority and futural succession into a

model of paternity in a humbled mode, that is, as articulating a universality of vulnerability, oriented not unequivocally toward a utopic future, but instead grounded in memorializing an incommunicable and radically singular fact of loss.

2.1 Schleiermacher as Biographical Object

Early in his mammoth, ultimately unfinished, and still untranslated *Life of Schleiermacher* (1870), German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) asserts that while understanding the work of some thinkers can proceed without knowledge of the circumstances of their lives, for others the situation is quite different. Writes Dilthey: 'The philosophy of Kant can be wholly understood without a closer engagement with his person and his life; Schleiermacher's significance, his worldview and his works require a biographical portrayal for their thorough understanding' (Dilthey x, Crouter 21). Dilthey's choice of examples makes some intuitive sense. Despite recent assessments that as a young man Kant may have gone so far as to have 'enjoyed wine' and even on occasion played billiards, the conceptual abstraction of the *Prolegomena* or the formalism of the *Groundwork* spark little interest in the personality of the dour Konigsberg bachelor who wrote them (Kuehn 129). Schleiermacher's works by contrast frequently speak in the first person, are addressed with intimate attention to quotidian domestic events, and speak evocatively about the contours of personal emotional life (Rowan xviii-xix). Dilthey's emphasis on our developing an understanding of Schleiermacher's biography thus jives with a readerly sense that Schleiermacher's works seem to actively invite us to know him better personally.

At a deeper level, though, Dilthey is interested in the interface between Schleiermacher's work and his life because for him, as for many scholars, Schleiermacher represents a figure of various harmonious parallelisms. For Dilthey, 'an effective

hermeneutics could only develop in a mind where the virtuouso practice of logical interpretation was united with a genuine capacity for philosophical thought,' and Schleiermacher represents just such a union of capacity and practice (Makkreel 260–261). In this sense, Dilthey follows Schleiermacher's own theory of biographical interpretation as exemplified in his work on Plato, which aims to relate the *Dialogues* to Plato's life with the goal of uncovering the inner harmony between insight and creativity, at once philosophical and artistic, that allowed Plato write them (Lamm 223, Crouter 31). Dilthey views this theory as revolutionary and productive, and praises Schleiemacher's translation of Plato accordingly:

> [With Schleiermacher's text] German aesthetics developed a great treasury of profound and sensitive insights into the poetic realm…His aesthetics always sought to establish a causal relation between the psychic state which produces a literary work and the form of that work…Schleiermacher understood Plato as a philosophical artist by this method and transformed hermeneutics by means of it.
>
> (Dilthey, *IP* 49–50)

Turning to Schleiermacher's biography so as to better understand his intellectual legacy, then, both follows in Dilthey's footsteps and proceeds with the apparent sanction of Schleiemacher's own methodological vision.

But if for Dilthey Schleiermacher represents a figure who harmonizes latent intellectual capacity with productive philosophical engagement, he also a embodies another parallelism: a harmony between doctrine and action, between principles and conduct. Thus Dilthey stresses that however powerful Schleiermacher's writings might be for their contemporary readers, those readers should know that the total effect of his personality in the world was all the more so:

> Such a biography, it was thought, would be doubly interesting and important to those who had not known Schleiermacher personally, as by all who had enjoyed that privilege it was universally maintained, that great as he was as a writer, and wonderful as were the versatility and profundity which he evinced in treating the most diversified branches of human life and human knowledge, it was, nevertheless, through the living influence of his entire personality that he had effected most in the

world.

(Dilthey xiii, Crouter 24)

Introducing the first and only edition of Schleiermacher's letters in English, Frederica Rowan (1860) sounds a similar note, conjuring for Schleiermacher a kind halo effect that harmoniously unites his work with his life: 'Of him it may with truth be said that his scientific life, and his personal life, his theory and practice, were always tending towards perfect harmony' (Rowan iv). Like Dilthey, Rowan views Schleiermacher's personal activities ('the living influence of his entire personality') as representing such an organic and harmonious outgrowth of his thoughts such that studying Schleiermacher's personal life alongside his formal works are reciprocally enforcing activities of edification:

> This translator [Rowan herself] undertook to introduce to the English reader the man Schleiermacher, not the theologian ; and the man and his private life, at least, are portrayed in these letters with a minuteness of detail that leaves nothing to be desired, while as a necessary consequence of the sincerity and the harmonious constitution of his mind and character, much light is also shed by them on his religious and philosophical views.

(Rowan xii)

For these readers, then, Schleiermacher represents an exemplary kind of thinker: one who practiced what he preached. As Schleiermacher's premiere twentieth century biographer, Martin Redeker, writes, 'A cynical aphorism maintains that for the valet there are no heroes; Schleiermacher had nothing to fear from his examinations of his private life' (209). And indeed Schleiermacher's own stepson, Ehrenfried von Willich (1807-1880), confirms this assessment in his memoirs, writing that 'I have never seen anyone in whom knowledge and life were so in unison as they were in him, anyone who so lived what he thought and knew' (Willich 26; Blackwell 68). For all these thinkers, contemporaries of Schleiermacher or otherwise, understanding Schleiermacher's thought implies knowing the man as well – insofar as that in his case personal conduct and professed principles supposedly existed in

total harmony.

2.2 Schleiermacher as Biographical Subject

As indicated above, Schleiermacher developed a robust notion of the role of biography in relation to the interpretation of philosophical texts and implemented this in his scholarly work. Schleiermacher's own emphasis on cultivating a biographical understanding of the producers of historically influential texts appertains equally to his treatment of Plato as it does to his exegeses of Biblical prophets. In both cases the premiere biographical concern that preoccupies him is the domain of personal relationships and family life in particular. In evaluating the Hebrew prophets, for example, Schleiermacher claims that 'No writing can be fully understood except in connection with the total range of ideas out of which it has come into being and through a knowledge of the various relations important to the writers' lives, relationships with those for whom they write,' (Schleiermacher, *BO* 58) and proceeds with his theological exegesis accordingly. By the same token, his biography of Socrates pays considerable attention to his family circumstances, and to Socrates' own status as a father, since for Schleiermacher these family relationships are central to understanding the projects of both thinkers (a topic I will address in Section 3.4 below).

In his own personal reflections, Schleiermacher himself appears to have been acutely conscious of a need to maintain a coherent and consistent consonance between his professed beliefs in written works and his conduct in relationships with others, and in domestic affairs in particular. When after many years of fruitlessly trying to marry and start a family he finally found himself engaged and soon to become a father, Schleiermacher wrote to his sister that his upcoming marriage represented not just a fundamental test of the

soundness of his ethical writings on family and the state, but a test of his own authenticity of character and his deepest convictions:

> I have taught so much about the beauty and holiness of family life that I ought to now have an opportunity of showing that what I have taught has been to me more than empty words, and that the doctrine has in truth sprung from my deepest feelings and from my inward energy. And this I have more especially to show, that wedded life, such as it ought to be, interferes with no duty, does not prevent friendship, devotion to science, or the most self-sacrificing life for the fatherland. What a magnificent opportunity do not the existing circumstances afford me for showing this, and how beautifully [my fiancée] Jette acquiesces in my views and helps me to carry them out!
>
> (Schleiermacher, *Letters II* 155)

Schleiermacher here insists that, with his upcoming marriage, his prolific publications, lectures, and sermons (his 'doctrines') will be put not just to a litmus test of validity on their own terms but also to a thorough a sounding-out of their authenticity as issuing from the very core of his person, from "my deepest feelings and from my inward energy." Cast in this light, Schleiermacher appears to see his texts and doctrines more than as just abstract productions, but as emanations of and testimonials to his character and lived preoccupations.

By this point it should be clear Schleiermacher manifestly took the relationship between his writings and his life seriously, and nowhere more so than when it came to his views on the family and exercising his role as a father. It seems only fitting, then, that our investigation into the status of Schleiermacher the Father in the fullest figurative implications of the term should begin by engaging his biography directly, and with an eye to issues of family life and paternity in particular.

2.3 Schleiermacher's Life Under the Sign of the Father

Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher was born on November 21, 1768 in the city of Breslau, Lower Silesia, at the time part of the Kingdom of Prussia and now Wrocław, Poland. For all his later celebration of stable, nuclear family life, it appears that Schleiermacher's own childhood domestic circumstances were rather stressed. His father, Johann Gottlieb Adolph Schleyermacher (1727-1794), was an Army Chaplain and served as the only Reformed Protestant minister for a district of far-flung garrisons (Richardson 34). As such, Johann spent most of his time travelling between remote parishes, covering some two thousand miles on his own by horse each year (Redeker 7). On the rare occasions he was home, it appears Johann remained 'aloof, busy with his reading, and somewhat emotionally withdrawn' (Richardson 35). Raising Schleiermacher, his sister Charlotte, and his younger brother Carl thus fell almost entirely to their mother, Katharina-Maria Stubenrauch (1736-1783), such that 'the young Schleiermacher was brought up in what was functionally equivalent to a single-parent household' (Richardson 35). Katharina-Maria herself appears to have been frequently ill, and when she died, Johann noted her death in their parish register as follows: 'The Lord be praised for the love and devotion she has shown me and my children; may she be rewarded for this in God's most blessed eternal fellowship' (Redeker 7).

In 1783, Schleiermacher and his siblings were sent to boarding school some hundred-twenty miles away in Niesky, Saxony. It is uncertain whether the family arrived at this decision as a result of Katharina-Maria's poor health, or if Johann, who had himself been sent away to theological school at the age of fourteen, determined that his children should follow in his own footsteps (Redeker 8). Whatever the case, when Schleiermacher left home at the age of fifteen, he would never see his parents again — his mother died later that

year, and although Schleiermacher would correspond regularly with his father until the latter's death in 1794, they never again met in person.

The school at Niesky was part of a community run by the Moravian Brethren (*Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine*) a sect in the Protestant tradition associated with a revival of the teachings of Czech theologian Jan Hus (1369-1415). The Herrnhuters practiced a Pietistic variety of Christianity that combined quiet, contemplative practice and personal Bible study with an emphasis on communal faith, good works, and missionary outreach (Christian 36). Moravian theological influences are discernable throughout the arc of Schleiermacher's *oeuvre*, particularly *vis-à-vis* his attunement to questions of affect (Pinkard 149), the role of music (Tice 100), and more (Richardson 36–42). More concretely, Schleiermacher's three years with the Herrnhuters also left him with a lifelong proficiency in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and English; he would later learn French (Redeker 9-10).

In 1785, Schleiermacher matriculated from the Herrnhuter school to begin professional theological studies at a small Moravian seminary in the nearby town of Barby. The austere atmosphere at this new institution appears to have chafed on the eighteen-year-old Schleiermacher (Redeker 11). Brethren Orthodoxy forbade the reading of secular texts, but Schleiermacher and a group of British schoolmates began secretly reading contraband issues of the *Allgemeinen Literatur-Zeitung* and soon moved on to smuggled copies of Goethe's *Werther* and Kant's *Prolegomena* (Redeker 12-13, 17). Additional exposure to various Enlightenment challenges to Pietism appears to have precipitated something of a crisis of faith in Schleiermacher, who publicly broke with the Brethren in a dispute involving both matters of student discipline and a theological split with the Moravian doctrine of atonement (Redeker 14-15; Pinkard 149).

Before formally withdrawing from the Barby seminary, Schleiermacher attempted to explain himself to his father. Where the older minister took his son's conflict with the Brethren as the sign of a full-blown turn to skeptical 'worldliness,' young Schleiermacher wrote to assure him that enrolling in theological studies at the more liberal and cosmopolitan University of Halle was instead in the service of the long-term elimination of his well-meaning doubts:

> Believe me, dearest father, removal into a freer sphere, where I shall be able to investigate all these questions thoroughly, will be the best, indeed the only means of reclaiming me. Let me take away the consolation with me, that I am still in possession of your paternal affection, and that you still entertain the hope that, although your son may never again return to the community of the Brethren (for I must confess that there is much in the doctrines and the constitution of the latter, which is not likely ever again to be approved of by me), he may, nevertheless, return to a firm faith in true Christianity ; for I am quite conscious, that a skeptic can never enjoy that undisturbed tranquility of soul which is the lot of a believing Christian.
>
> (Schleiermacher, *Letters I* 58)

Significantly, even as Schleiermacher acknowledges the frustration of his father's wishes for him *vis-à-vis* his place among the Brethren, he also appeals to paternal expectations for his future – namely, his father's 'hope' that Schleiermacher return to a 'firm faith in true Christianity.' The value of his father's blessing – the 'consolation' of his 'paternal affection' – apparently lies in vouchsafing precisely this future for Schleiermacher. In reply, Schleiermacher's father appears to have restrained his censure, although in his three years at Halle, Schleiermacher proved more preoccupied with reading Leibniz and Wolff and flirting with liberal political causes than studying theology or alleviating his doubts, and he only barely passed his exams in systematics (Redeker 15–17).

During his last year at Halle, and while studying for exams in Dossen, Schleiermacher appears to have entered a deep depression, and when he graduated in 1790 he encountered difficulties finding work (Richardson 41-42). A family friend intervened to

arrange Schleiermacher a position as tutor for the children of the East Prussian Count and Burgrave Friedrich Alexander zu Dohna (1741-1810), who maintained a luxurious manor in Schlobitten (modern Słobity). Schleiermacher's three-year stay at Schlobitten proved immensely significant. Tutoring the zu Dohnas' young sons, conversing with their daughters, and delivering sermons at family services, Schleiermacher found himself in the midst of a lively and stable extended family with no less than a dozen children (Richardson 45). In this environment, Schleiermacher thrived, penning a series of important ethical treatises (Beiser 53-54) and, on a personal level, renewing his faith and cultivating an almost mystical vision of harmonious family life.

Writing of Schlobitten in his *Soliloquies* (1800), Schleiermacher glosses this transformation as follows: 'In a stranger's home, my sense for beautiful shared experiences was first opened; I saw how freedom first ennobles and rightly orders the delicate mysteries of humanity' (Schleiermacher, *So* 18). Schleiermacher's celebration of 'beautiful shared experiences' – of sublime companionship and communal appreciation – as occurring first in the context of a 'stranger's home' certainly appears to cast his own family life in Breslau in a negative light. This suspicion is confirmed by one of Schleiermacher's own letters of this period to his father, which while ostensibly comparing Schlobitten to the theological aridity of Barby and Halle also undeniably rings as an implicit comparison to the tenor of family life and domestic role models *chez* Schleyermacher senior:

> Here my heart is properly nurtured and need not wither under the weeds of cold erudition and my religious feelings do not die under theological speculation. Here I enjoy the family life for which, after all, man was created, and this warms my heart… I learn here patience and that pliancy which is inspired by the heart, and which has its source in gratitude for social happiness. I am coming to know both myself and others, I have models to imitate and feel that I am becoming a better man.
>
> (Schleiermacher, *Letters I* 95)

Schleiermacher concludes this letter by inviting his father to celebrate his good fortune – or rather with a gesture of assuming that his own father already must certainly be celebrating it. 'I am sure you thank God, with me, for His merciful guidance, and pray for a blessing upon me that I may wisely profit by it. Ah! and may you add still further to my happiness by your love and your advice, which is always welcome' (Schleiermacher, *Letters I* 95). Crucially, Schleiermacher's solicitation of his father's blessing now appears more formulaic than in his letter from Barby, and his appeal for paternal counsel and even love casts these as supplemental to his current happiness, not the guarantors of hopes for a future one.

Schleiermacher's biographers have likewise framed the Schlobitten period as formative for his approach to family and social life as both conceptual, philosophical concerns and as matters of practice. German theologian and Schleiermacher scholar Martin Redeker writes that 'after Schlobitten, Schleiermacher became a virtuoso in friendship and in the deeper sharing of human fellowship' (18). Feminist scholar Ruth Drucilla Richardson argues that, thanks his time with the zu Dohnas, 'Schleiermacher was to become a person who possessed a great depth of feeling, a tremendous capacity for empathy, a love of home and family life, and a genuine appreciation of women' (37). In particular, it appears that Schleiermacher struck up a particularly close friendship with the young Gräfin Luise "Friederike" Juliana (1774-1801), with whom he corresponded even after leaving the zu Dohnas. Friederike appears to have been a primary inspiration for Schleiermacher's ethical writings of the period on the question of 'egalitarian friendship' between men and women (Richardson 38-39), and whose death from illness at twenty-seven aggrieved Schleiermacher deeply (Redeker 18-19).

Schleiermacher left the zu Dohnas in 1793. Although certain political frictions arose between him and his patron Count Friedrich, his departure from the family was ultimately

amicable and marked a satisfactory completion of an apprenticeship in pastoral ministry (Redeker 19). After a stint as an Assistant Pastor at Landsberg, Schleiermacher took on a position as Full Pastor and Reformed Chaplain at Berlin's Charité Hospital in 1796.

Moving to Berlin put Schleiermacher at the ascendant cultural hub of the German-speaking world (alongside Jena), and at ground zero of an intellectual transition from late Enlightenment to Early Romantic thought (Pinkard 148-150; Beiser 60-61). Schleiermacher participated in this intellectual ferment in a very direct and personal way by frequenting the salon maintained by a remarkable Jewish woman, Henriette de Lemos Herz (1764-1847). The widow of a doctor and famous student of Kant's, Herz she spoke eight languages, later learned Sanskrit and Turkish, and taught Wilhelm von Humbolt Hebrew (he wrote her love letters in it; Redeker 28). Schleiermacher met Herz through the zu Dohnas, and the two developed an intimate (but strictly Platonic) friendship that would last decades (Richardson 53–55). Herz praised his sermons as 'divine' and would later convert to Christianity, although she did not permit Schleiermacher to baptize her (Redeker 28-29).

Through Herz, Schleiermacher made the acquaintance of critic and poet Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829). Schleiermacher and Schlegel struck up a close friendship and, for a period of time, were roommates (Forstman 64). Together with Novalis, with whom both corresponded, Schleiermacher and Schlegel formed the nucleus of German Romanticism (Pinkard 132-138), a trio that historian and theologian Jack Forstman has dubbed 'The Romantic Triangle' (ix-xiv). Schleiermacher and Schlegel became stalwarts of the lively Berlin intellectual scene and partnered on an ambitious translation of Plato; although the mercurial Schlegel soon tired of the project, his departure in a dispute over primary editorial credit did not spell the end of their intellectual engagements and correspondence (Forstman 88-89).

As with so many of his relationships, Schleiermacher's engagements with Schlegel and their circle of friends dynamically co-existed with his production of critical texts that explicitly thematize the personal interactions and social norms at play in them. The circumstances surrounding the *Lucinde* affair are exemplary. During this period, Schlegel introduced Schleiermacher to Dorothea Mendelsshon Veit (1765-1839), the daughter of philosopher Moses Mendelsshon (1729-1786), who like Henriette Herz was a brilliant Jewish woman and fixture of Berlin cultural circles. Unlike the widow Herz, however, Dorothea was married, and her very public affair with Schlegel ignited into a firestorm of scandal with the publication of Schlegel's *Lucinde* (1799), a text that is at once a stylized investigation of the spiritual status of romantic love and inquiry into the institution of marriage while also a thinly veiled novelization of their affair. Schleiermacher stepped into the ensuing controversy by publishing the *Confidential Letters on Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde* (1800) in his friend's defense (Reder 64-67) and by personally mediating divorce negotiations between Dorothea and her husband, a banker named Simon (Forstman 86). Ruth Richardson persuasively argues that the *Lucinde* affair directly shapes Schleiermacher's ethical writings of the period, most notably in the *Soliloquies*, wherein he draws a distinction between 'external' or 'civil' marriage and a 'true,' 'eternal' variety (76-110). By the same token, Schleiermacher's seminal *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (1799) directly owes its existence to his relationship with Schlegel, who cunningly arranged a surprise birthday party for Schleiermacher where Schlegel, Herz, Veit, and a favorite son of zu Dohna ambushed him and made him swear to all of them that he would write a book (Frostman 65-67). As with his writings on *Lucinde* and the ethics of marriage, Schleiermacher's *On Religion* is a text that involves his social relationships not just in terms of their role as the proximate cause or precipitating circumstances of its publication, but also as a prominent theme and structuring device.

Indeed, the eponymous 'Speeches' take the form of extended addresses to his friends in direct continuation of their ongoing salon discussions (Schleiermacher, *OR* 3-17).

For all his prolific textual production on the topic of marriage, Schleiermacher's own love life during this period appears to have been both less florid and more miserable than his roommate Schlegel's. In 1799, Schleiermacher fell deeply in love with one Eleonore Christiane Grunow (1770-1837), whose unhappy marriage to the Lutheran minister of a soldier's hospital aggrieved Schleiermacher immensely (Richardson 70–71). Grunow ardently returned Schleiermacher's affections, although their relationship appears to have remained entirely unconsummated (Redeker 69-72). Their extensive, emotionally intense correspondence lasted some six years, with Grunow professing her love and pledging to leave her marriage, even addressing Schleiermacher as her "bridegroom" and repeatedly leaving home only to return to her husband (Richardson 75-78). By 1802, Schleiermacher had left Berlin to take on a pastorship in the Baltic town of Stolp (Słupsk), and his travails with Grunow combined with the stresses of now sole responsibility for the Plato project to plunge him into despondency. Schleiermacher appears to have seen the very possibility of his future happiness and longed-for fulfillment of a natural capacity for family life as in doubt. Indeed, as he wrote to an old friend, Johann Ehrenfried Theodor von Willich (1777–1807), a young Prussian of nobleman working as a military chaplain:

> I have absolutely subordinated the requirements of nature to the relationship into which I have entered with my whole soul and in which I alone live…It is an entirely fixed and habitual thought that if I do not have Eleonore, I will not have a wife or children at all.
>
> (Richardson 81)

In these stressful circumstances, it appears that Schleiermacher began to consider the possibility that literary texts, rather than a family, would be his only legacy. As things see-sawed with Grunow, Schleiermacher wrote to Herz of the sudden and terrifying fear that he

would die before finishing even those, glossing his worries as activating an explicitly *paternal* sensibility:

> What a strange state I was in last night, old fool that I am! I went to bed full of my work and tossed about sleepless for more than an hour and a half. It was not that I was excited by my work, for it had gone on slowly, calmly, and easily. No! It was the first awakening of the paternal feeling and a fear of death. Do you know that for the first time in my life I was seized with the feeling that it would be a great pity were I to die that night.
>
> (Schleiermacher, *Letters I* 206–207)

If he cannot have children, Schleiermacher seems to indicate, then his paternal productivity will consist instead in the composition of texts instead. Indeed, after hopes for yet another decisive break from Grunow's husband failed to materialize, Schleiermacher wrote Henriette Herz admitting that he wanted to die and that he planned on living only as long as it took to finish his Plato translation (Richardson 117-118). Schleiermacher's acute depression alarmed his friends, who managed to draw him away from the gloomy coast and secure him a professorship back at his old haunts in Halle, although he only cut ties with Grunow in 1805 after she initiated formal divorce proceedings against her husband with Schleiermacher's assistance but cancelled litigation mid-way (Richardson 118-119, Redeker 75-76).

After Stolp and at Halle, Schleiermacher turned from his frustrated efforts at marriage and founding a family with Grunow to other pursuits: teaching and, as always, producing texts imbricated with personal themes. In terms of writing, his primary text of interest during this period, *Christmas Eve, Or, A Dialogue on the Incarnation* (1805), takes the form of a Platonic dialogue transplanted to bourgeois Prussian home on the night before Christmas. *Christmas Eve* is a celebration of family and children marked by the inclusion of a barely disguised Schleiermacher, appearing briefly in the text as a theological student named Josef who although childless and unmarried3 sings idyllic praises of domestic life from his position as an outside witness (Tice 10-12); I will address *Christmas Eve* more below. In terms

of teaching, Schleiermacher appears to have been immensely popular as a Professor of Ethics and Pastoral Theology, lecturing prolifically, and professing the distinctively Platonic pedagogical philosophy that 'teaching can take place only through desire and love' (Schleiermacher, *BO* 42).

When Halle changed hands in battle from the Prussians to Napoleon's France in 1806, Schleiermacher also became something of a political activist and, ultimately, an academic advocate. Despite being openly critical of Napoleon, Schleiermacher maintained his position at the University of Halle until 1807 before deciding to return to Berlin to participate in a burgeoning administrative reform of the Prussian government (Redeker 87-91). In Berlin, he held a variety of small ministerial positions while joining a movement of German academics in petitioning King Wilhelm Friedrich III to endow a new University in the wake of Prussia's loss of Halle (Redeker 95-96). Schleiermacher's proposals *Timely Thoughts on German Universities from a German Viewpoint* (1808) led to his appointment to a committee that ultimately founded the University of Berlin under the direction of Wilhelm von Humboldt (Lawler 20-25). Schleiermacher's proposals as to the division of humanistic pursuits into various departments constructed with an eye towards a 'universal' representation of various domains of knowledge strongly shaped the final institution's ultimate form, and has remained influential (Lawler 26-28). Schleiermacher became the first Dean of the new university's Theological Faculty in 1809, and was later extensively honored for his work by the Prussian government despite the fact that certain of his publications – journalistic pamphlets on press freedom – had been censored and put him in some legal jeopardy (Redeker 94, 98). At the university itself, Schleiermacher appears to have emphasized his role as a teacher as being more important than either his administrative or

research duties (Lawler 32); nonetheless, he was soon inducted into the Berlin Academy of the Sciences (Redeker 185).

During this second and final period in Berlin, Schleiermacher finally found the domestic circumstances he had been seeking for so long. For years, Schleiermacher had maintained a close friendship with the chaplain Johann von Willich and his young wife, Henriette (nee von Mühlenfels, 1788–1840). According to Redeker, 'the young wife who had lost both parents very early in life respected Schleiermacher like a father' (Redeker 210) and Schleiermacher in fact acted the paternal role at her wedding, "giving her away" to Johann (Blackwell 64). Writing Henriette upon news of the birth of her and Johann's daughter in 1807, Schleiermacher assumes an explicitly paternal stance:

> And now let me turn to you, dear, sweet daughter, and dwell upon your perfected happiness, which still, when I think of it, brings tears of joy to my eyes. The highest consummation, the crowning dignity, of your life has come to you, beloved child of my heart! How shall I express to you my paternal joy! Every thought of you is a prayer and a blessing in the name of love and holy nature. I forget myself in gazing at your image with the new happiness beaming from your eyes, exultingly, proudly, and yet meekly! And how pure, how holy, and how naturally the first maternal feelings must spring up in your noble heart! Ah! How I thank you for being willing to be my daughter; you have thus conferred a happiness upon my life which I can compare with no other. It is a peculiar, singularly beautiful, and lovely blossom added to the glorious wreath which happy destiny has twined for me. And there is nothing artificial in this bond between us, but I am as really and truly your father as your natural parent could possibly have been!
>
> (Schleiermacher, *Letters II* 21)

Fully unpacking the idiosyncratic configurations of 'paternal joy' and 'natural' parenthood that sustain and mediate Schleiermacher's empathic yet also idealized and essentializing relation to his 'daughter' will require more attention below, but it is crucial to underscore the context now: Schleiermacher is a 37 year-old man addressing as 'daughter' the 17 year-old wife of his 28 year-old friend. This context grows even more complicated since later that

very year von Willich died in a typhoid outbreak while on siege and by 1809 Schleiermacher and Henriette had married.[128]

For Schleiermacher, who had previously articulated a notion of marriage first and foremost determined by 'friendship,' the role of father-friend appears to have easily morphed into a composite role of husband-father and husband-friend, with the claim and commitments of paternity now no longer simply extending to Henriette but also to the two children, a boy and a girl, she brought into the marriage with her (Redeker 209-210). Needless to say, Schleiermacher anticipated their domestic life enthusiastically, writing his sister Charlotte in 1808 that 'I become daily more familiar with the thought of my happiness, and everything and everybody that is connected with it becomes dearer to me, and all are welded together in my heart into one inseparable whole…In like measure as I long for Jette, I long for the sweet children and for the paternal life I shall lead with them' (Schleiermacher, *Letters I* 127). The multitude of relationships implicated here – with "Jette," with her children, with 'everything and everybody' – assemble themselves into an integral and apparently overflowing totality, and this, it seems, is the 'paternal life' Schleiermacher craves. By the same token, Schleiermacher celebrated his upcoming marriage as a chance to finally make good his years in ministry advising others and to personally ratify his many publications on the ethics of parenting and religious role of the family. As he wrote Herz, 'It is but right that I should now have an opportunity of showing that my precepts were something more than fine-sounding but empty words—that on the contrary what I taught was the product of my best powers and of my deepest self-consciousness!' (Schleiermacher, *Letters I* 7).

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[128] Henriette Herz appears to have conspired with to arrange a felicitous 'accidental' encounter between Schleiermacher and the widow while both were traveling (Redeker 210).

When they married, Henriette already had daughter and a son, Ehrenfried, who would later write a glowing memoir of his time in their household (Blackwell 65). The death of one of Henriette's cousins in battle led her two adopt his two young orphans, both boys; Schleiermacher and his wife would have three more daughters besides.[129] The family settled into a large home in Berlin, and Schleiermacher soon combined his teaching at the University with a prestigious appointment as preacher at the Trinity Cathedral, the city's largest Reformed Protestant church. As a preacher, Schleiermacher was immensely charismatic, and his sermons were published and widely read (Crouter 2). At home, his life appears to have been happy, and his relationship with his wife a loving one; by all accounts, Schleiermacher was doting, although Redeker takes him to task for permitting her to hold séances and entertain the company for bourgeois dabblers in the paranormal (211).

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[129] The career of one of these adopted boys, Johann August Ernst von Willich (1810-1878), rewards attention as tale worthy of a Borgesian picaresque. Three years old when adopted by Schleiermacher, August would later become a decorated Prussian army officer only to discover Communism and resign both his commission and title to lead a detachment of Free Corps against Monarchists in Brandenburg. None other than Friedrich Engels served as his aide-de-camp. Willich's views apparently lay further to the left than Marx's, whom he detested, and after fleeing to England he opposed Marx during the dissolution of the League of Communists in 1850. Immigrating to America, he gave the vocation of "citizen" to the authorities at Port Control in New York and moved to Ohio where he published an ethnic newspaper. An adamant abolitionist, Willich responded to the outbreak of the Civil War by organized several hundred German immigrants into enlisting as a brigade for the Union. Although his outspoken Communist sympathies at first prevented his advancement, his success at training men and singular feats of leadership rapidly earned him a series of promotions, and he ultimately rose to the position of Brigadier General. He rallied the 32nd Indiana at Shiloh by leading the regimental band in the *Arbiter Marseillaise* while turning his back to direct fire, spent several months as a POW in horrible conditions, and joined William Tecumseh Sherman's march on Atlanta; his personal intervention with Sherman allowed his all-German troops to retain their beer rations on the otherwise entirely dry March to the Sea. After the war, he returned, wounded, to Ohio, where he wrote philosophical essays and became the leader of a group of intellectuals known as the Cincinnati Hegelians. He emerged briefly from retirement to travel to Germany and offer his services as General to Otto von Bismarck during the Franco-Prussian war, but the Chancellor demurred. Willich appears to have enjoyed himself nonetheless by spending the rest of the trip attending philosophy lectures in Berlin. The boarding house in which he lived still stands in Ohio. (For Willich's experiences in Revolutionary Europe, see Engels' '*The Campaign for the German Imperial Constitution*, 1850; for his relationship with the League of Communists, see Marx's essay *The Knight of Noble Consciousness*; for his time and America and Civil War service, see his entry in *Appletons' Cyclopædia of American Biography* and web resources by Quigley, Peake, and Lause).

Schleiermacher would remain in Berlin, teaching and preaching, until his death in 1834, although he and his family frequently took vacations across Europe. His writerly productivity in these later years is considerable, but his focus turns exclusively to theological matters, and to writing and then revising his massive *The Christian Faith* (1821, 1830), a dense, idiosyncratic, and technical masterpiece of systematic theology which could not lie further from the rhetorical accessibility of *On Religion* or the charmingly disguised personal narrative of *Christmas Eve*. It is almost as if, with the fulfillment of his much-avowed domestic hopes, Schleiermacher's inclination to produce texts addressed to and thematizing his personal relations fades, as if actual fatherhood supplants the metaphorical kind. Against this backdrop of contentment, as 'a crowning joy,' Schleiermacher's first, last, and only biological son, Nathanael, was born in 1820 (Willich 105, Blackwell 66). Nine years later, he was dead.

3. Fatherhood, Family, and Universality in Schleiermacher's Oeuvre

As we have seen, surveying Schleiermacher's biography even briefly reveals the prominent role of issues involving family in general and paternity in particular. Schleiermacher's complicated relationship with the authority of his father and his efforts to found a family and produce children of his own appear from his personal correspondence to have been deeply preoccupying concerns for him throughout his life. Below, I explicate a resonant feature of many of Schleiermacher's public writings and his philosophical work – a model of universality that relies on a paternal logic of authorization, succession, and inheritance. As necessary background to making this claim, Section 3.1 below briefly summarizes the character of Schleiermacher's thought on the relationship between universality and individuality and addresses the importantly related issues of intuition, emotion, and communication, themes which famously and paradigmatically shape

Schleiermacher's notion of the essence of 'religion.' Section 3.2 unpacks the particular emphasis Schleiermacher gives to the family as a site of individuation oriented towards futurity, and then establishes how Schleiermacher frames this model as quintessentially involving paternal operations of authority and a paternal perspective on the future.

3.1 Schleiermacher's Concept of 'Religion': Intuition, Individuality, and the Universe

In brief, for Schleiermacher, 'religion' emerges as an intuitive feeling (*Gefühl)* of one's relationship to the infinite experienced at the interface of an individual's unique subjectivity and the universe. Over and above competing Kantian accounts of Reason that would restrict the scope of intuition to a limited array of sensible processes, Schleiermacher expands the capacities of Reason to incorporate a neo-Platonic mode of immediate intellectual intuition (*noesis*) oriented towards a transcendent and divine totality (Beiser 70-71; Cary 22). Schleiermacher adds a distinctively Romantic element to this model of immediate intellectual intuition by strongly emphasizing its emotional dimensions and by characterizing it as a distinctively personal experience for each individual (Pinkard 150-153). This emphasis on religion as a matter of an individual's experience of their relationship to the universe leads Schleiermacher to adopt a pluralistic perspective whereby the possibilities for articulations of authentic 'religion' are understood to be as variable as individuals and their experiences themselves, over and beyond the claims of specific doctrines or traditions (Redeker 48). In other words, Schleiermacher is arguably the first figure to propose an account of 'religion' *qua* universal anthropological category (Proudfoot 9-11, 24-27, Sharf 96-98).

Much of the contemporary and ongoing appeal of Schleiermacher's thought derives from his proposition that the essence of 'religion' lies neither in abstract theological

propositions nor in metaphysical formulations of Duty but rather in concrete human experience. As he writes in *On Religion*:

> [Religion] does not wish to determine and explain the universe according to its nature as does metaphysics; it does not desire to continue the universe's development and perfect it by the power of freedom and the divine free choice of a human being as does morals. Religion's essence is neither thinking nor acting, but intuition and feeling.
>
> (Schleiermacher, *OR* 22)

Being beyond the domain of 'thinking,' the conceptual content of this 'intuition and feeling' resists easy explication in positive terms. Attempting to describe it, Schleiermacher uses language that is by turns mystical and apophatic and then domestic and concrete:

> Would that I could hold it fast and refer to it your commonest as well as your highest activities. Did I venture to compare it, seeing I cannot describe it, I would say it is fleeting and transparent as the vapour which the dew breathes on blossom and fruit, it is bashful and tender as a maiden's kiss, it is holy and fruitful as a bridal embrace. Nor is it merely like, it is all this. It is the first contact of the universal life with an individual. It fills no time and fashions nothing palpable. It is the holy wedlock of the Universe with the incarnated Reason for a creative, productive embrace.
>
> (Schleiermacher, *OR* 43)

In terms of its emotional charge, the experience of religion carries all the joyful sensuality of matrimonial union. But Schleiermacher stresses that this is more than just a metaphor: *'Nor is it merely like, it is all this.'* Marrying the 'holiness' and fruitfulness of a 'bridal embrace' with an encounter between 'universal life' and the 'individual,' Schleiermacher thus appears to suggest that there is an organic *conceptual* relation between the two, involving complicated operations of origination and dependence, productivity and transfiguration. In fact, for Schleiermacher, just as the 'bridal embrace' is 'creative' and 'productive' in the generation of new individual human lives, the conceptual content of religious experience consists precisely in the individual's awareness of *their* status as a generated product of the universe itself.

Schleiermacher terms this status a position of 'absolute dependence' (*ein schlechthinniges Abhängigkeitsgefühl*) and names awareness of it 'God-consciousness' (*das*

Gottesbewußtsein). Thus formulated, God-consciousness is the awareness of one's participation in the universe as an individual who is dependent for one's existence upon it (Schleiermacher, *CF* §4.1-4). Schleiermacher's elision of awareness of one's position of absolute dependence upon the universe into a mystical consciousness of God has strong Neo-Platonic overtones: 'The universe is for [Schleiermacher] unity and wholeness in contrast to the multiplicity of natural and human events…this wholeness and unity is not empirically perceived, nor is it the casual structure of nature in space and time; it is the ultimate, which acts upon men and things' (Redeker 37). However, Schleiermacher updates the Classical notion of a cosmological impulse of attraction towards a divine 'Good Beyond Being' by instead appealing to the individual's own felt experience and to the fact of their own individuality as such. Specifically, Schleiermacher argues that all human experience is marked by an all-pervasive question of 'whence,' and names this very 'whence' 'God': 'As regards the identification of absolute dependence with 'relation to God' … this is to be understood in the sense that the *Whence* of our receptive and active existence, as implied in this self-consciousness, is to be designated by the word 'God,' and that this is for us the really original signification of that word' (Schleiermacher, *CF* 16). Contemplating the *whence* of our self-consciousness, we experience our position of absolute dependence upon the universe, and this is consciousness of God.[130]

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[130] Schleiermacher holds that when articulated at this level of abstraction 'God-consciousness' does not imply the orientation of any particular creed (IE, Christianity versus Judaism, the cults of Ancient Rome versus Eastern faiths, etc.; *OR* 95-114). Christianity does retain privileged status for Schleiermacher as thematizing a particular relationship between finitude and totality (*OR* 115-124, *CF* §2.1-2) granting it the position of what Pinkard names a 'religion of religion' or a meta-religion (Pinkard 155), but 'God-consciousness' itself remains a term that is supposedly non-creedal. Addressing Schleiermacher's understanding of Christianity in doctrinal theological terms *vis-à-vis* his broader notion of 'religion' is beyond the scope of his dissertation, but it should be noted that Schleiermacher's model has been criticized for smuggling particularistic, theological commitments into ostensibly neutral philosophical terms, with the concept of 'God-consciousness' standing as an

If God-consciousness depends upon an individual's awareness of their position of absolute dependence in relation to the universe, then the concept of individuality assumes considerable importance. For Schleiermacher, 'individuality is … that determination through divine providence by which each individual is assigned his proper place in the total world order' (Redeker 22) and it is at this level where 'religion apprehends man … from the vantage point where he must be what he is, whether he likes it or not' (Schleiermacher, *OR* 23). All human beings are individuals, or, in other words, individuality is a universal human feature: 'universality is the basis of all individuality, which grows out of it only gradually' (Schleiermacher, *LPE* 33). Insofar as religion emerges as a feeling arising within an individual that thematizes their own absolute dependence upon the universe *qua* individual, the paradoxical implication is that the universality of religion consists precisely in its mobilization of unique, singular individualities in a mode that is universally particular, and universal across all cases in its very particularity. Schleiermacher explicitly addresses this argument to the audience of his *On Religion*:

> Precisely because it is abstractly universal, religion hits home in particularity. I have tried, as best I could, therefore, to show you what religion really is. Have you found anything therein unworthy of you, nay, of the highest human culture? Must you not rather long all the more for that universal union with the world which is only possible through feeling, the more you are separated and isolated by definite culture and individuality?
>
> (Schleiermacher, *OR* 88)

For Schleiermacher, particularity and universality are thus inextricably and dynamically linked, with human individuality representing at once the evidence, site, mechanism, and object of religion's recuperation of individual particularity into universal connection.

Schleiermacher's emphasis on the individual in his model of religion cashes out in

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exemplary case in point (Proudfoot 13-23). Suffice it to say that, as with all philosophies of universality, Schleiermacher's is inevitably marked and displaced by its own perspectival particularity.

two clear ways. First, since religion emerges from individual intuitive feeling, which is subjective, Schleiermacher holds that discourse about religion ideally should issue from a position of individual feeling and proceed by activating this feeling in others rather than attempting to force it upon them. As a writer, Schleiermacher accordingly favors texts that are framed as dialogues, letters, speeches, monologues, sermons, and so forth, modes that are well suited to 'express an individual's deeply felt "take" on things as communicated to somebody who already shared enough of that "take" to be able to understand it or at least to be open to it' (Pinkard 153). Apostrophically geared to the individual interlocutor, real or fictional, or presenting the narrative of a fictional dialogue, Schleiermacher's texts thus represent as much pedagogical artifacts as they do literary compositions. By the same token, performing such nuanced communication demands a robust interpretative toolkit and a cultivated ability to toggle between one's own perspective and those of others, particularly along the axis of emotion (Pinkard 159). Schleiermacher's hermeneutic work and writings on dialectics theorize and operationalize numerous procedures for performing such interpretations of texts and personal utterances respectively (Gadamer 184-192). The interplay of parts-and-whole in the ongoing disclosure of meaning through time that characterize Schleiermacher's famously circular psychology of understanding recognizably map onto the model of universal totality and individual particularity at work in his account of religion.[131]

Second, and more importantly for our purposes, the ever-practical Schleiermacher understands the cultivation of individuality as entailing specific and high-stakes obligations

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[131] 'To understand the speaker, we must attribute certain beliefs to him, and we attribute these beliefs to him in light of our understanding of what he is saying. Getting at the "unity" that is presupposed in such acts of understanding involves the same interplay of creativity and responsiveness that [Schleiermacher] earlier argued characterizes the religious "intuition" of the universe.' (Pinkard 157)

for social institutions and flesh-and-blood people. Indeed, while Schleiermacher claims religion is a universal human feature latent in each individual that naturally develops in a unique way for everyone, he acknowledges that its growth can be deleteriously stifled. 'A person is born with the religious capacity as with every other, and if only his sense is not forcibly suppressed, if only that communion between a person and the universe . . . is not blocked and barricaded, then religion would have to develop unerringly in each person according to his own individual manner' (Schleiermacher, *OR* 59). For Schleiermacher, the forcible suppression of religious sense is unequivocally abhorrent – it strikes at the very possibility of the individual's becoming authentically conscious of their place in the universe – and he thus postulates an imperative to safeguard the development of the individual's religious capacities as mandating specific responsibilities for the state, and, crucially, for parents. With these high religious and philosophical stakes established, it is to Schleiermacher's vision of the childbearing family as the incubator of individuality to which we now turn.

3.2 Schleiermacher's Model of Individuation: From the Parental to the Paternal

For Schleiermacher, the defining 'creative task' of parenthood involves fostering the development of children into self-consciousness individuals in the fullest philosophical sense. In the academic lecture on ethics entitled the "Introduction and Doctrine of Goods" (*LPE* 64–67), Schleiermacher paints the development of a child's individuality into an identity separate from their parents as recapitulating in biological microcosm the philosophical process by which individuality is constituted in relation to universality: 'The parents' identity with their children derives from the organs they originally have in common, which is where the schematism of natural formation begins; and the way in which the

children develop their own particularity, which is subordinated to this, is the original way in which the individual sphere rises up out of the universal one' (*LPE* 65). The particular identity of the child thus emerges in close relation to the biology and identities of its parents, which are the preconditions of its existence and its future 'formation.' At this level of abstraction, Schleiermacher conceives of families themselves as having a kind of durable particularity of identity that extends as a vitality across multiple generations: 'As long as that life force which can be regarded as identical through several generations of the same family is on the increase, the process of developing particularity within that family will also be on the increase' (*LPE* 66). The integral role of individuality in Schleiermacher's vision of the universal order (Redeker 21) thus extends to families the vital status of both perpetuating and instantiating individuality itself.

Schleiermacher frequently reprises the theme of family's place in the universal order when sermonizing in a pastoral mode. Here as in more philosophical contexts, he emphasizes the *futural* dimension of the family: 'Christian families, founded on the holy bond of marriage, are appointed, in the divine order of things, to be the nurseries of the future generation' (Schleiermacher, *SS* 146). At the kernel of the family is a divinely-vouchsafed orientation towards the future, realized in the production of children. Glossing Colossians iii.21 – Paul's injunction that parents not produce 'bitterness' in their children – Schleiermacher enjoins his parishioners to be gentle towards their children precisely because of the vital future the family represents, embodies, and enables:

> It is there that the young souls who are to be our successors in cultivating the vineyard of God are to be trained and developed; it is there the process is to begin of restraining and cleansing away the corruption inherent in them as the children of sinful men ; there that their earliest longings after fellowship with God are to be stirred, and that they are to be fitted, by training and exercise, for future usefulness in every good work.
>
> (Schleiermacher, *SS* 146)

Per Schleiermacher, children will be 'our successors' – today our charges, tomorrow our inheritors. The question of ensuring their future wellbeing is first and foremost a matter of parents' attending to their status as 'children of sinful men' – that is, in properly managing our own conduct as parents. By appealing to a parent's own critical self-reflection as to what circumstances might best occasion the child to properly flourish, Schleiermacher seems to grant a certain space for a child's individuation. Schleiermacher confirms this attitude in a more philosophical mode in *On Religion* when noting that, in the case of children in marriages of mixed faith, the best course of action is an open and accepting attitude to however the child themselves might realize their "inward destination" toward one faith or another (Schleiermacher, *OR* 262).

It is hard not to hear in Schleiermacher's invocation of parental tolerance *vis-à-vis* the religious individuation of their children clear echoes of his appeal from the Seminary at Barby for his own father's 'paternal affection' despite his conflicts with the Brethren (Schleiermacher, *Letters I* 58). Indeed, it is unequivocal that while Schleiermacher does praise the 'family' (*die Familie*) as the site of the child's individuation, and does speak of a 'parental' obligation (*die Elternverantwortung*), his primary vocabulary when it comes to discussing the process of individuation in regards to issues of authority and freedom is exemplarily paternal (*väterlich*) and involves operations of paternity (*die Vaterschaft*). Thus in the formal philosophical context of his 1812-1813 lectures on ethics, Schleiermacher makes the following argument:

> All free action, then, builds on what is given and so does not emerge as something arbitrary; but every time something builds on something else [this takes place] with full consciousness of will and, indeed, as something distinct from the universal. It is precisely in this way that consciousness of particularity is brought about. Hence also the tracing back of particularity to the paternal, and the positing of one's own individuality as the germ of others.
>
> (Schleiermacher, *LPE* 240)

In other words, insofar as particularity's arising from the universal appresents in a mode akin to conscious and willful acts of construction (when 'something builds on something else'), individuation manifests through the constructive, willful, and conscious activity of paternity, which posits the individual as a kind of seed or 'germ.' As a matter of freedom – which is precisely the value Schleiermacher invokes in writing his father from Barby – individuation is articulated in the paternal register, and must appeal to its authority. In a more practical key, when it comes to a letter of this same period to his sister on the topic of whether or not she should home-school or board her son, Schleiermacher invokes a model of individuation that that is thoroughly gendered and in which the proper exercise of paternal authority consists in authorizing an individuation that is thoroughly masculine:

> One invaluable advantage afforded by schools is, that there the sense of right is developed, and the boy acquires a feeling of self-dependence. It is these two qualities that make the man. And observe, that almost all men who have remained too long in the paternal home prove themselves in some way or other wanting in manliness they are either irresolute, or incapable, or deficient in public spirit.
>
> (Schleiermacher, *Letters II* 252)

The properly developed man, Schleiermacher seems to indicate, requires a father who in the name of manliness and as an act of his own capable individuality authorizes the proper development of his sons into autonomous individuals who presumably will repeat the operation in raising their own sons, their 'successors.'

The figure of the paternal in Schleiermacher's thought at once saturates his vision of real-world fatherhood with philosophical significance and shapes his vision of humanity's unique place in creation as itself authorized by a beneficent act of divine paternity. Indeed, much as the individual father oversees his son's individuation, and fosters the ideal environment such that his son may someday inherit the task of 'cultivating God's vineyard' (*SS* 146), so too for Schleiermacher has the Earth itself been prepared for humanity's

flourishing as a paternal dispensation by God. As he writes in *On Religion*:

> Furthermore, consider how you are impressed by the universal opposition of life and death. The sustained, conquering power, whereby every living thing nourishes itself, forcefully awakes the dead and enters it on a new course by drawing it into its own life. On every side we find provision prepared for all living not lying dead, but itself alive and everywhere being reproduced. With all this multitude of forms of life, and the enormous mass of material which each uses in turn, there is enough for all. Thus each completes his course and succumbs to an inward fate and not to outward want. What a feeling of endless fullness and superabundant riches! How are we impressed by a universal paternal care and a childlike confidence that without anxiety plays away sweet life in a full and abundant world! Consider the lilies of the field, they sow not, neither do they reap, yet your Heavenly Father feedeth them, wherefore be not anxious.
>
> (Schleiermacher, *OR* 67–68)

Schleiermacher here describes a divine logic structuring the entirety of existence such that the natural order itself is a boon that encourages 'childlike' trust, a sign of 'paternal care' as 'universal' as the 'universal operation of life and death' and which recuperates and overcomes it. Universality itself unfolds under the sign of the paternal.

Schleiermacher's emphasis on the futural dimension of childrearing extends to his account of paternity with particular intensity. In a sermon glossing the Blessings of the Sons of Jacob, wherein the Patriarch prophetically and ambiguously names the inheritances of his twelve sons (Genesis 49 i-xxvii), and then directs the circumstances of his own burial alongside his ancestors (Genesis 49 xxviii-xxxiii), Schleiermacher grants the position of paternity a privileged vantage upon the future children represent, and a perspective which offers consolation to a dying father that his life has been well-lived:

> You remember that impressive scene in the life of the patriarch Jacob, when though in a strange country, yet confident in the divine promise, he regarded the land as the possession of his descendants; and, seeing in his sons, now grown to manhood, all the generations that were to follow, pronounced on each of them, by the spirit of prophecy, a blessing specially adapted to the peculiar characteristics of him who received it. We could desire nothing better than to find ourselves in a similar position when we feel that the time of our work on earth is drawing to its close. A man could hardly have a more enriching and comforting feeling in leaving this earthly scene than that of being able to indicate to each of those whom he leaves behind what is to be his special place in the work of God's kingdom, and what his own personal share

> in its blessings. And if this would be a comfort to us at the time of our death, so, even now, nothing could be more cheering to us, when wearied with the business of life and out of heart with our work, than some such prospect of what our children may be able to accomplish and what will be their portion in life.
>
> (Schleiermacher, *SS* 159–160)

Having honored his own sons through specific approval of their unique individualities ('a blessing specially adapted to the peculiar characteristics of him who received it') Jacob as archetypal father surveys the promising futures of his sons *qua* individuals in the universal order ('to each of those whom he leaves behind what is to be his special place in the work of God's kingdom'). The prospect of the futures to be enjoyed by one's sons not only offers deathbed consolation to the father – who in a scene straight out of Ariès or Benjamin dies surrounded by his offspring – but also represents a day-to-day salve for living, healthy fathers 'when wearied with the business of life and out of heart with our work.'

In more philosophical contexts, and in his *Speeches on Religion* in particular, Schleiermacher endows the futural dimension of paternal generativity with a near-utopic, millenarian potential. In a remarkable passage, Schleiermacher surveys contemporary Prussian society, still early in the process of industrialization, and accuses it of a mechanizing impulse that upends proper family relationships and imperils the older generation's ability to properly cultivate their successors: 'At present, millions of men and women of all ranks sigh under a load of mechanical and unworthy labours…The older generation succumbs discouraged, and, with pardonable inertness, abandons the younger generation to accident in almost everything, except the necessity straightway to imitate and learn the same degradation' (*OR* 167). Against this, Schleiermacher hopes first for advances in technology that will help restore leisure to families and, second and more importantly, calls for a raising of consciousness such that 'at the end of our future culture we [may] expect a time when no other society preparatory for religion except the pious family life will be required' (*OR* 167).

In this harmonious utopia, the proper relationship of fathers to their sons is enshrined centrally and eternally:

> But when the happy time comes and everyone can freely exercise and use his sense, at the very first awaking of the higher powers, in sacred youth, under the care of paternal wisdom, all who are capable will participate in religion. All communication that is not mutual will then cease, and the father, well repaid, will lead the stout son, not only into a more joyful world and a lighter life, but straightway into the sacred assembly also of the worshippers of the Eternal, now increased in number and activity.
>
> (Schleiermacher, *OR* 167–168)

Offering what is in effect his own patriarchal prophecy, Schleiermacher thus conjures a vision whereby a transfigured interaction of 'sacred youth' and 'paternal wisdom,' between 'stout sons' and honored fathers yields a world of harmony that is at once domestic and communal, familial and public, and thoroughly paternal. From the position of paternity, what is to come can be securely surveyed, and the father can 'lead' his sons in a harmony that redounds to his 'well-repaid' credit. Through the production and education of children, and through the formation of sons in particular, paternity vouchsafes the future on a scale that is at once domestic and cosmic, personal and eternal.

3.4 *Schleiermacher's Socrates: Paternity and Pedagogy*

For Schleiermacher, the future of filial inheritance paternity vouchsafes on a cosmic level mirrors the trajectory of intellectual legacies and the transmission of knowledge, which also proceed along paternal lines. For Schleiermacher, not only are philosophers 'fathers' to their teachings, but the pedagogical model that sustains the cultivation and transmission of philosophical wisdom is a quintessentially paternal one. Nowhere is this clearer than in Schleiermacher's biographical work on Socrates.

It is important to underscore both the centrality of Socrates to Schleiermacher's understanding of philosophy and the canonical importance of his own engagements with

Plato. The influence of Schleiermacher's translation of and commentary on Plato is frequently underestimated in the Anglophone world. In truth, his translation 'not only still dominates sales of paperback editions of Plato in Germany but also remains an authoritative translation for scholars' (Lamm 206). Although he began work the project on initially as part of a joint effort with Schlegel in 1799, Schleiermacher was soon left to the massive undertaking entirely on his own, and labored on it for nearly a decade (Krapf 26–27, Lamm 210-213). Schleiermacher's work was motivated not just by a desire to produce an authoritative version of Plato – whose dialogues had not yet been gathered into a well-prepared German edition of collected works – but also by his enthusiasm for a novel thesis as to the proper ordering of the dialogues (Lam 223) and a fundamental interest in Plato as a philosopher-artist (Makkreel 259). Schleiermacher's work on Plato is characterized by an attention to the totality of his dialogues as forming a kind of aesthetic and conceptual unity in which an awareness of the 'inner systematics' of his thought is fundamental (Redeker 182). This methodology, 'developed out of the aesthetic and historical modes of awareness of the Romantics…held that we must be able to unfold the moments of the genesis of a work if we are to appreciate it as a coherent whole' (Makkreel 260) and led Schleiermacher to adopt a strongly biographical approach that he extends not just Plato, but by extension and much more extensively to Socrates himself.

For Schleiermacher, the 'genesis' of Plato's work is to be found in his personal encounter with Socrates, whose paternal legacy Plato seamlessly transmits in perpetuation of a pedagogical relationship that he in turn extends to his own and future generations of students. In transcribing the words which Socrates articulated to him orally, Plato at once performs an activity of filial inheritance while also himself 'fathering' texts which future generations will turn to for edification (Schleiermacher, *DP* 16). The fidelity of this filial

transmission is unimpeachable – in his commentary on the Apology, Schleiermacher rejects any charge of Plato's having confabulated Socrates' teachings or having fictionalized the dialogues by dismissing the idea of Plato's 'fathering upon Socrates a work of his own art' out of hand (Schleiermacher, *TAS* xv).

Given his role as an intellectual father to Plato, and as the arguable Father of Western Philosophy, the circumstances of Socrates' own parentage and life as a father are naturally of considerable interest to the biographically minded Schleiermacher. Significantly, Schleiermacher is drawn to an apocryphal tradition wherein Socrates' own future as a figurative father to philosophy is prefigured by a kind family romance in which Socrates is born to a lesser, crude father only to be rescued for a life in philosophy by the intervention of a 'higher,' more sophisticated one. In particular, Schleiermacher invokes the account of Porphyry: 'Socrates, we are told by him, was in his youth compelled by his father to follow the art of a sculptor against his inclination, was very disobedient, and often withdrew himself from the paternal roof' (Schleiermacher, *TaS* v-vi). In this telling, the young Socrates suffers under the stifling authority of a father blind to his son's individuality and potential until he is saved by one 'Crito, a wealthy Athenian, who… having discovered the eminent talents of Socrates, induced him to give up the profession of his father' (Schleiermacher, *TaS* v). This operation of paternal generosity by Crito, 'the first who raised Socrates into a higher sphere,' empowers Socrates to pursue a philosophical education and, according to the legend, comes full circle when Socrates himself takes Crito as his student, with the latter 'subsequently becoming an intimate friend and disciple of our philosopher' (Schleiermacher, *TaS* vi).

Schleiermacher likewise argues that Socrates' own activities as a philosopher are to be understood as essentially manifesting a kind of generalized paternal care for the Athenian state and for his students alike. To this end, Schleiermacher cites Socrates' own self-

description in the *Apology*:

> "But that I was sent," says he, "as a divine messenger to the state, you may see from what I will tell you. Assuredly it is not a human feature in me that I have neglected all my own interests, and for a great number of years, have not concerned myself about my domestic affairs, and am only anxious for your welfare, going to every one of you and admonishing you, like a father or elder brother, to follow the path of Virtue."
>
> (Schleiermacher, *TaS* xix–xx)

In this role, then, as in his relationship to Crito, Schleiermacher's Socrates represents a kind of embodiment of the principle of paternity in intellectual terms – his philosophical practice consists of a communication of wisdom across a multitude of relationships and forwards into time all under the general sign of paternal custodianship. And even though Socrates himself may suggest that his paternal priorities are idiosyncratic, even somewhat inhuman, Schleiermacher is quick to assert that they did not, in fact, come at the cost of Socrates' performance of his duties as a an father: 'But the exertions which Socrates devoted to the improvement of mankind, did not prevent him from fulfilling those duties which were incumbent on him as a citizen…Socrates deserved well of the state as a father and a husband' (Schleiermacher, *TAS* xlv). Even Socrates' own execution by the state does not prevent him from exercising a beneficently paternal valedictory regard for both it and for his own flesh-and-blood children (Schleiermacher, *TAS* cxiv-cxv). For Schleiermacher, then, Plato's own foundational role as a philosopher hinges upon his seamless transmission of the legacy and example of Socrates (*TAS* xv-xviii), and the Socratic example itself is one of the harmonious and total operation of paternity.

3.5 *Schleiermacher's* Christmas *Eve: The Child as Successor*

If Schleiermacher's work on Socrates presents an image of paternity in a mode that emphasizes intellectual legacies, and where the issue of the philosopher's status as literal father emerges only as somewhat of an afterthought, his *Christmas Eve, or a Dialogue on the*

Incarnation (1805) enshrines fatherhood within a vibrant family scene and addresses itself to the parental custodianship and education of children as an enterprise of deep philosophical significance.

In formal terms, *Christmas Eve* represents a distinct genre: Platonic pastiche as domestic vignette. The text is a dialogue, with little narrative development beyond participants coming and going, and the topics – the status of music, the proper way to educate children, and so forth – are recognizably familiar turf. Crucially, however, Schleiermacher transposes the scene from a boozy Athenian *symposion* to the gaily decorated living room of a bourgeois Prussian family at the height of the holiday season (Schleiermacher, *CE* 28–29, 34-38). Moreover, unlike one of Plato's all-male dialogues, Schleiermacher's narrative gives prominence to and women children alike, and to no character more than a young girl named Sophie. The pun on the Greek for 'wisdom' (*Sophia*) is immediately transparent to the reader: Sophie is the gravitational center of the piece, functioning directly in the role of Socrates. In fact, the dialogues' father character, Eduard, spends most of the text more or less expanding upon Sophie's oracular statements and basking in wonder produced by her innocent-yet-profound Socratic questions. In structuring his Platonic pastiche around this paternal attunement towards a child's wisdom, and by ending on an appeal to the cultivation of a 'childlike' consciousness, Schleiermacher's *Christmas Eve* invests the futural orientation of paternity with the full utopian hopefullness we have noted above.

As a realistic depiction of a young girl (she appears no more than ten) Sophie is clearly implausible. Angelic in temperament and radiantly beautiful, she arranges a Christmas diorama with the skill of a "second Corregio" (Schleiermacher, *CE* 33), masterfully leads the assembled adults in song (38-39), and spontaneously recites Novalis (60-61). She is praised at

once for a childlike being-in-the-moment and for a fully developed, entirely authentic religious consciousness, a piety of mystical innocence (Schleiermacher, *CE* 38-40); she is a "pure revelation of the divine in my sight" says her mother, Ernestine (36). Occupying such a position of wisdom, Sophie predictably sings the praises of paternity. Addressing the question of her religious education, her father Eduard relates a brief anecdote:

> It is true that the girl does hear a great deal straight from the Bible, including the notion that Joseph was only the foster father of Christ. What I want to tell you about happened a year ago or more. She had asked who his real father was, then. Her mother answered that he had no other father than God. To this she replied that she believed God was her Father too, but that she would not like on that account to be without me, and that maybe it already belonged to the sufferings of Christ that he had no real father for it is a very wonderful thing to have one. Whereupon she snuggled up to me and fondled my hair, as children do.
>
> (Schleiermacher, *CE* 43)

In her role as such an exemplary daughter, Sophie later leads the family in a contemplation of the Christ narrative through sharing one of her picture books (*CE* 44-45) and unveils the aforementioned diorama, which incredibly conveys the entire history of Christianity, including dark episodes like the Crusades and 'the martyrdom of Hus' while somehow recuperating them all into a coherent narrative of the progressive glorification of God emanating from the crèche (Schleiermacher, *CE* 32–33). Sophie is thus appears at once as a symbol of childlike wisdom, transmitter of a Christian cultural heritage, and a guarantor of the hope for the future inheritance of paternal wisdom by children. Schleiermacher confirms this interpretation by including in the dialogue's last pages the entry of a character who is very transparently a stand-in for himself: Josef, a young, unmarried theology student (Tice 9).

Josef arrives to the Christmas Eve celebration late, and is only present for the last quarter or so of the text. He nonetheless immediately perceives a profound connection between himself and Sophie and forswears a promised theological disquisition in favor of acclaiming the glories of the child and praising the effect of her wisdom upon him: 'Itself

unbounded by speech, the subject of Christmas claims, indeed creates in me a speechless joy, and I cannot but laugh exult like a child. Today all men are children to me, and are all the dearer on that account' (Schleiermacher, *CE* 85). Sophie's sublime innocence has made Josef 'just like a child again' himself, and resolved any and all of his existential doubts and emotional pains: 'The long, deep, irrepressible pain in my life is soothed as never before. I feel at home, as if born anew into the better world, in which pain and grieving have no meaning and no room any more' (Schleiermacher, *CE* 86). What Sophie represents is for Josef (and for Schleiermacher) an immediate salve and repository of profound hope.

As with so many of his texts, *Christmas Eve* exists closely entangled with Schleiermacher's own personal relationships at the time of its composition. We know Schleiermacher saw himself in the Josef character because he effectively tells us as much in a letter to his sister, in which he also notably indicates that his primary inspiration for the text was news of her giving birth to daughter and a letter from Henriette von Willich announcing her own pregnancy (Tice 10–11). As a text glorifying family in general and exemplifying an orientation towards children in particular, it is thus hard not to see Schleiermacher's *Christmas Eve* in a deeply personal light, as a kind of idealized fantasy of family very much bound up in his own family aspirations and the circumstances of his relations at the time. At which point it is also significant to note that, nestled briefly within *Christmas Eve* is the brief spectre of the death of a child, deferred, quickly, through the invocation of a miracle.

A bit more than midway through their evening, and with Sophie safely out of the room, the adults tell a series of Christmas-themed stories. Ernestine, Sophie's mother, relate the tale of a women named Charlotte whose son took ill around Christmastide. Recounts Ernestine:

> 'For several weeks Charlotte had had to bear the suffering of an inexplicable and thus all the more distressing illness of her little boy, her youngest and most favored

> child. For a long time the doctor could as little give as take away hope of recovery; but pain and discomfort continued to rob the little cherub of his strength as time passed, until there was nothing left but to await his death.'
>
> (Schleiermacher, *CE* 64-65)

Having put aside preparations for Christmas because of her son's illness, Charlotte now finally steels herself to his fate, prays deeply at his bedside, and then arises, stating:

> "I have given back the little angel to the Heaven from whence he came, I now look calmly for his dissolution. I am calm and assured; nay, I can even wish to see him soon depart, in order that the signs of pain and of destruction may not dim the angelic form which has impressed itself so deeply and for ever upon my soul."
>
> (Schleiermacher, *CE* 66-67)

Charlotte then departs from her son's bedsides and selflessly gathers her remaining children to give them their Christmas gifts. In a sudden reversal of fate, however, the boy is revived and fully recovers, leading the mother to praise God and exult that since her son had previously been "consecrated" to God (that is, through her preemptively making peace with his death) so now she is 'doubly happy' to be mother to a 'living angel' (Schleiermacher, *CE* 69). Ernestine's tale completed, the family marvels unquestioningly at the story of the son's serendipitously resolved brush with death and his mother's beatifically composed response – and then Sophie returns to invite everyone to sing Christmas carols. As with Schleiermacher's Socrates, who can be an ideal father to the state and to his family at the same time, so too can the fictional family in *Christmas Even* encounter the possibility of a child's death as a salutary *exemplum*, safely ensconced first into an anecdote and then narratively defused by a miracle, without missing a beat. There are no trade-offs here: philosopher-fathers will leave legacies, students, and families behind, and sick children will heal, mature and someday have children of their own. Exulting with a 'childlike heart,' Josef, Schleiermacher's analogue in *Christmas Eve*, ends the piece on a joyful note, calling the family to gaze upon Sophie's diorama and then to celebrate the dawning Christmas Day: "Come,

then, and above all bring the child if she is not yet asleep, and let me see your glories, and let us be glad and sing something religious and joyful!" (Schleiermacher, *CE* 87).

Schleiermacher's own fate would prove far less happy.

4 Fatherhood in Crisis: Nathanael's Death

When Schleiermacher married he was forty years old; when Jette gave birth to Nathanael, he was 51. For years before, Schleiermacher had hoped to have a son of his own, but by the time Nathanael was born he had effectively given up hope. As he wrote Charlotte von Kathen the day after his son's birth on February 14th 1820:

> This time I had not felt so strong a wish that it might be a boy, as on former occasions. I was too much penetrated by the feeling that we do not know what we wish for, more especially in the present times. But among the children there was such a constant talk about the little brother that was expected, that I felt quite anxious as to how we should reconcile them to the fact, should the child be a girl. But when it proved to be a boy, you may conceive with what joy and thankfulness I received him, and that my first prayer to God was, to be inspired with wisdom and power from above to educate the child to His glory.
>
> (Schleiermacher, *Letters II* 285)

Unsurprisingly given Schleiermacher's model of paternity as involving overseeing a process of education and individuation unto the glory of God, his 'first prayer' upon Nathanael's birth is for 'wisdom' to fulfill this very task. Indeed, his language in writing to von Kathen directly parallels his vision in *On Religion* of a future order wherein 'stout sons [led] under the care of paternal wisdom,' will participate in harmonious celebration of the eternal.

As a father, Schleiermacher appears to have dotted on Nathanael. 'Bold and full of life, [Nathanael] was the favorite of everyone, the joy of the whole family and most especially of his father' (Willich 105, Blackwell 66). Schleiermacher appears to have spent hours observing his son, and his letters gush with praise at the child's ingenuity, marveling at

length, for example, at his delighted fascination with the operations of a watermill or at his high spirits at play with his fellows (*Letters II* 295). When Nathanael begins to learn to Latin – starting lessons at the age of six! – Schleiermacher's pride is palpable: 'Nathanael is to have an hour's instruction from a student every day. It is a new epoch in the little fellow's life, and he is greatly excited. Sometimes he wants to get out of bed at six o'clock already, because "he has so much to do"!' (Schleiermacher, *Letters II* 303). Schleiermacher moved his son's desk into his own room and the two worked alongside each other, Schleiermacher on his revision of *The Christian Faith*, and Nathanael on his homework.

In a sermon years earlier on the bonds between parents and children, Schleiermacher had observed that 'the whole being of the child is, in its very origin and essence, related to the parents; a thousand resemblances declare this to us in the most striking way; and it would seem inevitable that every new stage of the child's development must result in increasing love and unity of feeling' (Schleiermacher, *SS* 151). We can only wonder whether as he worked with Nathanael studying besides him Schleiermacher saw such resemblances, his own essence reflected and affirmed alongside him, or if each stage of his son's development inspired him ever-increasing 'love and unity of feeling.' But we do know that two weeks after Nathanael died Schleiermacher wrote about the 'heavy calamity' that had befallen him as follows: 'Since the boy had begun to attend the gymnasium, I looked upon it as my special vocation to take him under my more particular guidance…ultimately I had arranged it so that he studied in my room, and thus I may say there was no hour in the day in which I did not think of the boy, and occupy myself with him, and now in consequence I miss him every hour' (Schleiermacher, *Letters II* 211–212). More succinctly, Schleiermacher told a family friend that losing Nathanael 'drove the nails into his coffin' (Schleiermacher, *SS* 35).

The exact cause of Nathan's death is unclear. Redeker believes the fatal illness to

have been diphtheria (211) while Blackwell argues that it was scarlet fever (65-66). In a modern clinical setting, the two are not easily confused. 'Scarlet fever is a complication of Group A strep (the same bacteria that causes strep throat) and progresses beyond a simple sore throat to diffuse, red, sandpapery rash over the skin,' writers Tom Miller, MD.[132] 'Diphtheria is also a bacterial infection of the throat, although it classically tends to involve much more swelling of the neck as well as difficulty swallowing and breathing.' However, the rapid course of Nathan's illness – he developed a sudden fever and died within days – allows for the underlying possibility of either diphtheria or scarlet fever while suggesting bacterial meningitis as the immediate cause of death. An infection of supportive tissues around the brain and spinal cord, meningitis can results from bacterial contamination of the bloodstream and could easily have been produced by either illness.

Whatever its ultimate cause, we know that the course of young Nathan's illness, however brief, would have been agonizing. Reflecting on *The Doctor* (1891), a piece by British painter Sir Luke Fildes (1843-1927), Yale historian of medicine Sherwin Nuland contemplates the portrait of an exhausted doctor stooped besides a lifeless child in light of Fildes' own loss of a young son in circumstances very similar to those in which Schleiermacher lost Nathan:

> We don't know what malady killed Phillip Fildes, but it could not have bestowed a peaceful ending on his young life. If it was diphtheria, he virtually choked to death; if scarlet fever, he probably had delirium and wild swings of high fever; if meningitis, he may have had convulsions and uncontrollable headaches. Perhaps the child in *The Doctor* has gone through such agonies and is now in the final peace of terminal coma - but whatever came in the hours prior to her "beautiful" passing must surely have been unendurable to the little girl and her parents. We rarely go gentle into that good night.
>
> (Nuland 9)

Nathanael appears to have had a few brief moments of lucidity – when asked by his mother

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[132] Correspondence, April 2013. The hypothesis of death by meningitis is Dr. Miller's.

whether 'he loved his savior rightly' he replied in the affirmative (Schleiermacher, *SNG* 73) – but the course of his illness was swift and aggressive. Three days after Nathanael first took ill, Schleiermacher and his family faced the task of burying him.

4.1 *The Sermon*

Nathanael's was buried on November 1st 1829, with Schleiermacher officiating the ceremony in the Dreifaltigkeitskirche cemetery on Bergmannstrasse in the Berlin neighborhood of Kreuzberg. Schleiermacher appears to have struggled to maintain his composure through the proceedings. His stepson Ehrenfried von Willich recalls Schleiermacher's demeanor as follows: 'In his address at Nathanael's grave, where I stood beside him, it cost him an almost superhuman effort to bring his voice — stifled by tears and by his heart's deepest grief — to speak to himself the comfort which his God did not allow to fail him' (Tice 66, Willich 105). Nonetheless, Schleiermacher was able to complete the ceremony.

The sermon itself is a remarkable document. Schleiermacher's language is plainspoken, and any technical language is kept to the barest of minimums.[133] In classic fashion, Schleiermacher begins by addressing his audience directly:

> My dear friends, come here to grieve with this stooped father at the grave of his beloved child, I know you are not come with the intention of seeing a reed shaken by the wind. But what you find is in truth only an old stalk, which yet does not break even from this gust of wind that has suddenly struck him from on high, out of the blue.
>
> (Schleiermacher, *SNG* 72-73)

[133] Translator Albert Blackwell argues for an interpretation of the sermon through the lens of a sophisticated engagement with Hume and Kant, and sees its overall significance as marking a renewed commitment by Schleiermacher to a mélange of neo-Platonism with Enlightenment thought over and against the claims of his Pietistic upbringing (Blackwell 67-68). This reading, which hinges upon a discussion of Schleiermacher's interpretation of the Gospel of John, is geared towards an understanding of Schleiermacher first and foremost as a systematic theologian, and thus does not concern us directly in our investigation into Schleiermacher the father more broadly conceived.

Apostrophizing his audience – friends, relatives, students, parishioners – Schleiermacher acknowledges the spectacle he no doubt presents to them by invoking Matthew 11:7, Jesus' question to the crowds seeking John the Baptist ('What went you out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?'). What his audience has found, Schleiermacher concedes, is indeed an 'old stalk,' valiantly clinging on despite the odds, despite 'this gust of wind that has suddenly struck him from on high.' Schleiermacher proceeds to describe the calamity that has befallen him 'out of the blue,' relating it to the full scope of his life:

> Thus it is! For a happy household, cared for and spared by Heaven for twenty years, I have God to thank; for a much longer pursuit of my vocation, accompanied by undeserved blessings; for a great abundance of joys and sorrows, which, in my calling and as a sympathetic friend, I have lived through with others. Many a heavy cloud has passed over my life; yet what has come from without, faith has surmounted, and what from within, love has recompensed. But now, this one blow, the first of its kind, has shaken my life to its roots.
>
> (Schleiermacher, *SNG* 73)

Whereas previously Schleiermacher's capacity for faith and love have allowed him to overcome challenges both internal and external, Nathanael's loss has cut to his very core, 'shaken my life to its roots.'

Contextualizing this blow, Schleiermacher reiterates in précis his own teachings on the role of family and the value of children, making clear how much his sense of crisis – 'my life [shaken] to its roots' – implicates him at once as a father and as a philosopher. Glossing the origins of his son's name in the Hebrew for 'God has given,' Schleiermacher deploys familiar notions of parental custodianship, joyful family life, and religious responsibility. 'Ah, children are not only dear pledges entrusted to us from God, for whom we must give account; not only inexhaustible subjects of concern and duty, of love and prayer: they are also an immediate blessing upon the house; they give easily as much as they receive; they

freshen life and gladden the heart' (*SNG* 73). Schleiermacher further reveals that his own hopes as a father closely aligned with his vision of ideal paternal attunement as geared to the unique individuality of the child: 'When God gave him to me,' he says, 'My first prayer was that fatherly love would never mislead me to expect more of the boy than was right; and I believe the Lord has granted me this' (*SNG* 73). Indeed, for all his pride in Nathan, Schleiermacher seems particularly glad to have avoided the sins of overweening expectations, and admits humbly that 'I know very well that there are children far more outstanding in gifts of mind, in eager alertness, and upon whom far greater expectations concerning what they will accomplish in the world could be raised, and I would rejoice should there be many of them' (*SNG* 73). Yet Schleiermacher insists on one particular trait as indeed superlatively distinguishing Nathanael – an honest generosity of spirit:

> Honest and frank as our boy was, he looked everyone in the eye full of trust, doing only good to all, and we have never found anything false in him… A selfish nature was also something far from him, and he bore love and goodwill for all humanity. So he lived among us as the joy of the whole house. And when the time was come that it seemed necessary to transplant him to a larger community of young people and a wider circle of education, there too he began to acclimate himself and to thrive, and even the deserved and well-meant reprimands of his teachers fell on good soil.
>
> (Schleiermacher, *SNG* 73)

For Schleiermacher, who deeply valued communal ties and a capacity for personal growth and responsiveness to education, his enthusiastic praise of Nathanael in these domains seems all the more significant by virtue of his implicit appeal to the perspectives of Nathan's teachers and friends, many of whom were in attendance at the service and knew his son well.

Given Nathanael's capacity to grow and learn, Schleiermacher appears to have nursed high hopes for shepherding his future education and for the man he would become. We have seen that, when his son was first born, Schleiermacher confessed that 'my first prayer to God was, to be inspired with wisdom and power from above to educate the child

to His glory' (Schleiermacher, *Letters II* 285). Now, burying Nathanael less than a decade later, Schleiermacher reveals that he had continued to worry over his own ability to paternally educate his son, but that even in the worst-case scenario he had only contemplated his own death and Nathanael's surviving him, not the other way around.

> If I often said to myself though in a sense wholly other than that which has now come to pass-that it would not be granted me to complete his upbringing, I was none the less of good courage. I regarded it as one more beautiful blessing of my calling that, in days to come, he would never fail to find faithful fatherly advice and strong support on my account, though I hoped he would not fail to find it on his own account as well.
>
> (Schleiermacher, *SNG* 73)

'That it would not be granted me to complete his upbringing': Schleiermacher had long worried that the process of his son's education and individuation of his son might be interrupted, and had taken advantage of what opportunities for instruction he had been given and the entertained prospect that his son might internalize his counsel going forward ('faithful fatherly advice … on his own account as well'). At the very least, he seems to be saying, Nathanael would have had the benefit of Schleiermacher as a kind of internalized paternal voice, and thus his formation could have continued despite the physical death of his father. But until the event itself the possibility of his son's death being what would definitely frustrate that formation has been unthinkable for Schleiermacher, and only now can barely be thought. Schleiermacher must now contemplate a future robbed of the meaning which educating his son gave him: 'This charge, important above all others for the remainder of my life, to which my heart clung full of love, is now ineradicably stricken through; the friendly, refreshing picture of life is suddenly destroyed; and all the hopes which rested upon him lie here and shall be buried with this coffin! What should I say?' (*SNG* 74).

'What should I say?' This rhetorical question rings on multiple levels and meets answer on none. In one sense, Schleiermacher seems to be addressing his question at once

to his life's work, to the many things he has had to 'say' over the years about parenting, about fathers, and about the future as a site of hope. Whereas when he contemplated the prospect of marriage years earlier Schleiermacher saw the situation as one in which his stated doctrines were now finally and after much yearning being put to test by life, now at Nathanael's grave he finds himself in a position of sudden and unanticipated catastrophe which he had never previously contemplated and about which he is a loss for words. On another level, Schleiermacher's question – 'What should I say?' – like his opening bears upon the spectacle he presents to his audience. Having in his opening raised the question of what they may have come to see, Schleiermacher now asks about their expectations of what is they may have come to hear.

Schleiermacher admits that in fact members of his audience have already offered him certain consolations, and admits that it is possible that some others might wish to hear those consolations reiterated from his own position. One of these consolations is the well-meaning suggestion that his dead son has been spared the temptations of adult life, and thus from opportunities for sin. Schleiermacher paraphrases this position and admits that it has understandable traction, for some:

> There is one consolation, with which many faithful Christians soothe themselves in such a case, which already many beloved, friendly voices here have spoken to me in these days, and which is not to be simply dismissed, for it grows out of a correct assessment of human weakness. Namely, it is the consolation that children who are taken away young are in fact delivered from all of the dangers and temptations of this life and are early rescued into the sure Haven. And this boy would certainly not have been spared these dangers.
>
> (Schleiermacher, *SNG* 74)

But this idea holds little consolation for Schleiermacher. As we have seen, for Schleiermacher each person represents a distinct and unique particularity of individuality that exists in integral relationship with the coherence of the universe, and young people in

particular are marked by a destiny of individuation and flourishing that is bound up in the the proper order of the universe itself. Recuperating the premature departure of his son from that order by invoking his having avoided further worldly temptation not only flies in the face of Schleiermacher's general optimism and faith in his own paternal pedagogy, but offers little response to Schleiermacher's hopes for his son's unique capacities for individuation and participation in the universe, and ignores the importance of his role as generational successor for Schleiermacher, his status as an inheritor of his father's vision of his future. As Schleiermacher puts it:

> But, in fact, this consolation does not want to take with me, I being the way I am. Regarding this world as I always do, as a world which is glorified through the life of the Redeemer and hallowed through the efficacy of his Spirit to an unending development of all that is good and Godly; wishing, as I always have, to be nothing but a servant of this divine Word in a joyful spirit and sense: why then should I not have believed that the blessings of the Christian community would be confirmed in my child as well, and that through Christian upbringing, an imperishable seed would have been planted in him? Why should I not have hoped in the merciful preservation of God for him also, even if he stumbled? Why should I not have trusted securely that nothing would be able to tear him out of the hand of the Lord and Savior to whom he was dedicated and whom he had already begun to love with his childlike heart?
>
> (Schleiermacher, *SNG* 74)

Nathanael's 'childlike heart' is the same blissful attunement and religious openness so celebrated in *Christmas Eve*, which animates both Sophie and, contagiously, Josef, Schleiermacher's fictional stand-in. Recall that much as children themselves represent generational hope for Schleiermacher, so too does the childlike heart represent a site of hope insofar as it orients the individual towards a process of religious growth. And this is ultimately why Schleiermacher must reject the consolation of Nathan's being spared potential future sin: as much as Schleiermacher's paternal love and counsel would have ideally assisted Nathanael in his growth, Nathanael's childlike heart had inarguably set him on the course for a future that was vouchsafed by God's far more resourceful and ever-

dependable divine paternal love:

> And this love, even if it was not fully developed, even if it had undergone fluctuations in him: why should I not indeed have believed that it would never be extinguished for him, that it someday would have possessed him wholly? And as I would have had the courage to live through all this with him-to admonish him, to comfort, to lead therefore this way of thinking is not as consoling to me as it is to many others.
>
> (Schleiermacher, *SNG* 74)

Schleiermacher bore faith in the future vouchsafed for his son by virtue of his own parental efforts and their enabling relation to the paternal love of the divine, and now with that future gone he confronts the former as moot and the meaning of the latter in profound question.

The crisis of meaning Schleiermacher here invokes – a crisis of paternity in the full range of the term – strikes at another configuration of paternal inheritance and futurity that has been previously dear to Schleiermacher: the idea of a continuous, coherent, and progressive transmission and inheritance of memory and knowledge. As with his earlier reckoning with the implications of Nathanael's death, Schleiermacher confronts this other dimension of the crisis at hand through addressing yet another well-intentioned but misguided 'consolation':

> Still others who grieve generate their consolation in another way, out of an abundance of attractive images in which they represent the everlasting community of those who have gone on before and those who as yet remain behind; and the more these images fill the soul, the more all the pains connected with death are stilled. But for the man who is too greatly accustomed to the rigors and cutting edges of thinking, these images leave behind a thousand unanswered questions and thereby lose much, much of their consoling power.
>
> (Schleiermacher, *SNG* 74)

'The everlasting community of those who have gone on before and those who as yet remain behind.' Schleiermacher has lived a life of sustained investment in the 'living' spirit of Plato's works, in explicating the textual traditions of the prophets, and in preaching the edifying examples of the patriarchs. Yet now, contemplating the 'the pains connected with death,' the

erudition and long acclimation to the 'rigors and cutting edges of thinking' that have previously characterized Schleiermacher's devotions to these traditions now prevent him from taking solace in 'everlasting communities' of transmitted experience and memory.

'What should I say?' Schleiermacher has made clear that the ideal addressee of his paternal speech is now forever gone, and that speaking of the grand community of those gone by and of their legacy to their successors would be nothing more than offering 'attractive images.' What Schleiermacher does venture to say, then, is what he already has – that he his grateful to have had a life with his son while he could – and to address this gratitude to a paternal God whose legacy to his human children inspires a 'childlike' attitude that is now not one of future-directed hope but of acceptance and past-directed memory.

> Thus I stand here, then, with my comfort and my hope alone in the Word of Scripture, modest and yet so rich, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but when it shall appear, we shall see Him as He is,"[134] and in the powerful prayer of the Lord, "Father, I would that where I am, they also may be whom Thou hast given me."[135] Supported by these strong beliefs, then, and borne along by a childlike submission, I say from my heart, the Lord has given him: the name of the Lord be praised"[136] that He gave him to me; that He granted to this child a life, which, even though short, was yet glad and bright and warmed by the loving breath of his Grace; that He has so truly watched over and guided him that now with his cherished remembrance nothing bitter is mixed. On the contrary, we must acknowledge that we have been richly blessed through this beloved child. The Lord has taken him: His name be praised, that although He has taken him, yet He has left us, and that this child remains with us here also in inextinguishable memories, a dear and imperishable individual.
>
> (Schleiermacher, *SNG* 74-75)

Schleiermacher here layers a series of scriptural allusions – all hitting notes of submission to divine will – with what also appears to be an extension of the activities of divine providence to the operations of memory that will preserve some trace of Nathanael *qua* individual, a term which as we have seen is a philosophically resonant one for Schleiermacher. Building to

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[134] 1 John 3:2
[135] John 17:24
[136] Job 1:21. This is Job's exclamation in grief after learning of the death of his children.

almost incantatory mélange of scripture and philosophy, Schleiermacher seems to be nearing the end of his sermon. But at the last moment he pulls back, dispenses with the citations, and speaks with utter plainness, not to himself and to the question of 'What should I say?' but directly and lovingly to specific people around him.

> Ah, I cannot part from the remains of this dear little form, ordained for decay, without now, after I have praised the Lord, expressing the most moving thanks of my heart: before all, to the dear half of my life through whom God gave me the gift of this child, for all the motherly love and trust which she bestowed on him from his first breath to his last, expired in her faithful arms; and to all my beloved older children, for the love with which they were devoted to this youngest and which made it easier for him to go his way, bright and happy, in the straight path of order and obedience; and to all the beloved friends who have rejoiced in him with us, and with us have cared for him; but especially to you, dear teachers, who made it your pleasure to take an active part in the development of his soul: and to you, dear playmates and schoolmates, who were devoted to him in childlike friendship, to whom he was indebted for so many of his happier hours, and who also mourn for him, since you would have liked to go forward with him still farther on the common way.
>
> (Schleiermacher, *SNG* 75)

'Since you would have liked to go forward with him still farther on the common way.' With this gesture, Schleiermacher extends to Nathanael's teachers, his playmates, and his siblings participation in hopes for his now-impossible future, broadening them well beyond the scope of the narrowly paternal. But all the more crucially Schleiermacher addresses himself to his wife, Nathanael's mother. Whereas years earlier, before their marriage, he had written her celebrating the birth of one of her children by effusively contemplating the image of her cradling a child in her arms, and expressing a kind vicarious 'paternal joy' that was also an empathic connection with her own happiness (Schleiermacher, *Letters II* 21), now Schleiermacher contemplates her cradling their own child in his deathbed, and connects to her not through the mediation of an ersatz, metaphorical paternity, but through a shared experience of loss which he participates in directly. From this position of chastened paternity and profound loss, Schleiermacher issues to his audience the following injunction:

> Therefore let us all truly love one another as persons who could soon-alas, how soon!-be snatched away. I say this to you children; and you may believe me that this advice, if you follow it, will tarnish no innocent joys for you; rather it will surely protect you from many errors, even though they may be small. I say this to you parents; for even if you do not share my experience, you will enjoy even more unspoiled the fruits of this word.
>
> (Schleiermacher, *SNG* 75)

'Even if you do not share my experience.' Whereas earlier paternity represented for Schleiermacher a privileged perspective, functioning both as a mediating principle for his understanding the experiences *of* others and as an orientation towards a future legacy, now Schleiermacher presents it as an exemplary position *to* others and as indexing a singular past loss. The exemplary unshareability of Schleiermacher's unique experience of loss transforms his notion of paternity entirely: rather than functioning as the sign of a divinely vouchsafed universal order of flourishing succession and transmitted legacies, paternity now indexes a profound vulnerability. And it is this very vulnerability which Schleiermacher now broadcasts and urges his audience to honor in the name of fatherly love itself: 'Now, thou God who art love, let me not only resign myself to thy omnipotence, not only submit to thy impenetrable wisdom, but also know thy fatherly love! Make even this grievous trial a new blessing for me in my vocation! For me and all of mine let this communal pain become wherever possible a new bond of still more intimate love, and let it issue in a new apprehension of thy Spirit in all my household!' (75).

4.2 *Schleiermacher Dies*

Schleiermacher lived for five more years after Nathanael's death. Acknowledging that the loss was one from which Schleiermacher 'never healed,' his biographer W. Selbie sums up Schleiermacher's last years succinctly: 'He bore his pain manfully and continued writing and teaching, conscious himself that it was only for a little time...in 1834 he died full of years

and honors' (Selbie 14). After Nathan's death, Schleiermacher himself appears to have been deflated, even brokenhearted, writing to a friend that 'I [have] begun to attend to all my duties as previously, and life goes on in its old grooves, but more slowly and more heavily' (Schleiermacher, *Letters II* 212). Schleiermacher continued teaching and preaching as always until the first week of February, 1834, when he showed up with a cough for church services and then a few days later appeared 'hoarse and with a terrible cold' at an academic meeting (Redeker 212). His colleagues were concerned for his welfare and insisted he return home; he did, went to bed, and never left – pneumonia set in and on the 14th of February he died.

As a man who years earlier had preached on the patriarch Jacob's enviable fate of having been able to bid farewell to his own children on his deathbed (*SS* 159–160), Schleiermacher appears to have gotten his wish. Redeker describes the scene:

> As the pneumonia developed Schleiermacher recognized the seriousness of the hour and expected his death. He went into his final hour with the courage and determination of faithful acceptance and firm hope. For him death was the fulfillment of life because communion with Christ and its completion was the fulfillment of his own life. His wife described the hour of his death: he had his wife read some spiritual songs by the friend of his youth, Albertini, and as he felt his end coming he called his household to him to celebrate the Lord's Supper together. He gave the bread and wine to his wife, her friend Mrs. Fischer, his stepson Lommatzsch, using the biblical words of institution from 1 Corinthians 11 and then added "To these words of Scripture I hold fast. They are the foundation of my faith." After the blessing he again looked steadily at each one there and affirmed: "In this love and communion we will remain one." With this, death overtook him. His children were brought in, and the Holy Communion was brought to a close by distributing the already consecrated elements to the children kneeling at the bedside of the dead man.
>
> (Redeker 212)

Several thousand people attended his funeral, and the Prussian King and Crown Prince marched with his cortege (Crouter 145). The procession ended in Kreuzberg, where Schleiermacher was buried beside Nathanael.

Conclusion: Universalities in Crisis

1. A Paradoxical Universal

By this point, it should be apparent that considering the status of parental mourning for deceased children as a human universal reveals several paradoxes. On the one hand, as we addressed in Chapter One, multiple disciplinary investigations into parental mourning as a human universal appear inevitably underwritten by a desire to fulfill implicit presuppositions about human nature: even nominally descriptive scientific and sociological efforts regularly drift into normative claimsmaking. As Chapter One also demonstrated, this desire frequently dovetails with specific political concerns.[137] Above and beyond whether the debate is narrowly over Philippe Ariès's Parental Indifference Hypothesis, one thing is clear: when it comes to the question of parental bereavement, the universal is never neutral – in their articulation, claims of its universality are paradoxically often very singular indeed.

By the same token, the literary survey undertaken in Chapter Two revealed an additionally paradoxical dimension to considering the problem of parental mourning as a human universal. Surveying a broad array of traditions and texts, it became clear that even a steadfastly skeptical position about the pitfalls of conceptual translation between cultures

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[137] As a case in point, consider the unrest produced by the killing of US teenager Michael Brown in August of 2014, whose death sparked a grassroots nationwide campaign of activism against an epidemic of extrajudicial killings of black youth by police officers. At several junctures, the image of Brown's mourning parents – who joined a long litany of similarly bereaved black families – proved a tipping point in motivating public outrage and protest. It also specifically prompted *The New York Times* columnist Charles Blow to exhort in an August 24th column entitled *A Funeral in Ferguson* that "Nobody should know what it feels like to bury a child as the whole world watches. But that is what Michael Brown's parents must do." In an entirely righteous and understandable way, the axis on which this invocation of Brown's parents' bereavement operates is that of an appeal to human universals above and beyond racial marginalization – an idea underscoring the slogan championed by that movement, namely, that #BlackLivesMatter.

and about the limitations of the written word to transcribe affects nonetheless has to acknowledge the marked recurrence of certain features appearing in multiple traditions across time and place. These features are not limited to tropes like appeals to the natural world or to the artifacts of material culture, but also include expressions of similar-sounding emotional experiences and recurrent, sophisticated interrogations of high-level concepts like the idea of the future or the meaning of life. Although when it comes to literary texts our ability to stipulate the universality of parental mourning as a human universal is necessarily constrained by the limitations of our dataset – not just in terms of this specific project, but in terms of any endeavor restricted to written media in the first place – a brief survey nonetheless suggests certain features which appear *as-if* universal. However, even this observation is not free from paradox, since among the most frequently encountered features is an insistence that the experience of losing a child escapes description or communication. In other words, despite the empirical fact that the death of children is something which – one way or another – people throughout history seem frequently compelled to narrate or otherwise to communicate about in the first place, they also seem compelled to do so while consistently stressing that their experience is incommunicable. A comparative survey of literature on parental mourning with an eye towards assembling a working list of quasi-universals thus paradoxically suggests a near-universal insistence that the phenomenon in question is always radically singular.

Turning from a broad survey to a specific case study, as we did in Chapter 3, we observed how the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher is preoccupied with questions of universality, not just in his account of human psychology and cultural universals, but as a key part of his model for how human communication can occur and interpretation can proceed (to say nothing of his theological investments in the notion). And yet tracking the

relationship between these thoughts and his personal history of both parenting and bereavement highlights how much those former theoretical concerns exist in critical tension with the latter. Specifically, we saw how thoroughly Schleiermacher's model of universality depends on certain specific assumptions about the transmissibility of knowledge and communicability of experience as a matter of paternal inheritance, assumptions which the death of his son Nathanael throw into very real crisis. This crisis is at once personal but also very clearly entails a reconfiguration of Schleiermacher's philosophical understanding of the limitations of communication and universality as concepts.

It is by elaborating on this idea of a *crisis* that I want to conclude. In its etymological origins, the word "crisis" comes from a Greek word for the turning point in the course of a disease, the *krisis* (κρίσις); this word also frequently is used to refer to the outcome of a court case or an athletic test of strength (Lidell and Scott 997). The noun itself derives from a verb, *krinein* (κρίνειν), which can mean to judge or to decide, specifically through acts of separation, distinction, and discrimination (a word that also derives from the same root). The ultimate source in Indo-European also yields numerous cognates in multiple languages for the verb "to sieve" – as in, to sift wheat from chaff by forcing it through a mesh lattice or other process of separation (Beekes 780-781).

On a poetic level, all of these valences seem to be at play in representations of parental bereavement – there is a trial, a test, and then a (fatal) outcome, a winnowing. But to speak of a "crisis" also can have explicitly philosophical overtones. This sense of "crisis" specifically leans on the notion of severance at play in the word to trope on the idea of an *epistemological* break. In this sense, a crisis is a disruption in the transmission of knowledge produced by a world-historical event or epochal scientific discovery so incomprehensible in terms of all knowledge generated before it such that the human capacity for certainty about

anything going forward is suddenly and dramatically thrown into question. This sense of crisis is perhaps most eloquently articulated by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) in his *Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1936).[138] For Husserl, the "Crisis" at hand is symptomatic not just of recent developments in physics, which have upended his contemporaries' understandings of the laws of the universe, but of disruptions threatening the core of European "Reason" itself. A severance has occurred, separating what Husserl understands as the "sciences" (experimental or theoretical scientific disciplines) from philosophy as a rigorous discipline that helps make sense of them, a severance that constitutes a crisis in the possibility for meaningful human existence itself. As Husserl claims:

> We make our beginning with a change which set in at the turn of the past century in the general evolution of the sciences. It concerns not the scientific character of the sciences but rather what they, or what science in general, had meant and could mean for human existence… In our vital need – so we are told – this science has nothing to say to us. It excludes in principle precisely the questions which man, given over in our unhappy times to the most portentous upheavals, finds the most burning: questions of the meaning or meaninglessness of the whole of this human existence.
>
> (Husserl 5-6)

Husserl's existential language makes clear that what is at stake here is more than just a crisis in terms of how Europe understands breakthrough research in quantum physics: it is a crisis of self-understanding, of identity, and of philosophy itself. Husserl is unapologetic about eliding human meaning-making in general into philosophy specifically, and about making both at once "universal" but also distinctively European in their origin and character.[139] And

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[138] This tradition of course continues with Kuhn (1962) and Van Fraasen (2004).

[139] One of many of the bitter ironies of this paradoxically particularistic – and chauvinistic – understanding of the "universal" domain of Reason and enterprise of philosophy is that Husserl has no problem excluding the Roma from participation in European culture, or questioning whether "Eskimos" possess Reason (*Crisis* 273). Husserl himself was born to Jewish parents, but converted to Protestantism and proudly saw himself as a patriotic Austrian before anything else; none of this

as he makes clear in his *Vienna Lectures* (gathered with the *Crisis* in English), the promise of universal (European) reason has always been an orientation towards futurity which depends upon a narrative of progressive enrichment and deepening of knowledge *explicitly along generational lines*. European philosophy, for Husserl, promises:

> A new form of communalization and a new form of enduring community whose spiritual life, communalized through the love of ideas, the production of ideas, and through ideal life-norms, bears within itself to the future horizon of infinity: that of an infinity of generations being renewed in the spirit of ideas.
>
> (Husserl 277)

But as Husserl insists, this narrative is now disrupted, thrown into crisis – and not just because the implication of quantum physics threaten the bracketing *epoché* that underpins the possibility of phenomenological reduction. The "unhappy times" and "portentous upheavals" Husserl implicitly references include the rise of Fascism, his own expulsion from the university – abetted in no small part by personal betrayal at the hands of his own student, Martin Heidegger – and impending violent calamities that will wrack the continent and globe. Europe's future "infinity of generations" is under threat as much as is the viability of its future-oriented philosophy: the upheavals of history and science threaten philosophy and entire generations with oblivion and meaninglessness. As Husserl asks:

> "But can the world, and human existence in it, truthfully have a meaning if the sciences recognize as true only what is objectively established in this fashion, and if history has nothing more to teach us than that all the shapes of the spiritual world, all the conditions of life, ideals, norms upon which man relies, form and dissolve themselves like fleeting waves, that it always was and ever will be so, that again and again reason must turn into nonsense, and well-being into misery? Can we console ourselves with that?"
>
> (Husserl 5-7)

"Can we console ourselves with that?" The plangency only intensifies when we appreciate that Husserl is speaking as a man who had already lost one son to a World War, has no

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helped him, however, from becoming the target of the virulent anti-Semitic attacks that ultimately ended his career. For more on Husserl's biography, see Smith (2006).

illusions about the next one on the horizon, and overall seems to be mourning far more than just an abstract concept.[140] Indeed, for Husserl, the transmission of knowledge which underpinned his life and work, the mechanism which vouchsafes the enterprise of philosophy itself, which makes philosophy "universal," has been severed, and this crisis is at once abstract and very real, communal and yet singular, universal and yet particular.

It is with this fullest sense of what constitutes a crisis in mind – as a boundary-confusion in knowledge and in terms of what is knowable – that I propose that the death of a child represents not just a crisis *in* philosophy, but a crisis *for* philosophy. By a crisis *in* philosophy, I do not mean to reiterate the oft-explored trope of the suffering of a child as an event that prompts contemplation of the nature of evil or absence of God. If anything, such treatments of the death of children help make the event thinkable by reducing it to an example (albeit a trump card) in perennial discussions among philosophers about the nature of suffering, evil, and the like.[141] What I am instead arguing is that the death of a child represents a crisis of what is *thinkable for philosophy the first place* because it disrupts the model of the transmission of knowledge and communication of experience on which philosophy depends (at least in its predominant, patriarchal, and Western form). In other words, I claim that the death of the child stands in for the death of the universal itself, and that, to the extent to which philosophy depends on thinking in terms of this specific model of

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[140] Both of Husserl's two sons saw action: Wolfgang was badly wounded in 1915 and then killed at Verdun in 1916; Gerhard was horribly injured in 1917. In the end, this history of family service may have – briefly – cushioned Husserl's persecution, but only so far: his pensions as a parent of children who had served the State were also severed in 1933. For more, see Smith (2006). Although it is well beyond the scope of this dissertation, current scholarship into Heidegger's recently made-public "black notebooks" (*Schwarze Hefte*) suggest that themes of inheritance, futural destiny, and paternal lineages, and the "true" ownership of "European philosophy" expressed therein could yield provocative juxtaposition with Husserl's later work (For more on the notebooks, see Gordon 2014).

[141] As for example in Chapters 4 (*Rebellion*) and 5 (*The Grant Inquisitor*) of Book V of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Brothers Karamazov* or in the centerpiece scene of the death of child in Part IV of Albert Camus' *The Plague* (*La Peste*).

universality, the diagnosis for the philosophical enterprise in the wake of such a loss is terminal. But I also claim that the death of a child represents a crisis *for* philosophy – because if philosophy, which traditionally takes up on matters of mortality, communication, and contingency, cannot do at least *some* work in the way of consolation or meaning-making in the way of such an event, then what good is it in the first place?

In what follows, I will briefly sketch out what I take to be two fundamental metanarratives that underpin accounts of the task and value of philosophy, turning to a moment in Walter Benjamin's essay *The Storyteller* and a brief passage in Plato's in *Phaedo*. Respectively, I take these texts to make the claim that personal experience is valuable because it is transmissible as wisdom over and above one's own death, and that philosophy, which is preoccupied with the transmission of wisdom, is at its core devoted to learning how to acquire wisdom about how to die well and how properly to transmit that wisdom. Underpinning both, I claim, is a metanarrative of *proper* succession, of how inheritance *should* proceed: one should die in a bed surrounded by one's literal descendants, and the teacher should offer wise valediction to his students before passing on. The messy reality that children can and do die before their parents, and students before their teachers, is anathema to this metanarrative, and throws it, and the logical of universality itself, into crisis in the fullest sense of the word.

2. The Storyteller's Deathbed

Walter Benjamin's essay 1936 *The Storyteller* (*Der Erzähler*) is many things – a history and comparison of various literary genres (with particular attention to the epic versus the novel), a quasi-biography of Russian novelist Nikolai Leskov (1831-1895), and more. For our

purposes, however, it is most saliently a meditation on the concept of experience – an attempt to answer an unspoken, deceptively simple question, namely, *Why do we care about experience?* Although the response Benjamin offers to this unspoken question is enigmatic at best, the upshot is clear: we care about experience because of death, and because it is the only thing which we can hope to share of ourselves with each other in spite of it.

Significantly, Benjamin structures his piece as a kind of memorial, the epitaph for a figure, the eponymous Storyteller, who is in danger of receding into memory, who is not nowadays present with the force of "living immediacy" (82). We feel the storyteller's absence as a profound impoverishment in our self-expression and our ability to relate to others: "It is as if something that seemed inalienable to us, the securest among our possessions, were taken from us: the ability to exchange experiences" (82). The exchange of experiences, Benjamin suggests, is embodied in the storyteller's function, insofar as the storyteller is a nexus for them, but that continuous exchange of experiences exceeds that specific incarnation since it is a fundamental human activity more broadly: "Experience which is passed on from mouth to mouth is the source from which all storytellers have drawn…and among those who have written down the tales, it is the great ones whose written version differs least from the speech of the many nameless storytellers" (84). In other words, what storytellers do is distill commonalities of experience across time and space and time (storytellers who come from afar are prized, but so too are homebodies)[142] – cataloguing if not universals in the abstract philosophical sense, then near-universals that reflect

[142] 'When someone goes on a trip, he has something to tell about,' goes the German saying, and people imagine the storyteller as someone who has come from afar. But they enjoy no less listening to the man who has stayed at home, making an honest living, and who knows the local tales and traditions." (Benjamin 84)

commonalities of lived experience.[143] In short, storytellers traffic in "wisdom" (87). Why Benjamin sees the Storyteller figure to be an archaic, doomed one need not overly concern us here – suffice it to say crudely that it comes down to an atomization and alienation brought about by the social conditions and history of modernity.[144] But Benjamin is painfully aware that that history has included the senseless slaughter of millions of young people on the battlefields of Europe – and also the production of traumatized, broken survivors, who, to the extent to which they who cannot speak about their experience, are dead men walking.[145] And this is also why the storyteller's absence stings so acutely: what storytellers do is help us transmit our experiences, in the form of wisdom, over and against our own inevitable deaths. "Death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell," writes Benjamin. "He has borrowed his authority from death" (94). To the extent that our own experiences outlive us through this transmission, to the extent that we can offer posthumous counsel to others, we can enjoy a prosthetic extension of our existence and continued impact

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143 "All this points to the nature of every real story. It contains, openly or covertly, something useful. The usefulness may, in one case, consist in a moral; in another, in some practical advice; in a third, in a proverb or maxim. In every case the storyteller is a man who has counsel for his readers." (Benjamin 86)

144 "The storyteller takes what he tells from experience -his own or, that reported by others. And he in tum makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale. The novelist has isolated himself. The birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual, who is no longer able to express himself by giving examples of his most important concerns, is himself uncounseled, and cannot counsel others" (87). Benjamin sees a similar, pernicious shift away from experience in the development of "news" – information-focused economies of attention. "Information is kind of localized, like a traffic report or weather forecast, it has an operational utility in terms of how we shape our day to day plans in life while not bringing us to reflect on the broader situation of our life and being in it." (Benjamin 89)

145 "Was it not noticeable at the end of the war that men returned from the battlefield grown silent -- not richer, but poorer in communicable experience? What ten years later was poured out in the flood of war books was anything but experience that goes from mouth to mouth. And there was nothing remarkable about that. For never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power. A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body." (Benjamin 84)

on the world. Unsurprisingly, then, in parallel to the alienation associated with the recession of the storyteller, whose function is to parlay experience over and against death, to reach towards a future beyond ourselves, towards eternity itself, comes a severance of death from the public square and the private hearth, a hygienic screening-away of the dying into hospices and hospital wards.[146] Benjamin contrasts this segregation of the dying with the idealized scene of death predominant in the Middle Ages, where the dying person passes on surrounded by their children, grandchildren, siblings, and friends – embedded in a community and with their lineage before them, witnessing their passing.[147] What is lost with this moment is not just a possibility for human connection in an abstract way, but the quickening of the wisdom that is the storyteller's stock in trade: those who witness a human's proper passing receive something that the dying person passes on, something of themselves. Writes Benjamin:

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[146] "The idea of eternity has ever had its strongest source in death. If this idea declines, so we reason, the face of death must have changed. It turns out that this change is identical with the one that has diminished the communicability of experience to the same extent as the art of storytelling has declined. It has been observable for a number of centuries how in the general consciousness the thought of death has declined in omnipresence and vividness. In its last stages this process is accelerated. And in the course of the nineteenth century bourgeois society has, by means of hygienic and social, private and public institutions, realized a secondary effect which may have been its subconscious main purpose: to make it possible for people to avoid the sight of the dying. Dying was once a public process in the life of the individual and a most exemplary one; think of the Medieval pictures in which the deathbed has turned into a throne toward which the people press through the wide-open has been pushed further and further out of the perceptual world of the living. There used to be no house, hardly a room, in which someone had not once died. (The Middle Ages also felt spatially what makes that inscription on a sun dial of Ibiza, *Ultima multis* [the last day for many], significant as the temper of the times.) Today people live in rooms that have never been touched by death, dry dwellers of eternity, and when their end approaches they are stowed away in sanatoria or hospitals by their heirs." (Benjamin 93-94)

[147] Benjamin's description of these circumstances jibes with Ariès's research, which documents the specific postures, sequence of prayers, and ritualized valedictions that dominated European practices of dying through the middle ages (Ariès *CC* 7–11). All of these things were ideally to be tightly circumscribed. As Ariès writes: "One awaited death lying down, gisant. This ritual position was stipulated by the thirteenth century liturgists … Thus prepared, the dying man could carry out the final steps of the traditional ceremony … The first step was to express sorrow over the end of life, a sad but very discreet recollection of beloved beings and things, a summary which was reduced to a few images…After the lamentation about the sadness of dying came the pardoning of the always numerous companions and helpers who surrounded the deathbed." (Ariès, *WAD* 6–7)

> It is, however, characteristic that not only a man's knowledge or wisdom, but above all his real life—and this is the stuff that stories are made of—first assumes transmissible form at the moment of his death. Just as a sequence of images is set in motion inside a man as his life comes to an end-unfolding the views of himself under which he has encountered himself without being aware of it—suddenly in his expressions and looks the unforgettable emerges and imparts to everything that concerned him that authority which even the poorest wretch in dying possesses for the living around him. This authority is at the very source of the story.
>
> (Benjamin 93-94)

In your dying moments, your experiences precipitate – and what wisdom you possess is transmitted. There is universal value in this transmission, and Benjamin quotes Pascal to this purpose: "'No one,' Pascal once said, 'dies so poor that he does not leave something behind" (98). And yet when there is no witness to death – whether that death occurs on a rotting battlefield or in an antiseptic hospital world – nothing lives on. "Surely it is the same with memories too," writes Benjamin in response to Pascal, "although these do not always find an heir" (98).

This metanarrative, which grounds the value of experience in its transmissibility as wisdom over and against death, is thrown into crisis by the death of a child. What experiences the child has – what lineage they leave behind – is vastly different than that of the idealized Medieval elder, or even of a random, otherwise forgotten person whose *bon mot* becomes an idiom.[148] Aleksandar Hemon's infant daughter Isabel has no story to tell, no experiences to narrate – she spent her last months in and out of seizures and writhing in

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[148] In *The Storyteller*, death at young age comes up only peripherally: "'A man who dies at the age of thirty-five," said Moritz Heimann once, "is at every point of his life a man who dies at the age of thirty-five.' Nothing is more dubious than this sentence but for the sole reason that the tense is wrong. A man—so says the truth that was meant here—who died at thirty-five will appear to remembrance at every point in his life as a man who dies at the age of thirty-five." (100) What Benjamin appears to be saying is that an early death marks the memory of the deceased as one-who-died early at every turn, in a kind of suspended temporality. But thirty-five is the youngest death Benjamin will record in his piece; Benjamin himself committed suicide at 48, in flight from Nazi occupation and in despair at the prospect of being returned to occupied France by Spanish authorities.

agony, turned over by gloved hands, purged by chemicals, and perforated with tubes. She does not transmit her experience: she simply dies. And while the contemplation of one's own mortality may be tolerable – assuaged by the knowledge that *our* experiences may be transmitted – contemplating this reality defies the imagination. As Hemon writes:

> There's a psychological mechanism, I've come to believe, that prevents most of us from imagining the moment of our own death. For if it were possible to imagine fully that instant of passing from consciousness to nonexistence, with all the attendant fear and humiliation of absolute helplessness, it would be very hard to live. It would be unbearably obvious that death is inscribed in everything that constitutes life, that any moment of your existence may be only a breath away from being the last. We would be continuously devastated by the magnitude of that inescapable fact. Still, as we mature into our mortality, we begin to gingerly dip our horror-tingling toes into the void, hoping that our mind will somehow ease itself into dying, that God or some other soothing opiate will remain available as we venture into the darkness of non-being. But how can you possibly ease yourself into the death of your child? For one thing, it is supposed to happen well after your own dissolution into nothingness. Your children are supposed to outlive you by several decades, during the course of which they live their lives, happily devoid of the burden of your presence, and eventually complete the same mortal trajectory as their parents: oblivion, denial, fear, the end. They're supposed to handle their own mortality, and no help in that regard (other than forcing them to confront death by dying) can come from you – death ain't a science project. And, even if you could imagine your child's death, why would you?
>
> (Hemon 54)

Here, again, we return to the idea of a disruption in *how things should be*, an inversion of the proper order wherein parents should precede their children into death rather than the other way around. Through this reversal of the proper order of mortality, the chain of transmission has been severed – and this possibility defies imagination until it actually happens.[149] Schleiermacher can worry for his child in the event that he (Schleiermacher) dies

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[149] The essayist Brock Meeks, preparing to claim the body of his son, who committed suicide, describes this unthinkability thusly: "The 'Parental Handbook' they give out at a child's birth has a chapter conspicuously missing—they tear it out on purpose so as to not alarm new parents—that chapter, I've come to know, is titled, 'How to Bury Your Child.' But I strongly suspect the chapter would be nothing but blank pages anyway. You see, there really are no instructions for this scenario because a parent is Never.Supposed.To.Bury.Their.Child. Never. Ever." Meeks' powerful *Suicide Journal* is online at: http://bit.ly/1EHbIEc.

– but that Nathanael should die before him remains unthinkable until he is already gone.[150] And yet the metanarrative of a lineage of inheritance is severed all the same, and the transmission of knowledge and the communication of experience are thrown into crisis. Hemon minces no words about how there is no meaningful experience to gleaned from his daughter's death:

> One of the most despicable religious fallacies is that suffering is ennobling—that it is a step on the path to some kind of enlightenment or salvation. Isabel's suffering and death did nothing for her, or us, or the world. We learned no lessons worth learning; we acquired no experience that could benefit anyone. And Isabel most certainly did not earn ascension to a better place, as there was no place better for her than at home with her family. Without Isabel, Teri and I were left with oceans of love we could no longer dispense; we found ourselves with an excess of time that we used to devote to her; we had to live in a void that could be filled only by Isabel. Her indelible absence is now an organ in our bodies, whose sole function is a continuous secretion of sorrow.
>
> (Hemon 61)

Far from passing on wisdom, the child who died of a tumor has, in her parent's grief, become a kind of metaphorical tumor herself.

3. Dying Teacher, Teaching Dying

Moving from the vignette of the Medieval deathbed conjured by Benjamin to a foundational image in Western philosophy which is also a deathbed scene showcases the second metanarrative which is throw into crisis by the death of a child. This is the idea that philosophy's primary focus is as an *ars moriendi,* an apprenticeship in how to die, which takes

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[150] Recalling Annie in his memorial written the week after her death, Charles Darwin expresses a similar inability to comprehend this reversal of how-things-should-be. "One felt one knew her thoroughly & could trust her: I always thought, that come what might, we should have had in our old age, at least one loving soul, which nothing could have changed." Indeed, Darwin adds that it was *Annie* who feared losing her parents, rather than the other way around: "Her sensitiveness appeared extremely early in life, & showed itself in crying bitterly over any story at all melancholy; or on parting with Emma even for the shortest interval. Once when she was very young she exclaimed "Oh Mamma, what should we do, if you were to die."

the form of a parental inheritance whereby the teacher (as parent) instructs the student (as child) in mortality up to and through their own exemplary passing. Plato's *Phaedo* narrates the circumstances of the death of Socrates, whose mortality has not only served as the basis of countless syllogisms taught in classrooms the world over (in some variation of "If all men are mortal, and Socrates is a man, then Socrates is mortal")[151] but which, dramatized in the

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[151] Freud, for his part, did not think much of this *qua* consciously instructable and learnable wisdom. "It is true that the statement 'all men are mortal' is paraded in textbooks of logic as an example of a general proposition, but no human being ever really grasps it and our unconscious has as little use now as it ever had for the idea of its own mortality." (*SE* 3692) It is worth observing that a book could– and should – be written dedicated to the topic of child loss in Freud's life and work. The most obvious locus that cries out for attention is the matter of the child in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* whom Freud observes playing the famous "fort" and "da" game (*SE* 720) – Freud's grandson, the child of his daughter Sophie, who died between revisions of the volume. In telling this story about childhood yearning for an absent mother, Freud does not directly address the fact that the parent in question is in fact his own child, who, now dead, he as bereaved father yearns for. Instead, Freud merely notes: "When this child was five and three-quarters, his mother died" (*SE* 3721). Derrida takes the erasure as indexing Freud's broader concerns about the precarity of transmission of knowledge involved in the psychoanalytic enterprise – that is, his difficulty (or rather inability) to guarantee its future or lineage of chosen disciples "The fort:da game not only coincides with the death on the level of family biography, but it also coincides with Freud's fears about the mortality of the psychoanalytic movement…Why is the movement marked by an endless series of conflicting interpretations and, in the process, subject to the discontinuities of the 'breaking away' of numerous disciples? Does to the fort:da game represent psychoanalysis itself? Just as the child hurls the reel away, so Freud disperses and disseminates his ideas." (Derrida 303). Feminist critics like Elisabeth Bronfen have tackled the connection more directly – pushing hard on the gendered dynamics of the "stake for Freud in refusing to acknowledge an interdependence between the theoretical formulation of a death drive and the experience of his daughter's death" (Bronfen 17-18). For Laurence Simmons, the answer is clear: "Freud becomes involved in the calculated risk of the fort:da game; like Ernst [the grandchild] he was to experience the provisional loss of mastery so long as he could pull on the string and recover his powers of theoretical command. On the one hand, Freud wants to exercise paternal power to keep psychoanalysis firmly within the authorization of his name, but, on the other, he is compelled to risk this name in a speculative enterprise." (Simmons 8). In any event, above and beyond *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud also written about child loss (both this and those of friends) with interlocutors including Ludwig Binswanger, Ernest Jones, and Oskar Pfister, all of which is documented in various volumes of Freud's Correspondences and Peter Gay's authoritative biography. He is not restrained about the depth of his feelings of loss in the wake of the 1920 influenza epidemic, which he calls "a senseless, brutal act of fate, which has robbed us of our Sophie… "One must bow one's head under the blow, as a helpless, poor human being with whom higher powers are playing." Among the losses of other children that grieved Freud was the death of Sophie's other son, Heinz Rudolf ("Heinele"), who was born in 1918, which appears to have been a breaking point for him – even more than the loss of Sophie. The death of this child seems to have grieved Freud even more deeply. On October 15, 1926, Freud wrote to Ludwig Binswanger, "For me, that child took the place of all my children and other grandchildren, and since then, since Heinele's death, I have no longer cared for my grandchildren, but find no enjoyment in life either. This is also the secret of my indifference—it has been called courage—towards the threat to my own

story of his execution, offers a template for the image of the dying sage, and how the properly philosophical order of death should proceed.

The dialogue itself takes the form of Echecrates of Phlius's interrogating Socrates' student Phaedo as to the circumstances of his teacher's final hours and execution. The attention to detail is granular and specific,[152] and the scene itself is saturated with tenderness. As Phaedo describes it:

> "For I was close to him on his right hand, seated on a sort of stool, and he on a couch which was a good deal higher. Now he had a way of playing with my hair, and then he smoothed my head, and pressed the hair upon my neck, and said: 'Tomorrow, Phaedo, I suppose that these fair locks of yours will be severed.'"
>
> (Plato 87)

One key detail bears stressing from the get-go: Socrates's death sees him surrounded not by his family, but by his students. In fact, as numerous readers have observed, the moment Socrates's students arrive at his cell, he sends away his wife and children.[153] Only after the

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life." On March 11, 1928, he returned to the subject in a letter to Ernest Jones: "Sophie was a dear daughter, to be sure, but not a child. It was only three years later, in June 1923, when little Heinele died, that I became tired of life permanently. Quite remarkably, there is a correspondence between him and your little one. He too was of superior intelligence and unspeakable spiritual grace, and he spoke repeatedly about dying soon. How do these children know?" Three years later, he corresponded with Binswanger after the latter had suffered a similar loss: "We know that the acute sorrow we feel after such a loss will run its course, but also that we will remain inconsolable, and will never find a substitute." Even in his most laconic statements, Freud – whose wife Martha would refer to him as "shattered" by the loss of Sophie –still hints at considerable pathos and a profound sense of heartbreak and wrongness. As Freud writes Lajos Levy, a recently bereaved father and psychiatrist: "To outlive a child is not agreeable. Fate does not keep even to this order of precedence."

[152] Echecrates first asks: "What was the manner of his death, Phaedo? What was said or done? And which of his friends had he with him? Or were they not allowed by the authorities to be with him? And did he die alone?" (Plato 53) Later, he demands to know Socrates's reactions and facial expressions: "Tell me, I beg, how did Socrates proceed? Did he appear to share the unpleasant feeling which you mention? Or did he receive the interruption calmly and give a sufficient answer? Tell us, exactly as you can, what passed." (Plato 87)

[153] "On entering we found Socrates just released from chains, and Xanthippe [his wife], whom you know, sitting by him, and holding his child in her arms. When she saw us she uttered a cry, as women will: "O Socrates, this is the last time that either you will converse with your friends, or they with you." Socrates turned to Crito and said: "Crito, let some one take her home." Some of Crito's people accordingly led her away, crying out and beating herself." (Plato 57)

women and children have been banished from the scene does Socrates begin a somewhat laconic meditation on the nature of pain – as if the substitution of his students for his children allows Socrates to contemplate his own mortality more abstractly. In any event, the dialogue proceeds as Socrates's students seek to probe his thoughts on death, not just to understand his confusingly implacable demeanor, nor even to console themselves, but explicitly as an act of the transmission of knowledge. One student, Simmias asks: "But do you mean to take your thoughts with you, Socrates? Will you not communicate them to us? The benefit is one in which we too may hope to share" (61).[154] Replying,, "I deem that the true disciple of philosophy is likely to be misunderstood by other men; they do not perceive that he is ever pursuing death and dying" (61), Socrates then launches into a lengthy disquisition on the relationship between the soul and the body, and the proper role of philosophy as a tutelage of desire away from transient vanities in favor of immortal goodness. Philosophy is thus "the practice of death" (81), the transmission of wisdom as to what is valuable in light of mortality and what isn't.[155] The nuances of Socrates' argument need not concern us: topics run from discussions of the principle of harmony to a catalogue of virtues to plentiful analogies involving clothing. The key moment for us occurs halfway through the dialogue, by which point Socrates has managed to convince one student (Cebes) of the existence of the soul *before* birth, but another student (Simmias) won't grant that this provision doesn't necessarily imply that the soul *continues* exist after death – in other words, he still fears that death brings about an extinction of the soul. With typical truculence,

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[154] Unless otherwise noted, all my citations from Plato are from Jowett's translation.

[155] "Yet the exchange of one fear or pleasure or pain for another fear or pleasure or pain, which are measured like coins, the greater with the less, is not the exchange of virtue. O my dear Simmias, is there not one true coin for which all things ought to exchange?—and that is wisdom." (Plato 67) Socrates is particularly cheered by (or attempts to cheer his students by) the image of an afterworld marked by the exchange of wisdom between sages.

Socrates holds out, stressing that, per the technical letter of his syllogistic reasoning about the binary but generative opposition of living and dying and the premise of the soul's reincarnation, both of his students *should* be convinced and then their fears assuaged. But then Socrates does something remarkable: he admits that, on this matter, for his students, and possibly for everyone, it is clear that logical proofs are not enough. Some consolation must be given in another register, must speak to some need beyond what reason alone can satsify – and Socrates, already a paternal figure to his students, and a father to actual children besides, describes this needs through a comparison to ministering to a frightened child. The entire exchange merits quoting in full; Socrates is the first speaker.

> "Surely the proof which you desire has been already furnished. Still I suspect that you and Simmias would be glad to probe the argument yet further: like children, you are haunted with a fear that when the soul leaves the body, the wind may really blow her away and scatter her, especially if a man should happen to die in stormy weather and not when the sky is calm."
>
> Cebes answered with a smile: "Then, Socrates, you must argue us out of our fears—and yet, strictly speaking, they are not our fears, but there is a child within us to whom death is a sort of hobgoblin; him too we must persuade not to be afraid when is alone with him in the dark."
>
> Socrates said: "Let the voice of the charmer be applied daily until you have charmed him away."
>
> (Plato 76)

The complexity of the interaction here is hard to overstate. On the one hand, Socrates begins in a playful mode – the idea of the soul blowing away depending on weather conditions has a whimsical charm to it. Cebes picks up on the ludic dimension, acknowledges it, and responds in kind, but makes clear that what is at stake is more than child's play. Cebes owns up to his persisting fear of death – or rather, owns it via displacing

it onto an internalized child-figure who is scared by it as though by a bogeyman.[156] The verb Cebes uses when asking Socrates to "persuade" this inner child is *μεταπείθω* – which carries the specific sense of "changing a man's persuasion (*πειθώ*)" (Liddell and Scott 1115). In other words, Cebes conjures an inner child whom Socrates must persuade out of that fear of death – while still deploying a language of reason that characterizes conversations between adults. In response, Socrates offers not persuasion, but charm: "Let the voice of the charmer be applied daily until you have charmed him away."[157] The "charmer" here is a form of the verb *ἐπαείδω*, which not only puns on the verb for (adult) persuasion used by Cebes, but is also a word for singing to someone, for soothing them, for using charms or incantations upon them. The verb in "until you have charmed him away," *ἐξεπάδω*, is a related word that encompasses not just soothing or saying magical charms, but also medical interventions; Homer uses it to describe the procedure for stopping a hemorrhage on the battlefield, and Demosthenes uses it to describe the treatment of a seizure.[158] The intervention here is thus at once lyrical and custodial, magically efficacious and medically palliative: it banishes the bogeyman, heals the wound (in Greek, a *trauma*), and brings the epileptic back from crisis, all at once. And the site of all these interventions, which occur at the limits of philosophy, even beyond it, is the child within the adult.

Cebes and Simmias take Socrates's advice as a strict analogy, rather than an allegory – as they see it, the "charmer" is short for the sage, and they need to find a new teacher. "And

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156 *"καὶ ὁ Κέβης ἐπιγελάσας, ὡς δεδιότων, ἔφη, ὦ Σώκρατες, πειρῶ ἀναπείθειν: μᾶλλον δὲ μὴ ὡς ἡμῶν δεδιότων, ἀλλ' ἴσως ἔνι τις καὶ ἐν ἡμῖν παῖς ὅστις τὰ τοιαῦτα φοβεῖται. τοῦτον οὖν πειρῶ μεταπείθειν μὴ δεδιέναι τὸν θάνατον ὥσπερ τὰ μορμολύκεια."* The "hobgoblin" is the demigod Mormo (*μορμολύκεια*), a mythological "she-hag" and companion of Hecate who supposedly punished them for acting out (generally by biting them); the word also more generally functions as a "bogeyman" or generic term for a fantasized, nonexistent fear.

157 ἀλλὰ χρή, ἔφη ὁ Σωκράτης, ἐπᾴδειν αὐτῷ ἑκάστης ἡμέρας ἕως ἂν ἐξεπάσητε.

158 See Lidell and Scott 603 and 590.

where shall we find a good charmer of our fears, Socrates, when you are gone?," they ask (76).[159] Socrates responds, in so many words, that Greece is a big place, and that while looking for teachers, they shouldn't forget to look within themselves: their philosophical growth should involve their growth into their own teachers.[160] Whether or not this internal philosopher is guaranteed to soothe the child within remains unsaid; conversation shifts to other topics and Socrates grows increasingly vatic. But what is vital for our purposes here is how, in one of the foundational texts about philosophy and death in the Western world, death is invoked in relation to children, *but only as a metaphorical, internalized representation conjured by the adult philosophical gaze*. As Socrates's emotional concession to his students seems to suggest, when it comes to facing death – here in the form of the death of one's teacher, but also the fact of one's mortality more broadly – there are limits to what philosophy can do. Per Socrates, those limitations are embodied, within the adult, by a kind of inner child – part of an adult that *should* know better, but is scared nonetheless. The best counsel philosophy can offer is an appeal to something beyond itself, or at least, to something beyond philosophy in the narrow sense of dialectical reasoning and logic: it counsels a "soothing" that is at once self-soothing and a seeking of yet other teachers who can soothe. Sanguinity in the face of death is not promise: Socrates represents, for Plato at least, a courageous pinnacle. But philosophy can at least offer a lifelong learning that approaches those heights, and Plato gives us the exemplary example of the death of his teacher as a

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[159] *τῶν τοιούτων ἀγαθὸν ἐπῳδόν*. Their use of the "singer [of such charms]" (ἐπῳδόν) does not include the full valences of the ministrations of Socrates' "charming away" – suggesting his two interlocutors understand the phrase merely as a kind of epithet for philosophical mentors specifically, rather than prompting an interrogation of the *askesis* of philosophy itself.

[160] "Hellas," he replied, "Is a large place, Cebes, and has many good men, and there are barbarous races not a few: seek for among them all, far and wide, sparing neither pains nor money; for there is no better way of using your money. And you must not forget to seek him among yourselves too; for he is nowhere more likely to be found." (76-77)

model. Philosophy, we could thus say, is a kind of (self)-pedagogy unto death of the adult's inner child. But while philosophy – at its limits – can help the adult soothe their figurative inner children as they age, the question of how it can help them deal with actual dying ones seems structurally foreclosed.

Socrates dies nobly, surrounded by his (male) students, who function as heirs to his wisdom – a position of apparently superior exaltation to that of his actual flesh-and-blood children. Crito, Socrates' "dearest friend" asks him if he has any last wishes:

> "And have you any commands for us, Socrates – anything to say about your children, or any other matter in which we can serve you?"
> "Nothing particular, he said: Only, as I have always told you, I would have you look to yourselves; that is a service which you may always bring to me and mine as well as to yourselves."
>
> (Plato 113)

Socrates's last testament is his teaching – and his students are more his children than his own offspring. The narrative more or less makes this clear not just by featuring his students as self-identifying as "children" who are about to be "orphaned" but ushering on to the scene Socrates's actual family only to rapidly shuffle them off again:

> "We waited, talking and thinking of the subject of discourse, and also of the greatness of our sorrow; he was like a father of whom we were being bereaved, and we were about to pass the rest of our lives as orphans. When he had taken the bath his children were brought to him (he also had two young sons and an elder one); and the women of his family also came, and he talked to them and gave them a few directions in the presence of Crito; and he then dismissed them and returned to us."
>
> (Plato 113)

Socrates then drinks the hemlock while surrounded his friends, and when they grow overly emotional, remonstrates them for being unmasculine and immature.[161] As a kind of father-

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[161] "When we saw him drinking, and saw too that he had finished the draught, we could no longer forbear, and in spite of myself my own tears were flowing fast; so that I covered my face and wept over myself, for certainly I was not weeping over him, but at the thought of my own calamity in having lost such a companion." Socrates' rebuke is firm: "I sent away the women mainly in order that they might not offend in this way, for I have heard that a man should die in peace" (Plato 115).

figure for philosophy, Socrates functions as a patriarch whose demeanor and teachings during his deathbed scene represent a paradigmatic model for wisdom about death as something that can be deployed in life, used in dying, and transmitted to others after and through one's own passing. But the scope of this wisdom is constrained, implicitly and otherwise, to a proper logic of succession – and is about adults facing their own mortality first and foremost. "To tremble at the approach of death is to behave like a child who is scared of ghosts and spirits," writes Enlightenment physician and philosopher, Julien Offray de La Mettrie, "The pale phantom can knock at my door whenever he wishes and I will not be afraid" (Critchley 257). Perhaps La Mettrie, who history records died from a massive binge on *pâté aux truffes*, met his death with such stoicism; perhaps not.[162] But his perspective, like that of Socrates (and presumably Plato) is firmly that of the adult reflecting on themselves and on their elders, a stance where philosophy is about one's own death, and the death of one's teachers, first and foremost, and where the acquisition and transmission of knowledge within that circuit is of value in and of itself. What meaning could this perspective possibly make of the death of a child – how could it even look upon it, other than to see it as a source of crisis?[163]

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[162] King Frederick the Great of Prussia eulogized La Mettrie as follows: "La Mettrie died in the house of Milord Tirconnel, the French plenipotentiary, whom he had restored to life. It seems that the disease, knowing with whom it had to deal, was cunning enough to attack him first by the brain, in order to destroy him the more surely. A violent fever with fierce delirium came on. The invalid was obliged to have recourse to the science of his colleagues, but he failed to find the succor that his own skill had so often afforded as well to himself as to the public." (Lange 91)

[163] If much of the philosophical enterprise, classically understood, is about the transmission of knowledge of what is valuable and what is not, Barbara Chasen quickly puts to rest any easy well-intention assertion that her loss can yield philosophical value in those terms: "During Shiva, a colleague said to me about work, 'Now you will know what is really important and what is crap.' It is not so. Nothing, nothing seems important compared to his death. How can random chaos teach you anything about what is important. So I just muddle along, with a broken heart. Perhaps that is what I've learned so far. That you can." (Chasen 19)

4. Nonpedagogical Death

Taken together, Benjamin and Plato outline metanarratives that converge upon a common theme: whether it be personal experience or abstract knowledge, communication is possible between individuals and over and beyond our deaths because of the transmission of *wisdom* across generational lines. Whether it because of the compelling dimensions of our personal stories or our sophisticated doctrines about the praxis of mortality, who we are and what we have to offer has value insofar as it is communicable to others – to the extent to which it is transmissible as an inheritance. The model of this possibility of transmissibility, communicability, and relatability along a model of generational lines should by now be firmly familiar to us as underpinning the dominant logic of universality itself. To the extent to the death of a child represents the severance of this logic of transmission, communication, and relation, and a frustration of the generational paradigm, it represents a crisis at the core of any thinking of universality.

Even those more given to formal philosophical language can and do falter at attempts to recuperate anything from the death of their children. The grief of the American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) in the wake of the death of his beloved son Waldo (1836-1842) offers our last case in point. Emerson's first, wife, Ellen, died of tuberculosis less than two years into their marriage; his second wife, Lydia (Lidian) bore four children. Of these, their first child, Waldo, was his fathers' favorite, a source of delight and fascination.[164] As he grew, Waldo played in his father's office: "Little Waldo, now a year and

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[164] "Emerson took to calling him Wallie at first…The week Waldo was born, Emerson went scrambling in the woods with a neighbor, Peter Howe, bringing back "six hemlock trees to plant in my yard which may grow while my boy is sleeping." He proudly reported Waldo's progress. Lidian noted that Emerson was "a most attentive observer of nursery phenomena." He told William that at two and a half months Wallie could "suck, cry, laugh, coo, warble, and jump"; at just under four

a half old, built a tower in his father's study one day 'of two spools, a card, an awl case, and a flour-box top,'"; when Lidian traveled to visit family, "Emerson wrote nearly every day to report Waldo's newest words, 'Mamma gor,' 'becdy becdy,' 'din din'" (Richardson 280, 286). As Robert Richardson documents in his authoritative biography of Emerson, *The Mind on Fire,* by five Waldo was "was the apple of his father's eye and his constant companion…he played quietly in Emerson's study for hours…he slept in a trundle bed in his parents' bedroom" (355). As Waldo grows, he appears to have been a sensitive young child attuned to the vulnerability of his younger sister, Ellen, and, poignantly to the question of mortality.[165] In January of 1842, the Emerson family and its circle of close friends was struck by a series of crises. Henry David Thoreau's brother died of lockjaw, Thoreau himself came down with what appeared to be the same disease,[166] and then both Waldo and Ellen developed scarlet fever (Richardson 358). Although Ellen recovered, Waldo's fever intensified, and he died in less than three days after first showing symptoms. Emerson was

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months "Waldo struggles, leaps, studies manipulation and palmistry, and optics." Whenever the baby fell sick, fear descended on the household. The child touched something deep inside Emerson. There is in some of his comments a defenseless, prayerful nakedness that had not been there since the days of Ellen. When Waldo caught a cold in April Emerson wrote, "Ah! my darling boy, so lately received out of heaven, leave me not now." (Richardson 256)

[165]"In August of 1841 Waldo was old enough to write a letter to his sister Ellen, then two and a half, but not old enough to go to the post office to ask for Daddy's letter. Emerson noted, without anxiety, that Waldo could be a bit timid: "He does not want to go to school alone, no, not at all, no, never." He played endlessly with a toy house he and Henry Thoreau were building for Ellen. It was to have grand features called 'interspiglions.' It was to have a bell 'louder than ten thousand bells, that could be heard in all the countries." His grandmother gave him reading lessons every day. Margaret Fuller and Caroline Sturgis 'caressed and conversed' with him whenever they were at the house. One night when he was almost four and when he and baby Ellen were just recovering from colds, Waldo told his mother he had just prayed a little prayer all himself. Lidian asked what he had said. "I asked God that I might be good-that Ellen might live and grow up."" (Richardson 356)

[166]Thoreau later recovered from what appears to have been what Richardson describes as a "sympathetic reaction" (presumably a psychosomatic breakdown of some kind; 358). Although there is not space to address it here, Thoreau's mourning of this brother, which runs subtly throughout his *Walden* (1854), is very much also about the singularity and incommunicability of loss. For a brilliant reading of these, see Barbara Johnson's essay, *A Hound, a Bay Horse, and a Turtle Dove: Obscurity in Walden* gathered in *A World of Difference* (1989).

distraught.[167] He reflects on his experiences in both his correspondence and diary entries from the period. The letters, as Richardson observes, reveal Emerson in a shambles, at a loss for words, and broadcasting that what he is enduring is incommunicable:

> "He was reduced to a stuttering and helpless repetition. 'Farewell and farewell,' 'my darling my darling,' 'my boy, my boy is gone.' To Margaret Fuller he wrote, 'Shall I ever dare to love anything again? "To Carlyle he wrote a month later, You can never know how much of me such a young child can take away.'"

(Richardson 359)

His journal entries of the period reflect many of the same tropes familiar from our typologies of grief.[168] At first, Emerson is terse.[169]

> *January 28, 1842*
> Yesterday night at 15 minutes after eight my little Waldo ended his life.

Two days later, Emerson begins narrate a sense of a changed world, an attention to domestic objects, the sun, and more, all tropes that should by now be familiar from our survey in Chapter 2.

> *January 30, 1842*
> The morning of Friday I woke at 3 o'clock, & every cock in every barnyard was shrilling with the most unnecessary noise. The sun went up the morning sky with all his light, but the landscape was dishonored by this loss. For this boy in whose remembrance I have both slept & awaked so oft, decorated for me the morning star, & the evening cloud, how much more all the particulars of the daily economy; for he touched with his lively curiosity every trivial fact & circumstance in the household, the hard coal & the soft coal which I put into my stove, the wood of which he brought his little quota for Grandmother's fire, the hammer, the pincers, & file, he was so eager to use; the microscope, the magnet, the little globe, & every trinket & instrument in the study; the loads of gravel on the meadow, the nests in the henhouse and many a little visit to the doghouse and to the barn.

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[167] None other than author Louisa May Alcott, at the time a nine-year-old neighbor and presumably playmate of Waldo's, came by on the mourning of the 28th to see how Waldo was faring, and unaware he had died during the night. "Years later she remembered how "his father carne to me, so worn with watching and changed by sorrow that I was startled and could only stammer out my message. "Child, he is dead" was the answer. "That was my first glimpse of a great grief," Alcott recalled." (Richardson 358).

[168] In addition to the hard copy edition, Emerson's diary (whence these quotations) is also available online at: http://bit.ly/1AbA6ZQ.

The usage of such tropes, and of the language of bewilderment, persists. A month later, Emerson would write that the order of the world appeared askew, unnatural – as though his son could reappear any moment.

> *February 21, 1842*
> Home again from Providence to the deserted house. Dear friends find I, but the wonderful Boy is gone. What a looking for miracles have I! As his walking into the room where we are, would not surprise Ellen, so it would seem to me the most natural of things.

Emerson would carry a profound grief over Waldo with him for the rest of his life. What is most crucial for our purposes is that, in contradistinction to the metanarratives outlined above, what Emerson describes - and continues throughout his life to describe - is a crisis that evacuates the concept of experience itself of meaning, and an event that yields no redemptive philosophical value whatsoever. Against the Socratic or Platonic model, which focuses on cultivating wisdom as an adult to calm the fears of the child within, Emerson's journal entry of January 30 suggests that the death of his child has undone any proper ordering of maturity or wisdom: "Sorrow makes us all children again, destroys all differences of intellect. The wisest knows nothing." A few days later, writing to his friend Caroline Sturgis first voices what will become a refrain through his work going forward: that he "cannot grieve."

> "Alas! I chiefly grieve that I cannot grieve; that this fact takes no more deep hold than other facts; is as dreamlike as they; a lambent flame that will not burn playing on the surface of my river. Must every experience—those that promised to be most dearest & most penetrative—only kiss my cheek like the wind & pass away?"
>
> (Cameron 20 *op. cit.*)

The notion of "experience" here is of an endeavor now fraught with risk and tenuousness, a bitter grind of evanescence that culminates in a rhetorical plea that seems to echo Yamanoue no Okura's laments of a millennium earlier. As to the notion of "grief" in "I chiefly grieve

that I cannot grieve," this paradoxical phrasing suggests that term itself fails to capture the scope of his experience – at the very least. Moreover, it seems to suggest that "grief" in the sense of a process of working-through is inaccessible to him, and instead what he feels is a sense of universal contingency and fragility. There is no lesson in this – no process of education, adaptation, or growth. Indeed, from the start, Emerson sees Waldo's as death as inexplicable and meaningless: the best he can do is distract himself. As he journals on February 21, 1842: "I comprehend nothing of this fact but its bitterness…Explanation I have none, consolation none that rises out of the fact itself; only diversion, only oblivion of this & pursuit of new objects." His essay, *On Experience* (1844), for all its extraordinary complexity, essentially boils down to this to this basic paradox: the experience of the death of his son (who Emerson does not – cannot – even refer to by name in the essay) produces a blockage or a severance in the continuity of experience as such that brings its continuity and communicability into crisis. It is not philosophically enlightening or in any way redeemable, and this disappointment – this dead-end of thought at the end of the line – is a crisis in the pedagogy of wisdom, and in the possibility of the communication of experience and transmission of knowledge, of utter finality. As Emerson writes, "I grieve that grief can teach me nothing" (*Essays* 236).

Even though he would have other children, for Emerson, the death of Waldo represented a turning point he could never get past. More than a decade later, Emerson exhumed Waldo's body to bury it next to his mother.[170] His description of the event is seemingly affectless, even numb, with a telling lacuna at the moment of disinterment itself.

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[170] Reburial and disinterment were not uncommon practices in Nineteenth Century America. As a historian of the phenomenon, Michael Kamen, writes, "On occasion a family would reopen a recently buried coffin in order to gaze one last time at the visage of someone beloved, most often a child" (40). For his part, Emerson had already disinterred and contemplated the corpse of his previous wife, Ellen, in 1831.

> *Wednesday 8 July 1857*
> This morning I had the remains of my mother & my son Waldo removed from the tomb (the) Mrs. Ripley to my lot in "Sleepy Hollow." The sun shone brightly on the coffins, of which Waldo's was well preserved - now fifteen years. I ventured to look into the coffin. I gave a few white-oak leave to each coffin, after they were put in the new vault, & the vault was then covered with two slabs of granite.

The vault may be new, but of new wisdom it contains nothing, only the blankness of whatever it is that Emerson saw but does not report seeing. Placing this journal entry alongside *On Experience*, the literary critic Sharon Cameron brilliantly argues that the loss of his child essentially stands as so dominant an event for Emerson that it suffuses everything – the mourning of an absence as the only true universal. Writes Cameron:

> "I ventured to look into the coffin." In that flatly declarative last sentence, Emerson records his sense of the risk associated with looking for the child, or of looking at the child's remains, or of looking into the space where child is or was…The grief occasioned by the death of the child is the essay's first cause; it begets the other subjects, the consideration of which – Emerson's and ours - depends on our understanding the relation to Waldo's death. Mourning does its work in that the loss and grief initially attached to a single experience ultimately, impersonally, pervade the perception of all experience so that everything is susceptible to the same disappointment."
>
> (Cameron, 64-65)

As Cameron argues, I think correctly, the trauma of Waldo's death becomes synecdochal for Emerson with experience itself: all experience is tinged with loss.[171]

However one might read Emerson's later work, one thing is clear: the patriarch of Transcendentalism and one of the father-figures of American philosophy finds nothing educative, and nothing to lean on, in the death of his child. "Death ain't a science project," observes Hemon. Put crudely, the death of a child fundamentally resists reduction to a teachable moment, philosophical or otherwise. The only lesson is that the parent is still alive and the child is dead and that life, such as it is, goes on. When one of Barbara Chasen's

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[171] "In Emerson's essay, grief becomes a trope for experience because the self's relation to experience, like its relation to grief, is oblique, angled, contingent, dissociated…Once the self understands its relation to experience, what it understands is that something has been removed. Death is the source of that understanding, teach us our relation to *every* event." (Cameron 68)

patients, a woman who has been seeking to adopt a child, learns the details of her therapist's son's death, and relays the concerns of a mutual acquaintance that Chasen may be suicidal, Chasen replies that she is struggling, and coping. But she does not tell the whole story:

> I felt I had to admit that I truly did not know how I was surviving, that somehow I was…[But] I could not tell her that somehow you survive, that you don't die though you want to. If anyone would have told me my twelve-year-old would die and I would continue to live, I, too, would have thought it was impossible to go on. But you don't die.
>
> (Chasen 14)

Chasen echoes Frost and then explicitly cites him: all we life teaches a parent in the death of a child is that life goes on; there is no other lesson.

5. A Kenotic Universal

To the extent to which the death of a child represents the frustration of any model of universality that depends on the communication of experience and transmission of knowledge as an inheritance along generational lines, it provokes a crisis in the concept of universality itself. But perhaps there is another way to conceive of universality *in light of* the paradoxes provoked by our considering the universality of parental mourning for lost children. Although this can only be a tentative gesture, I want to suggest an alternative thinking of universality which foregrounds and departs from an understanding that what is likely one of the most universal of all human experiences is the experience of loss or losses that, one way or another, always elude description, and which remain always irreducibly singular even as they can be talked about, compared, and responded to with compassion. Under the foregrounded sign of lack or loss, this perspective would emphasize and tolerate the *gap* between our normative expectations for and of human universals and the limits of our descriptive methodologies for pinning them down. This gap itself, I suggest, could be

understood as a defining feature of universality – a universality of human vulnerability to life's vagaries, and but also of conceptual vulnerability to reductive theorizations. This notion would entail a universality that proceeds not confidently, along the lines of the patriarchal transmission of experience and inheritance of knowledge *qua* wisdom as a positive content, but instead through a faltering, vulnerable process that is subject to interruption and tragedy, and where more often than not what is common and shared is the experience of having undergone losses that are no less universal touchstones for their being singular and impossible to fully put to words.

Although this approach to universality would cash out with implications for many of the ways in which the term has been deployed, we should instead close by bringing it to bear on the question of the universality of parental mourning – the question that has preoccupied this entire inquiry. Seen under the sign of this reconfigured, kenotic understanding of universality, the paradoxes of incommunicability and singularity surrounding the experience of parental mourning that we have observed throughout our survey reveal themselves to be entirely what we would expect: near-universal appeals to singularity and incommunicability index the paradoxical structure of universality itself. But this perspective also yields something else: it puts in sharp relief the hints that numerous grieving parents across the ages have themselves appealed to compassion and solidarity with others under the sign of shared, singular losses.

A universal centered on loss – an empty, kenotic universal – makes sense because, despite the insistence on incommunicability, for bereaved parents, communication, like life, does go on. In fact, the singularity of their loss frequently functions precisely as a touchstone for connecting with others who have suffered similar losses. After learning that his beloved twenty-five year-old daughter Léopoldine had drowned in the Seine, Victor Hugo would ask:

"*Pères, mères, dont l'âme a souffert ma souffrance, tout ce que j'éprouvais, l'avez-vous éprouvé?*"[172] Over the years, parents have responded to each other's appeals for solidarity – in person and elsewhere. BabySteps.com, a community for bereaved parents, is designed to look like a colorful house, perhaps something painted by a child, and features different-colored doors to forums where members can relay experiences and post memorials – "Bereavement Sharing Rooms" and "Memorial Rooms." Elsewhere online, an independent Swedish artist and videogame developer Simon Karlsson has begun work on a game called "A Song for Viggo."[173] The premise is far from conventional:

> You play a father who accidentally kills his son and then has to keep on living, even though everything crumbles around him. Your first mission is to arrange your son's funeral. You are going to have to do it alone, because your wife, Karen, went into a deep depression following the death of Viggo.

There is no Boss in "A Song for Viggo," no achievements to unlock, no points to score: the gameplay instead consists in managing the day-to-day triage of mourning and living.[174] There is no way to "win." It just goes on.

> Your goal is to maintain everyday life, despite the tragic circumstances. Be there for your daughter. Put food on the table. Do the dishes. Keep your marriage together. The struggles are of a psychological, rather than mechanical, nature. There is only one puzzle. It's called life...It is a story that tries to discuss things we don't normally talk to each other about. It is an investigation of the nature of depression – one of the world's main public diseases. And it is, indeed, about a simple fact: Even after the end, everything continues.

The game makes use of an ingenious animation design that relies on models originally cut out of paper for its graphics – as Karlson writes, the aesthetic presents a world which "after a terrible tragedy, is revealed to be as thin as paper." Blank white and gray two-dimensional

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[172] Hugo's *Contemplations IV*, whence this plea, is available online at: http://bit.ly/1Gldv0v.
[173] *A Song for Viggo*, and Karlsson's descriptions of it, is online at: http://kck.st/1h8k8vr.
[174] "Manage everyday chores while trying to deal with the aftermath of your son's passing. For example: To arrange your son's funeral, you first have to call the funeral home, and in order to call them you'll have to look up their phone number, and so on. But don't forget to feed the cat and buy groceries! In the meantime, your family is falling apart."

forms move frailly through a virtual three-dimensional space – the palette and paradoxically flattened dimensions suggesting not just how grief colors experience, but the limits of how much grief can be simulated or even communicated in the first place.

Outside of cyberspace, there are also venerable examples, throughout various canons, of appeals to grieving parents to look to the loss of yet others who have suffered similar or worse. There exist numerous variants of what is known as the Parable of Kisa Gotami in the Pali Buddhist Canon, but in all of them, a bereaved mother, driven to near-madness because of the loss of her young child, approaches the Buddha begs him to bring her child back to life.[175] The Buddha promises to help her, provided she can bring him a mustard seed from the pantry of a home that has not suffered a grievous loss. She consents, and as she visits countless families, realizes that she is not alone in her grief: no home has been untouched by grief – a realization that allows her to continue living, and living with compassion.[176]

The appeal of a kenotic universal lies in the capacity for generating solidarity across difference by appealing to the inevitable reality of loss while not erasing differences between experiences of it. This idea may perhaps be as old as loss itself, and is hinted at in many of the texts we have surveyed in our inquiry. Seeking one last example to close out our catalogue, it seems fitting to find one that is fragmentary – a testimony of generational severance that has itself been damaged in transmission, worn away by the passage of time, but the meaning of which is still carries through. The example comes from among the

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[175] For a version dated to the Sixth Century CE, see Davids (1971).

[176] Similar folktales exist in European traditions, where the trope of the overly-grieved parent (and mother in particular) realizing she is not alone is not uncommon; see the archive of story variants maintained by DL Ashilman at http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/mourn.html for a wealth of examples. I suspect this narrative preoccupation with overly distressed mothers partakes of misogynistic elements, and that expressions of prolonged grief by men are frequently suppressed, self-censored, or displaced (as in such folktales) onto women.

thousands of pages of epigraphy that make up the Corpus of Archaic Latin Inscriptions (*CIL*). It is an epitaph of an uncertain date, erected over the grave of a child, a six-year-old boy. The inscription is written in the voice of the dead child addressing his parents.

> Optatus, freedman of Publius and Clodia, lived six years and eight months. Here my parents burnt my dead body in the flower of my age. So long as was allowed me I lived more acceptable than any other to the gods above, of whom none could speak ill in bitter word . . . to the gods above whom loyalty compels . . . now modestly you . . . say you: "Optatus, lightly rest the earth on you." . . . a child who had not yet your share of years . . . when I am torn away from my mother's bosom to death . . . in life I was dear to departed souls, and very dear to the goddess who made away with me under unlucky omens. Cease now, mother mine, cease to torment yourself in vain sobs of wretchedness each livelong day, for grief such as this has not now befallen you alone; sorrows the same as these have fallen to the lot of mighty kings too.
>
> (*CIL* 12.1223)

"For grief such as this has not now befallen you alone." This direct address is in fact a kind of double apostrophe – an address to an absent figure – insofar as the child is as long gone and turned to carbon as the parents whom he supposedly consoles with wisdom beyond his years. And yet this communication occurs, and the child's grave speaks to us, all the same.

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