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The Language of Loss: Writing at the Intersection of Literature and Philosophy

By

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Doctor of Philosophy

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B.A., University of California, Santa Cruz, 1999
M.A., New York University 2005

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An abstract of
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Abstract

The Language of Loss: Writing at the Intersection of Literature and Philosophy
By Jacqueline Abrams

The Language of Loss examines the presuppositions that underlie both our conventional and critical discussions of loss, in order to reveal a more nuanced concept that breaks with categories of linear time and encapsulated subjectivity. Often, the experience of loss is taken as a point of departure, assumed at the outset to constitute an event that befalls a totalized subject and, once it occurs, divides time into "before" and "after." Questions about redressing loss, coping with it, even making meaning of it, typically rely on this notion of loss as a given event. This dissertation intervenes by challenging the very concept of loss on which those questions are grounded. Through close readings of specific literary and philosophical works, this dissertation argues that loss is not a definitive event that occurs at a specific moment in time, but rather a "constitutive force" that constantly works upon us. As the nuances of loss emerge, we find that it collapses discrete boundaries between presence and absence, life and death, and operates simultaneously as a force of dispersal and of gathering. Loss turns out to be the very ground for relationality itself, exposing us to the world and to others. We look to the works of Friedrich Nietzsche, Ford Madox Ford, Franz Kafka, and Virginia Woolf because, in each case, their writing preserves a link to that more traditional notion of loss, at the same time that it destabilizes the very presuppositions on which it is founded. In different ways, each author confronts the idea that the subject is an entity that possesses its Being, its world, the objects around it, such that it *has* those things to lose. By challenging notions of self-possession and linear temporality, they force us to re-think the concept of loss as well. Finally, each author elaborates a thinking of creative action—and writing, in particular—that derives from this force of constitutive loss, and exposes the tension between permanence and ephemerality. Thus, rather than dismiss the urgent claims to loss that are a salient feature of modern existence, this dissertation renders them more complex.

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Introduction

Point of Departure

To live is to lose. On the order of existence's most elusive questions, the experience of loss seems to be something we know intimately, without intervention or mediation, something that *belongs* to life by virtue of its inevitability. When it comes to loss, who is not an expert (or will become an expert) in and through the very act of living? One loses time, loved ones, things, ideas, life itself. Because one's own experience seems to confirm the very phenomenon of loss on such an immediate level, the *structure* of loss itself is often left uninterrogated. The fact that *one loses*—that one has lost or that one stands to lose—is not submitted to radical questioning, but is assumed from the outset to be an event, or series of events, that undoubtedly occur. Loss is treated more as a point of departure for investigation, a brute fact of existence that provides a foundation for further critical questions and interventions. These interventions are endlessly renewed and assume multiple forms. Whether they include psychological strategies for coping with loss, or political action for redressing loss, or even philosophical or religious inquiries into the meaning of loss, in each case, the event of loss itself is often taken for granted. To be sure, there is no shortage of engagement with the phenomenon. Literature bears witness to it through its countless confrontations with death, with spurned lovers, with disappeared objects, with characters seeking, finding, and losing. Philosophy directly or indirectly treats the question of loss whenever it investigates the basic phenomena of existence, of facing one's own death, of understanding temporality. Even theories of friendship invoke the notion of loss, conditioned as friendship is by the possibility that one may always survive the loss of the

friend.[1] And psychoanalysis tracks the conscious and unconscious symptoms of loss by investigating the various responses to its occurrence, whether one attempts to close with one's losses, or whether one remains persistently tied to them in the mode of interminable mourning. But even in these theoretically complex and nuanced dealings with loss, rarely is the underlying *fact* of loss interrogated in its own right. Rarely does one ask the more provocative, and perhaps controversial question, *is loss as such possible?*, as the answer seems to be so clearly and incontrovertibly affirmative.

To be clear, this project does not deny the experience of loss. It does not ignore the massive historical losses to which the last two centuries alone have borne witness, or the personal and collective suffering that are a constant feature of modern existence. It does not undermine the important work being undertaken in various disciplines that attempt to assess and evaluate all kinds of losses, either to expose their theoretical implications or to ensure more just conditions. On the contrary, it takes loss seriously as an open question, as one that requires us to make explicit the underlying assumptions that usually undergird our thinking of loss. It attempts to get back behind these inquiries, which treat loss as a point of departure, in order to ask about the very conditions of possibility for loss in the first place. It remains to be determined whether this inquiry will amount to an ontological investigation into loss, or whether the very nature of loss will turn out to destabilize ontology altogether. To this end, it raises the following questions: What concept of the subject informs our understanding of loss? What notions of time sustain it? What sense of possession, or having, is operative when we say that one has lost something or someone?

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[1] See, for example, Jacques Derrida. *The Politics of Friendship*. Trans. George Collins. New York: Verso, 2006.

In order to explore these questions, this dissertation turns specifically to the writing of modernity, precisely because this writing is so often framed in terms of loss—the loss of old forms of expression and representation and the embrace of new ones. And yet, even as it is identified by these categories of loss, this writing nonetheless works to dismantle the very presuppositions on which our common conception of loss is grounded. As we will see in greater detail throughout this dissertation, this writing challenges important metaphysical concepts like encapsulated subjectivity, which posits a totalized Being that is identical to itself and that *has* a world to lose, as well as notions of linear temporality, whereby time is neatly divided into discrete periods of "before" and "after," presence and absence, life and death. These concepts have covertly structured our understanding of the phenomenon, such that, when they are undermined, so too is the very notion of loss itself. Here, we attempt to re-conceive of loss in non-metaphysical terms, and then explore its relationship to the very act of writing itself.

At the outset, it should be noted that the texts under consideration here do *not* treat loss as an explicitly philosophical problem whose emerging contours must be puzzled out. Rather, each of the authors figured in this dissertation preserves a thinking of loss, while simultaneously destabilizing it. Every chapter profiles a single author—Friedrich Nietzsche, Ford Madox Ford, Franz Kafka, and Virginia Woolf—to show the ways in which each idiosyncratically engages with the fallout of the metaphysics of loss, even as they maintain a link to its old meaning. The condition of being suspended between a no-longer tenable concept of loss and an indeterminate alternative produces in each text significant consequences for our thinking of subjectivity, time, and creative action. Because a critique of the structure of loss is *not* the intended aim of each work,

often times, this dissertation must read the subtle tensions within the text, the moments in which the writing itself seems to problematize the very terms that the author has explicitly employed. Before turning our attention more directly to the challenges that these texts face, let us consider for a moment the way in which a seemingly secure and stable concept of loss begins to show signs of trouble. To do so, we will turn, not to one of the primary authors of this dissertation, but to Sigmund Freud, whose writing persistently returns to the question of loss in its various aspects.

PRIMARY LOSS

In his 1917 essay, "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud distinguishes between two responses to loss. He identifies mourning as the "normal" process that the psyche undergoes, in which it severs its attachment to the lost object, withdrawing the libido into itself until it finds a new object to replace the old. Melancholia, on the other hand, is the aberrant form that mourning takes when the psyche is unable to accept the reality of loss, and instead remains fixated on the lost object, which it then internalizes. On Freud's analysis, this process of internalization, in which the psyche takes the lost object inside itself, results in symptoms of self-loathing and self-reproach, which do not manifest in the case of successful mourning.[2] Before looking more closely at this essay, and in particular, the way in which references to loss become increasingly convoluted as it progresses, I want to briefly step back and provide a broader perspective about the

[2] Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 248: "If one listens patiently to a melancholic's many and various self-accusations, one cannot in the end avoid the impression that often the most violent of them are hardly at all applicable to the patient himself, but that with insignificant modifications they do fit someone else, someone whom the patient loves or has loved or should love. […] So we find the key to the clinical picture: we perceive that the self-reproaches are reproaches against a loved object which have been shifted away from it onto the patient's own ego."

relevance of this early essay and the critical debates that surround it to the discussion of loss in this dissertation.

In the intervening century since its publication, the response to Freud's essay has been monumental, informing not only psycho-analytic and post-Freudian studies, but the work of deconstruction, trauma studies, and countless other investigations into the relationship between subjectivity and loss. One particular line of critical inquiry has emerged in reaction to Freud's schematic distinction between mourning and melancholia. Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok take issue with Freud's claim that only the melancholic undergoes a process of internalization, whereby the lost object is taken inside the self. To the contrary, they argue that even in the case of mourning, internalization occurs, albeit a different form of internalization from that of the melancholic. In the case of successful mourning, "introjection" occurs as a process of full assimilation of the foreign body into the self. While the mourner is able to close with the pain and grief of loss, the departed other nonetheless becomes a constitutive part of the self. The melancholic, on the other hand, experiences a different process, called "incorporation," whereby the lost other is denied its own death, and is instead preserved within a crypt that the self constructs precisely in order to house that other, who is now suspended somewhere between life and death. Unlike his "successful" counterpart, the melancholic is unable to complete the act of mourning, and remains riveted to this loss that now haunts from the inside.[3]

Significant to this dissertation is the fact that the seemingly discrete categories of life and death and self and other, begin to break down in Abraham and Torok's reading. The instability of these binaries is pushed to its limit in Jacques Derrida's preface to

[3] Abraham and Torok, *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonomy*.

Abraham and Torok's work. In this preface, entitled "Fors," Derrida claims that the very distinction between mourning and melancholia, between introjection and incorporation, cannot be sustained precisely because the work of mourning is always destined to fail. There is no "successful" introjection, no completed mourning, as the self is always already inscribed and constituted by the loss of the other, whether or not that death actually occurs. There is no "getting over" these losses, as they already constitute the subject on a kind of structural level, holding it open, refusing any totalization or full assimilation. Elissa Marder engages with this debate in her discussion of the strange and nuanced relationship between Derrida's preface and the body of Abraham and Torok's text, a discussion that ultimately invokes questions about the force of magic and telepathy as they bear on the act of reading itself. Marder writes that, "the crypt not only disrupts the concept of self and, with it, conventional ways of thinking about place, but also radically undermines any possible clear distinction between the living and the dead by showing that the living can be inhabited by dead others even as those dead others are 'kept alive' artificially in secret safe-houses within the self."[4] It is precisely this unseating of the subject as a self-enclosed, self-identical Being that informs the work of this dissertation. To understand the self as comprised of those others, who are neither dead nor alive, but "'kept alive' artificially" within the self, provides insight into the direction that the present discussion will pursue, as it already begins to problematize any reductive thinking of life, death, or the event itself. These critical readings, along with others, like David Eng and David Kazanjian's important study on loss, attempt to reconceive of our relationship to the fixity of the past and to time by interrogating melancholia's persistent

[4] Marder, "Mourning, Magic, Telepathy," 184.

attachment to loss, and the ways in which it is unexpectedly productive of creative activity.

While this dissertation draws heavily on the work of these important critics, privileging a notion of the subject that resonates and is conversant with the one alluded to here, the intervention that this work seeks to make occurs before the mourning/melancholia, introjection/incorporation split. Or, to put it otherwise, rather than focus on the way in which Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia collapses around notions of interiorization or even around the questions of success, failure, normalcy and pathology, we already have reason to pause at the first mention of loss. When the essay opens, Freud claims that "the exciting causes" for mourning and melancholia are "the same for both conditions."[5] To this end, he writes,

> Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on. In some people the same influences produce melancholia instead of mourning and we consequently suspect them of a pathological disposition."[6] [*Trauer ist regelmäßig die Reaktion auf den Verlust einer geliebten Person oder einer an ihre Stelle gerückten Abstraktion wie Vaterland, Freiheit, ein Ideal usw. Unter den nämlichen Einwirkungen zeigt sich bei manchen Personen, die wir darum unter den Verdacht einer krankhaften Disposition setzen, an Stelle der Trauer eine Melancholie.*]

At this early stage of the essay, mourning and melancholia still share a common source of loss, conceived as some real loss in the world, even in cases when the lost object is an ideal. Freud lists these potential losses in a seemingly neutral way, as though there were no hierarchy among them. And yet, on closer read, one loss is privileged above the others, "the loss of a loved person," which emerges as a kind of originary loss. Even though the very next loss named—"the loss of some abstraction"—is preceded by the

[5] Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 243.
[6] *Ibid*., 243.

conjunction "or," implying that it is qualitatively no different from the loss of a loved one, it is nonetheless framed in terms of substitution. In a strange syntax, Freud writes, "the loss of some abstraction which has *taken the place* of one." Here, the term "one" refers back to that primary lost object, the "loved person," such that any loss on the order of abstraction only seems to exist in relationship to it. On this reading, the loss of the beloved other appears as kind of template for loss in general, which is imagined on the model of that originary event. One of the concerns of this dissertation is the way in which the trope of loss always seems to elicit an ordering or hierarchizing tendency, one that relies on a logic of primacy and fallenness. In this subtle way, "the loss of abstraction" appears to be a secondary kind of loss, one that "takes the place" of something more fundamental.

In an essay that otherwise imagines the process of mourning to be a kind of balance sheet of libidinal investment, where psychic equilibrium is the outcome of normal functioning, it would seem that any notion of excess or remainder would be cause for concern. That is, the process of mourning seems to subscribe to a fantasy of completed and totalized activity that ties up all loose ends, one in which the libido is capable of becoming entirely "free" and "uninhibited,"[7] and available for a substitute object. It is not surprising, then, that Freud would conceive of loss itself in terms of substitution. And yet, even in this seemingly innocuous move from the privileged loss of the beloved other to the secondary loss of abstraction, some excess is produced. And, here, excess takes the form of an increasing indeterminacy. Already with this initial move toward "the loss of some abstraction," the image of loss itself has become more abstract. Even the modifying adjective "some," which would simply seem to refer to the totality of

[7] *Ibid*., 244.

abstract losses, produces that sense of elusiveness that becomes more pronounced as the essay continues. To this end, even Freud's list of examples—"one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on"—progresses toward a horizon of infinite possibility, where the seemingly unremarkable "and so on" does not just stand in for all those endless circumstances that cannot be listed in their entirety, but indicates the way that loss will become more obscure with every attempt to define it more precisely.[8] Loss, which appeared at the beginning of the essay as the stable ground upon which the more perplexing question of mourning and melancholia arose, by the end has turned into the mystery itself.

At first, it seems that Freud wants to trace one of the primary differences between mourning and melancholia to their opposing responses to the event of "reality-testing." Freud explains that, in the case of mourning "respect for reality gains the day,"[9] and the libido is withdrawn from the lost object, however painful and laborious the process may be. We would expect, then, that Freud would counter this image of successful reality-testing with a description of melancholia's refusal to accept the *reality* of loss. But instead, Freud re-opens the discussion of loss itself to amend his earlier claims, suggesting that the problem might not lie with the psyche's resistance to reality, but with the very nature of certain kinds of loss. He begins by confirming what he has already said in regards to the loss of a loved one and to the loss of an abstraction: "In one set of cases it is evident that melancholia too may be the reaction to the loss of a loved object. Where the exciting causes are different one can recognize that there is a loss of a more ideal

[8] See: Eng and Kazanjian regarding the "and so on" of Freud's quote: "This 'and so on' marks a melancholic excess—an abundance implicit in the very notion of remains—that exceeds the restrictive enclosure of melancholia as pathology, negativity, or negation" (Eng, 5).
[9] Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 244.

kind. The object has not perhaps actually died, but has been lost as an object of love (e.g. in the case of a betrothed girl who has been jilted)."[10] Here, it seems that both mourning and melancholia are potential responses to death and to dejection, that the loss engendered by abandonment is just as "real" and viable a loss as death itself. But as Freud continues, things become more complicated. He writes:

> In yet other cases one feels justified in maintaining the belief that a loss of this kind has occurred, but one cannot see clearly what it is that has been lost, and it is all the more reasonable to suppose that the patient cannot consciously perceive what he has lost either. This, indeed, might be so even if the patient is aware of the loss which has given rise to his melancholia, but only in the sense that he knows *whom* he has lost but not *what* he has lost in him. This would suggest that melancholia is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious.[11]

It is at this point that mourning and melancholia diverge with regard to loss as the excitatory cause. In the case of melancholia, the analyst may presume that some loss has occurred, because the patient behaves as though it has, but neither the analyst nor the analysand can identify the loss itself. The conclusion that Freud draws from this is that melancholia involves some form of loss that exists on an unconscious level, whereas mourning does not.

In this build-up to the announcement of melancholia's unconscious component, however, the reader stumbles over the claim that the melancholic may be conscious of his loss, "but only in the sense that he knows *whom* he has lost but not *what* he has lost in him." [*"Ja, dieser Fall könnte auch dann noch vorliegen, wenn der die Melancholie veranlassende Verlust dem Kranken bekannt ist, indem er zwar weiß* wen*, aber nicht,* was *er an ihm verloren hat."*] The bizarreness of this sentence alone should give us reason to

[10] *Ibid*., 245.
[11] *Ibid*., 245.

pause. Nowhere up until this point has Freud dissected a loss in this way, parceling out its various components. On the contrary, the loss of a "loved person" emerged, as we have seen, as a kind of primary loss, that is, precisely one in which the "*whom*" and the "*what*" would be conflated. The fact that a seemingly originary loss might harbor within it this internal division, or splitting, suggests, at the very least, that loss is much more complicated than it previously appeared. And it is not simply more complicated in a way that Freud would hope to manage or control. In other words, the complication does not simply refer to the fact that, in some cases, namely melancholia, loss occurs on an unconscious level. We are interested, rather, in something that seems to inhere within the nature of loss itself and in the way that it unsettles the very categories that it nonetheless seems to produce. If Freud was initially compelled, however unintentionally, to frame loss in terms of an originary lost object—the loss of a loved one, a "*whom*," we might say—then this introduction of a "what" that might reside alongside/within/behind the "whom" works to unsettle it. Suddenly, it seems as though there is something more originary still. Now the "whom" potentially bears within it a mysterious "what," something always capable of evading consciousness, even when the "whom" is known. This "what" haunts the center of that originary loss, and in the process, instills in *all* loss a potential zone of inaccessibility.

Freud does not elaborate further on this distinction between the "whom" and the "what" of loss in this essay, and it is passed over even in this paragraph without ceremony. But Freud, too, seems to sense that something has become dislodged, or unhinged with this reference to melancholia's "unknown loss,"[12] and he tries to re-assert control, to re-quarantine mourning from the potentially contaminating effects of

[12] *Ibid*., 245.

melancholia.[13] In the process, he is led to restrict mourning's losses in a way that is no longer resonant with his earlier inclusion of abstraction and ideals. He writes, "the exciting causes of melancholia have a much wider range than those of mourning, which is for the most part occasioned only by a real loss of the object, by its death."[14] Even with the tempering claim "for the most part," the gesture of singling out "death" as the occasion *par excellence* for mourning cannot help but strike the reader as a serious reduction from the once expansive list of potential losses ("and so on"). The significance of Freud's essay for this dissertation lies in the fact that it begins in such a way that the contours of loss appear to be clear, definable, circumscribable, even if one could never list every potential occurrence of loss. As the essay unfolds, Freud acknowledges that loss may elude consciousness, but the limiting factor seems to reside in the patient's access to that unconscious loss, rather than something inherent within loss itself. But in the parceling out of loss into a "whom" and a "what," which stand in some kind of essential relationship to one another, Freud has turned an apparently stable notion of loss into something abyssal. It is this vortex that loss seems to create, beckoning, on one hand, a thinking of primacy, of origin, of plenitude and fallenness, and on the other, a refusal to grant any of these terms unproblematically, that this dissertation investigates. We turn, then, to the writing of modernity, as it is there that this tension is sustained in a particularly charged way.

MODERNITY'S INVESTMENTS: TIME AND THE SUBJECT

[13] Freud will later complicate his early distinction between mourning and melancholia in *The Ego and the Id* (1923), when he comes to conclusion that mourning cannot claim a pure space apart from melancholia, as the ego itself is comprised of once-held and then discarded object-cathexes.
[14] Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 256.

Although critics debate the exact parameters of "modernity"—its start and end dates, its abiding tenets, its most representative figures—they consistently describe it in terms of a changing relationship to time.[15] For the purposes of this dissertation, the "writing of modernity" will encompass a period that dates from the middle of the 19th century up through the interwar years of high modernism, precisely because, in form and content, this writing bears witness to a shifting experience of time itself, and because it reflects on its own fraught relationship to its cultural past, opening questions of temporal continuity and rupture. And as we will see through the course of this investigation, the question of loss profoundly engages with the question of time. Inscribed within a traditional concept of loss seems to be a notion of time as linear and chronological, whereby prior plenitude undergoes a process of diminishment, and some figure of origin succumbs to its fall. The division of time into the binaries of "before and after," "then and now"—seemingly benign terms that appear to be the very condition of loss itself—silently import into the concept an entire infrastructure of metaphysics. They seem so integral to our understanding of loss, in fact, that it is difficult to imagine how we might take our departure from them. How does one begin to speak about loss without those very terms that mark the event as such, that acknowledge that some passage or transformation has occurred? We turn to the writing of modernity precisely because it maintains a link to this language that distinguishes between discrete moments, at the same time that it

[15] For an excellent discussion of modernity and its preoccupation with time, see Elissa Marder's book, *Dead Time* (2001), in which she investigates modernity's "temporal disorders," such as addiction and trauma, through readings of Baudelaire and Flaubert. It takes as its starting point Walter Benajamin's notion of shock experience and considers the cases in which time itself is the very thing that resists assimilation. Also, see Ulrich Baer's work, *Remnants of Song* (2000), which also turns to writers of modernity (Baudelaire and Paul Celan) in an effort to chart those "unresolved" experiences that evade memory and cognition and ultimately bear on questions of traumatic temporality. Finally, see Perry Meisel, *The Myth of the Modern* (1987), who investigates the desire within modernism to posit, or find, origins, even though the attempt is a necessary failure.

collapses the categories of chronological time and the totality of the subject. This dissertation will explore the very tension within a writing that conspicuously identifies itself with loss and change, all the while destabilizing these concepts.

Aligned in the critical literature with "the alienating, blinding experience" of "large scale industrialism,"[16] this writing responds, on the one hand, to the increased regimentation of existence, and on the other, to the kinetic energy of the amorphous urban crowd that always remains excessive to it. Modernity's rhetoric of change refers not just to the external elements of existence—new modes of technology, the mechanizing of daily life, social and political upheavals—but, as Walter Benjamin explains, to something that has changed within the very "structure of experience" itself.[17] He writes this in an essay entitled, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," whose poetry, he claims, registers and responds to this change by placing the particularly modern experience of shock [*Chockerfahrung*] "at the very center of his art."[18] Drawing on the work of Freud, Benjamin suggests that the task of consciousness is to protect the living organism from the external stimuli of the world, and once these stimuli are converted over to consciousness, their power to haunt, overwhelm, and produce anxiety is annulled. That is, "The more readily consciousness registers these shocks, the less likely they are to have a traumatic effect."[19] According to Benjamin, Baudelaire's poetry captured this struggle, in which consciousness battles to assimilate the shocking and the foreign to itself, rendering it in the form of "a duel in which the artist, just before being beaten,

[16] Benjamin, "On Some Motifs," 172.
[17] *Ibid*., 171.
[18] *Ibid*., 178.
[19] *Ibid*., 176.

screams in fright."[20] Thus, Baudelaire's poetry communicates the very breakdown of communication itself, and language emerges to narrate the limits of its own narrative capacity.

Benjamin's essay on Baudelaire is infinitely rich and complex, and deserving of a much more nuanced reading than this introduction can accommodate. Thus, by way of simply gesturing to the ideas developed later in this dissertation, we will pursue only a few points in Benjamin's text, noting that the figure of Baudelaire that makes a brief appearance in this introduction comes by way of Benjamin. In particular, we want to note the way that Baudelaire's writing troubles the boundaries between inside and outside in relation to this experience of shock. According to Benjamin, what Baudelaire captures in his poetry is the explicitly modern shock of being in the middle of the "amorphous crowd of passers-by."[21] If shock itself refers to all those external stimuli that consciousness fails to convert into cognition or voluntary memory, then the figure of the crowd signals the modern self that meets its limit in the form of an experience that has, at once, occurred and not occurred, having evaded consciousness altogether. It is a self that can no longer pretend to totality, self-transparency, or self-knowledge, because it is comprised of elements that it does not recognize and cannot properly claim as its own. But the subject that is rent open in Baudelaire's work is not one that draws back in fear, as Benjamin explains, but one who suffers "the stigmata which life in a metropolis inflicts upon love."[22] That is, rather than retreat from the jostling presence of the nameless masses, the poet embraces the very source of his own shock. And to complicate matters, the crowd exists simultaneously outside of the poet, and yet belongs to him in an essential way.

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[20] *Ibid*., 178.
[21] *Ibid*., 180.
[22] *Ibid*., 185.

Benjamin insists on this when he writes, "As for Baudelaire, the masses were anything but external to him."[23] Or again, "The masses had become so much a part of Baudelaire that it is rare to find a description of them in his woks" but "the secret presence of a crowd is demonstrable almost everywhere."[24] That is, by enfolding the crowd within himself, and not simply the other way around, Baudelaire harbors the very source of shock itself. And, in this extreme proximity, the crowd does not surface in his work in any explicit way, but instead haunts his poetry, in the way that a memory trace, which resists conscious integration, haunts the one who experiences it by failing to experience it. And, as in the case of the crypt, which challenges our notions of encapsulated subjectivity by blurring the boundaries between the living and the dead, Baudelaire presents us with an image of a subject, accosted by a world that, nonetheless, occupies from the inside.

Part of the work of this dissertation is to pursue this collapse of boundaries, in particular, the boundaries that quarantine the subject from the world and from others, precisely because it is these boundaries that give rise to a notion of *having*, or possession, the very grounds for thinking that the subject has some *thing* to lose in the first place. To flesh out the significance of Baudelaire's transgression of boundaries in relation to the crowd, we will turn for a moment to another thinker whose critique of metaphysics is instructive here, Martin Heidegger. While Heidegger is not treated explicitly in this dissertation, like Baudelaire's crowd, his work nonetheless informs this entire project. In some ways, we might say, all of Heidegger's work, from his early writing, *Being and Time,* through his later work on the language of poetry, is about tearing open discrete

[23] *Ibid*., 183.
[24] *Ibid*., 183.

boundaries and showing how entities that once seemed self-enclosed are actually held open, exposed, and engaged in myriad relationships that prevent them from being entirely self-sustaining. Whether it is the subject, the present moment, truth, or language itself, Heidegger shows how each is comprised of something given and something withheld, such that nothing ever manifests without also concealing certain aspects of itself. When it comes to the subject, which Heidegger re-names with the German word "Dasein," implying that Being is always oriented toward something other than merely itself, the very notion of a hard and fixed boundary separating it from the world and from others (such as we might find in the case of the Cartesian cogito, for example) is upended. For Heidegger, the subject does not *possess* its own Being, nor does it encounter the world as something merely "out there" to be had and to be lost. Instead, Heidegger's subject is always bound up with the world, finds itself in a mood, is turned over to its cares and concerns and projects, defined as much by its potentialities for Being as by what it is, at any given moment.[25]

In particular, it is around the figure of death that the discussions of subjectivity, time and loss coalesce. For Heidegger, the subject is a Being that lives within the horizon of its own death, a Being that exists always toward its own end [Sein-zum-Ende].[26] But this death that awaits the subject is an event that will never occur as such, because when it does, Dasein is no longer "there" to experience it.[27] This condition in which the subject lacks the very thing that belongs to it most fundamentally, holds it open to the world in a radical way, turning that subject into something that is essentially fragmented and exposed, spread out, not just among the things around it, but across time. For Heidegger,

[25] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 145.
[26] *Ibid*., 245.
[27] *Ibid*., 237, 242.

the very moment of the present derives from the future, as Dasein is always projected out ahead of itself, anticipating its own arrival. While we do not have time here to flesh out Heidegger's complex analysis of ecstatic temporality, at the most basic level, the fact that the present moment is not a discrete entity, but tied to the future and the past in a non-linear, non-chronological way, reveals something for our thinking of loss. As we move away from the concept of an event that divides time into before and after, loss emerges as a constitutive force always bound up with the movement of withdrawal, the manner in which things exist without ever being fully given. In this way, loss reveals a new image of plenitude that is proleptically shot through with death, absence and disappearance, at the same time that fallenness maintains traces of life, presence and fullness even after its occurrence. Loss will become the grounds for the very thinking of relationality, the way in which things are drawn together, and in which nothing is entirely available or appropriable. Each of the authors in this dissertation explores this condition, not only on the level of content, but through form and style as well. And yet, we must note that, even as these authors elaborate in their various ways a more nuanced thinking of loss, it never completely departs from its metaphysical significations. To this end, we note that the very writing of modernity is steeped in the language of binaries that it nonetheless displaces.

As was alluded to earlier in this introduction, modernity reflects not just on its changing experience of time, but also on the weight of its cultural inheritance, the relationship in which it stands to its own past. In the modernist writing of the 20th century, this preoccupation with the past enters the work in the form of a particular "belatedness." This term itself is highly determined, and bears its own rich history in the

critical literature, one that takes its orientation from Freud's notion of *Nachträglichkeit*, or deferred action, elaborated in his case study of the Wolf Man. While we will not pursue this line of thinking here, we will note that this concept of belatedness, whereby an event refuses to be localized in any particular moment of time, problematizing the very status of an event, as well as the idea of linear time, very much informs the work here.[28] For the sake of this introduction, however, we invoke the notion of belatedness simply to reference the feeling of having arrived "too late," as Perry Meisel describes it in *The Myth of the Modern*. This idea that one has constitutively *missed the event*, however indeterminate and unspecific that event remains—that one shows up only after something has transpired—derives from the lamentable fact that we cannot call oneselves into being, that we inherit "predetermined" rules and figures, language and tropes and thus cannot create our own ground, independent of that past.[29] To discover in an "inherited figurative language" a world in which everything has already been determined and originality has already been exhausted, is to imagine some realm of truth "behind the bias of figure." Here, one retroactively posits some sense of origin to account for the fact of one's belatedness.[30] Thus, Ezra Pound's rallying cry to "Make it New!" reverberates with the

[28] The term *Nachträglichkeit* arises in the case study of the Wolf Man in order to describe a situation in which a young child witnesses his parents copulating. But because the child is too young at the time to fully understand the meaning of the event, the event itself does not exist for him *as such* at the moment of its actual occurrence. It is only belatedly—first at a later age, then more fully through the process of psychoanalysis itself—that the event, which was not, properly speaking, experienced at the time, produces a memory. That is, the event *becomes* an event, not when it occurs, but when it *recurs*. *Nachträglichkeit* thus describes a situation that is produced only after the fact, which means that, at its chronological moment in time, the event is simultaneously present and absent (Freud, Wolf Man, 202). This concomitance of presence and absence will be crucial for the work that follows in this dissertation, as the notion of "constitutive loss" participates in the breakdown of seemingly binary positions, presence and absence first of all.

[29] Perry Meisel, 40.

[30] See also Lecia Rosenthal's reading of belatedness in terms of modernism's preoccupation with catastrophe and the unprecedented event in *Mourning Modernism* (2011): "In modernism's aesthetics of departure, the problem of the past imposes the weight of an unassimilated, ever-burgeoning dispersal of

desire to unburden oneself from this authority of tradition and the strictures of influence. It is a call, not to mine the past for something still untapped, but to create a future that breaks with it. Writing, it seems, would now be framed in terms of this rupture between two temporalities, two heterogeneous moments in time that keep no community. We cannot help but hear in this rhetoric, a notion of loss and change that is entrenched in the metaphysics of presence and absence, priority and fall. This break that would dispense with the old and, in its place, erect the "new" is imagined in a language of all-encompassing severance. Even in Virginia Woolf's famous pronouncement that, "On or about December 1910, human character changed" we find the world seemingly divided into before and after.[31] The work of this dissertation, then, consists in taking these claims seriously, hearing in them traces of a loss that calculates, orders, and divides, and yet, finding in them, too, a notion of loss that pushes beyond these limits, that operates in the mode of transgression.

Chapter I, "Nietzsche's Exposure of the Subject and the Opening of the World," turns to the writing of Friedrich Nietzsche in order to establish the philosophical stakes of

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loss. Both proleptic and retrospective, anticipatory and backward-looking, lateness is at odds with the neat distinctions between the (first) 'now' of the event and the (secondary) 'now' of posterity" (Rosenthal, 3).

[31] Here, one could do a reading of Benjamin's claim regarding Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal*: "If there really is a secret architecture in the book—and many speculations have been devoted to this question—the cycle of poems that opens the volume is probably oriented toward something irretrievably lost." (Benjamin, 197). What kind of irretrievable loss is this? What would "irretrievable" mean on this register? Benjamin discovers this engagement with loss in the following lines of Baudelaire's poem, "Recueillement" [Contemplation]. The poem reads: "See the dead departed Years leaning over / Heaven's balconies, in old-fashioned dresses." Benjamin glosses this passage by claiming that, "In these lines, Baudelaire resigns himself to paying homage to bygone times that escaped him in the guise of the outdated" (199). Or again, in one of Baudelaire's "Spleen" poems, "Le Goût du néant" [The Taste of Nothingness], which reads, "Le Printemps adorable a perdu son odeur!" ["Spring, the beloved, has lost its scent"], Benjamin writes that, "Here Baudelaire expresses something extreme with extreme discretion; this makes the line unmistakably his. The word *perdu* acknowledges that the experience he once shared is now collapsed into itself" (200). This "collapsing" of experience "into itself," this "*perdu*," the loss that cannot be explicitly named except in terms of the disappeared "scent" of "Spring," seems to divide time into "then" and "now." How might we read the perdu in modernity's writing? One could trace the "perdu" from this work through to Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, investigating what kind of object of loss time is. How does it manage both the metaphysical implications of loss and the dissemination of metaphysics at the same time?

this dissertation. In particular, it investigates the question of subjectivity, not as the triumph of Becoming over Being, but in terms of a tension between stability and rupture, gathering and dispersal. It pursues this question by re-thinking relationality in his work, turning specifically to his writing on the slave and the noble to problematize the rigid boundaries between them and to better understand the nuances of an encounter between self and other. Further, this chapter looks to some of the more complex themes in his work—the pronouncement of God's death, the will-to-power, the relationship between life and death—to show how each is informed by the notion of constitutive loss. Finally, it closes by turning to the question of creative action to consider its ties to the "event" of death, as well as the call that it places to the "reader of the future," the counter-signatory that Nietzsche's work perpetually seeks.

Chapter II, "Language and the Deferral of Meaning in Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier*," investigates the relationship between loss and narration, whereby experience itself seems to be mediated by the very act of telling. It looks to Ford's use of the time-shift, by which the narrator strays from the constraints of chronology and linear temporality to tell a story about a missed encounter with one's own life. In the process, it discovers a link between language and desire, whose larger implications are that language *produces* the very things that it purports to describe. Language itself leads the way in this novel. And any images of fullness and plenitude are revealed to be merely mirages, constructed after the fact to account for an absent origin. The novel stages the desire for some kind of meaning, some final word, some definitive answer, which it invests in the image of inheritance. And yet, the only meaning that language can produce is one that refuses to stand still, one that offers no plenitude, but is built around loss. It is a meaning

born of indeterminacy. Like the Nietzsche chapter before it, which envisions its recipient in the form of a perpetually held out audience, this novel explicitly names its own fictive reader, appealing directly to a "you," in the it hopes that this "you" will ground this slippery text, but only ends up dislodging it further.

In Chapter III, "Kafka's Fatigue and the Indeterminacy of Loss," we focus on the question of loss as the very condition of existence itself, the very thing that enables life, as well as writing. Within Kafka's worlds there is almost no image of plenitude, such that any event of loss already breaks with traditional models of wholeness, origin, primacy. Loss marks the structural deferral of plenitude, as if it could exist only in the form of its absence, a promise infinitely held out. Progress itself emerges only as a stripping away, whereby characters, whose names are often only letters, go in search of fullness, only to be further evacuated along the way. The by-product of this non-progressive, non-teleological movement is fatigue. Sleep and exhaustion are constant preoccupations, not just in Kafka's daily life, but as the force that propels his work without advancing toward any end. We turn specifically to his novel, *The Castle*, in order to ask what sleep delivers and what its failure to materialize means. Ultimately, we consider the economy in which sleep, writing and loss all participate.

In the final chapter, "Imperatives of Elegy: The Constitutive Losses of Virginia Woolf," we focus on the writings of Virginia Woolf, to consider the link between literary language and the underlying sense of loss that elegy presupposes. This chapter explore the idea that elegy, for Woolf, describes a loss that is not calculable, but constitutive of the self, bound up with concealment and ambiguity. Loss becomes a figure of excess, something that will not succumb to language, cognition, or communicability. Here, we

finally round out the thinking of "constitutive loss" as a destabilizing force that corrupts the boundaries between inside and outside, life and death, presence and absence, holding something open that pretended to closure. This chapter explores the way that loss inhabits the self proleptically, an event that has both already occurred and is still on its way. As in all the chapters before it, here we track not just the forces that tend toward dispersal, but those that promote unity, gathering, pulling things together. We investigate the breakdown of boundaries, not just between self and other, as described in the mind of Mrs. Ramsay, one of Woolf's most complex characters, but also with regard to the world of things and objects. In closing, we turn to the question of creative action to see how it is born of this breakdown in boundaries, and how it gives rise to a notion of ephemerality as the very source and condition of permanence.

CHAPTER I

Nietzsche's Exposure of the Subject and the Opening of the World

On the path towards radically rethinking the concept of loss, Friedrich Nietzsche's place is exemplary, not least of all because he challenges our understanding of loss itself, stripping the concept of its facile associations with absence and fallenness, and imbuing it, instead, with the joyousness and gaiety proper to life.[1] Whether writing about Ancient Greek tragedy, the will to power, or the death of God, Nietzsche's work engages with the theme of loss in covert ways. But his more radical intervention into the itinerary of loss derives from the fact that Nietzsche's own thought fundamentally issues from the place of loss, oriented and defined by its strange and complex demands. What this means is that concepts that support and undergird a traditional notion of loss—metaphysical concepts like the encapsulated subject and the world of discrete objects outside of it—are subverted in Nietzsche's writing. His entire oeuvre, we might say, is dedicated, in one way or another, to this mapping of a world in which loss is a constitutive factor, one that tears the subject open, exposing it to its environment, leaving it fragmented and incomplete, but riveted, nonetheless, to this ostensible outside, to others, and to the things that surround it in the mode of persistent relationality.

Nowhere do we see this more clearly than in his own autobiography, *Ecce Homo*, where the structuring force of loss determines and shapes the writing itself. In this final work, the dismantling of the subject and the object reaches its culmination, as Nietzsche

[1] I want to thank Elissa Marder for her critical interventions in the chapter, particularly around the discussion of the riddle and its ever-transforming terminology. As a result of our conversations, every aspect of this chapter was pushed to greater depth and her insights are woven into the text in countless ways.

simultaneously *presents* himself via his writing, and yet resists falling back into notions of totalized subjectivity that make such self-presentation possible. Our investigation, then, begins with specifics moments in Nietzsche's autobiography that disrupt the discrete boundaries between life and death in ways that are instructive for the rest of the chapter. From there, we move to a discussion of loss as the destabilizing force of subjectivity and objectivity more generally. This broader discussion winds us through the detours of Nietzsche's most salient and complex ideas, like the death of God, eternal recurrence, and the slave/noble dichotomy, raising questions about temporality, the relationship between Being and Becoming, and the boundaries between inside and outside, self and other. Along the way, we demonstrate that Nietzsche is not a thinker of assertive self-overcoming in the service of an ever-expanding, ever-consuming will to power, but instead that Nietzsche indicates a much more nuanced mode of receptivity and radical exposure to the world, one which issues from the force of constitutive loss and makes possible a creative and transformative engagement with life. That is, loss turns out to be the very condition of finitude and the very possibility of writing itself. Thus, we begin at the end with Nietzsche's final work, *Ecce Homo*.

THE GRAVE AND THE WOMB

In the opening line of *Ecce Homo*,[2] in a chapter immodestly entitled, "Why I Am So Wise," Nietzsche traces the singular gift of his existence to its unique suspension between apparently oppositional poles. He claims to straddle the divide between life and death, on the one hand, and sexual difference on the other. But it is not life and death, or

[2] Although *Ecce Homo* was his last original book, *Nietzsche Contra Wagner* was Nietzsche's final published work during his lifetime (1895); it is compiled of previously written text.

man and woman, *in general* that he references. Instead, it is his own family tree that he maps. In the form of a riddle, the genealogist turns his gaze upon himself to reveal an intimate relationship with life and death through the figures of his parents. He writes, "The good fortune of my existence, its uniqueness perhaps, lies in its fatality [*Verhängnis*]: I am, to express it in the form of a riddle, already dead as my father, while as my mother I am still living and becoming old" (EH, "Wise"§1).[3] The terms of the riddle seem clear: death is aligned with the father, who has always already passed. Life belongs to the mother, who ages, who moves towards death, but in the mode of persistent survival. Even as Nietzsche imagines himself to be the figure that transcends these divides, the terms of the riddle are still presented as if they were oppositional forces: life vs. death, mother vs. father. But, as we might expect with any Nietzschean utterance, the very terms of this riddle will become more and more convoluted as we delve deeper into his oeuvre. For now, however, it is enough to note that *Ecce Homo*, the book that Nietzsche hoped would provide a more personal introduction to his readers, is one that opens with the problem of life and death and the problem of sexual difference.

The irreverence of the book—with chapter titles, such as "Why I Am So Wise," "Why I Am So Clever," "Why I Write Such Good Books"—distracts the reader from the fact that it is supposedly written as an invitation to a still-absent audience. To be clear, the insurmountable distance between "the greatness of my task," as Nietzsche calls it, and "the smallness of my contemporaries," is not to be eradicated by *Ecce Homo*; Nietzsche

[3] For another reading of this passage, see Klossowski "The Consultation of the Paternal Shadow" in *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, where Klossowski traces in Nietzsche's writing an "inverted Oedipal schema.' Klossowski writes :"Nietzsche *substituted himself*, and *had always substituted himself, not for his father next to his mother*—following the Oedipal schema—but, in accordance with an inverted schema, *for his mother* next to his father, as being *his own mother*. This is what he later explained through his own self-cure" (Klossowski, 134).

does not believe such an eradication to be possible. But it is nonetheless an appeal, an effort to enable greater transmission. This is his final effort, not to pander to the ill-equipped and parochial masses, but to find the lone philosophers who wander without community, the few capable of receiving the work. *Ecce Homo* is Nietzsche's self-denuding performance, which explicitly insists to the reader, *"Hear me! I am such and such a person. Above all, do not mistake me for someone else"* (EH, Preface§1). To right the problem of mistaken identity is the impetus of the book. It is a work about being misunderstood and the efforts undertaken to correct it. Nietzsche beseeches his reader, not in the mode of desperation, but rather with the tone of one prepared to settle all accounts. His opening riddle must be read in this context, as the first word in the service of self-exposure and the call to a new breed of thinkers.

So what exactly does the riddle reveal? The very fact that it is a riddle at all is worth noting. Implicit in this formulation is the idea that something must be untangled or worked out. It is a challenge to the reader, a seductive lure, whose power lies in the unspoken suggestion that the one capable of unscrambling its terms is the one worthy of understanding its meaning. In order to map the unique constellation of Nietzsche's existence, whereby "good fortune" is indistinguishable from "fatality," one must navigate the riddle of mother-life and father-death and Nietzsche's irreconcilable belonging to both. And, in claiming that he belongs to both, Nietzsche reveals his own extraordinary exile from all sides. It would seem that one who simultaneously straddles life and death belongs completely to neither state, identifies with no single condition, no definitive space, no discrete temporality. And this existential homelessness—which, we might note, had already been literalized in 1869 when Nietzsche relinquished his Prussian citizenship

and permanently became a "stateless émigré"[4]—is here rooted in the division between a living mother and a dead father.

The living mother will not die, even as she is tied to the image of ageing. Via the mother, Nietzsche remains riveted to life, moving toward a certain death that, nonetheless, does not arrive. And as mother, he is on the side of creation, pregnancy, and birth. Throughout Nietzsche's work, there are repeated references to his own transgendering, to the "spiritual pregnancy" that the true philosophers—the "male mothers," as he calls them—undergo (GS§72). As Nietzsche says, "we have to give birth to our thoughts out of our pain" (GS, Preface§3). And he identifies himself with those whose "overfull power" is "pregnant with the future" (WP§846). Creation seems to be the province of the mother, and as a philosopher who advocates for creative intervention in the world, Nietzsche aligns himself with the maternal function. Via the father, Nietzsche embodies the position of the male inheritor, the continuance of a family name that originates in the past, to the long line of fathers and sons that came before him. As the riddle makes clear, the father is already on the side of death, already within the grave. Nietzsche does not simply associate with the dead father by means of some particular action, like mourning, which still belongs to the world of the living. The riddle is unequivocal about this: Nietzsche himself is "already dead as [his] father." There is an overt identification with the lost object itself, not in the mode of a Being that has lost something external, which he incorporates into the self in the form of melancholic preservation. This loss is much more ontologically devastating. To say, "I am dead as my father," is to exist by means of this exorbitant loss, to have been obliterated and,

[4] See Siegfried Mandel's introduction to Lou Salomé's book, *Nietzsche* (p. xxii). In spite of his renunciation of Prussian citizenship, Nietzsche did serve briefly as a medical orderly in the Franco-Prussian War.

simultaneously, to recognize oneself as an obliterated object. It is to die and to survive death at the same time.

The riddle seems to present us with terms that are aligned in this particular way. But when we step back from the specifics of the riddle—life/death, mother/father—and consider, instead, the kind of figure that would be capable of holding such contradictory positions, at the most basic level, we can say that the subject emerges as something fundamentally unlocalizable. It slips out from every determined position by simultaneously identifying with its opposite. Emphasis is on movement and transmutability. These are the metamorphoses of an ever-transforming Being, one that is continually in the process of Becoming. And this constant Becoming does not simply refer to a Being that now assumes one discrete position and then replaces it with another, and so on and so forth in a linear fashion. Rather, Nietzsche claims for himself a dual identity. "I am a Doppelgänger," he writes. "I have a 'second' face in addition to the first. *And* perhaps also a third" (EH, "Wise"§3). Nietzsche's multiple faces are not merely masks, if we think of masks in terms of superficial disguises that a stable and determined subject might temporarily don. These second and third faces belong just as originarily to the subject who is in a constant state of transformation.

Here, these multiple faces send us back to a passage from *The Gay Science*, in which Nietzsche suggests that we need "the strength to create for ourselves our own new eyes—and ever again new eyes that are even more our own" (GS§143). Initially, we might be tempted to read this claim as an appeal to the subject, a demand that he appropriate a vision that is increasingly *his own*. But this reading misses the mark. In spite of the apparent suggestion that the subject increasingly hone his vision toward

greater precision, there can be no final correction of the underlying astigmatism. This is not because clear sight is structurally prohibited, but because the subject has already been exploded open, dispossessed of anything like one final set of eyes that might improve linearly toward greater and greater sight. The subject is already a Doppelgänger. His sight is multiplied from the outset, and the notion of rendering it increasingly his "own" is undermined by the fact that there is no enclosed self-sameness, no grounding sense of propriety that might steer its progress. Instead, there is only an endless cycle of renewal and re-vision that does not lead toward any singular end. And while the riddle posits Nietzsche in the "unique" position of a suspended subject, his entire oeuvre has already undermined that uniqueness. This bridging position of indeterminacy is precisely the condition of the Nietzschean subject, who no longer appears as an encapsulated entity. Thus, every subject is a Doppelgänger. To be a Doppelgänger is the very meaning of subjectivity here. To explore this in greater depth, we must understand the function of the subject within Nietzsche's work.

While Nietzsche is, perhaps, more frequently cited for his diatribes against religion and morality, his pronouncement of the death of God, and his critique of mass culture, it is his treatment of the subject that undergirds so many of these ideas. One might argue that no single thread in his work can be pursued in isolation from the entire Nietzschean cloth, and yet, as we will see, each investigation tends to lead one back to the underlying question of the subject. Thus, Nietzsche writes:

> Must all philosophy not ultimately bring to light the preconditions upon which the process of reason depends?—our belief in the 'ego' as a substance, as the sole reality from which we ascribe reality to things in general? The oldest 'realism' at last comes to light: at the same time that the entire religious history of mankind is recognized as the history of the soul interpretation. Here we come to a limit: our

> thinking itself involves this belief (with its distinction of substance, accident; deed, doer, etc.); to let it go means: being no longer able to think. (WP§487)

The entire scaffolding of western thought seems to rest on the basic "fiction" that the subject is a substance. And from this thought—that the subject is a thing, that it has an essence, that its relationship toward its being is one of possession[5]—there follows an elaborate mapping of reality. For Nietzsche, not only does this belief in the subject-as-substance govern our fundamental understanding of all activity—that all *effects* can be traced back to a motivating *cause* that is "unified" and more or less intentional, that if "[t]here is thinking: therefore there is something that thinks" (WP§484)—it also makes possible the larger parceling out and dividing up of existence into appearance and reality, soul and body, *this* world and *that* world, good and evil. When Being is reified first in the subject, the world is then primed for designation into so many calculable and determinate objects. To understand the ego as a coherent and unified entity, as opposed to, say, a tumultuous and ever-transforming clash of drives, instincts, and negotiations of power, is to posit a world that is stable, that can be understood, that can be uncovered for the "substance" that inheres there. All thinking, he says, is predicated on this concept of the subject. So when Nietzsche counters this enclosed and essence-driven notion of subjectivity with one that is more fractured, cacophonous, and always in flux, he delivers a paralyzing blow to the very possibility of thought as such: "*to let it go means: being no longer able to think*." In the place of a unified subject who bears its essence as if it were yet one more quality it possessed, Nietzsche proposes the "subject as multiplicity" (WP§490), constructed instead of a "continual transitoriness and fleetingness."

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[5] See also *Will to Power*, Section 549: "The fundamental false observation is that I believe it is *I* who do something, suffer something, 'have' something, 'have' a quality."

But once Nietzsche tears the ground away, sets the subject loose from its moorings to substance, its emancipated and unhinged condition activates an endless search for origins and for destinations. Even though linear temporality itself is one of the first casualties to go down with the old notion of the subject, there is nonetheless an increased pressure on the old bookends of past and future to produce genealogies, on one side, and the arrival of new philosophers, on the other. The future, or more specifically, the idea of destination, increasingly seeps into Nietzsche's writings, which are charged with invocations to an audience of readers that never materializes. Not just in *Ecce Homo* but in most of his works, Nietzsche appeals explicitly to the thinkers and true philosophers of the future. The questions that obsess him— *Who will receive his works? What compatriots of thought will countersign his texts? Will his words ever fall on ears capable of hearing them?*—seem to produce two alternate conceptions of the future. On the one hand, Nietzsche is looking for a community of equals, and he calls out to a "you" that is his peer. You "brothers," you "creators, you "industrious comrades" (GM, Preface§7). The image is one without internal hierarchy. On this model, Nietzsche grants himself a collective of brothers, a new fraternity to replace the actual brother that he lost as a child. But if he imagines that they are out there somewhere, he nonetheless persists as the figure of the solitary wanderer bearing the greatest loneliness, however much he infuses it with Nietzschean joy. If his texts deploy a search party to find those comrades, those brothers, Nietzsche makes it clear that they are never found: "I am still looking," he says (GM, Preface§7).

The second model figures Nietzsche, not in the position of the brother, but rather in the position of the father. As we have seen, through his explicit identification with his

own dead father, the riddle already invests Nietzsche with a certain paternal function. When considered within this context of destination, the paternal function seems to be about passing something down to an heir. It is about ensuring the survival of a Nietzschean mode of thinking; it is about discovering the son who can "muster the courage to push [Nietzsche's] suspicion to its limits" (GS, Preface§2). But while the father in the riddle seems to be rooted in the past—the sign of inheritance and indebtedness to the dead—here, the paternal function seems much more aligned with that of the living mother, a "male mother," as we have seen, who inseminates the future with radical thought. Of course, the very discrete notions of "past" and "future" do not entirely hold up in Nietzsche's work, once the essentialist subject has been discarded. Thus, even when Nietzsche seems to uphold a movement of linear temporality, claiming, for example, "I am merely my father once more and, as it were, his continued life after an all-too-early death" (EH, "Wise§5), Nietzsche actually distorts and undoes temporal boundaries in the process. The very notion of a finite life, perfectly circumscribed by birth and death, is upended here. In this passage, the son's continuation of his father's life after death, disrupts, rather than maintains, these boundaries.[6]

The radicality of this father-son relationship should not be tempered or stripped of its subversive implications. Nietzsche does not simply mean that the son keeps alive the father's memory or his name in some metaphorical way. This would hardly be remarkable. Looking more closely at Nietzsche's other references to the father-son relationship, we find that, around the figure of the father, a discussion of *belatedness*

[6] Nietzsche's identification with his father is so extreme that he treats his father's death sentence—a "softening of the brain" at the age of thirty-six—to be his own death sentence, and it threateningly hangs over Nietzsche until the full onset of his madness. See Safranski, 362. In a letter to Carl von Gersdorff in 1876, Nietzsche writes: "My father died of an inflammation of the brain at age thirty-six. It is possible that it will happen to me even faster."

arises. As it turns out, patrilineage is not just the passing down of certain characteristics from father to son, but involves the surfacing of dormant qualities that otherwise remain hidden. In *The Gay Science*, for example, Nietzsche makes a claim about the eruption of traits that emerge generations after they have been acquired. He writes: "But just wait for their children and grandchildren, if you have time to wait that long: they bring to light what was hidden in their grandfathers and what their grandfathers themselves did not suspect. Often the son already betrays his father—and the father understands himself better after he has a son" (GS§9). Elsewhere, in *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche says: "What is silent in the father learns to speak in the son; and often I found the son to be the father's exposed secret" (Z, "On the Tarantulas"). At first it might seem that the son's very existence constitutes an act of betrayal, a form of duplicity. The son speaks what the father has kept quiet. But on closer read, the father-son relationship turns out not to be one of simple continuity or discontinuity. The son may be the father's "exposed secret," but a secret that the father himself never suspected. That is, the son preserves something in the father that the father did not know was there, and thus is also the destroyer of its hidden aspect. This is simply another form of creation, where the son brings to life something that did not fully exist before.

If this emphasis on destination is part of the fallout of the subject-as-substance and ultimately complicates the gender alignments that the riddle seemed to portray, the discussion of origin similarly complicates the terms of the riddle. As suggested earlier, the deprivation of the subject, who can no longer serve as substantive ground, inaugurates an urgent search to account for a beginning, for a source and a lineage. The fact that Nietzsche claims for himself the role of the genealogist—the one who pieces together the

myriad traces of a past in order to uncover the thread that made necessary a particular present and signals a possible future—is not unrelated to the emergence of the fractured subject. We may even decipher in Nietzsche's incessant penning of his own autobiography—nine of them before the age of twenty-four[7]—an anticipation of the substantive ego's bitter end. The beginning must be written over and over again, as there can be no final word, no definitive origin for a subject that now emerges as "multiplicity." It is in the atmosphere of this dispossession that Nietzsche's first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, purports to describe precisely the event of a birth, whereby tragedy emerges from the spirit of music revealing the collective, albeit unrestrained, will that underlies and unifies all individual difference and provides solace in the face of death. But in this book about birth, about the eruption of tragedy onto the world scene before Socrates and Euripides could distort it beyond all recognition, it is the *womb* that most transfixes the author.[8] As if Nietzsche still needed to get back behind the moment of birth to seek out something even more originary, he continually returns to this concept of the womb, or rather, to a plurality of wombs.

On some level, *The Birth of Tragedy* is a kind of detective story, an investigation to determine the womb from which ancient tragedy rightfully emerged. On its most manifest level, the work profiles the pre-Socratic Greeks, who, out of the fullness and exuberance of life, invented tragedy as a perfect balance of two competing drives. The first, ruled by the image-making god Apollo, is the tendency toward splitting off, toward individuality and difference. The second, under the music-making god Dionysus, is the

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[7] Safranski, 25.

[8] There is not time here to develop in an in-depth discussion of Nietzsche and pregnancy, but a reference to Nietzsche's complex acts of re-gendering, especially around the topic of pregnancy, see Derrida's work, Spurs: "[Nietzsche] is the thinker of pregnancy which, for him, is no less praiseworthy in a man that it is in a woman" (65). Also, see Luce Irigaray, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*.

demand for release, for intoxication, the merging of all difference into a primordial unity and world will. Nietzsche tracks this rare moment of "reconciliation" between these two gods. He argues that the equilibrium unique to the ancient tragic form allowed the Greeks not only to countenance death, but to live with an unprecedented degree of creativity. The eponymous "birth," then, in *The Birth of Tragedy* seems to be precisely this "reconciliation"—"the most important moment in the history of Greek religion" (BT§2). But once Nietzsche announces this birth, the real problem of its maternal origin seems to surface. And so we find Nietzsche, assuming the role of the obstetrician, trying to discern *which* womb ["*Mutterschoß*"] actually delivered the specimen of tragedy.

At times, the chorus, with its distillation of difference into a collective voice, operates in the capacity of a womb: "the choral passages which are interwoven with the tragedy are, to a certain extent, the womb of the entire so-called dialogue" (BT§8). At other times, music in general is the rightful womb: "What form of drama was left, if it was not to be born from the womb of music, in that mysterious twilight of the Dionysiac" (BT§12). Elsewhere, the world-will itself is the womb that manages the conflicting sensations of pain and joy, allowing us to experience "behind the world and through its destruction, a supreme, artistic, primal joy in the womb of the Primordial Unity" (BT§22). Finally, it is Dionysus, previously identified by Nietzsche as "the mysterious twilight" in which the "womb of music" gives birth, here becomes womb: "The Dionysiac, with the primal pleasure it perceives even in pain, is the common womb from which both music and the tragic myth are born" (BT§24). This is not even to mention all the other disparaged wombs—"the womb of this Socratic culture" (BT§18) or the "womb

of theoretical culture" (BT§19)—that emerge after the fall of tragedy and which always carry for Nietzsche the seed of "catastrophe."

In this biography of the ancient tragic form, whose end is precipitated not by natural causes, but by its own "suicide,"[9] the search for a womb is, from the beginning, tragically bound up with the certitude and foreknowledge of its death. That which the womb carries is already slated to die. Nietzsche cannot write about ancient tragedy's birth without always already mourning its premature demise. In this way, the womb marks the promise of loss, the loss of its own creation. And, yet, in a characteristically Nietzschean twist of plot, it is not just the womb that anticipates the eventual loss of tragedy, but also the death of tragedy that signals the loss of the primordial womb. As though this originary womb could no longer persist after the death of its progeny, tragedy's suicide leaves the world bereft of the maternal origin. Assessing the cultural consequences of ancient tragedy's death—namely, the voracious drive-to-knowledge that takes its place—Nietzsche poses the following question: "The enormous historical need of dissatisfied modern culture, the accumulation of countless other cultures, the consuming desire for knowledge—what does all this point to, if not to the loss of myth, the loss of a mythical home, a mythical, maternal womb?" (BT§23). [*Worauf weist das ungeheure historische Bedürfniss der unbefriedigten modernen Cultur, das Umsichsammeln zahlloser anderer Culturen, das verzehrende Erkennenwollen, wenn nicht auf den Verlust des Mythus, auf den Verlust der mythischen Heimat, des mythischen Mutterschoosses?*] The death of tragedy is the closure of the womb, the banishment from that maternal place of

[9] See *Birth of Tragedy*, Section 11, where Nietzsche writes that tragedy "died by suicide, as the result of an irresolvable conflict, which is to say tragically, while all the others died the most beautiful and peaceful deaths, fading away at a great age."

protection. The womb comes to mark the condition of a fundamental lostness, a deprivation of origin, and the existential homelessness that settles on the modern world.

While the riddle had seemed to square mother firmly on the side of life, the very source of her procreative power—the womb itself—turns out to be intimately bound up with death. As the chapter progresses, we will see how creation and death are really enmeshed. But here it suffices to note that the terms of the riddle, which opens Nietzsche's last original book, have already been proleptically transvalued by the entire body of work that precedes it. Thus, the figure of the father, which in the riddle had seemed tethered to the past, is actually aligned with destination and the future. And the mother, who the riddle figured as the source of life, creation, and birth, reveals herself to be aligned with death and loss. And, as if to illustrate the unexpected proximity between birth and death, and the out-of-joint quality that time displays once the subject is torn open, Nietzsche reverses the order of their occurrence, so that birth follows death rather than precedes it. In a passage in *Ecce Homo*, where Nietzsche reflects on all of his philosophical contributions and their failure to find a proper home among his contemporaries, he writes: "The time for me hasn't come yet: some are born posthumously" (*EH*, "Good Books" §1). It is a seemingly simple utterance, which, on the surface, might be taken to mean that the impact of Nietzsche's work will not be felt until after he has passed. But to appreciate the full weight of this claim, we must consider the bizarre distortions of time that make it possible.

BOUNDARY AND RUPTURE

If Nietzsche claims for himself a posthumous birth, it means he must somehow live as one returned from the grave. Here, temporal frames, especially those that supposedly circumscribe a finite life, are subverted. What would it mean, not merely to survive one's own death, but to be born after it, for loss to occur before the figure of plenitude that is supposed to precede it? It is a reversal of the most fundamental order of time. And this is partly what Nietzsche is after: to disrupt a thinking of time as obligingly chronological and to upend a binary thinking of life as opposed to death. So why do his writings betray a fixation with the *properness* of time, constantly profiling events that are out-of-joint with their moment of reception, as if it would be possible for them to ever sync up properly? [10] For example, Nietzsche displays a preoccupation in his writing with *earliness*. Not only does he assert his anachronistic misalignment with his own time, he makes that misalignment a salient feature of one of his most well-known figures, the "madman" who comes to announce the death of God. The madman's desperate warning—that we ourselves have killed God—falls on deaf ears. And in the ensuing silence, he smashes his own lantern and declares his arrival premature: "'I have come too early,' he said then; 'my time is not yet'" (GS§125). Both Nietzsche and the madman are ahead of their times, and not just because they are both philosophically precocious in relationship to the provincial thinkers around them (although this is certainly part of it). Their out-of-jointness serves a larger purpose, which is to expose the vulnerability of time to an order other than chronology. Rather than revealing time's linearity, Nietzsche's emphasis on the properness of time and its subversion highlights, instead, time's malleability.

[10] In a section of *Zarathustra*, entitled "On Free Death" ["Vom freien Tode"], Nietzsche extends the notion of "properness" to the very act of dying itself. He writes: "Many die too late, and some die too early. The doctrine still sounds strange: 'Die at the right time!' / Die at the right time: thus Zarathustra teaches it.'"

As if to remind us that the real emphasis is not on earliness, but on time's *disjointedness*, Nietzsche also figures himself as the one who comes too late. Philosophically isolated in his own century, Nietzsche considers his true contemporaries to be the Ancient Greeks. Thus, when he uses the first person plural, "we," invoking a community in spite of this isolation—"we daredevils of the spirit"—it is a community that consists of the dead. "Oh, those Greeks! They knew how to live," he writes in the Preface to *The Gay Science* (*GS*, Preface §4). He continues: "And is not this precisely what we are again coming back to, we daredevils of the spirit who have climbed the highest and most dangerous peak of present thought and looked around from up there—we who have looked *down* from there? Are we not, precisely in this respect, Greeks?" This "we" stands simultaneously at a loss to the Greeks, and yet, via this philosophical fraternity, transcends the distance of millennia. Thus, Nietzsche's first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, is precisely an effort to understand their culture and revivify it. Nietzsche looks to their ancient love of tragedy and attempts to discover in it some hint of their unique orientation to the world. In typically Nietzschean fashion, what he finds in this tragic form is actually evidence of "overbrimming health," reversing what might otherwise appear to be the case. Here, unexpectedly, health demands tragedy, while degeneration and weakness, which culminates in the period of modernity, manifests as a frenzied display of optimism, logic, and reason.

But if the Ancient Greeks are Nietzsche's kindred spirits, this inheritance is nonetheless burdensome. One suffocates under the weight of Ancient Greek accomplishment. One's own work is diminished by the greatness of the Greeks. He writes, "Almost every age and stage of culture has attempted at some point to free itself,

with deep feelings of anger, from the Greeks, because, in comparison with them, all one's own achievements, although apparently completely original and quite sincerely admired, suddenly seemed to lose colour and life and shrivel into an unsuccessful copy or even a caricature" (BT §15). The Ancient Greek-effect, it seems, is to belatedly transform beauty, originality, and skill into paltry imitation. What seems magnificent in the moment need only be brought into comparison with the Ancient Greeks in order to expose its deficiencies. The grandeur of their achievements makes a mockery of everything that follows. Here, again, we cannot help but note that Nietzsche seems to re-inscribe a thinking of binaries in which the copy or caricature stands in a fallen relationship to the original, which embodies plenitude and perfection. That is, the copy marks the loss that befalls the primacy of Ancient Greek origin. Why, then, does this philosopher, who seems so bent on subverting reductively oppositional thinking, slip so easily back into it here? Or, we might ask: do these terms actually stand in an oppositional relationship to one another?

To engage with this question further, we look elsewhere in Nietzsche's work for instances of this apparently binary distinction between copy and original. Although it emerges in a slightly different guise, this same opposition turns up again in *Ecce Homo*, specifically when Nietzsche writes about his father. He says: "My father died at the age of thirty-six: he was delicate, kind, and morbid, as a being that is destined merely to pass by—more a gracious memory of life than life itself." [*"Mein Vater starb mit sechsunddreissig Jahren: er war zart, liebenswürdig und morbid, wie ein nur zum Vorübergehn bestimmtes Wesen, --eher eine gütige Erinnerung an das Leben, als das Leben selbst."*](EH, "Wise"§1). To be always already memory, the *Errinerung an das*

Leben, rather than life itself, is, in some ways, to exist as copy, never accessing the original. Ghosted from the outset, the father seems to circumvent experience, to move directly to the imprint of life, to the traces it leaves behind. But by linking up the discussion of copy/caricature with the discussion of life and death around the figure of the father, we discover a much more nuanced relationship at stake, one in which the original cannot be severed from the copy, but is made possible and upheld by it. This idea becomes clearer as we frame the discussion in the broader terms of life and death. That is, in the father's missed encounter with life, life begins to look a lot death. This is not surprising when we recall that it is particularly around the topic of life and death that Nietzsche most explicitly collapses discrete boundaries. He writes: "Let us beware of saying that death is opposed to life. The living is merely a type of what is dead, and a very rare type" (GS§109). Everything issues out of and back into this space of death, which encompasses the fleeting and brief condition of life. Life is riveted to death, not in a purely binary way, but as co-extensive and mutually intertwined. Life belongs to death and death to life, just as the copy and the original belong to one another, each as the other's enabling force. This idea, which is sketched here only in a cursory way, becomes increasingly charged as we turn our attention more fully to death itself. And to open a proper discussion of death in Nietzsche's work is to investigate the death of all deaths, the death of God.

Bearing in mind this image of the copy, we note that it is a *shadow*—Buddha's shadow, in particular—that harbingers the death of God in Book Three of *The Gay Science*. In a section entitled "New Struggles," Nietzsche writes: "After Buddha was dead, his shadow was still shown for centuries in a cave—a tremendous, gruesome

shadow. God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown" (GS§108). Because his shadow—this copy of God—remains active in minds of men, they fail to register His death as a death. This passage seems to suggest that, if God's death destabilizes time in any way, it is has more to do with the shortsightedness and willed blindness of men, than anything inherently awry with the categories of time itself. On this surface reading, "God is dead," means simply that we can no longer appeal to any transcendent principle by which to anchor ourselves or guide our actions. God's death is the annihilation of all absolutes and the destabilization of meaning, so coveted in a world that otherwise reveals itself to be arbitrary, cruel, and unjust. The Judeo-Christian God once provided man, in his smallness, with a sense of belonging, "a deep feeling of standing in the context of, and being dependent on, some whole that is infinitely superior to him" (WP§12a). God's death, then, is inevitable, once we realize "that becoming has no goal and that underneath all becoming there is no grand unity," and that the truths man took to be given are "fabricated solely from psychological needs" (WP§12a).[11] Critics, on this reading, may debate the details of God's post-mortem or the exact causes of Nihilism (i.e. the endless scientific denuding of the world, the wearying sense that underneath all our religious values lies a vast and expansive nothingness, the auto-destruction of morality as it suffocates under its own tenets[12]), but these critics rarely consider the bizarreness of

[11] WP§12 (A): What all these notions have in common is that something is to be achieved through the process—and now one realizes that becoming aims at *nothing* and achieves *nothing*. –Thus, disappointment regarding an alleged aim of becoming as a cause of nihilism.

[12] In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche identifies a kind of compulsion of sacrifice, an inevitable momentum and telos that has no choice but to end with the sacrifice of God as though propelled by the very drive that ends with auto-destruction. Nietzsche writes:: In earlier times, people offered their god sacrifices of human beings, perhaps even those they loved best. […] Later, in humanity's moral epoch, people sacrificed to their God the strongest instincts that they possessed. […] Finally: what was left to sacrifice? Didn't people finally have to sacrifice everything comforting, sacred, curative, all hope, all faith in hidden

God's death as Nietzsche frames it. That Nietzsche *means what he says* when he says that "God is dead" is taken at face value.[13] But if we don't push this any further, then the complex notion of death in Nietzsche's writing, as well as the strange circumstances of God's obituary, are thus ignored.

Arguably, the most famous passage concerning the death of God also appears in *The Gay Science* a few sections later and falls under the famous heading, "The madman" ["*Der tolle Mensch*"]. It opens in the voice of an unnamed narrator who inquires into the status of a rumor: "Have you ["*Habt ihr*"] not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place, and cried incessantly: 'I seek God! I seek God!'" (GS§125). The passage opens in the form of a question: a question, formulated in the negative, to a plural you about the status of a rumor about a madman, who comes looking for God. We cannot interpret "The madman" without simultaneously noting all of these intervening layers that set the actual announcement of the death of God at a remove from the reader. The opening question, then, is whether the *rumor of the madman* has reached our ears. As Nietzsche himself is the author of the rumor, never published before this first telling, it is a question that must, of course, be answered in the negative. And yet, in asking the question, the passage suddenly invents an entire possible

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harmony, in future bliss and justice? Didn't they have to sacrifice God himself, and, out of self-directed cruelty, worship stone, stupidity, heaviness, fate, nothingness? To sacrifice God for the sake of nothingness—the paradoxical mystery of this final cruelty has been reserved for the generation that is just now emerging—and all of us already know something about it" (BGE, §55).

[13] In otherwise beautiful and complex readings, many critics still adhere to a notion of "death" in Nietzsche's writing that does not consider the more complicated and nuanced continuum of life/death, as opposed to a more radical distinction between life and death. For example, in his rigorous and otherwise subtle reading of Nietzsche, Michel Haar still claims that "God is dead" "summarizes the collapse of all values. For disaffection in regard to religious faith is only one sign among many indicating the bankruptcy of every ideal: not only of every ideal, but of every intelligibility. With God there disappears the guarantee for an intelligible world, and therewith the guarantee for all stable identities, including that of the ego. Everything returns to chaos" (Haar in Allison, 14). Thus, while Haar derives from God's death the important destabilization of identity, the notion of 'death' itself does not seem to present any sort of philosophical problem.

rumored history that precedes the telling. (Ironically, "The madman" is the passage *par excellence* that truly does get co-opted by popular culture, where the channels of rumor pass it along, until the name of Nietzsche becomes synonymous with the "death of God.") By opening in this way—with an address to the reader about the status of an imaginary rumor—this work of philosophy lapses into fiction. Without opening Nietzsche's entire discourse on the relationship between *Wahrheit* and *Lüge*, we still must note that the announcement of this divine mortem is tied in certain ways to literature. And God's death is only one part of this narrative, which includes the ranting perambulations of the madman, and a rumor, and a marketplace full of villagers that resist him. In this turn to a literary form, emphasis is no longer on some logical conclusion (i.e. God is dead) and the arguments that support it, but is multiplied, such that the movement of narrative itself—the way that the story unfolds—takes precedence.

The announcement itself follows its own strange trajectory. That is, the madman, the one who claims to come seeking God is also the one who *knows* that God is not to be found. And so his first words—"I seek God! I seek God!"—transform the entire scene of his ominous tidings into a performance. He has come to announce a death, but instead pretends to be searching for the missing. When he is received by the marketplace with jests and taunting responses—"Has he got lost? Did he lose his way like a child?"—the madman cuts the charade and breaks the news. "'Whither is God?' he cried; 'I will tell you. *We have killed him*—you and I'" (GS§125). But this pronouncement that is supposed to convey the greatest loss of all losses, immediately lapses back into questions. Almost the entire rest of his monologue assumes the form of the interrogative, questions posed to everyone and no one in particular: "'How did we do this? How could we drink

up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun?'" Each question spirals us further and further away from the earth, into the cosmos, as the perspective gains ever-greater distance—"Do we not feel the breath of empty space?"—and time is scrambled until darkness and night close in upon the day. The profundity and utter calamity of this deed is conveyed by way of these questions.

If God's death, which turns out to be more of a murder after all, is announced via an onslaught of questions, it is because the form of the question is more suited to an event that eludes any attempt to definitively pin it down. Although the madman unequivocally announces the completion of this deed—"God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him"—there is something, nonetheless, about the event of this death that remains excessive, such that it has, at once, occurred and not occurred. As this chapter has already noted, after the madman has made his announcement and is met with astonished silence and blank stares, he shatters his lantern, declares his premature arrival, and concludes thus: "my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men." ["*Dies ungeheure Ereignis ist noch unterwegs und wandert*."] (GS§125). While one may certainly infer from these lines a simple claim that men have not yet *processed* or recognized the impact of God's death (and undoubtedly, Nietzsche's writing bears this reading out), the exact formulation of this claim still gives reason to pause. What does it mean for an event to be wandering, an *ungeheure Ereignis* that simultaneously has occurred, but is nonetheless still *unterwegs und wandert*? Not only is God lost, but God's death, too, seems to be lost. As such, the madman's grief is at once entirely justified and premature.

It seems that Nietzsche can hardly discuss the occurrence of God's death without simultaneously announcing its non-arrival, as though the event could only be thought in terms of its derailing, its lagging behind itself. It is at once the most intimate act and the farthest thing from us. So, he writes that, although we have committed the murder ourselves, "[t]his deed is still more distant from [us] than the most distant stars" (GS§125). Extreme proximity is tied to the greatest distance. And as we look more closely at the "deed" itself, it becomes harder to say whether the actual event under investigation refers to the death of God or to our reception of the news, or whether, in fact, those two components can be separated at all. In another famous passage, Nietzsche writes: "The greatest recent event—that 'God is dead,' that the belief in the Christian god has become unbelievable—is already beginning to cast its first shadows over Europe" (GS§343). In this quotation, God's death is nothing other than the waning belief in God Himself. Something that had been taken for granted—something we had accepted on faith—has disappeared and taken believability with it. Within these various passages, the meaning of the death of God seems to vacillate between two different possibilities. At times, God's death seems to refer to an event in the world. It occurs whether or not humanity takes note. The death is an event unto itself. In fact, it is only in this way that Nietzsche can claim that God's death occurs without our having registered it. The shadow of Buddha on the walls of the cave distracts us from the absence of God Himself. At other times, however, God's death cannot be separated from our belief in God. For example, in the last passage cited, God's death is nothing other than the very loss of our belief in God. We cannot even think the event of this death in isolation of its reception.

Far from attempting to untangle the intricate convolution of Nietzsche's text, this discussion posits that the strangeness surrounding God's death requires us to resist any straightforward notion of an *event*. As we have just seen, the event of God's death means various things, at times referring to our belief in God, at others, referring to an isolated occurrence, independent of the question of faith. As we have also seen, the event of God's death resists any straightforward temporality: the greatest loss that has befallen modern culture has both occurred and is still on its way—*unterwegs und wandert.* And it is precisely this temporal havoc—the inability to *determine* what has actually occurred and what has not occurred—that God's death unleashes. It is under these circumstances that Nietzsche describes the condition of the "born guessers of riddles," the free-sprits and noble souls like himself, who, as a direct result of God's death, find themselves in a kind of fractured temporality, "posted between today and tomorrow, stretched in contradiction between today and tomorrow" (GS§343). The impact of this event, which resists any categorization, is the abandonment to an in-between time that cannot be mapped or charted.[14] To serve as the hinge between today and tomorrow means that one belongs properly to no calculable time. So when Nietzsche writes that, "This long plenitude and sequence of breakdown, destruction, ruin and cataclysm […] is now impending" (GS§343), the reader must resist any simple divide between "before" and "after." As suggestive as the semantics are of a prior plenitude and subsequent fall, it is rather the case that one now lives in an *endless* breakdown and infinite recurrence, which has always been on its way and will never fully arrive.

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[14] This notion of in-betweenness is also reinforced by the very positing of humanity as a rope or a *bridge* in the opening of *Zarathustra*. "'Mankind is a rope fastened between animal and overman—a rope over an abyss. / A dangerous crossing, a dangerous on-the-way, a dangerous looking back, a dangerous shuddering and standing still. / What is great about human beings is that they are a bridge and not a purpose: what is lovable about human beings is that they are a *crossing over* and a *going under*" (Z, Prologue§4).

If *The Gay Science* bears the bad tidings of His passing, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is ostensibly written in the wake of God's death. It is a book that follows the fits and starts of the eponymous Zarathustra, who alternately descends from his mountain home into the marketplace, retreats back to isolation, descends again, exposing to his various disciples an image of the world that is deteriorating and the new one that is on its way. His teaching is that of the Overman, [*der Übermensch*], the figure whose long arrival is possible because of the death of God. Only by annihilating the decaying vestiges of the Judeo-Christian world, is the creation of new values possible.[15] But in the same way that God's death seemed to unhinge time and produce the condition of in-betweeness [*das Zwischen*], so the text of *Zarathustra* unfolds as a kind of evasion of time, even as it tries to pin time down from the very first sentence: "When Zarathustra was thirty years old…" (Z, "Prologue"§1). In this work, the notion of the "non-arrival" assumes an even greater magnitude, because this figure of the Overman, which is suddenly made possible in a new, godless world, never, in fact, shows up. Zarathustra is clear on this point, as he says: "Never yet has there been an overman" (Z, "On Priests"). But it is not simply that the Overman has somehow failed to materialize, and that his non-arrival will be converted into a definitive arrival once he finally makes an appearance. Non-arrival is *structurally* written into the figure of the Overman, as the one that must continually *get over* man. In fact, this figure that belongs to an indefinite future, cannot be described in terms of Being, as though Being were something he might possess. The Overman simply makes explicit the fact that there is no solid ground of Being. Instead, the Overman exists in the mode of ever-transforming, impermanent Becoming. Here, we might recall the image of

[15] On this necessary link between the birth of *der Übermensch* and the death of God, see *Zarathustra*, "On the Blessed Isles": "Once people said God when they gazed upon distant seas; but now I have taught you to say: overman."

the mother in the riddle that opened this chapter. Her interminable progress toward an end that never arrives is of the same order as this Overman, who exists in a perpetual state of transformation—"I am that *which must always overcome itself*'" (Z, "On Self-Overcoming"). This structural deferral that belongs to both the mother in the riddle and the Overman is the same one that prevents God's death from ever being over and done with. It ensures that life does not ever achieve a final stance, a final condition, but that it "must be struggle and becoming and purpose and the contradiction of purposes" (Z, "On Self-Overcoming"). This is not to say that there are no moments of stability. On the contrary, in order to "overcome," some solid ground must be achieved.

Although the Overman exists by way of perpetual squandering like the sun that gives generously without expecting anything in return, he must, nonetheless, practice some kind of maintenance, some form of hoarding, which perhaps belies his kinship to his progenitor, man. According to Nietzsche, man is characterized by his anxious eye toward self-preservation, safety, and stockpiling. Here, the image of man is of a figure hunched over, clutching his belongings to his chest in an effort to fend off potential losses. The gesture is one of self-enclosure and guarding. In contrast to man, the Overman embodies life's insatiable desire to reach for the heights, to grow, to discharge its energy. Thus, Zarathustra says: "And because it needs height, it needs steps and contradiction between steps and climbers! Life wants to climb and to overcome itself by climbing" (Z, "On the Tarantulas"). In the act of overcoming, however, life must arrive at the landing of each step. As Heidegger will have taught us in his lectures on Nietzsche, there is no way to bypass the climbing, to achieve the heights without *pausing* at intervals along the way. The process of overcoming cannot be a consistent squandering without

some degree of replenishment. And the act of creation—which is so central to the figure of the Overman—must halt at times to survey its work. This alternation between outpouring and maintenance is crucial, because for Nietzsche the act of creation cannot be separated from the act of destruction, which must have something fixed to destroy.

Again, we are reminded of the figure of the mother, not when she appears in the riddle, purely on the side of life, but as her procreative power is revealed to be always already bound up with loss, death, and destruction. This becomes clear when Nietzsche describes the creative/destructive impulse that surfaces in Zarathustra. Zarathustra says, "Whatever I may create and however I may love it—soon I must oppose it and my love, thus my will wants it" (Z, "On Self-Overcoming"). Self-overcoming—the very essence of Becoming—demands a rejection of what came before. To grow, one must destroy each prior state. And, in order to destroy something—to take up the stance of opposition—some *thing* must be achieved. There must be a moment, however brief and transitory, for that oppositional and destructive position to take shape. Beyond the discussion of the Overman, this subtle relationship—this tension between stability and flux, between the creation of a boundary and its transgression—is critical to Nietzsche's entire oeuvre. Contrary to whatever assumptions we might have about Nietzsche's privileging of Becoming over Being, there can be no impermanence without the respite of stability. One might go so far as to argue that this tension between boundedness and its undoing is the very object of Nietzsche's every inquiry; it is that which he insistently tracks, as it manifests each time in different guises.

Even in his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, the value and uniqueness of the ancient tragic form inheres in its achievement of this tension between boundary and

rupture. Tragedy is the perfect harmony of two drives: on the one hand, the Apollonian drive to split off, to delimit, to individualize, "the divine image of the *principium individuationis;*" and on the other, the Dionysian ecstasy, the collapse of all those limitations, which "[causes] subjectivity to vanish to the point of complete self-forgetting" (BT§1). It is this construction, dispersal, and reconstruction of the Self—rather than any permanent state of boundlessness—that Nietzsche articulates. He is not content to simply imagine the disappearance of the *principium individuationis*, but the way in which it violently returns after the intoxicating Dionysian unity: "the ecstasy of the Dionysiac state, in which the usual barriers and limits of existence are destroyed, contains, for as long as it lasts, a *lethargic* element in which all personal experiences from the past are submerged. […] But as soon as daily reality re-enters consciousness, it is experienced as such with a sense of revulsion" (BT§7). Splintering back off into individuals and regaining a sense of separateness is painful after the total distillation of coming-together. "From highest joy there comes a cry of horror or a yearning lament at some irredeemable loss. In those Greek festivals there erupts what one might call a sentimental tendency in nature, as if it had cause to sigh over its dismemberment into individuals" (BT§2). This cry of "irredeemable loss" that issues from the heart of the Dionysian—a surge of pain tied to the deepest pleasure—is nonetheless a lament aimed at Apollonian individuation. If there is an "irredeemable loss" at the fundament of existence—a wound that is proper to living itself—it is because, in a *bounded* and *delimited* world of individuation, there is no permanence. There is no eternal. There is only change and decay. Loss, thus, belongs to the transition back into the *principium individuationis*. The Dionysian, so long as it enacts the distillation of all difference and

the rupture of all boundaries, provides its own immunity to loss. There is only an amorphous and united whole. And so, even though the Dionysian is tied in Nietzsche's work to the force of destruction and the sense of unrestrained annihilating power, we are still inclined to ask: what would loss even look like in the Dionysian state where everything was so tightly fused? For this reason, Nietzsche finds in ancient tragedy a "metaphysical solace," a comfort derived from the fact that, in and through the Dionysian chorus, something remains "eternally the same despite all the changes of generations" (BT§7). In spite of the fleetingness and transience that characterizes an individual existence, the chorus reveals that "life is indestructibly mighty and pleasurable" (BT§7) beneath it all. Thus the Dionysian, however temporarily, preserves against the losses to which the Apollonian must, nonetheless, succumb.

Thus far, this discussion has attempted to establish an important link between loss, boundedness, and subjectivity in Nietzsche's work through considerations of the death of God, the Overman, and the Dionysian/Apollonian relationship. But nowhere is this link more complicated, and, therefore, we might say, indicative of something revealing, than around Nietzsche's discussion of the eternal recurrence. In *The Gay Science*, the theory is introduced with a hypothetical clause, as if it were a thought experiment:

> What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: 'This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence—even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!' (GS§341).

The promise of an eternal return is the heaviest weight [*das grösste Schwergewicht*] that Nietzsche can conceive. On first read, it is not immediately clear why the perpetual replay of existence *ad aeternum* should necessarily produce the horror that it does: "Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus?" But as this is one's "loneliest loneliness," the promise of its infinite repetition means that one remains eternally anchored to the greatest pain. The endless cycle of every detail, every profound and mundane moment, every thought and desire and insignificant occurrence bears down with a kind of tedium and exhaustion. And the nature of one's response to this condition of eternal recurrence reveals whether one is noble, courageous and strong, or whether one is slavish, cowardly, and weak. But *acceptance* of this eternal return is not enough; to be courageous means that one must *will* the return, desire the endless repetition, love one's fate—*amor fati*, as Nietzsche calls it.

If a future of infinite repetition is the heaviest thought that Nietzsche can imagine, the notion of a past that can never be relived is equally terrifying. He invokes the same imagery—"gnashing teeth" and "loneliness"—when he describes the will's attitude toward lost time, the "it was" that belongs exclusively to the past. He writes: "'It was': thus is called the will's gnashing of teeth and loneliest misery. Impotent against that which has been—it is an angry spectator of everything past. The will cannot will backward; that it cannot break time and time's greed—that is the will's loneliest misery. […] This, yes, this alone is revenge itself: the will's unwillingness toward time and time's 'it was'" (Z, "On Redemption"). Both thoughts are horrifying: to lose the past irrevocably and to live it eternally. Nietzsche is interested in the superabundant act of

strength required to transform the will's vengeful response to the "it was" into the powerful and creative expression, "thus I willed it!" Heidegger picks up on this transformative urgency in Nietzsche's language and homes in on the notion of revenge to describe the will's impotency as it confronts the past. Heidegger writes: "Revenge is the will's aversion to time, and that means the ceasing to be, its transience. The will no longer has any influence over it, and its willing constantly runs up against it. Time and its 'it was' is the stumbling block that the will cannot budge. Time, as transience, is the adversity that the will suffers."[16] The will, which always wants its way, discovers its absolute limit in the "it was" of the past.

Heidegger stresses the "transient" quality that belongs to time—to a time that has expired and cannot be retrieved. For the sake of this discussion, we might reframe this quality of transience in terms of loss: It is *loss*—the fact that one always lives at a deficit to time, the fact that existence is an endlessly losing venture—that the will cannot tolerate. Revenge, then, is feeling that belongs to the one who has lost. And so to transform the "it was" into the "thus I willed it!" is not only to appease that vengeful will, so embittered by the discovery of its utmost limit, it is also to mitigate against the experience of loss. In the same way that the Dionysian seemed to recuperate the losses inherent to the divided and individuated world of the Apollonian, it would appear that the eternal return is an inoculation against the transience of time and the losses it inevitably delivers. This will, of course, turn out only to be appearance; but for now, we must note

[16] Heidegger quoted in Allison, 73.

that the eternal return seems to recuperate its losses. Everything circles back around again and so nothing is ever taken from one entirely.[17]

The sense of protection against loss, against death and disintegration is echoed in *Zarathustra*: "Everything goes, everything comes back; the wheel of being rolls eternally. Everything dies, everything blossoms again, the year of being runs eternally. Everything breaks, everything is joined anew; the same house of being builds itself eternally. Everything parts, everything greets itself again; the ring of being remains loyal to itself eternally" (Z, "Convalescent§2). What falls into ruin seems to be recuperated through time's curvature back on itself, circling around to give life back to the dead, wholeness back to the shattered, union back to the dispersed. But in this description of redemptive temporality, Nietzsche slips in the word "being": "the ring of *being* remains loyal to itself eternally." This thinker of Becoming, of impermanence over stability, nonetheless smuggles in the notion of Being. The critical literature that has been produced in response to this tension is vast.[18] Everyone wants to know: what does it mean for this preacher of endless Becoming to invoke the static condition of Being? Elsewhere, Nietzsche is even more explicit about the interconnection between Being and Becoming when he writes: "To impose upon becoming the character of being—that is the supreme power of will. […] That everything recurs is the closest approximation of a world of becoming to a world of being" (WP§617).

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[17] To be sure, the will does not derive any real sense of comfort from knowing its losses are shored up by the eternal return, because in order to will this return, it must always have forgotten that it has willed it infinite times before. As Klossowski explains in his work, *Nietzsche and Vicious Circle*: "Everything would stop *for me* if I *remembered* a previous identical revelation—even if I were continually to proclaim the necessity of the return—for it would serve to keep me within myself, and thus outside the truth that I am teaching. It was therefore necessary for me to forget this revelation in order for it *to be true*!" (Klossowski, 46).

[18] See: Haar, Lingis, Heidegger, Klossowski, Deleuze.

Some critics have suggested that, while Becoming remains in flux, the circle itself does not "become," but rather simply *is*. Michael Haar, for example, writes: "Even though Becoming is in itself what is unstable, namely Chaos, the circle is the highest stabilization possible for this instability."[19] Similarly, Deleuze writes: "We misinterpret the expression 'eternal return' if we understand it as 'return of the same.' It is not being that returns but rather the returning itself that constitutes being insofar as it is affirmed of becoming and of that which passes."[20] On this reading, the static component of the eternal return does not refer to the content of existence that simply returns endlessly and unchanged, but the very fact of return, which comes around each time in the mode of variation. The eternal return for Deleuze is not the Same on infinite replay, but simply the fact of encounter each time anew: "identity in the eternal return does not describe the nature of that which returns but, on the contrary, the fact of returning for that which differs."[21] Klossowski dedicates an entire book to the thinking of the eternal return, suggesting that while there is recurrence, the one who wills its return must be marked by anamnesis, a crucial forgetting on the part of the subject that he has willed this very return infinite times before. For Klossowski, the "Being" aspect of Becoming would always be shot through with difference.[22]

Heidegger, too, quotes this passage in Nietzsche to suggest that, "[t]he highest will to power—that is, the life force in all life—is to represent transience as fixed Becoming within the Eternal Recurrence of the same, and so to render it secure and

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[19] Haar in Allison, 34.
[20] Deleuze, 45.
[21] *Ibid*., 45.
[22] Klossowski, 44.

stable."[23] Heidegger explains that this conflation of Being and Becoming is a gesture of guarding: "This thinking takes becoming under its care and protection—becoming of which constant collision, suffering, is a part."[24] The quality of Being would here hold and encircle the pain of Becoming without closing it off in any restrictive or limiting way. For all of these critics, the eternal return does not, in fact, bring any simple notion of the Same back around, and so the complexity of thinking the concept of Being while still maintaining the priority of difference, which is so crucial to Becoming, is itself an endless task. For the sake of this discussion, I want to resist the urge to categorize within the eternal return those aspects that belong to the camp of Being and those to the camp of Becoming. Rather than determining the exact allotment and distribution of Being and Becoming within the eternal return, it is the pulsing tension between boundedness and transgression that we must track. That Nietzsche ultimately cannot fathom Becoming without Being, and vice versa, means that loss is continually enacted and disabled. Enclosed and bounded Being is always on the verge of loss, while a ruptured and endless Becoming prohibits any final condition.

EXCESS, OTHERNESS, AND THE DISPOSSESSION OF THE SUBJECT

The shifting terrain of Nietzsche's thought, which makes it impossible to definitively separate stability from flux (and which I have here prioritized as the tension between boundary and its transgression), is the point of departure from which to investigate the Nietzschean relationship to Otherness. As one might expect from such a chameleon author, this relationship will not be just one thing, but again, an ever-

[23] Heidegger quoted in Allison, 75.
[24] *Ibid*., 76.

vacillating position between an ostensible entity and an Other, which presumably lies outside of it. At the outset, we must acknowledge that the very notion of an "outside" will bring its own set of difficulties. If the boundaries that Nietzsche erects and disables are continually shifting, the effort to locate the demarcation between an enclosure and what lies beyond it, prevents one from definitively separating an inside from an outside. It is not purely coincidence that so many of Nietzsche's critics, beginning with Heidegger, fixate on whether Nietzsche's works fall *inside* or *outside* an inherited tradition of metaphysics. For his own part, Nietzsche believes himself to be outside of metaphysics—with its thinking of pure presence and pure absence and the absolute distinction between the sensible and the supersensible. Heidegger, of course, argues, that Nietzsche's inversion of the privileged term in any metaphysical relationship—now the body takes precedence over the soul, Becoming over Being, etc.—is not a departure from metaphysics, but merely its reversal.[25] The point here is not to weigh in on this endless

[25]Addressing Nietzsche's position with regard to the tradition of metaphysics, Heidegger claims that metaphysical thinking "persists even when the Platonic hierarchy of the super-sensible and sensible is reversed and the sensible is experienced in a more essential and broader sense" (Heidegger in Allison, 77). When Derrida examines Heidegger's relationship to this question of Nietzsche's overturning metaphysics, he writes: "In his consideration of the problematic of *Umdrehung* Heidegger emphasizes the very strongest of torsions, that in which the opposition which has been submitted to reversal is itself suppressed. Thus, as the story goes, 'with the true world we have also abolished the apparent one (*mit der wahren Welt haben wir auch die scheinbare abgeschaft*)!' In such a tortured movement not only has the hierarchy of the two worlds of the sensible and the intelligible been reversed, but a new hierarchy with its new order of priorities has been affirmed. Its innovation does not consist in a renewal of the hierarchy of substance of values, but rather in a transformation of the very value of hierarchy itself. […] What must occur then is not merely a suppression of all hierarchy, for an an-archy only consolidates just as surely the established order of a metaphysical hierarchy; nor is it a simple change or reversal in the terms of any given hierarchy. Rather, the *Umdrehung* must be a transformation of the hierarchical structure itself. Heidegger here is pursuing the Nietzschean operation into the very reaches where it exceeds metaphysics and Platonism. But at the same time it would seem that what he is after there is in fact a form of question more proper to a hermeneutic, and consequently philosophical, order, indeed the very order that Nietzsche's operation should otherwise *put out of order*" (JD, 81). To break out of metaphysics, then, requires an entire re-haul/revaluation of the "hierarchical structure," and yet to "pursue" this *Umdrehung* to its end leads Heidegger back into the philosophical order that Nietzsche's work ostensibly shuts down. The question seems to come down to the kind of relationship that the "overcoming" of metaphysics actually entails. There is, according to Heidegger, a difference between an *Überwendung*, which would be a metaphysical way of getting over metaphysics (purportedly Nietzsche's way of doing it), which believes itself to be done with metaphysics,

debate about whether Nietzsche gets outside of metaphysics or remains entrenched within it. Rather, it is to suggest that there is something in Nietzsche's work that *calls out for* and demands the very critique that Heidegger and others cannot help but level; there is some preoccupation with boundaries in Nietzsche's work that invites a similar obsession with boundaries in his critics.

Thus, rather than definitively pinpoint the boundary between an inside and an outside, this discussion will highlight the fluctuations that are produced via this constitutive tension. To do so, we return briefly to the problem posed by the eternal recurrence. In the previous section, it was observed that many of Nietzsche's critics resist a thinking of eternal recurrence that is simply a repetition of the Same over and over again unchanged. Or, more precisely, if the Same recurs, it is nonetheless only by means of difference. In his reading, Pierre Klossowski also makes it clear that the eternal return is not simply the *fact* of recurrence, but is something that must be *willed*. And each time one wills the return of everything past and everything future, one must forget that one has willed this infinite times before and will *will* it infinite times after. There can be no comfort, in other words, in knowing that everything has already happened and will happen again. Klossowski writes:

> Now this subject can no longer will itself as it has been up to now, but wills *all* prior possibilities; for by embracing in a single glance the necessity of the Return as a universal law, I deactualize my present self in order to will myself in *all the other selves whose entire series must be passed through* so that, in accordance

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that metaphysics becomes part of a past from which one may depart, as opposed to a *Verwendung*, an overturning that cannot, in any case, break with the past in a clean and totalized way. On this register, the past is necessary, as it reveals the way in which Being still reveals itself. For Heidegger, Nietzsche's exuberant life-affirmation still remains entrenched within Nihilistic modes of overcoming.

> with the circular movement, I once again become what I am at the moment I discover the law of the Eternal Return.[26]

Klossowski is interested in the moment of revelation, when the subject must encounter the eternal return with all its initial force and strangeness. Accordingly, one cannot simply will the return of oneself as one is *in that moment*, knowing everything one knows, having experienced everything one has experienced. Rather one must will the return of *all* the selves that one has been along the way. Further, in willing the eternal recurrence, one cannot simply desire the return of everything as already determined and necessary, but must also will *all of the possibilities* that fully constitute each moment of one's existence. That is, every moment is structured not only by what one does, but by all of the other possibilities that one does not pursue. In the re-willing, these, too, must present themselves as genuine possibilities all over again. Of particular note here, is this condition of *de-actualization* that must befall the "present self." The act of re-willing not just what one *is*, but what one *was* and what one *could have been*, dislodges the Self from the safety of the present moment. In other words, the eternal return destabilizes the subject and introduces into the present a potential derailing, even if each successive return always delivers one to the same place. Here, possibility is constitutive of the present and always already inheres in each instance of actuality, such that any pretense of complete closure is fundamentally prohibited.

The important point here is that this rupture, which constitutes the Self at the moment of its discovery of the eternal return, is a condition that must also structure a different kind of relationship to an outside. When the subject no longer stands toward itself in the mode of enclosure and *self-possession*, the very encounter with otherness will

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[26] Klossowski, 45.

have to be transformed. Klossowski sets the stage for this kind of investigation when he writes: "Re-willing is the pure adherence to the Vicious Circle: re-willing the entire series one more time—re-willing all experiences, and all one's acts, but not as mine: this possessive no longer has any meaning, nor does it represent a goal. Meaning and goal are liquidated by the Circle."[27] Klossowski is clear on this point: the Self is stripped of any "possessive" relationship to his own "acts." One's life recurs, but not with any sense of belonging. To translate it into the terminology that this chapter has activated, we might say that, to re-will oneself means to sustain a necessary loss. In this way, the eternal return does not mitigate against loss, but embodies it. One *loses* all one's possessions. Possession itself is stripped of significance, as one's own experiences and activities must present themselves in the guise of another. To re-will, then, is to encounter one's own life in the mode of something foreign. And this foreignness, or otherness, that must be taken inside—thereby constituting the Self as an entity held open and exposed—complicates everything that will follow.

In order to follow the various leads that this chapter has thus far produced, we must co-opt one more Nietzschean concept: the will-to-power. For Nietzsche, the will-to-power is the general force that underlies everything. As the first section of this chapter suggested, Nietzsche rejects an essentialist view of the world, whereby an entity possesses its Being in the manner of a substance or an essence. The will-to-power will not, then, be an *entity* called "will" that tends toward power. The will is not a definitive *thing* in the world; it is a force—the driving force of everything that is and everything that becomes. It does not seek out one end specifically. It is not teleological. What power wants is precisely more power. It is difficult to conceptualize this kind of power that is

[27] *Ibid*., 55.

not driven or motivated by some underlying substance, and that never reaches any final point of satiation. Alphonso Lingis describes it as "the chaos, the primal fund of the unformed—not matter, but force beneath the cosmos, which precedes the forms and makes them possible as well as transitory."[28] It is the very principle of growth. It is life in the process of discarding its dying and decaying aspects, and hungry always for more. This act of consumption is central to understanding how the will operates, namely without restraint and without conscience. Nietzsche writes: "this is the oldest and healthiest of all instincts: I should add, 'one must want to have more than one has in order to *become* more.' For this is the doctrine preached by life itself to all that has life: the morality of development. To have and to want to have more—*growth*, in one word—that is life itself" (WP§125). Here, the very possibility of Becoming, so crucial to Nietzsche's work, is bound up with the drive toward acquisition: *"one must want to have more than one has."* But how are we to understand this Nietzschean will-toward-acquisition in light of the Klossowski passage we just read, in which the subject, through the act of re-willing, becomes precisely *de-possessed* of all it has and is? It is in bringing the concept of the will-to-power together with the subject of the eternal return that the relationship between loss and acquisition becomes particularly charged, and thereby structures the various possibilities for an encounter with something like an outside.

To recapitulate, the subject of the eternal return is never fully present. Spread out across infinity, the Self that eternally awaits its own return is never done arriving. Always on the way to itself, it never achieves the solid ground of Being. In order to stand in the full presence of Being, the subject would have to somehow outwait the final cycle of the eternal return, precisely that which can never happen. This is what dispossession means:

[28] Lingis in Allison, 38.

that a subject that does not *have* its existence in any totalized way, and as such, is constituted by loss. This is not to suggest that the subject could simply *get over* its losses by re-acquiring them on the next go-round. Rather, it exists always in the mode of loss—loss as a constitutive force. Because of the eternal return, the subject never fully possesses anything, nor does it lose in a purely metaphysical way. The Nietzschean subject, rather pulsates, or vacillates, straddling these poles of losing and gaining, which mutually inform one another and prohibit any reductively binary categories. Let us be clear, however, that this does not prevent Nietzsche from establishing a tight link between owning, or possessing, and existence itself. He does not mince words when he says, "one must possess something in order to be something" (WP§125). In order to make sense of this claim within the context of everything else Nietzsche has seemingly destabilized, we will discover how it bears on this larger discussion about the "outside" in Nietzsche's work.

For Nietzsche, the way in which one comports oneself toward the outside determines the class to which one properly belongs. Either one is noble or one is slave, and it all depends on whether one perceives the outside as something to be countenanced with strength, or whether it is something from which to recoil in fear and bitterness. This fundamental distinction—between the *active* and the *reactive*—is the basis for all value judgments that follow. Nietzsche traces the genealogy as follows:

> The slave revolt in morality begins when *ressentiment* itself becomes creative and gives birth to values: the *ressentiment* of natures that are denied the true reaction, that of deeds, and compensate themselves with an imaginary revenge. While every noble morality develops from a triumphant affirmation of itself, slave morality from the outset says No to what is "outside," what is "different," what is "not itself"; and *this* No is its creative deed. This inversion of the value-positing eye—this *need* to direct one's view outward instead of back to oneself—is of the

> essence of *ressentiment*: in order to exist, slave morality always first needs a hostile external world; it needs, physiologically speaking, external stimuli in order to act at all—its action is fundamentally reaction. (GM, I§10).

The slave's one creative moment is when he encounters the world, finds only hostility and struggle there, and in his impotence, experiences a quiet, controlled desire for revenge. This *ressentiment*, or grudge against life, is then sublimated into an entire moral system in which self-restraint and the taming of will is required. The slave's tremendous power lies in this: through the construction of this moral system, which is predicated on a denial of the instincts and the drives, he transforms the world into something that is as impotent as he. His power here is not virile, but passive and reactive. With a paranoid eye always trained on the outside, the slave responds to the otherness he discovers there with a pervasive "No," and then retreats back to the defensive asylum of morality.

In certain ways, by claiming that slave morality has its own requirements and physiological "needs" (the first of which is "a hostile external world"), the passage seems to suggest that reactivity is somewhat like the active will-to-power in that it aims always towards its own expression. The reactive will scans for any potential provocation, as though it, too, needed to discover the "external stimuli" that would allow for its discharge. In a twist of terminology, the *inverted* vision that Nietzsche disparages refers to the slave's peevish *outward* gaze. Contrary to what one might expect, the fearful and anxious slave does not keep an eye on himself in a protective measure, but obsessively scans the border awaiting intrusion. The noble, on the other hand, corrects the "inversion" by facing *himself*, even as he encounters an outside. In other words, the non-inverted eye peers inward; it keeps its sights on its own Being, "triumphantly" affirming its existence. And if the noble's eyes are on himself, then presumably his back is toward the world,

even as he ventures outside. We might say that the noble is the one who can afford to keep his eyes on himself, as the will-to-power leads of its own volition. Nietzsche writes: "it acts and grows spontaneously, it seeks its opposite only so as to affirm itself more gratefully and triumphantly" (GM, I§10). But in both cases—for the slave and the noble—the outside appears as something necessary. In the former, the outside constitutes the requisite grounds on which to react and retreat; in the latter, the outside is essential, if only for the sake of its acquisition.

As the slave's relationship to the world seems to be one of straightforward aversion and retreat, let us focus for a moment on the noble, as it is around the discussion of the noble's *active* drive that Nietzsche's writing seems to totter somewhat. As opposed to the reactive slave, who weighs the consequences before doing anything, sizing things up, scheming and plotting, resenting and feeling sorry for himself, the noble is guided always by his own needs and instincts. The noble does not measure or anticipate or calculate, but goes out and confronts danger with recklessness and abandon. At times, Nietzsche seems to liken the noble to a kind of blissful imbecile who has "too much carelessness, too much taking lightly, too much looking away and impatience" to know any real sense of hostility or lasting feelings of revenge (GM, I§10). In fact, Nietzsche suggests that the noble is so thoroughly marked by forgetting, he falls victim to circumstances that the clever slave avoids: "indeed he suffers more frequently because he does not know how to learn from experience and keeps on falling into the very same trap time after time" (TL, p.153). To be unable to learn from experience is to exist in a kind of perpetual present, where the past does not penetrate consciousness to better prepare the noble for the future. Nothing lingers. Nothing upsets for too long. No traumatic excess

haunts this noble. Each moment arrives as a kind of tabula rasa of experience. And without any real conscience to speak of, the noble confronts the world as something simply to be *taken*. In other words, he appears to be nothing other than the perfect and unchecked expression of the will-to-power.

In its unrestrained form, the noble's will aligns with the very instinct of life itself, which "*in its essence* means appropriating, injuring, overpowering those who are foreign and weaker; oppression, harshness, forcing one's own forms on others, incorporation, and at the very least, at the very mildest, exploitation—but why should we keep using this kind of language, that has from time immemorial been infused with a slanderous intent?" (BGE§259). Nietzsche wants to strip these actions of their bad reputation and insist that this is just what life does, or *wants* to do, when left to its own devices. On this model, the "outside" serves one purpose: to provide the necessary resistance, such that the noble is able to assert his power in the form of subjugation. The world offers some friction, and thus a kind of raw material to be impressed and shaped into an expression of the noble himself, expanding and growing by *bringing the outside in*. Nietzsche writes: "Appropriation and assimilation are above all a desire to overwhelm a forming, shaping and reshaping, until at length that which has been overwhelmed has entirely gone over into the power domain of the aggressor and has increased the same" (WP§656).

Here, the conquering noble, who drags the vanquished inside the "domain of the aggressor" and uses them to fortify "the same," begins to sound a lot like the old concept of the subject as a cordoned-off and enclosed entity. Even in his continual self-expansion, the fact that the noble rules over his own distinct territory and possesses something that Nietzsche calls "the same," seems highly suspicious. The concept of "the same" as the

protected territory of the noble, should give us reason to pause. What happened to that other, suddenly distant image of the Nietzschean subject, as the fractured, non-totalized, perpetually arriving figure? So long as Nietzsche treats the "subject" as a specific philosophical problem, all of the nuances of subjectivity come to the fore, breaking with metaphysical categories and rigid boundaries. But as soon as Nietzsche transitions to the slave/noble discussion, all of that nuance seems to retreat to the background. And yet, it is here that this more nuanced conception of the subject is most urgently needed. The noble, whom Nietzsche treats with such veneration and reverence, begins to look more and more like a slave—one who goes out to master the world, not simply to discharge his raging and ever-hungry will, but as one who senses his own constitutive incompletion and so must continually re-affirm himself by possessing more and more things. Even the earlier description of the noble's "value-positing eye" that points always toward himself (as opposed to the slave's anxious outward glance), belies an undertone of need, even desperation, for self-confirmation. In this act of watching oneself, there is a tacit effort to shore up existence.

The noble's aggressive efforts toward acquisition push us to consider more carefully Nietzsche's stance on possession. He writes: "Our pleasure in ourselves tries to maintain itself by again and again changing something new *into ourselves*; that is what possession means. To become tired of some possession means tiring of ourselves" (GS§14). This passage is about more than the will's insatiable desire. Rather, possession involves the very *stance* one takes towards one's own existence. The risk one runs in halting the frenzied acquisition of the world is that the Self becomes intolerable. One tires of oneself. To go on living with oneself requires continual consumption. As Nietzsche

writes, “Even the most beautiful scenery is no longer assured of our love after we have lived in it for three months, and some more distant coast attracts our avarice: possessions are generally diminished by possession” (GS§14). That is, the force of dispossession haunts every possessive act, such that to acquire more means to lose more. So this cycle of conquering and discarding can only pick up momentum, never diminish, for fear of the self-annihilation that will result. Ultimately, this means that it is not really possession that affirms Being, but the endless and constant renewal of things. This is why Being never reaches that place of final assurance; it always needs more. In the noble’s need to possess, there is a tacit desire *to be*, which is never finally achieved. Like the slave, the noble is beholden to an endless process that never achieves that final position of mastery.

While the slave and the noble at first appeared as much at odds as the figures of Nietzsche’s mother and father in the opening riddle, just like that complex couple, here, too, boundaries break down. For example, it first seemed that the slave was identified by his resounding “No” to the outside, while the noble encountered the world with an affirmative “Yes.” But as it turns out, the noble has his own idiosyncratic “No” to the world. Even though the noble’s rejection of the outside is ostensibly different in nature—an act of self-preservation—it is, nonetheless, a defensive, reactive move. The noble, in fact, seems to deny the world in a much more extreme manner than the slave ever does. Surprisingly, it is the noble, not the slave that Nietzsche describes in the following passage:

> But in all these matters—in the choice of nutrition, of place and climate, of recreation—an instinct of self-preservation issues its commandments, and it gains its most unambiguous expression as an instinct of self-defense. Not to see many things, not to hear many things, not to permit many things to come close—first

> imperative of prudence, first proof that one is no mere accident but a necessity. (EH, Clever§8).[29]

Suddenly, it seems as if the noble—this great "Yes" to the outside—never even gets close to the world. He shuts his eyes, his ears, removes his entire body from the world so as to never be provoked into reaction. While Nietzsche describes this as a necessary hibernation before an attack—the storing up of one's energy—there is an extreme self-isolation and almost-paranoid protection that is unexpectedly required of the noble, whose vulnerability suddenly becomes apparent.

Similarly, if Nietzsche discovers in the will-to-mastery and the drive to conquer an underlying impulse to transform the strange and the foreign into the familiar, then the slave and the noble ultimately stand on equal footing. Describing the general momentum of the will-to-power, Nietzsche writes, "The spirit's energy in appropriating what is foreign to it is revealed by its strong tendency to make the new resemble the old, to simplify multiplicity, to overlook or reject whatever is completely contradictory. […] Its intention in doing so is to incorporate new 'experiences,' to fit new things into old orders" (BGE§230). Ostensibly, this is the driving force behind all acts of power, particularly those that belong most appropriately to the noble. Yet, this reduction, or translation of the foreign to the same, is the very tendency that Nietzsche elsewhere criticizes because it is grounded in the instinct of fear. We see this in his description of the *will-to-knowledge*, which Nietzsche disparages as the mark of the lowly and uninventive thinkers. He writes:

> Something strange is to be reduced to something familiar. And we philosophers—have we really meant more than this when we have spoken of knowledge? What is familiar means what we are used to so that we no longer marvel at it, our

[29] Also see: BGE§41 and §230.

> everyday, some rule in which we are stuck, anything at all in which we feel at home. Look, isn't our need for knowledge precisely this need for the familiar, the will to uncover under everything strange, unusual, and questionable something that no longer disturbs us? Is it not the *instinct of fear* that bids us know? (GS§355).

Here, the drive to knowledge, which is described in the exact same terms as the noble's will to conquer and acquire (i.e. transforming and molding the foreign into the same), appears to be a highly *reactive* move. The world incites fear by presenting us with strange and unfamiliar things. The noble, *no less than the slave*, responds by reacting. And the upshot of this transforming and taming tendency is not the fulfillment of the will-to-knowledge, but on the contrary, the failure to really know or learn anything. Nietzsche writes, "What is familiar is what we are used to; and what we are used to is most difficult to "know"—that is, to see as a problem; that is, to see as strange, as distant, as 'outside us'" (GS§355). Here, knowing—real knowing, a "knowing" that is worth its salt—maintains a relationship to the foreign *as foreign*, not as mastered, or colonized, or assimilated. The subjugating nature of the noble's will does not lead to the coveted place that one might expect. There is a subtle strain in Nietzsche's writing that privileges a more exposed and even vulnerable relationship to the outside.

In this refined image of knowledge, Nietzsche highlights the importance of distance, as if too much proximity renders the thing imperceptible. There must be space, purchase, and perspective in order to encounter something. Even in Nietzsche's description of his first contact with Wagner's music, its value lay in its excessivity and difference. Nietzsche describes being a child and growing up in "the swamp air of the fifties," such that his "first contact with Wagner was also the first deep breath of [his] life." Nietzsche continues: "I experienced, I revered him as a *foreign* land" (EH,

Clever§5). Wagner does not simply get assimilated into the claustrophobic space of Nietzsche's youth, but offers a first vista of the beyond. Wagner's value is his foreignness. Although Nietzsche will later break with Wagner, in his early veneration of the man and his music, we sense an element of the unpredictable, as if part of Wagner's beauty lay in the way that he departed from his time, the way in which he was not merely a product of his era and could not be perfectly controlled by it. The gift that Wagner gives Nietzsche is the freedom to lose himself, which is critical to the very notion of Becoming. The goal is to not orchestrate every aspect of one's existence. Nietzsche writes:

> To become what one is, one must not have the faintest notion *what* one is. From this point of view even the *blunders* of life have their own meaning and value—the occasional side roads and wrong roads, the delays, "modesties," seriousness wasted on tasks that are remote from *the* task. All this can express a great prudence, even the supreme prudence: where *nosce te ipsum* would be the recipe for ruin, forgetting oneself, *misunderstanding* oneself, making oneself smaller, narrower, mediocre, become reason itself. (EH, "Clever"§9).

The image of a will that dominates everything it encounters, subordinating and transforming the foreign into itself has no real place here. Instead, the emphasis is on *not* knowing, not controlling, but forgetting, misunderstanding and "making oneself smaller." The value of accident and detour cannot be calculated in advance, and the very possibility for becoming "what one is" requires a kind of blind and aimless wandering at times. The very notion of the "*fröhliche Wissenschaft*," a joyous and gay science that Nietzsche advocates, may be understood in terms of this potential derailing that always accompanies risk. To be an experimenter who works in the name of "gay" science is to be willing to go astray. He writes: "For one must be able to lose oneself occasionally if one wants to learn something from things different from oneself" (GS§305). Any truly

noble will would have to balance mastery and domination with this relinquishment of control. The will-to-power must also be the will-to-letting-go.

Thus, alongside the dominant strain of Nietzsche's work that prioritizes the active and assertive mode of Becoming, we see that the passive stance allows for its own kind of encounter. Surprisingly, it seems that passivity is the *only* way to truly encounter something that remains excessive. Nietzsche describes his very experience of "revelation" in this way. He says:

"The concept of revelation—in the sense that suddenly, with indescribable certainty and subtlety, something becomes *visible*, audible, something that shakes one to the last depths and throws one down—that merely describes the facts. One hears, one does not seek; one accepts, one does not ask who gives; like lightning, a thought flashes up, with necessity, without hesitation regarding its form—I never had any choice" (EH, "Zarathustra"§3). The commanding will has no business here. The subject, rather, is accosted in some way, and he must let himself be accosted without trying to transform the experience into something he can control.

For Nietzsche, this experience of submission is tied to the act of writing itself. He continues: "The involuntariness of image and metaphor is strangest of all; one no longer has any notion of what is an image or a metaphor: everything offers itself as the nearest, most obvious, simplest expression. It actually seems, to allude to something Zarathustra says, as if the things themselves approached and offered themselves as metaphors" (EH, "Zarathustra"§3). Creation, it turns out, does not only harbor a destructive tendency, but also requires this radical passivity, which is why Nietzsche says that, "it is the 'work', whether of an artist or of a philosopher, that first invents the creator, the one who is said

to have created it" (BGE, §269). Even if creation is bound up with destruction, the will-to-power does not seem to be the dominant force in these moments. Even Nietzsche's praise for the experience of suffering may be related to precisely this encounter with something excessive. Thus, suffering would not be simply the necessary hurdle that the will-to-power must overcome on its way to recovery. Rather, suffering and sickness present the body with an experience of the foreign that is valuable in and of itself. To encounter the unknown as the unknown without transforming it or dominating it is, perhaps, the most valuable and difficult encounter one can have.

CONSOLATORY MEASURES

In the preface to *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche describes his experience of writing the book as the emergence from suffering and the outpouring of "gratitude" for an unexpected "convalescence." The preface alludes to the sickness that preempted the writing and the rebound of health after its long departure: "This whole book is nothing but a bit of merry-making after long privation and powerlessness, the rejoicing of strength that is returning" (GS, Preface§1). Writing bears witness not only to the recovery that culminates in the joyousness, the gaiety, the *Fröhlichkeit*[30] proper to a "Gay Science" [*Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*], but also to the experience of pain that gives rise to it: "one is instantly reminded no less of the proximity of winter than of the triumph over the winter that is coming, must come, and perhaps has already come." The book heralds the spring, but also brings back the harshness of living in the midst of a winter when the

[30] For Nietzsche, the very possibility of a "gay science" is one that would have to allow for, even invite, a degree of pain. The possibility of a "gay science" is an effort to envision scholarship on a model other than the natural sciences. When it breaks from this model, what kinds of experiments become possible? Nietzsche's will-to-experiment is one that does not disdain to fail, but instead invites failure, suffering and pain.

spring has not yet arrived. The preface opens with Nietzsche's musing on the possibility that the work may remain fundamentally inaccessible, regardless of his effort to bring the reader and the work together. How can one convey the brutal conditions of a hopeless winter and the exalted first signs of spring to one that has never experienced the seasons? How do you teach the inner experience of pain to one that has never lived through it?

For Nietzsche, these questions are not distinct from questions of form, in particular, questions regarding the status of a preface. The function of a preface, as *The Gay Science* frames it, is to enable a certain proximity, or relationship, between a text and the one who reads it, perhaps unprepared and ill-equipped to receive it. He writes: "This book may need more than one preface, and in the end there would still remain room for doubt whether anyone who had never lived through similar experiences could be brought closer to the *experience* of this book by means of prefaces" (GS, Preface§1). The job of the preface is to collapse the distance that separates the reader from the work. But, as though the preface itself had to be subjected to the eternal return, the effort to enable an encounter between text and reader turns out to be an endless task. Even with a second or third preface, it occurs to Nietzsche that there may be no possible encounter between the work and those uninitiated to suffering. It is, rather, a work for those who already belong to a shared experience of pain, sickness, and anguish, if such a reader could even be found.

And yet, part of what *The Gay Science* will have taught the reader is that there can be no real community around suffering. Suffering individuates; that is its gift and its torture. "Our personal and profoundest suffering is incomprehensible and inaccessible to almost everyone; here we remain hidden from our neighbor, even if we eat from one pot"

(GS§338). Even with the qualifying use of the term, "*almost* everyone," the idiosyncrasy of pain is critical here. Nietzsche explains: "one simply knows nothing of the whole inner sequence and intricacies that are distress for *me* or for *you*."[31] Although Nietzsche's diatribe is really directed at those who impose their *pity* [*Mitleid*] on the sufferer,[32] his claim, nonetheless, suggests that something remains profoundly inaccessible in any experience of pain. What the Other can never share is "[t]he whole economy of my soul and the balance effected by 'distress,' the way new springs and needs break open, the way in which old wounds are healing, the way whole periods of the past are shed" (GS§338). It is the full trajectory of one's life and all of the known and unknown circumstances that contribute to "the whole economy" of one's existence that renders suffering fundamentally personal, even if there are always others who suffer. So even if Nietzsche writes specifically to those who, through the depth of their own pain can recognize his and somehow better receive his work because of it, he does not waver in his belief that one stands alone as one faces his own unique suffering.[33] And when recovery is upon the sufferer, with its bestowal of keener vision and heightened awareness, it remains the case that, "the path to one's own heaven always leads through the voluptuousness of one's own hell" (GS§338).

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[31] Worth noting here is Nietzsche's emphasis on the "for *me* or for *you*," which seems to imply or presume some sense of camaraderie. That is, the "me" and the "you" seem to occupy one side, whereas the anonymous "one" constitutes the other. Nietzsche comes closest to positing a community around suffering at the same moment that he denies the possibility of this very community.

[32] Here the German word "*Mitleid*" contains within it this sense of community—the "mit" the "with" that inheres in the sharing of sorrow. It is this, and not merely the looking down, or condescension of pity that Nietzsche rejects.

[33] For an excellent discussion of pain that breaks with a thinking of encapsulated subjectivity, see Andrew Mitchell's article, "Entering the World of Pain: Heidegger," in *Telos* (Spring 2010). Here, Mitchell does a close analysis of Heidegger's writing on pain, whereby pain is no longer conceived on the order of sensation, but is the very mark of one's belonging and openness to the world. As Mitchell convincingly demonstrates, interiority for Heidegger is understood as "intimacy" and "relation," and, therefore, the very notion of an interiorized space in which a subject might "have" a sensation of pain, is overturned.

Around this discussion of suffering, Nietzsche's language lapses back into what seems like a notion of the totalized subject once again. The suggestion that pain rivets one to the self—that it "makes us noble; it separates" (BGE§270)—seems to rest on the assumption that the individual who is shut out from the rest of the world is thrown back onto himself. Indeed, Nietzsche identifies the sufferer by his "spiritual arrogance," a "horrifying certainty, pervading and colouring him completely, that because of his suffering he *knows more* than the wisest or most clever people" (BGE§270). More austere and more profound than the blithely contented masses, the tortured individual exudes a conviction of self and altogether the pretense of self-sufficiency. According to this passage, "knowledge" is possible for this individual, whereas others remain, at best, "wise" or "clever," always in an empty way. But it is precisely around this concept of knowledge—that "because of his suffering he *knows more*"—that we sense something has shifted. This is not simply the revival of the discarded category of encapsulated subject. The kind of knowledge that suffering provides is, in fact, one that always speaks to the openness and exposure of the subject. The sufferer is the one who, even in the throes of his own pain, "knows" that he is never totalized or complete. Knowledge looks different on this register because it is incorporated into the self in a different way.

In the same preface, Nietzsche poses the question: what happens to thought when it is submitted to the "pressure of sickness"? And he answers with an analogy:

> Just as a traveler may resolve, before he calmly abandons himself to sleep, to wake up at a certain time, we philosophers, if we should become sick, surrender for a while to sickness, body and soul—and, as it were, shut our eyes to ourselves. And as the traveler knows that something is *not* asleep, that something counts the hours and will wake him up, we, too, know that the decisive moment will find us awake, and that something will leap forward then and catch the spirit in the act. (GS, Preface§2).

In the same way that the traveler at once sleeps and keeps watch, the sufferer simultaneously closes his eyes to himself and holds them open. It is this tension between surrender and vigilance that determines the sufferer's relationship to his body and to the world. His knowledge is mediated by this liminal condition that is nether entirely present, nor absent, to itself. We might hear in this casual reference to the traveler, resonances of another traveler—the "dark fellow traveler"—that makes an appearance later in the book and that Nietzsche imagines standing behind each "noisy, living, life-thirsty" person (GS§278). This dark traveler foretells the hovering presence of death even in the full bloom of life. In the same way that the traveler of the preface straddles two positions—sleep and wakefulness—this "dark fellow traveler" binds the living to their preemptive deaths, holding them in two conditions simultaneously.

As we might imagine, any "knowledge" proper to this sufferer, who is suspended between alertness and self-abandonment, will not be one that dogmatically asserts itself. Rather, it is one that maintains a connection to obscurity, uncertainty, and even vulnerability. Nietzsche suggests as much when he writes: "We no longer believe that truth remains truth when the veils are withdrawn; we have lived too much to believe this. Today we consider it a matter of decency not to wish to see everything naked, or to be present at everything, or to understand and 'know' everything." (GS, Preface§4). On this reading, truth is not the unveiling and discarding of a secret essence that lies *underneath* or *beyond*. There is no stripping away of appearance to get at something under the

surface; the veils[34] and appearances are part of the "truth," and there is no act of revealing that does not maintain its link with concealment [*Verborgenheit*].[35]

Because "truth" does not manifest in the mode of full nudity, but always keeps something hidden, any writing that engages in the act of exposure remains connected to an irreducible otherness that cannot be made entirely available. Nietzsche often finds in his own words traces of something that does not belong to him, the voice of an Other that inhabits his works. In the preface to *The Gay Science* he writes, "It seems to be written in the language of the wind that thaws ice and snow" (GS, Preface§1). Something writes through him, uses him to produce words that are not solely his own. Similarly, in the preface that he appends to *The Birth of Tragedy* fourteen years after the initial publication of the book, Nietzsche contemplates precisely this question of the foreign voice [*die* "*fremde Stimme*"]. The entire preface, which he titles, "An Attempt at Self-Criticism," surveys the radical departure he claims to have taken from certain ideas presented in the work, from the language of the book, and from Wagner, who the writing originally extolled. In the intervening years, Nietzsche's youthful veneration of Schopenhauer wanes and when he returns to write the preface to *The Birth of Tragedy*, he laments the

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[34] For an entire discussion of Nietzsche and the notion of the veil, see Derrida's work, *Spurs*. Here, the veil opens onto the larger issues of woman and truth in Nietzsche's work, and in particular, the way in which woman destabilizes philosophical discourse precisely by means of her relationship to truth. Derrida writes, "There is no such thing as the essence of woman because woman averts, she is averted of herself. Out of the depths, endless and unfathomable, she engulfs and distorts all vestige of essentiality, of identity, of property. And the philosophical discourse, blinded, founders on these shoals and is hurled down these depthless depths to its ruin. […] Woman is but one name for that untruth of truth. […] For him (Nietzsche), truth is like a woman. It resembles the veiled moment of feminine modesty" (51). Also: "Because, indeed, if woman *is* truth, *she* at least knows that there is no truth, that truth has no place here and that no one has a place for truth" (53).

[35] For Heidegger, truth, or *aletheia* always manages these dual processes of revealing and concealing. On Heidegger's reading, concealment does not simply designate absence or oblivion, but rather concealment appears or manifests in its own right. If it were simply absence, it would not be concealment. The effort is to move away from a notion of truth as correspondence. Truth as this tension between concealment and unconcealment is the very medium of appearance. *Aletheia* is the very attunement to relationality of beings.

use of words that remain incongruous to the spirit of Dionysus, which was the driving force of the work. He writes:

> I now regret very much that I did not yet have the courage (or immodesty?) at that time to permit myself a language of my very own for such personal views and acts of daring, labouring instead to express strange and new evaluations in Schopenhauerian and Kantian formulations, things which fundamentally ran counter to both the spirit and taste of Kant and Schopenhauer. […] How differently Dionysus spoke to me! (BT, Preface§6).

His "self-criticism" has to do with his own missed encounter with language. He had written in a language that did not belong to him, and that could not convey the concepts, whose very implications ran counter to the words that tried to contain them. Not surprisingly, in this work explicitly about the Ancient Greeks, Nietzsche feels himself to be nothing other than a "copy" or "a caricature" of someone else. Nietzsche ultimately finds in Schopenhauer and Kant a fundamental resignation and retreat from life, totally at odds with the exuberance and life-affirming nature of the Dionysian god.

But the voice of Dionysus *also* haunts the work, producing yet another *fremde Stimme* in a text already possessed by so many competing languages. Dionysus speaks through Nietzsche, such that Nietzsche does not recognize his voice as his own. Instead, "a strange voice was speaking here, the disciple of an as yet 'unknown god' who concealed himself beneath the cowl of a scholar" (BT, Preface§3). And upon later reflection, Nietzsche decides that the entire book, written in the language of philosophy to an audience of unreceptive *philologists*, should really have been written in verse: "It ought to have *sung*, this 'new soul,' and not talked! What a pity it is that I did not dare to say what I had to say at that time as a poet; perhaps I could have done it!" (BT, Preface§3). Would singing have allowed Nietzsche to depart from a certain experience of

borrowed language? Would song or poetry have produced a voice entirely his own? The answers to these questions seem somehow less important than the unexpected link that seems to have surfaced between the foreignness of language and some conception of suffering.

If we wanted to measure the distance that Nietzsche takes from himself between the writing of *The Birth of Tragedy* and the subsequent writing of its preface, we might do so in terms of his rejection of a particular compensatory economy. In addition to the Schopenhauerian and Kantian language that he later disavows, he also denies his praise of metaphysical solace within the ancient tragic form. Fourteen years later, the very need for transcendent solace has become despicable to him. He now bids his readers abstinence from "metaphysical comfort," the palliative concept that something more primordial, unchanging, and eternal lies behind the fleeting appearance of existence. It is not just that metaphysical comfort depends on a notion of truth that still seeks to *uncover* and *unveil*, but that it betrays a cloying, sentimental desire to *transcend* this world, a weakness that for Nietzsche is born with Plato/Socrates and penetrates the modern world via Christianity. He cautions: "No, you should first learn the art of comfort *in this world*, you should learn to *laugh*, my young friends, if you are really determined to remain pessimists. Perhaps then, as men who laugh, you will some day send all attempts at metaphysical solace to Hell—with metaphysics the first to go!" (BT, Preface§7).

Before looking more closely at this invocation to laughter, we must linger for a moment on the logic of compensation that silently undergirds any appeal to metaphysical solace. Compensation suggests that, although one stands to lose in one sphere of life, one gains eternity in another. What appears to be transient is, underneath it all, everlasting.

Compensation pretends to redeem one's losses and thus provide comfort. There is a suspicious movement toward closure in consolation. The frayed edges of suffering are collected and tucked in, and one gives in to the desire to wipe away the exposed and raw traces of pain and mend all open wounds. Thus, when Nietzsche recalls his suffering before the convalescence of *The Gay Science*, he explicitly distances himself from the closure of consolation. The pain is described as follows: "This stretch of desert, exhaustion, disbelief, icing up in the midst of youth, this interlude of old age at the wrong time, this tyranny of pain even excelled by the tyranny of pride that refused the *conclusions* of pain—and conclusions are consolations" (GS, Preface§1). This resistance to the "conclusions of pain" has not only to do with Nietzsche's refusal to cut short the experience of suffering—his advocacy of a certain "discipline of suffering" (BGE§225)—but also with a more general aversion to closure. This thinker of the eternal return, nonetheless, wants to resist a thinking that privileges the closure of debts and the settling of accounts.

The very concept of closing with one's debts rests on a thinking of equivalence. And here debt should be conceived existentially, everything one has inherited in and through the very act of living. For Nietzsche, any kind of existential equivalence is profoundly misguided. In a diatribe against the Golden Rule, Nietzsche rejects any principle that "wants to establish all human intercourse on the basis of mutual services, so that every action appears as a kind of payment for something done to us" (WP§926). To suggest that one should 'do unto others only as he'd have done to himself' is to democratize and reduce human life, to find equality where there is really only difference. He continues: "The presupposition here is ignoble in the lowest sense: here an

equivalence of value between my actions and yours is presupposed; here the most personal value of an action is simply annulled (that which cannot be balanced or paid in any way—)" (WP§926). For Nietzsche, this approach relies on a kind of tallying-up of experience, an evaluation of all behavior, as though there were only a single continuum along which every action could be plotted. Any thinking of equivalence treats human actions as if they were readable, measurable, and substitutable, whereas Nietzsche sees only radical asymmetry between separate entities.

This is part of the reason that he rejects the concept of pity so vehemently. Pity—*Mitleid*, literally the sharing of sorrow with another—imagines a parity between two separate individuals (i.e. that I can know what you suffer, that I am in a position to wish your suffering away). But it also conceals an act of evasion—that one deviates from one's own path by intervening in another's. And if there is any payoff to doling out one's compassion, it is not to the benefit of the sufferer, but to the one who offers his pity (WP§368). In a section of *Zarathustra* entitled, "On the pitying," Nietzsche writes that, "Great indebtedness does not make people thankful, but vengeful instead; and if the small kindness is not forgotten then it will become a gnawing worm." On the surface, Nietzsche is the philosopher of extreme self-interest, the one who justifies any action so long as it benefits the self and who dismisses all forms of morality that place the neighbor above the self. And yet, here we begin to see subtle gestures that point, instead, to the elevation of the Other. There is a respect for the personal path and idiosyncratic needs of the Other, a radical non-imposition of the Self on the Other that emerges in Nietzsche's works. Distance and *withholding one's pity* turn out to be a profound display of honor for the dignity of the Other.

Although Nietzsche's texts seem to take a strong stand against pity and compassion, he is not unaffected by the sight of another's pain. He writes: "Suffering in all its nuances has become interesting for us; in this respect we are certainly not fuller of pity, even when we are shaken by the sight of suffering and moved to tears: we do not by any means for that reason feel like helping" (WP§119). This introduces a subtle variation into his apparently unwavering rejection of pity. He does not advocate a rejection of all feeling, but, rather, acts of intervention. In fact, Nietzsche's profound feeling for others is something that he must continually defend against and reconcile. Even Nietzsche, at times, cannot resist intervention. The image of Nietzsche at the moment of his mental collapse in 1889, throwing his arms around the neck of a horse to shield it from the beatings of a carriage driver, deserves to be read alongside this complex analysis of compassion.[36] And for all of its apparent straightforwardness, Nietzsche's stance against pity produces strange effects in his writing. It is as though the effort to suppress compassion reveals its own limitations. Stifled compassion also requires release in some form, and, at times, seems to manifest as a loss of control within writing itself.

The following passage of *The Gay Science*, for example, takes a seemingly overt stand against pity, cautioning against any deviation from one's own course. But as the passage continues, it reveals that the author's own course involves own subtle deviations. Nietzsche writes:

> I know, there are a hundred decent and praiseworthy ways of losing *my own way*, and they are truly highly "moral!" Indeed, those who now preach the morality of pity even take the view that precisely this and only this is moral—to lose one's *own* way in order to come to the assistance of a neighbor. I know just as certainly that I only need to expose myself to the sight of some genuine distress and I am lost. And if a suffering friend said to me, "Look, I am about to die; please promise

[36] Safranski, 370.

> me to die with me," I should promise it; and the sight of a small mountain tribe fighting for its liberty would persuade me to offer it my hand and my life—if for good reasons I may choose for once two bad examples. (GS§338).

Why is it that hypothetical scenarios of compassion produce in Nietzsche's writing an unprecedented moment of deficient illustration: "for good reasons I may choose *for once* two bad examples"? What are the "good reasons"? Why do pity-evoking conditions necessarily lead to the writing of "bad examples"? He does not elaborate. And these "bad examples"—an imaginary friend's request that Nietzsche follow him to his death, as well as the taking up of arms on behalf of a "small mountain tribe"—both entail the potential loss of Nietzsche's life. Here, compassion bears its relationship to death and to bad writing. That is, writing, which cautions here against the derailing of one's own path, undergoes its own derailing as it tries to contain it.

This is not the first time that language and compassion are aligned in Nietzsche's work. *The Birth of Tragedy*, which the author later disavows precisely because of its emphasis on solace and comfort, originally advocated the *need* for compassion. Nietzsche describes the ancient spectator in the throes of the Dionysian experience, ripped from his individuated existence, fused with the primordial unity of everything, nearly disappearing entirely into the intoxicating world will when suddenly "the power of the *Apolline*, bent on restoring the almost shattered individual, bursts forth, bringing the healing balm of a blissful deception" (BT §21). In this moment, the spectator identifies with the image of the tragic hero onstage. Nietzsche continues, "And where we had imagined we were expiring, breathless, in the convulsive reaching-out of all feelings, and that there was little which still tied us to this existence, now we hear and see only the hero, mortally wounded and yet not dying, with his despairing cry." The spectator anchors down, so to

speak, in this writhing, dying hero. Rather than bursting from an overwhelming rush of empathic feeling, something is held in check and maintained by virtue of this compassion. Unexpectedly, Nietzsche writes: "though compassion may reach into us and seize hold of our feelings, in a sense compassion saves us from the primal suffering of the world, just as the symbolic image of myth saves us from looking directly at the highest idea of the world—and just as thoughts and words save us from the unchecked outpouring of the unconscious Will" (BT §21). In a very uncharacteristic move, Nietzsche discovers in compassion not the potential derailing of the individual from his own, unique path, but a stopgap, a kill-switch to cut the all-pervasive "primal suffering" of existence. Through the centering and grounding of compassion, the general agony that belongs to the heart of existence, is channeled and contained.

But Nietzsche does not stop here. Instead, he likens the containing-force of compassion to the function of myth and to the function of *language*. Language gives shape and form to what would otherwise be a torrent of unrestrained and free-reigning impulses, urges, and drives. Language, like compassion, allows us to tolerate existence. It marks our distance from the unharnessed and unconscious will. We might say that Nietzsche's preoccupation with pity and compassion, and even with language, is an investigation into the necessity of distance.[37] Even his essay on metaphor, "Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense," is about our remove from the world by way of

[37] For a link between distance and the figure of woman in Nietzsche, see Derrida, *Spurs*: "If it is necessary to keep one's distance from the feminine operation, from the *actio in distans* (to mistake this necessity for just another 'approach,' however, would be at the risk of death *itself*), it is perhaps because the 'woman' is not a determinable identity. Perhaps woman is not some thing which announces itself from a distance, at a distance from some other thing. […] Perhaps woman—a non-identity, a non-figure, a simulacrum—is distance's very chasm, the out-distancing of distance, the interval's cadence, distance itself, if we could still say such a thing, distance *itself*" (JD, 49). For Derrida, the figure of woman is going to suspend the very opposition between truth and untruth" (Derrida, 107)

metaphor. Describing the degrees to which language holds us at a distance from the world, even as it seduces us into believing we grasp it perfectly, Nietzsche writes:

> The stimulation of a nerve is first translated into an image: first metaphor! The image is then imitated by a sound: second metaphor! And each time there is a complete leap from one sphere into the heart of another, new sphere. […] We believe that when we speak of trees, colours, snow, and flowers, we have knowledge of the things themselves, and yet we possess only metaphors of things which in no way correspond to the original entities. (TL, 144).

This model denies any presence at the origin of language. There are only leaps out of one "sphere" and into another. And yet, language is described as though it provided a kind of protection, a layer between ourselves and the world. Its mode of protection is to deceive us into believing that there is perfect contiguity—that our relationship is one of proximity and immediacy—where really there is distance and divide.

It is not that we must somehow get behind language or underneath it, in order to forge a more intimate relationship with the world. There is no "true" world that lurks underneath, such that more precise language or better forms of representation might access. Any attempt to represent the world always already involves distance: the very stimulation of a nerve must be *translated* into an image, already one sphere removed even before sound gets attached to it. And this emphasis on "translation" at the heart of metaphor gives us reason to pause. Here, translation does not mean the conversion of an original into a copy with minor difference. Each translation is its own entity entirely. Each is as original as the sphere prior, thereby distorting any simple notion of originality. In the end, the seemingly "true" world turns out to be predicated on the very deception that belongs to all language. That is, all we ever have is language. So we might ask, what does it mean for Nietzsche, upon returning to *The Birth of Tragedy* over a decade after its

publication, to not only reject his earlier valuation of metaphysical solace, but in its place to advocate laughter, an affective response that precisely does away with language?

If Nietzsche sees an inextricable connection between consolation and conclusion, as he says in the preface to *The Gay Science*, his disavowal of metaphysical solace is also a denial of conclusion. To seek no consolation in the Dionysian/Apollonian relationship—to demand, instead, that one hold oneself in the midst of primordial suffering without retreat to compassion, or to language, or any other palliative notion—is to sustain a very particular relationship to the world. It is to deny oneself the breathing room of conclusion, the refuge of meaning beyond the pain of existence. If language participates in an essential duplicity, seducing us into believing that the world is accessible and knowable, the turn to laughter does not collapse the distance between self and world, but denies the conceit of conclusion and consolation. In laughter there seems to be an acceptance of things as they are, not in the mode of Schopenhauerian resignation, but with a certain joyfulness. There is an acknowledgment of an insuperable distance that cannot be bridged. There is a taking-it-lightly that seems incongruous with the weight and wound of existence, and that nonetheless seems to be the only proper response to such a condition.

As Nietzsche writes of his own temperament in the face of despair: "in order to endure this type of extreme pessimism (it can be perceived here and there in my *Birth of Tragedy*) and to live alone 'without God and morality' I had to invent a counterpart for myself. Perhaps I know best why man alone laughs: he alone suffers so deeply that he *had* to invent laughter" (WP§91). Laughter achieves both distance and proximity, a response that does not attempt to represent the world and thus participate in the duplicity

of language. And yet it maintains distance, precisely by recognizing its powerlessness to eradicate the pain of living. This tension between proximity and distance haunted *The Birth of Tragedy* in the form of the Prussian War, the Battle of Wörth that "rolled across Europe" in the background of Nietzsche's writing. As Nietzsche says, the book could not be divorced from his own brief experience on the battlefield. He writes of himself in the third person when he says, it was "whilst recovering slowly from an illness which he had brought back from the field," that Nietzsche "reached a settled and definitive view in his own mind of the 'Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of *Music*'" (BT, Preface§1). But it is not simply that the war devastated him. Rather Nietzsche says, he was "very troubled and untroubled at one and the same time" (BT, Preface§1). Both *proximity* and *distance* to the agonies of war determine the work that took shape. And it is around pity, consolation, compassion and suffering that language encounters the limits of its expression.

WRITING'S WITHHOLDING AND THE PURSUIT OF DEATH

In his replacement of a universally valid, eternal and immutable concept of "truth" with a more nuanced theory of language, Nietzsche exposes the human need for deception and illusion. We want to believe that our concepts reflect a world that we have discovered, not one that we have created. But in his essay, "Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense," Nietzsche refutes this when he argues that nothing is "discovered" in this simple way, and that language, far from reflecting the world in an unbiased manner, shapes and determines the world, thereby revealing our stance toward it. Language is an imposition of human order on something that will always remain excessive to it

regardless of how precise, scientific and impartial we attempt to be. In this essay, Nietzsche asks, "What, then, is truth?" He answers in the following way:

> A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms, in short a sum of human relations which have been subjected to poetic and rhetorical intensification, translation and decoration, and which, after they have been in use for a long time, strike a people as firmly established, canonical and binding; truths are illusions of which we have forgotten that they are illusions, metaphors which have become worn by frequent use and have lost all sensuous vigour, coins which, having lost their stamp, are now regarded as metal and no longer as coins" (TL, p.146).

Truth was once movable, shifting. It designated a highly creative moment that reflected the "sum of human relations" from which it was born. But, this active will to create truth, cemented itself into rigid and fixed depictions of the world. Lost now is the flourish, the "rhetorical" flair and "decoration" of a once dynamic *taking* of the world. The metaphors, which used to participate in an economy of exchange—"coins" infused with "sensuous vigour"—have lost their allure, as we no longer even recall the system of value to which they once belonged. "Truth," which originally signaled a multiplicity of metaphors and metonymies, was born in a creative burst, but now, complacent in its total dominion over everything, shows signs of decrepitude. And this "mobile army," tasked with setting up and defending a coherent and consistent representation of the world, is just as skilled at covering its tracks. Through repeated use of the familiar rhetoric, the very fact of truth's rhetorical origins is effaced. This is not to say that the construction of "truth" is a conscious conspiracy. Rather, it seems as though language itself has usurped control, and because we no longer remember that it was our own poetic hand that built the elaborate machinery of metaphor, e assume that it reflects the world *as it really is*.

Nietzsche goes so far as to suggest that this effacement of our creative origin is *necessary* for the narcotic effect proper to any seemingly inviolable "truth." He writes:

> Only by forgetting this primitive world of metaphor, only by virtue of the fact that a mass of images, which originally flowed in a hot, liquid stream from the primal power of the human imagination, has become hard and rigid, only because of the invincible faith that *this* sun, *this* window, *this* table is a truth in itself—in short only because man forgets himself as a subject, and indeed as an artistically creative subject, does he live with some degree of peace, security, and consistency. (TL, 148).

Rather than taking credit for this creation, man obliterates his memory. It seems that forgetting is key to the successful functioning of language. "Man" sacrifices the remembrance of his power and creative force for the comfort of believing that he lives in a world where there is inherent meaning and absolute logic. As if to highlight the extremity of man's forgetting, Nietzsche makes up his own creative story of origin, a fabulous tale of an alternative genesis, whereby man is not exalted but rendered pathetic, pitiable and inconsequential. In our haste to forget our creative role in constructing the world, we allow our active and vibrant metaphors to stagnate and decay. They die by our own hand, but remain operative nonetheless. So our highest concepts turn out merely to be the ashes and residue of once-active metaphors, whose rhetorical life force is simply snuffed out. Our most revered concepts are nothing but mausoleums for the dead.

This link between death and metaphor is already foretold in the fable Nietzsche writes describing man's debased origin. It begins with a hypothetical planet that comes into being and is then frozen almost instantaneously, killing everything on it. According to Nietzsche, even this inconsequential cosmic blip does not come close to capturing the insignificance of man in the larger context of the universe. Fundamentally weak and vulnerable, man requires the tool of intellect to just barely keep himself alive for the short

duration of his existence. But strangely, buried in an aside about the human intellect and man's misguided arrogance, Nietzsche slips in a bizarre reference to the dead. Writing on the intellect, he says, "it is nothing other than an aid supplied to the most unfortunate, most delicate and most transient of beings so as to detain them for a minute within existence; otherwise, without this supplement, they would have every reason to flee existence as quickly as did Lessing's infant son" (TL, p.141-2). The reference to "Lessing's infant son" is made only in passing, and the hyperbolic gestalt of the paragraph is enhanced by the casualness and lightness of this remark. Nothing more is said about this dead child. In the Cambridge translation of the essay, the editors include an explanatory footnote to orient the reader with regard to the source of the reference. It was a comment made by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing upon the death of his newborn child. Lessing writes: "Was it good sense that they had to pull him into the world with iron tongs, or that he noticed the filth so quickly? Was it not good sense that he took the first opportunity to leave it again?"[38] Although this infant death does not claim any position of priority in Nietzsche's text, he nonetheless straps the work to a death. More interesting still, is that both Nietzsche and Lessing elide the noteworthy fact that this death was immediately followed by the death of the mother. Here, we are thrown back onto the terms of the riddle, which began to breakdown as we delved deeper into Nietzsche's oeuvre. The unmentioned death of the mother, whose womb carried the dying child to term, links any notion of origin to the inevitability of erasure and death. And this turns out to be the case with language, too. Having always already effaced that early creative impulse that gave rise to metaphor, language acts as a crypt, harboring what is dying and what is dead, that which "has become hard and rigid" and corpselike.

[38] Lessing, quoted in "Truth and Lying," 142.

Part of the devastation that Nietzsche unleashes in his critique of "truth" is precisely this introduction of death into a realm that was supposed to be immune from it. Truth, which purportedly inheres in the world, is supposed to be eternal and absolute. There is no death in the realm of truth because truth is precisely that which does not change, grow old, or die; it simply *is*. With his substitution of language and metaphor for the old, seemingly pure and imperishable notion of truth, Nietzsche introduces human artistry, and therefore death, into the sphere from which it was supposed to be barred. Truth turns out to be self-serving, an expression of human needs and interpretations, neither of which stands in a transcendent relationship to the world. It is the collapsing of these boundaries that constitutes the catastrophe of Nietzsche's analysis: What seemed pure is always already structured by an originary contamination. In her investigation of metaphor in the Nietzschean corpus, Sarah Kofman considers the impact of this disruption in terms of the relationship between philosophy and literature. She finds that, by undermining the very presuppositions that quarantine metaphor in the so-called periphery zone of rhetoric, Nietzsche also dismantles a central tenet of metaphysics. Kofman writes:

> Until Nietzsche, philosophy and science had relegated metaphor to a poetic sphere because they sought to speak 'properly.' They sought to demonstrate, and not to convince by way of images or comparisons. Philosophers formerly appealed to metaphor only for didactic reasons or as the last resort, and even then with great prudence. But by granting such precise limits to the metaphor, they concealed the fact that concepts, too, are metaphorical.[39]

[39] Kofman (here quoted in Allison, as this translation is more preferable to me than the Duncan Large translation.) In Allison, see p. 208-9. In the Large translation, p.17. On the relationship between metaphor, art and loss, Kofman writes: "So right form The Birth of Tragedy we can find in Nietzsche a generalized 'theory' of metaphor, based on the loss of the 'proper' in two senses. On the one hand there is no metaphor without a stripping away of individuality, without masquerage and metamorphosis. To be able to transpose, one must be able to transpose oneself and one must have conquered the limits of individuality: the same must partake in the other, must be the other. […] But if there is metaphor it is because this unity is always already in pieces and can only be reconstituted when symbolically transposed into art. Beyond individual

And by troubling the strict demarcation between philosophy and poetry, Nietzsche reveals that such a purported opposition "rests on the fictional separation between the real and the imaginary."[40] Once the binary relationship between the real and the imaginary no longer stands, the very possibility of something like truth is impossible to maintain. Truth, now freed from its constraints and from its cloistered place of infallibility and exaltation, proliferates. Suddenly co-opted into the sphere of experiment, testing, and hypothesis, truth is granted permission to be merely *provisional*, something to be indulged for a while perhaps, and then abandoned when it no longer serves. That is, Nietzsche strips the truth of its preciousness, permanence and immutability.

In his analysis of *style* in Nietzsche's work, especially as it pertains to the question of woman, Jacques Derrida tracks precisely this radical divestiture of truth and finds that, in Nietzsche's hands, truth does not disappear entirely, but rather seems to multiply. Derrida looks specifically at a section in *Beyond Good and Evil* [*Jenseits von Gut und Böse*], in which Nietzsche writes: "After paying myself such a generous compliment, perhaps I may be allowed to enunciate some truths about 'women,' assuming that henceforth people will know from the start how much these are simply—*my* truths" [meine *Wahrheiten sind*] (BGE§231). In this passage, Derrida is momentarily interested in the fact that Nietzsche stresses "*my* truths," the proprietary and plural nature of what has traditionally been taken to be absolute and singular. Derrida remarks: "In fact, in *Jenseits*, it is in a paragraph on women that one reads 'there are only—*my* truths'

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separation, symbolized by the dismemberment of Dionysus, metaphor allows for the reconstitution of the originary unity of all beings, symbolized by the resurrection of god.

On the other hand metaphor is linked to the loss of the 'proper' understood as the 'essence' of the world, which is indecipherable and of which man can have only representations which are quite 'improper.' Corresponding to these representations are more or less appropriate symbolic spheres" (Kofman, 14—Large translation).

[40] Kofman quoted in Allison, 208-9.

(*meine* Wahrheiten sind). The very fact that 'meine Wahrheiten' is so underlined, that they are multiple, variegated, contradictory even, can only imply that these are not *truths*. Indeed there is no such thing as a truth in itself. But only a surfeit of it."[41] Truth manifests only in this mode of plurality, always in the form of something excessive, something that cannot be reduced or contained, but must overspill its limits. And if this proprietary and plural notion of truth is bound up in Nietzsche's work with the very possibility of language it is because our representations always and only expose something that we have *constructed*, the traces of our relations and our needs, and not the objects they presume to depict.

Whatever we deem to be "true" is only a mirror that we hold up to ourselves, even if we do not acknowledge the reflexivity of its image. And yet, to align truth with language means nothing, if we do not know the *value* of language itself within Nietzsche's work. Here, Derrida's notion of truth as "surfeit" is helpful, as it requires us to think truth not only in terms of language, but also in terms of limits. And language, for Nietzsche, is the exposure of our limitations and our potential. Thus, Nietzsche writes: "We set up a word at the point at which our ignorance begins, at which we can see no further, e.g., the word 'I,' the word 'do,' the word 'suffer': —these are perhaps the horizon of our knowledge, but not 'truths.'" (WP§482). Words are outposts at the border of our reach. They are flags, simultaneously marking our territory and our limitations. If *words* attempt to stake out some claim to truth, according to Nietzsche, they only end up revealing the limits of knowledge, that something always outdistances the word. And it is not by accident that the three words he uses to clarify this point are, "I-do-suffer." Here, Nietzsche takes this notion of the subject, of action, and of pain to their extreme. The

[41] JD, 103.

subject—the *I* itself—emerges as an effect of *doing* and of *suffering*. The subject cannot exist in isolation of these conditions.[42] And here, we may recall Nietzsche's desire for a reader who shares in the experience of suffering and could therefore better receive his work. As it turns out, everyone is a potential reader in this way, because suffering is a constitutive part of subjectivity itself.

If there is anything left that might be called "truth" (although always with the caveat that it is not grounded in an objective world of verifiable and calculable determination), it is the notion of the suffering subject that acts in the world. For Nietzsche, this is why art is essential. He writes: "We possess *art* lest we *perish of the truth*" (WP§822) [*Wir haben die Kunst, damit wir nicht an der Wahrheit zugrunde gehen*]. Art saves us from the unbearable realization that there is nothing that definitively anchors us in this world or in the next, no underlying and inherent meaning, no God, no morality, no soul, no axioms or inviolable laws or principles to which we might appeal. We are suspended, and only art serves to shield us from this existential isolation. Ironically, for this author who so strongly advocates mastery and power, it seems to be by virtue of art's non-possessive relationship to the world—that it does not seek to grasp the truth in the same way as the sciences, metaphysics, or religion—that it is, therefore, granted special access. Because art has nothing to gain from this imaginary relation to truth, it opens onto horizons that the other spheres of life do not seem capable of accessing. But although art does not attempt to possess the truth, the verb that Nietzsche uses to describe our relationship to art is one that presupposes an act of possession: We *have* art, "*Wir haben Kunst*" we possess it. When the more traditional notion of truth has

[42] I want to thank Elissa Marder for insisting on the relation between subjectivity, action and suffering in this passage.

absconded, the need to assert one's mastery and possession is all the more urgent. And yet, as we might imagine, the nature of this "possession" will be anything but straightforward.

We can no longer "possess" art in the same way when the very possibility of objective truth has been destroyed. Possession in general is subjected to a revaluation as soon as we have done away with the notion of truth, and the very security that it seemed to ensure. Thus, when Derrida surveys the exhilarating wreckage of what used to be "truth," he notes that, as a result of the now-defunct opposition between truth and non-truth, something in Nietzsche's work will have to be discharged and unleashed. He writes: "Reading is freed from the horizon of the meaning or truth of being, liberated from the values of the product's production or the present's presence. Whereupon the question of style is immediately unloosed as a question of writing."[43] When reading is no longer constrained by any metaphysical demands—that it be productive of meaning, that it convey a message, that it unite an author and a reader in a seamless and transparent relationship—then *style* becomes the locus of power in its ever-changeable form.

Thus we find in Nietzsche, especially around the discussion of art, a fixation with style. In fact, it begins to look as though art were nothing other than style itself. And to be an artist means precisely to impose style upon one's very Becoming. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche writes: "*One thing is needful*.—To 'give style' to one's character—a great and rare art! It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and then fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye" (GS§290). The work of art is not distinct from the self, an object made and released into the world, something that stands apart.

[43] *Ibid*., 107.

Instead, Becoming itself is artful, and this has to do with exposing and channeling not just one's assets, but one's deficiencies as well. It is an exploitation of the self, an opening up and a willingness to be even ugly in one's Becoming. Nietzsche makes it clear that he is not interested in the production of "beautiful feelings": "leave that idea to females" (WP§842). Rather, the "greatness of an artist" is determined by "the degree to which he approaches the grand style, to which he is capable of the grand style. This style has this in common with great passion, that it disdains to please: that it forgets to persuade; that it commands; that it *wills*—To become master of the chaos one is; to compel one's chaos to become form" (WP§842). The "grand style" is no single style to which one could point. Its characteristics include a certain irreverence, an absentmindedness that the world is watching. Instead, it is mastery, not of the outside world, but of one's own "chaos." This is not the language of assimilation and incorporation that Nietzsche elsewhere employs, even though it bears some of the same emphasis on willing and commanding. In this act of mastery, one flaunts even one's own weaknesses. Art is the shaping of one's own Becoming, one's own transience, one's own passing. It is always, therefore, an outstanding project, one without any end in sight.

Still, in this non-teleological and interminable stylizing of one's Becoming, artistic production occurs. There are moments of apparent completion; projects come to an end. This is the most dangerous moment, as decay sets in immediately, wearing away what was once vibrant. Thus, in an apostrophe to his own withering thoughts, Nietzsche writes:

> Oh, what are you really, all of you, my written and depicted thoughts! Not so long ago, you were still so colourful, young, and malicious, so full of thorns and covert spices that you made me sneeze and laugh—and now? You've already cast off

> your novelty and some of you, I fear, are at the point of becoming truths: they already look so immortal, so heart-breakingly righteous, so boring! (BGE§296)

Writing seems to activate a laborious process of dying, as though thoughts, too, were subjected to the torments of finitude, even if their final death throes were marked not by disappearance, but by immortality. Like the sterility of metaphor that loses its vitality from overexposure, the worst thing to befall a "colourful, young, and malicious" thought is acceptance. To achieve the apparent honor of "becoming truths" (and we note the use of the plural here) is tantamount to death, as life seems to require contradiction, transformation, changeability, not the "heart-breakingly righteous" and "boring" security of conviction.

If it seems, however, that writing is the culprit here, that writing sets off the process of accelerated aging, it turns out that writing is always only capable of tracking the dead. Only that which is *already dying* belongs to the realm of writing. Writing does not provoke the fall, rather it seems to be the case that the dying are the ones that place the call to writing itself. Thus, Nietzsche says,

> And was it not ever thus? What things do we really write down and depict, we mandarins with our Chinese brush, we immortalizers of things that *can* be written, what things are really left for us to paint, after all? Alas, only that which is about to wither and beginning to smell rank! Alas, only exhausted, retreating storms and late, yellowed feelings! Alas, only birds that have flown themselves weary, flown astray, and have let themselves be caught in someone's hand—*our* hand! We immortalize what cannot live or fly any longer, weary and crumbling things all! (BGE§296)

Writing emerges here as a kind of engraving on the tombs of the dying and dead. Writing is a tending to the infirm and the weak, a commemoration for what once lived, always in the mode of preemptive eulogy. Thus, writing's relationship to death is not, as we might expect, primarily one that anticipates the death of the author. The relevant death here is

the death of thought. And the ambivalence and ambiguity surrounding the exact cause of death is inextricable from the very nature of writing itself. It is depicted here as a kind of capturing—a mummified preservation, an encryption, keeping the dead alive in the form of the work. And yet, writing is only able to capture that which was already slated for death: "We immortalize what cannot live or fly any longer." There is something agonizing in Nietzsche's lament, in his intimate declaration to his own languishing thoughts: "And it is only for your *afternoon*, my written and depicted thoughts, that I still have paint, much paint perhaps, many colourful tender words and fifty yellows and browns and greens and reds—but they will not help anyone to guess how you looked in your morning, you sudden sparks and miracles of my solitude, my old, beloved—*wicked* thoughts!" (BGE, §296). This passage sounds like a private love letter to thought itself, whose death Nietzsche must continually mourn, as one relentlessly bound to the dead who nonetheless live on in immortalized and preserved form. Here, the death of thought does not invoke laughter, but a quiet melancholic tone that longs for the return of an earlier time.

Thus, in the production of art, there is undoubtedly presentation and exposure; something is made available through the act of writing, even if it is by way of the undertaker. However, if art is what prevents us from "perishing of the truth"—the truth that there is no truth—it is because art does not only lay bare, but exists in the manner of withholding. In his lectures on Nietzsche and the "Will-to-Power as Art," Heidegger writes that, "The grand style prevails wherever abundance restrains itself in simplicity."[44] The artist, as the creator of the work of art, is one who does *not* render everything knowable and accessible. In his mastery—in compelling his own chaos into form—the

[44] Heidegger, "Will to Power as Art" in Nietzsche Lectures, Vol. 1, 134.

artist sets something free, but always with restraint. And this is not merely an exorbitance of control, as though the artist were able to designate which parts to display and which to keep hidden. Rather, in any artistic act something is *simultaneously* offered and held back. In a section of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche briefly profiles the "attraction of imperfection" and muses on the poet who "is more attractive by virtue of his imperfections than he is by all the things that grow to completion and perfection under his hands" (GS§79). At first it seems as if Nietzsche may be launching a critique of this incompletion and imperfection. But then, he discovers something redeeming in the *partial* offering that constitutes the incomplete artistic endeavor. Writing about the poet, Nietzsche says, "His works never wholly express what he would like to express and what he would like to have seen: it seems as if he had had the foretaste of a vision and never the vision itself; but a tremendous lust for this vision remains in his soul, and it is from this that he derives his equally tremendous eloquence of desire and craving" (GS§79). Missing the mark, failing to bring "the foretaste of a vision" to its ultimate end, turns out to be a *virtue* of the work, not its negation. The fact that something is held back, even from the artist himself, allows the work to transgress its boundaries and forge a relationship with the viewer, the listener, the reader. This is why Nietzsche says, "By virtue of this lust he lifts his listeners above his work and all mere 'works' and lends them wings to soar as high as listeners had never soared." And in the process, the listeners themselves are "transformed into poets and seers" (GS§79).

This is not to say that the artist displays any form of stinginess. On the contrary, it is around this issue of *offering* that Nietzsche separates the artist from everyone else. That is, the artist is an *artist* by virtue of a particular generosity. Nietzsche is unwavering on

this point. He writes, "This is what distinguishes the artist from laymen (those susceptible to art): the latter reach the high point of their susceptibility when they receive; the former as they give" (WP§811). Or again in the next section, the artist is the one who "is able to squander without becoming poor" (WP§812). As opposed to the masses, who exist by way of preservation, accumulation, and stock-piling, the artist gives everything away. *Except*, of course, what he is unable to give. And this threshold of his gift-giving, the fact that something is always held back, ultimately shapes his art. Thus, writing on the hermit, Nietzsche says: "We always hear something of the echo of desolation in a hermit's writings, something of the whispering tone and shy, roundabout glance of solitude; out of his mightiest words, even out of his screams, we still hear the sound of a new and dangerous sort of silence, silencing" (BGE, §289). Silence belongs to those most audible utterances as the limit of what can be said. It reminds us that every act of communication is also a necessary failure of communication. One can never say it all.

The silence that Nietzsche finds in the hermit's writing is not one that can be made to speak. It does not harbor a single, translatable meaning, a secret that simply awaits decoding. When Nietzsche asks in rhetorical fashion, "don't we write books precisely in order to hide what we keep hidden?" we should not take this to mean that the "hidden" element of the work could simply be brought into sight. The "hidden" remains hidden, even to the one who hides it. Thus, Nietzsche wonders "whether a philosopher is even capable of 'final and true' opinions, whether at the back of his every cave a deeper cave is lying, is bound to lie—a wider, stranger, richer world over every surface, an abyss behind his every ground, beneath his every 'grounding'" (BGE§289). This "hidden" object, this "silencing" silence is infinitely greater than the philosopher's (or writer's, or

artist's) ability to manage it. Rather, it manages the artist. In this way, the artist maintains a relationship with what is *not* there. There can be no full incorporation of the work of art precisely because something is always outstanding. It remains open by virtue of everything it *does not say* is. For Heidegger, this is precisely the work's invitation to the Other. Heidegger writes, "every great thinker always *thinks* one jump more originally than he directly *speaks*. Our interpretation must therefore try to say what is unsaid by him."[45] The "unsaid" emerges between two thinkers, and is something that neither can say alone. We might note that this approach breaks with any appropriative gesture of critique, as anyone who attempts to liberate the "unsaid" of Nietzsche's works, nonetheless produces a new "unsaid." There is always more silence. And while this silence is a gift to the Other, perhaps the very notion of alterity is done away with here, as the strict demarcation between Self and Other, life and death, mother and father, and creation and destruction, can no longer be sustained.

[45] *Ibid*., 134.

Chapter II:
Language and the Deferral of Meaning in Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier*

"WHY I WRITE"

Remarking the discontinuity between love's fulfillment and the poverty of language in the face of it, Roland Barthes invokes the Nietzschean image of the eternal return, which here emerges as the desire for an endlessly self-enclosed and self-preserving entity. Barthes writes: "(Fulfillment means an abolition of inheritances: '…Joy has no need of heirs or of children—Joy wants itself, wants eternity, the repetition of the same things, wants everything to remain eternally the same.' The fulfilled lover has no need to write, to transmit, to reproduce.)"[1] Writing, as byproduct, or remainder, of the unrequited and unfulfilled, is linked to reproduction, the begetting of children, the creation of heirs. Writing here belongs to the earthly, to the passage of time and the erosion of things, while fulfilled love breaks with mundane temporality. If the satisfied lover has no use for writing, there is a sense in which the deprived lover, even if he never pens a word, experiences writing as *need*, if only as the impulse toward transmission and reproduction, the signs of unconsummated desire.

The entirety of Ford Madox Ford's novel, *The Good Soldier* (1915), could unfold in the space of this quotation. "You may well ask why I write," says the narrator, John Dowell, to his reader. He is the cuckolded husband and the betrayed friend, whose narration tracks his own belated discovery of the infidelities that surrounded him, and of which he was ignorant for the nine plus years of their occurrence. The story he tells is of the dissolution of a small group of friends—he, his wife, Florence, and the Ashburnhams,

[1] Barthes, 56.

Edward and Leonora—who had met at the baths in Nauheim in 1904. The reason he gives for writing down their story is the following: "For it is not unusual in human beings who have witnessed the sack of a city or the falling to pieces of a people to desire to set down what they have witnessed for the benefit of unknown heirs or generations infinitely remote; or if you please, just to get the sight out of their heads" (7). Assuring the reader that his case is not pathological, Dowell claims that he must write; he must bestow upon his unknown (and non-existent) heirs the gift, the cautionary tale, of this little coterie. Writing, here, emerges in the service of something else—some benefit, or some wisdom, to impart to the future. But this telling is also a purging, a banishment from thought, the catharsis that comes from no longer having to keep a story alive in one's "head." If, as Dowell claims, this is all a matter of bearing "witness," it befalls the reader to puzzle out the nature of witnessing in this novel. Because, in spite of the analogy he draws in this passage , Dowell has *not* witnessed "the sack of a city" or even "the falling to pieces of a people," and part of the novel's insistent pressure is to understand *what*, exactly, has been witnessed, and what kind of link inheres between the act of witnessing and the act of writing.

The discussion of witnessing relies, in part, on understanding John Dowell's relationship to the events and experiences he narrates. This question has prompted a number of critical responses, most of which begin with the observation that Dowell is an "unreliable narrator," as he continuously admits the limits of his knowledge, uttering his refrains, *"I don't know"* and *"I know nothing."* The disorientation of the reader derives from the fact that these admissions of ignorance are interspersed with detailed descriptions of characters' traits, their intimate thoughts, their secret loves and their

sordid personal histories. In response, these critics tirelessly seek out the motives behind Dowell's constitutive unreliability and alternately find their answers in his deceitful and deliberate misinterpretation of facts (*Hafley*), his neurotic sensibility that attunes him to the pain of the universe (*Meixner*), his dual-persona that vacillates between confidence and bewilderment (*Lehan*), and the fact that he cannot surmount the ambiguities of meaning and so falls into a pattern of failure and consolation that paces the narrative rhythm (*Schorer*). Often, these critics display something like moral outrage toward this narrator, even as they praise the novel. And in those cases when a critic finds something valuable in Dowell's very unreliability, as does Samuel Hynes in his influential article, "The Epistemology of *The Good Soldier*," at best he grants Dowell a version of the Socratic virtue that, to know nothing still constitutes a form of knowledge.[2] In each case, however, Dowell is judged primarily in terms of his relationship to knowledge and truthfulness.

The notion of witnessing is particularly charged in this novel because it is not simply a story about adultery, suicide, and suffering, but about the very confrontation with language itself, about the effort to narrate and to write in the first place. Dowell's witnessing, then, does not primarily take as its object the events of the text, but, rather, witnessing must also account for the struggle to produce language in their service. The problem is that Dowell himself was simultaneously present and absent to his own

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[2] See Samuel Hynes: "To know what you can't know is nevertheless a kind of knowledge, and a kind that Dowell did not have at the beginning of the affair. Of positive knowledge, he has this: he knows something of another human heart, and something also of the necessary and irreconcilable conflict which exists between Passion and Convention, and which he accepts as in the nature of things" (235). See also Eugene Goodheart: "Acknowledging that one does not know is a considerable achievement, as Socrates demonstrated, because it generates questions that lead to knowledge" (622).

experiences at the time of their occurrence. This is why critics insist on his unreliability. His narration must negotiate between the ignorance of his past self—the cuckolded husband who did not suspect his wife's infidelities—and his ever-so-slightly-less ignorant present self. He does this by continuously charting the degree of his budding enlightenment. But the discrepancy between these two selves—that is, the character, Dowell, and the narrator, Dowell—leads to a convoluted telling, which slips seamlessly between knowledge and ignorance. Thus, in addition to those critical responses that attempt to pathologize and psychologize Dowell, there are those that attempt to untangle the narratological knots that he winds through his act of telling. Emphasis is put on unscrambling the tortuous chronology of the text and mapping the ever-transforming position of the narrator/character with relationship to knowledge. It is striking, however, that in all of these studies, the very strangeness of *experience* itself is left uninterrogated. So even when they turn to Ford's theory of impressionism—his disdain of facts, and his belief that impressions must be continually submitted to revision[3]—these critics nonetheless sail right past the novel's treatment of experience itself as something highly problematic.

The notion of bearing witness is rendered more complicated still, as the novel seems undecided as to whether the act of witnessing consists in hearing the story or telling it. Based on the reasons Dowell gives for relaying the story in the first place, it would seem that writing shoulders the burden of witnessing; and yet, Dowell also reveals that this story—the story that he himself narrates—is actually a *re-telling*. We learn this

[3] Ford writes about how he and Conrad realized that Life "comes back to you, we saw that Life did not narrate, but made impressions on our brain. We in turn, if we wished to produce on you an effect of life, must not narrate but render impressions" (Ford, *Joseph Conrad*, 194).

immediately in the novel's opening line. He says: "This is the saddest story I have ever heard." Here, at the first sentence, we already have reason to pause. A story that purportedly belongs to the realm of Dowell's own experience, one that he must produce, as we know, both for the benefit of "unknown heirs" and in order to relieve himself of its haunting imagery, is not a story that he claims to have lived, but one that he claims to have *heard*. The very opening sentence distances Dowell from the events of the text, events that belong to him, even if they were not integrated into consciousness at the moment of their occurrence. As such, he arrives at his own story late, only to find that events have always already excluded him. Experience itself turns out to be mediated by the very act of telling. And the story does not become *his story* until he has first heard it through the mouth of another, only to then transform it into his own.

To what, then, must Dowell bear witness? To the belated appropriation of his own experience? And did some form of witnessing transpire in and through the "original" telling of the story? Here, this origin is evoked, and yet, only in the form of its inaccessibility. This previous telling, which we learn, came to Dowell through the mouth of Leonora, is something to which the reader is forever barred access. Thus, it is preserved only as an indelible trace, which leaves its mark on the first sentence of the novel. If the one who must now bear witness to the story is the only one to have been entirely oblivious to its events when they occurred, then witnessing in this novel has something to do with blindness. To bear witness is to account for the missed experience with one's own life.

The Good Soldier is thus about the belated encounter with one's own existence. And this sense of belatedness, which the text inscribes in the figure of its narrator,

already inheres in the novel in the form of its own complex history. The very opening line that announces the work as the "saddest story" was actually inserted at the last minute by Ford. Previously, Ford had intended to title the book, *The Saddest Story*, but after his publisher cautioned him that a work under that name would never sell during the bleakest days of war, Ford changed the title to *The Good Soldier*, only later to regret it.[4] The original reference to "the saddest story," however, found its way into the body of the text in the form of its opening sentence, a remainder, or trace, of its earlier identity. As if to enact the novel's own thematic engagement with the question of boundaries and frames, the very migration of the original title to its eventual position as first sentence, not only blurs the distinction between outside and inside, but also produces the very condition of belatedness that haunts its narrator. When the title becomes part of the body of the text after the novel has already been completed, we might say that the text *belatedly* internalizes something that nonetheless belonged to it from the outset. As if the first sentence still harbored the memory of its earlier position as title, by the time it makes its way onto the first page, it assumes its role at the head of a story that was, literally, completed before it arrived. Thus, when the first line—"This is the saddest story I have ever heard"— is finally added to the novel, it is truly is in the position to announce a story that has, in fact, already been told.

Perhaps it is because the events of his life occur belatedly, or because he was oblivious to the affair between his wife and his best friend, Edward, and thus the pain is

[4] Meixner, 242. One could do an entire study on the changing of names within Ford's work. Not only does the title of his most important work undergo this transformation, but his own proper name does as well. Born Ford Madox Hueffer, Ford decided to adopt his maternal grandfather's name purportedly in an effort to tone down the traces of his Germanic background (or inheritance) during a time when England's relations with Germany were strained.

not acute, whatever the case, Dowell is compelling, in part, because he betrays no signs of malice, contempt, jealousy or anger as he narrates his story. Mostly he appears unaffected. Other times, he relays Florence and Edward's dalliances with something closer to compassion and understanding. If anything, a tone of forgiveness would better describe Dowell's language in these moments. Mark Schorer, in his definitive introduction to the novel, discovers in Dowell's absence of emotion a mark of irony. He writes, "*The Good Soldier* carries the subtitle, 'A Tale of Passion,' and the book's controlling irony lies in the fact that passionate situations are related by a narrator who is himself incapable of passion, sexual and moral alike."[5] Thus, the opening line regarding the profound sadness of this saddest story can only be read, according to Schorer, as a nod to absurdity. Schorer's position seems to be prefigured by the text, demanded, in some ways, by the unabashed disconnect between the content of the narration and its tone. Dowell provokes bewilderment in his reader when he makes comments like the following: "You ask how it feels to be a deceived husband. Just heavens, I do not know. It feels like nothing at all. It is not hell, certainly it is not necessarily heaven. So I suppose it is the intermediate stage. What do they call it? Limbo" (75). He is either blithely stupid, pitifully meek, or playing with his reader; and it seems that the text has no interest in settling the matter one way or another.

But this passage, which Ford invests with a touch of mockery toward his seemingly doltish character, actually exposes something besides Dowell's shocking placidity toward the events of his life. It also reveals something about his relationship to language. As though he could only ascertain the qualitative feel of his experience by a

[5] Schorer, ix

process of deduction, he hovers in a purgatorial non-space, a zone of deprivation. It is not emotion that he lacks, regardless of the preponderance of critical responses that argue this to be the case. Rather, his deprivation has more to do with words. He is an outsider to the very language that he himself invokes in order to describe the condition of his experience. "What do *they* call it? Limbo." Language is the province of an unidentified "they." That is, the term that Dowell uses to describe the feeling of being a "deceived husband" is a term that belongs to the vernacular of others, not his own. This mode of searching for the right word or term, which often times never materializes for Dowell, is evident in other instances as well, where he simply weaves his aphasia into the narrative and ends up with phrases like, "*Somebody-or-other"* once said; or, such-and-such an event took place in "*Jerusalem or somewhere"* (19). Rather than treating these linguistic trip-ups as further evidence of Dowell's unreliability, or simply categorizing them as mere effects of the novel's psychological realism,[6] this chapter will argue that they betray a more nuanced relationship between the narrator's language and the events that he attempts to relay. That is, the novel proposes a certain kind of link between language and experience and sets it loose upon the text in the figure of its narrator.

The novel itself offers the reader a clue as to the importance of language when it instills in its supposedly "passionless" narrator momentary flashes of something that looks like anxiety. This anxiety erupts not so much around the contents of Dowell's narration, but rather when content touches on formal or tropological questions. For example, Dowell begins by describing the foursome in terms of a synchronized and

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[6] In his otherwise excellent article on the novel's convoluted chronology, Skinner (1989) nonetheless attributes Dowell's "unreliability" to the desired effect of psychological realism, which he believes governs the narrator's endless revisions and insecurities when it comes to knowledge.

choreographed dance: “Upon my word, yes, our intimacy was like a minuet” (8). When, half a page later, he erupts with emotion, it does not have to do with any of the events he describes, but rather with his mistaken use of this particular metaphor: “No, by God, it is false! It wasn’t a minuet that we stepped; it was a prison—a prison full of screaming hysterics, tied down so that they might not outsound the rolling of our carriage wheels as we went along the shaded avenues of the Taunus Wald” (9). This is not simply another instance of Dowell’s general narrative vacillation. The strong display of emotion has, rather, to do with the fact that the singular image of a minuet could not adequately describe the nature of that friendship. We sense that the source of Dowell’s agony always traces back to this question of language, of how to re-produce the events for the sake of his reader. He says, “I don’t know how it is best to put this thing down—whether it would be better to try and tell the story from the beginning, as if it were a story; or whether to tell it from this distance of time, as it reached me from the lips of Leonora or from those of Edward himself” (14). By framing the problem in this way, it seems that Dowell is concerned with whether to dramatize the story—treating events as contingent, aimlessly wandering toward an unknown end—or whether to invoke the perspective of interpretive distance—treating events as necessary, as always headed toward the end that is already determined. But the question is disingenuous because Dowell doesn’t actually take these two options seriously. He slips back and forth between them, at times, exploiting the tension of a dramatic moment and, at others, employing the paraphrastic remove of a distant (and sometimes disinterested) narrator. Not only does he *not* feel the need to make a decision about how “to put this thing down,” he flaunts any pretense of formal constraint, as is evident in his treatment of narrative time.

SPEECH, WRITING, AND THE INVOCATION OF "YOU"

Employing the famous "time shifts" that occur in this period of Ford's writing, Dowell slips easily between the past, present, and future of the narrative's chronology. Events are told "out of order," such that the demise of the four friends is narrated in the first few pages of the novel, whereas the description of their first encounter does not occur until the penultimate section of the book. Elsewhere, deaths are announced and described in detail, well before the characters to whom these deaths belong have been fully introduced. These temporal leaps are made possible by a more general form of digression that the narrative self-consciously adopts. Reflecting on his own ambulatory style, Dowell admits, "I have, I am aware, told this story in a very rambling way so that is may be difficult for anyone to find his path through what may be a sort of maze" (201). The effect of these digressions, however, is that they make it difficult to determine any order of priority among the disparate stories that seem to be haphazardly woven together. For instance, in the midst of telling the reader about a trip that he and his wife once took "from Biarritz to Las Tours" (15), Dowell lapses into the story of the 12th century troubadour, Peire Vidal, "[b]ecause, of course, his story is culture" (18). And while the reader is led to believe that this anecdote about Peire Vidal and his unrequited love is illustrative of Dowell's own condition, the digression is dismissed just as casually as it was introduced. Dowell abruptly concludes by saying: "Anyhow, that is all that came of it. Isn't that a story?" Thus, the reader that goes in search of a latent connection between Peire Vidal and Dowell himself may find it, but may also miss the salient fact that the entire narrative is simply comprised of bits of "stories" that are strung together, and that it

is as much about the act of telling stories as it is about the "truths" that they purportedly reveal.

In this way, one of the scandals of Dowell's story—that he "forgets" to narrate the suicide of the eponymous "good soldier," Edward Ashburnham, and that he must, therefore, pick up the narrative again after he has already signed off in order to tell it—is not about Dowell's unreliability or his rambling manner. In some ways, all of Dowell's revisions, qualifications, forgettings and remembrances are accounted for by the novel's own admission that it is being told over a two-year period, during which time, the value and meaning of events change depending on the context of their narration. The writing itself seems to bear witness not to the events of Dowell's life, which, in any case, he was not there to experience, but, rather, to the *writing* of those events, the reckoning with meaning, which is far from determined. And it seems that Dowell's own anxiety about "how it is best to put this thing down" (14) has to do with the apparent definitiveness that writing seems to ensure. "Putting it down" seems to signify a way of fixing it, determining things once and for all. For this reason, Dowell invokes a thought-experiment, a hypothetical scenario in which writing is turned into speech, in hopes that it will make narration easier. He writes:

> So I shall just imagine myself for a fortnight or so at one side of the fireplace of a country cottage, with a sympathetic soul opposite me. And I shall go on talking, in a low voice while the sea sounds in the distance and overhead the great black flood of wind polishes the bright stars. From time to time we shall get up and go to the door and look out at the great moon and say: 'Why, it is nearly as bright as in Provence!' And then we shall come back to the fireside, with just the touch of a sigh because we are not in Provence where even the saddest stories are gay. (15)

Here, writing is only possible when it masks itself in the guise of a *speaking voice*. In his article, "Listening to the Saddest Story," Denis Donoghue describes this conflation of

speech and writing to suggest that, "the story is given not as so many pages of print but as a mouthful of air."[7]

But in releasing narration from the apparent fixity of writing—by pretending, instead, that it is as ephemeral as "a mouthful of air"—the need for an external anchor becomes all the more urgent for Dowell. To this end, a "you" must be invented and "Provence," which, here, assumes the status of a mythical place where all sadness is converted into gaiety, must be invoked, each of which ensures its own form of relief. It seems, at first, that this "you" offers Dowell a space in which to tell his story. As a "sympathetic" listener, the "you" offers the very gift of silence, without judgment and without interruption. But only a few pages later, that silence becomes oppressive. And when Dowell wonders, "Is all this digression or isn't it digression? Again I don't know," he seems to blame that "you" for the indeterminacy: "You, the listener, sit opposite me. But you are so silent. You don't tell me anything" (17). Thus, the one created in the service of silence, has now become conspicuous in its non-intervention.

On Denis Donoghue's reading, the "you" that is named in the early pages of the text as the condition of Dowell's own telling, is not an anonymous "you," but actually refers to another character in the novel. Her name is Nancy Rufford, and we meet her comparatively late in the story. Nancy has been under Edward and Leonora's care since the age of thirteen years old, and she is ultimately the cause of Edward's suicide when he realizes that he is in love with her. As a result of his suicide, Nancy succumbs to madness. According to Donoghue, something remarkable happens in Dowell's narrative at the very moment that Nancy goes mad. For the first time, Dowell draws attention to the

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[7] *Ibid*., 561.

passage of time and to the fact that he is engaged in the act of *writing*.[8] Dowell says, "I am writing this, now, I should say, a full eighteen months after the words that end my last chapter" (253). Donoghue argues that the transition from the full "presence" of speech to the final, begrudging admission of writing has to do with the fact that, in Nancy's madness, where she lies beyond the pale of coherent conversation, Dowell must simply surrender the fiction of the silent listener and accept the work in its written form.[9]

While, on some level, the novel solicits this kind of intervention, inviting the reader to oppose the act of speech to that of writing, any rigid distinction between the two, and even the alignment of speech with presence in the service of a Deconstructive reading, is hard to sustain in this text. Not only is it the case that, the one moment in which Dowell employs the present tense, progressive aspect, indicative mood is when he describes himself in the act of writing—"I am writing this, now…" (253)—but the "you" that Donoghue attributes to Nancy Rufford is not dropped by Dowell when Nancy falls into madness. If Dowell's acknowledgement of writing is linked, for Donoghue, to the loss of that fictive listener who sits by the fireside and dreams of Provence, then it is significant that Dowell references the "you" even after he has accepted Nancy's irrecoverable condition. Reflecting on the relationship between Edward and Leonora in the very last pages of the novel, he says: "I can't make out which of them was right. I leave it to *you*" (267-my italics). If that "you" signified Nancy, as Donoghue argues it does, its inclusion at the end of the novel, after she has gone mad, would seem odd. Thus,

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[8] Donoghue, 561.

[9] See Donoghue: "In *The Good Soldier* Dowell's speech is the only power he commands, and what speech commands is mostly the space of its presence, its resonance. Dowell's voice has every power in the world except to change anything or forestall it. It can do all things, provided they are all one thing, the conversion to inwardness by repetition" (565).

rather than pursue the speech/writing divide around the figure of Nancy Rufford, we turn, instead, to the broader question of language, as it is language that bears witness to loss in this novel. And loss, here, will not turn out to be a definitive event, but rather a *condition* inherent to language itself. Loss will be the very thing that produces the indeterminacy of meaning within the text, and at the same time, invests language with a radical performative power. But before examining the nature of this constitutive loss, we must look more closely at how language functions within the novel.

CATASTROPHE, REBIRTH, AND THE MANAGEMENT OF LANGUAGE

In Ford's own estimation, *The Good Soldier* marked the high point of his literary career. In the dedicatory letter that he appends to the novel twelve years after its original publication (yet another testament to the novel's engagement with belatedness[10]), Ford admits, "I have always regarded this as my best book" (xix). The reason he gives for his affection toward the novel is as follows:

> I had never really tried to put into any novel of mine *all* that I knew about writing. I had written rather desultorily a number of books—a great number—but they had all been in the nature of *pastiches*, of pieces of rather precious writing, or of *tours de force*. But I have always been mad about writing—about the way writing should be done, and partly alone, partly with the companionship of Conrad, I had even at that date made exhaustive studies into how words should be handled and novels constructed. (xx)

The completeness and plenitude of *The Good Soldier* stands in contrast to everything that came before. It is presented as an image of wholeness against the fragmentary writing that preceded it, the "pastiches" and momentary "tours de force." The novel is described

[10] Ford goes on to write: "And it happens that, by a queer chance, the Good Soldier is almost alone amongst my books in being dedicated to no one: Fate must have elected to let it wait the ten years that it waited—for this dedication" (Ford, *The Good Soldier*, xix).

in a language of totalization—"*all* that I knew about writing"—such that nothing escapes; there is no remainder. *The Good Soldier*, thus, tells two stories simultaneously: one that recounts the escapades of four friends, and another that tells a story about writing itself. This second, more covert story is linked in some way to the critical studies that, "even at that date," Ford had undertaken on behalf of language. And the clue to deciphering it has to do with exerting control. "All" that Ford knew about writing, all that he had learned through his "exhaustive studies" revealed something about "how words should be handled and novels constructed." Important to note is the idea that language must be managed and words must be "handled." If language must be controlled in this way, it is because words are not constrained by anything external. They do not stand in for any substance; they do not refer, first and foremost, to a world of things, but only to each other. And the sense is that, left to their own devices, words pose some kind of threat. We see this thematized in the novel itself through Dowell's own self-appointed position as guardian over language.

In her marriage of convenience to Dowell, Florence's goals are manifold: "She wanted to marry a gentleman of leisure; she wanted a European establishment. She wanted her husband to have an English accent, an income of fifty thousand dollars a year from real estate and no ambitions to increase that income. And—she faintly hinted—she did not want much physical passion in the affair" (87). In order to ensure limited, or rather, nonexistent, sexual relations with her husband, Florence feigns a serious heart condition, ostensibly contracted on the night of her marriage when she and Dowell first set sail for Europe. From that night until Florence's suicide, twelve years later, Dowell's very existence revolves around his role as "a male nurse" to his wife. And his primary

responsibility is to restrict language. The imagined threat to Florence's health, were she to hear or participate in a conversation about anything that evoked passion of any kind, was catastrophic. Thus, Dowell must steer all language around her, must maintain talk at the level of superficiality. Language must remain trite, predictable and dull. Dowell says:

> I had to keep her at it, you understand, or she might die. For I was solemnly informed that if she became excited over anything or if her emotions were really stirred her little heart might cease to beat. For twelve years I had to watch every word that any person uttered in any conversation and I had to head it off what the English call 'things'—off love, poverty, crime, religion, and the rest of it. (18)

Here, the difference between words and objects collapses under Dowell's vigilant protection of his wife's "little heart." It is as though words, which do not refer to concrete entities in the world, which are not backed by anything substantive, are thus able to behave like objects, and assume their own destructive power.

Of course, Florence's fragile heart is a sham, and Dowell's hypochondriacal precautions guard only an imaginary illness. The irony is that, while Dowell believes himself to be the protector, the one who must shelter his wife from the brutality of language, it is, in fact, all the other characters that attempt to manage and deflect language away from Dowell. Leonora, in particular, threatens her philandering husband, were Dowell to ever find out about his affair with Florence. Only later does Dowell learn the degree to which Leonora protected his ignorance: "Leonora assured [Edward] that, if the minutest fragment of the real situation ever got through to my senses, she would wreak upon him the most terrible vengeance that she could think of" (108). Thus, each of the characters, for various reasons, hermetically seals Dowell within a totalized network of lies, allowing him to carry on his assault against words, "evolving [his] plans for a shock-proof world" (53), noting, here, that, for Dowell, "shock" is the effect of language.

On the surface, Dowell's efforts to quarantine language in order to annul its damaging effects appear to be ridiculous. His misguided belief that his wife might actually die as a result of her exposure to certain words strikes the reader as the novel's abiding joke. And yet, as the novel progresses, we discover that the effects of language are just that damaging as Dowell believes them to be. In fact, in every instance of death portrayed by the novel—Florence's suicide, Edward's suicide, and the death of Maisie Maidan, the young girl that Edward had courted prior to his affair with Florence—it is language itself that is found to be the culprit.

Mrs. Maidan is the novel's first victim, and her death occurs the year that the Dowells and the Ashburnhams meet in Nauheim. Edward and Leonora, who had been living in India to escape yet another of Edward's sexual scandals, bring Maisie Maidan back with them to the continent when they return. Although Leonora knows that Maisie and Edward are in love, it is a love that seems to her innocent enough, and preferable to the more tumultuous affairs in which Edward had previously embroiled himself. When Maisie finally dies, the last image of her is an absurd one: "Maisie had died in the effort to strap up a great portmanteau. She had died so grotesquely that her little body had fallen forward into the trunk, and it had closed upon her, like the jaws of a gigantic alligator" (81). Swallowed up by the *mouth* of her suitcase, Maisie's body fills up its "jaws," as if her final act were to silence something. While the official cause of her death is heart failure, the novel makes it clear that the true source of her death lies in an overheard conversation. And the text presages this absurd image of Maisie, lodged in the jaws of her suitcase, by linking her death to the ever-babbling mouth of Florence, who drones on "below the window" to a newly smitten Edward Ashburnham "about the Constitution of

the United States" (56). In the letter she leaves for Leonora just before her death, Maisie writes: "I have just heard how you have—in the hall they were talking about it, Edward and the American lady. You paid the money for me to come here. Oh, how could you?" (78-9). Later, when Dowell speculates on the exact conditions of the event, he writes:

> I fancy Florence was just about beginning her annexing of poor dear Edward by addressing to him some words of friendly warning as to the ravages he might be making in the girl's heart. That would be the sort of way she would begin. And Edward would have sentimentally assured her that there was nothing in it; that Maisie was just a poor little rat whose passage to Nauheim his wife had paid out of her own pocket. That would have been enough to do the trick. (79)

It is not just talk that triggers Maisie's death, but talk that signals the end of love. Although Maisie gets part of the story wrong, believing Leonora to have purchased her from her husband back in India, what she gets right is more important. Edward's conversation, in which he minimizes the significance of Maisie in his life, is also a courting speech to Florence. The end of one love is marked by the budding of a new one. And it is this passage out of love, always rendered in language, that causes each of the deaths in the novel.

Florence is the next to go, and again, it is an overheard conversation that prompts her suicide. It is nine years after the two couples meet, and her affair with Edward still drags on, even though he no longer participates with any kind of enthusiasm. This year, the Ashburnhams have brought along with them their young ward, Nancy Rufford. And one evening, when Edward and Nancy sit under a tree, listening to music off in the distance, Edward suddenly realizes that he is in love with the girl. More will be said about Edward's sudden realization of love later in the chapter. For now, we merely note that, even though his conversation with Nancy remains innocent enough, Florence, who eavesdrops in the dark trees behind them, hears more than is intended in his speech. She

hears what he says and what he does not say. Horrified by what she senses beneath his words, Florence runs back to the hotel. Dowell recounts the scene of her return: "Florence running with a face whiter than paper and her hand on the black stuff over her heart" (111). Florence herself is transformed into a ghostly sheet of paper at first contact with Edward's disguised words of love for Nancy, words that simultaneously signify his disappeared love for Florence.

Edward is the final the victim of language, although this time it is the written word. The story becomes claustrophobic as it nears its end, all the remaining characters pent up in one house at Branshaw Teleragh. Dowell describes the inevitable end that must issue out of the impossible situation that Edward, Leonora and Nancy have unwittingly created, the clash of desire, hatred, lust and restraint. Dowell writes: "The end was perfectly plain to each of them—it was perfectly manifest at this stage that, if the girl did not, in Leonora's phrase, 'belong to Edward,' Edward must die, the girl must lose her reason because Edward died—and that after a time Leonora, who was the coldest and strongest of the three, would console herself by marrying Rodney Bayham and have a quiet comfortable good time" (253). Although Nancy loves Edward, she also reviles him for his treatment of Leonora, and in the midst of this intractable situation, it is decided that Nancy will be sent back to live with her father. All Edward asks of Nancy is that, "being five thousand miles away, [she] would continue to love him. He wanted nothing more. He prayed his God for nothing more" (261). In an act of hurt and vindication over being sent away, Nancy writes a telegram to Edward and Leonora that reads: "Safe Brindisi. Having rattling good time. Nancy" (277). Treating it as a sign of her waned

love, Edward commits suicide with a penknife, further binding his death to the written word.

Judging by its catastrophic effects, we are compelled to view language as the very arbiter of suffering in *The Good Soldier*. The text seems to imagine that language harbors within it a uniquely destructive power, and it wields this power primarily by *not* naming things directly. In all three cases, death results from an obscure, presumably hidden meaning, something not said, but imagined to lie behind the more banal utterance that simply cover over it,[11] always communicating beyond its content. But, if the novel aligns language and death, it also presents another image of language that operates on the side of life. Returning to the dedicatory letter appended to the opening of the novel, Ford at first ties language to death, but then, links it to the very possibility of resurrection. Reflecting back on the cultural milieu at the time of the novel's publication, Ford writes:

> Those were the passionate days of the literary Cubists, Vorticists, Imagistes, and the rest of the tapageur and riotous Jeunes of that young decade. So I regarded myself as the Eel which, having reached the deep sea, brings forth its young and dies—or as the Great Auk I considered that, having reached my allotted, I had laid my one egg and might as well die. […] But greater clamours beset London and the world which till then had seemed to lie at the proud feet of those conquerors; Cubism, Vorticism, Imagism, and the rest never had their fair chance amid the voices of the cannon and so I have come out of my hole again and beside your strong, delicate, and beautiful works have taken heart to lay some work of my own. (xxi).

Writing, here, is imagined as a birthing process that must, nonetheless, exact a sacrifice. And the writer, in the process of his craft, is transformed into a female, capable of "[bringing] forth its young" in the form of a work. Like the Great Auk, once this "one

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[11] In his work on Joseph Conrad, Ford writes: "For certain subjects will grip you with a force almost supernatural, as if something came from behind the printed, the written or the spoken word, or from within the aura of the observed incident in actual life, and caught you by the throat, really saying: 'Treat me'" (Ford, *Joseph Conrad*, 5-6).

egg" has been laid, the writer proceeds to die. And yet, in a reversal that defies nature, life returns to the one who has given life. Ford is reborn as a matter of circumstance, in order to give birth again. He emerges from the dead, only because writing pulls him back from it. Writing, as the cause of death, is also the condition of rebirth.

The novel itself takes up these questions about language's relationship to life and death by making it the very agent of the work. Language not only precipitates the multiple deaths in the novel, but it is used as a kind of barometer to gauge the quality of each character from the outset. That is, each of the characters is described explicitly in terms of his or her relationship to language, both speech and writing alike. Of Maisie Maidan, Dowell says in a slightly patronizing way, "The poor child was hardly literate" (79). About Leonora, she "could not stand novels" (195). Regarding Florence, "she was just a mass of talk out of guide-books" (134). Edward "was the English gentleman; but he was also, to the last, a sentimentalist, whose mind was compounded of indifferent poems and novels" (276). Leonora was "proud" and "she was silent" (202)—"what she desired above all things was to keep a shut mouth to the world" (193)—but once the floodgates opened, "there was no stopping the talking" (211). Florence, after her death, "just went completely out of existence, like yesterday's paper"; or again, "Florence was a personality of paper" (133), and, as Dowell reflects on the possibility of having prevented her suicide: "it would have been like chasing a scrap of paper—an occupation ignoble for a grown man" (134). Edward "talked like a cheap novelist—Or like a very good novelist for the matter of that, if it's the business of the novelist to make you see things clearly" (122). Leonora "craved madly for communication with some other human soul" (223). "But having no priests to talk to she had to talk to someone and, as Florence insisted on

talking to her, she talked back, in short, explosive sentences, like one of the damned" (211). Florence "was an unstoppable talker. You could not stop her; nothing would stop her" (203). Talking to Edward "was like opening a book after a decade to find the words the same" (69). Talk is figured as something garish: "What happened was just hell. Leonora had spoken to Nancy; Nancy had spoken to Edward; Edward had spoken to Leonora—and they talked and talked. And talked" (220).

Amidst all this talk, civility itself is conceived as the restraint of language. Intimacy is but the very paucity of words. Regarding the first blissful years of the foursome, Dowell explains that they "were characterized by an extraordinary want of any communicativeness on the part of the Ashburnhams, to which we on our part replied by leaving out quite as extraordinarily, and nearly as completely, the personal note. Indeed, you may take it that what characterized our relationship was an atmosphere of taking everything for granted" (37). As the story progresses, the disintegration of the four friends is marked by the intrusion of language. Increasingly, characters are reduced to paper, to novels, to cheap talk, to chattering mouths, an endless flow of language, both spoken and written. But it is important to note that the novel does not figure language as just another activity in which characters engage or from which they abstain. Rather language itself is the agent that moves things along. And language is an agent because it alone makes things happen. One senses that it is not the characters that use language, but language that uses the characters. Language often arrives unwittingly and produces consequences that the characters must then scramble around in an effort to contain.

THE PRECOCIOUSNESS OF LANGUAGE AND THE BELATEDNESS OF DESIRE

In his article on *The Good Soldier*, Denis Donoghue investigates this question of language in relation to Dowell's anxiety around his own claims to knowledge. Donoghue writes, "we register the narrator's nervousness in the presence of knowledge. He says something, and then he qualifies the saying, *as if the words pushed him further than he cared to be pushed,* his scruple being what it is."[12] Here, Donoghue discovers a disconnect between the moral compass of the narrator—"his scruple being what it is"—and the way that Dowell is compelled to say things, perhaps dictated by the demands of his own story, that he cannot fully endorse on second thought. Continuing this investigation, Donoghue observes:

> Much later [Dowell] says, "And yet I do believe that for every man there comes at last a woman," and he changes the form of his belief even before the sentence is complete: "Or, no, that is the wrong way of formulating it." *When he says something, the saying makes it feel wrong.* A paragraph ends "So, perhaps, it was with Edward Ashburnham," and the next paragraph begins "Or, perhaps, it wasn't. No, I rather think it wasn't. It is difficult to figure out."[13]

Donoghue notes that the narrator resists committing to the utterances he nonetheless makes, and thus the entire novel reads with an air of tentativeness and revision. The simple act of saying something "makes it feel wrong." Here, Donoghue weighs in on the critical debate regarding the unreliability of the narrator and his shifting position in relation to facts, on the one hand, and impressions, on the other. But, as though Donoghue's own language pushed him beyond his explicit intentions, the observation that he makes is much more far-reaching than he fully acknowledges. What he picks up on here is the way that language drives this novel of its own volition. More broadly speaking, language is always out ahead of the one who utters it/writes it, and the novel

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[12] Donoghue, 558-my italics.
[13] *Ibid*., 562-my italics.

bears witness precisely to this preemptory edge of language.

In his study on Joseph Conrad, with whom he was close friends and also collaborated on literary projects, Ford reveals something about the way language behaves. Ostensibly, he is noting Conrad's specific distrust of the English language, and its inferiority to French. The "indictment" is that "no English word is a word; that all English words are instruments for exciting blurred emotions." Voicing Conrad's concerns, Ford continues,

> 'Oaken' in French means 'made of oak wood'—nothing more. 'Oaken' in English connotes innumerable moral attributes: it will connote stolidity, resolution, honesty, blond features, relative unbreakableness, absolute unbendableness—also, made of oak…The consequence is that no English word has clean edges: a reader is always, for a fraction of a second, uncertain as to which meaning of the word the writer intends. Thus, all English prose is blurred.[14]

Leaving aside the surprising claim that other languages do not encumber their words with connotations, the point here is worth noting. The difficulty with English—and for that matter, we might extend the claim (beyond Ford's intentions) to language in general—is that words do not have "clean edges." Words cannot be perfectly circumscribed or controlled, and so language always juts out beyond the intentions of its author. This "fraction of a second," this minor slippage that is just enough for the reader's uncertainty and confusion to take root, is the head-start that language always has over any singular meaning.[15] As the writer who wants to command language, on the one hand, and on the other, must concede its recalcitrance, Ford is backed into dividing language into two separate possibilities: English, where words are unrestrained and untethered, and the

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[14] Ford, *Joseph Conrad*, 229.

[15] As if to assert writing's head-start over speech, Ford writes: "Well, the lay reader should understand that our tongues really do follow our pens when we are engaged in writing the specious lies on which our existence depends" *Ibid*., 167.

idyllic zone of French, where words obey the author's intentions—a fantasy that corresponds to Dowell's own invocation to Provence early in the novel as the space where all sad stories are converted to gaiety. The novel may posit this wish—a wish for France and for French—but the way that it bears witness to language's machinations reveals that language always participates in the mischief of English. It is language's head-start over meaning, its anticipatory nature, its mode of precociousness, that the novel exposes.[16]

The Good Soldier takes this observation—that language outdistances any attempt to corral and control meaning—and turns it into a question about agency. If, as Donoghue observes, language itself seems to push Dowell into utterances that he afterwards disavows, then reasserts, only to finally throw his hands up in confusion, one is led to ask, what kind of relationship adheres between the utterances themselves and the things they purportedly describe? While on the surface, it may seem that our narrator is simply unreliable—that he does not know for sure the truth of the things he narrates and so he must vacillate between conviction and doubt—this view places language in the service of reportage and description, whereby its value is determined by whether it accurately or inaccurately renders the events of the world as they *actually* occur. On this reading, the world takes precedence and language is secondary, a mere means by which to access that world. Rather than discovering in that "unreliability" the grounds on which to launch a

[16] Attesting to this point: "Already we have caught the narrator's misgiving: the relation between words and what they claim to know seems confused. It is not that the words can't rise to a real knowledge, but that they presume upon it. They are premature, pretending to know in advance what the narrator can't even claim to know in hindsight. The sentences seem explicit, but what they explicate is far darker than their syntax implies, so the narrator must confound their lucidity, intervene on behalf of truthfulness. Truthfulness, rather than truth, since truth refers to the facts of the case, and truthfulness to the spirit in which they are to be declared—his truthfulness, the narrator's" (Donoghue, 559).

critique of this very hierarchy whereby language is contingent upon an underlying world of true events, this approach to the novel treats Dowell's unreliability as confirmation of this hierarchy, by prodding the reader to ask: Did Dowell understand what was *actually* happening? On this view, the questions concerning language (*How does language function in this text? What does it do?*) are made subservient to the questions about truth, knowledge and perception (*Did Dowell observe this or that event correctly? Is he in the best position to narrate these events?*). In this way, the reader is seduced into thinking that Dowell's narration is fundamentally about adultery, suicide, and madness. But this is not the story that Dowell tells. The story that Dowell tells is actually one about language and the overturning—not the maintenance—of that hierarchy, such that language itself takes precedence. That is, beneath (or alongside) the surface story, there is another about how language operates and what language knows *in advance*. Thus, the novel presents us with two seemingly conflicting visions: the first is the one in which language drags along behind the world, imperfectly accesses the facts, and attempts to describe events that endlessly slip away from it; the second is the one in which language leads the way, where words know more than the characters who utter them, and via those utterances, bring the world into existence.

Because this is a novel in which the movement of plot is carried out, not primary through the characters' actions in the external world, but on the level of interiority—that is, in the emotional world of its characters—we find that the effects of language play out most starkly in the realm of *desire*. Outside the primary time frame of the novel—the years between the first meeting of the four friends and the period after Edward's suicide, Nancy's madness, and Leonora's new life—there are a few significant events that

determine the course of things. One of these events—perhaps the most important, as it is the moment that initiates Edward's many infidelities—is referred to as the Kilsyte case. The story goes as follows: roughly five years into his marriage, Edward is on a train, sharing a third-class compartment with a young nursemaid who is in tears over her lover. Out of compassion and a kind of "half-fatherly" instinct to comfort the girl, he asks her why she is crying, puts his arms around her waist and kisses her. Edward later insists that, at the time of the event, his intentions had in no way been rooted in sexual desire. Even though Edward is acquitted of the charges brought against him, to escape the scandal, he and Leonora flee to the colonies until the press dies down. The most remarkable thing about the Kilsyte case is not at the external level of the "assault" itself, but rather what emerges afterwards in the courtroom. Dowell relays the events, which he has heard from Edward's own mouth. The text reads:

> [Edward] assured me that, before that case came on and was wrangled about by counsel with all the sorts of dirty-mindedness that counsel in that sort of case can impute, he had not had the least idea that he was capable of being unfaithful to Leonora. But, in the midst of that tumult—he says that it came suddenly into his head whilst he was in the witness box—in the midst of those august ceremonies of the law there came suddenly into his mind the recollection of the softness of the girl's body as he had pressed her to him. And, from that moment, that girl appeared desirable to him—and Leonora completely unattractive (171).

While Edward sits in the box, bearing witness to a violation that he had not been aware of committing, the actual violation retroactively occurs. While it was not sexual desire that preceded or prompted the act, desire emerges afterwards, in the courtroom itself. There is something about the "august ceremonies of the law" and the specific kind of legal language that fills one "with all the sorts of dirty-mindedness" that actually creates the desire in the character accused of harboring it all along. In the "witness box," where

presumably Edward must produce his own speech regarding the event, the event becomes something else; it takes on new meaning. The very name of the case, "Kilsyte," carries a reference to "sight," to the death of sight, "kill sight," and foretells of the blindness that the descriptive, arousing language of the courtroom will ultimately convert to vision. Sight comes in the form of belated desire, and when it does finally arrive, it is not triggered by contact with the girl's body, but by a recollection of that body brought on by language itself. That is, language finally allows desire to rise to the level of consciousness.

The two other explicit moments in the text in which we see language behave in this way are also connected to the belated arrival of desire. Additionally, both are tied to the character of Nancy Rufford. The first occurs during the previously mentioned encounter between Edward and Nancy in the park, during which time Florence eavesdrops, hears more than Edward intends to say, and ultimately kills herself. Again, Dowell narrates the events as relayed to him by Edward. Dowell says,

> And then, it appears, something happened to Edward Ashburnham. He assured me—and I see no reason for disbelieving him—that until that moment he had had no idea whatever of caring for the girl. He said that he had regarded her exactly as he would have regarded a daughter. […] But of more than that he had been totally unconscious. Had he been conscious of it, he assured me, he would have fled from it as from a thing accursed. He realized that it was the last outrage upon Leonora. But the real point was his entire unconsciousness. (123)

Once again, Edward repeatedly provides assurances as to his total innocence regarding any underlying sexual desire. The image depicted here is of a character practically accosted by an emotion, rather than driven by it. Or, to put it another way: the text complicates any notion of what it means to be driven by desire, by freeing it from the constraints of the conscious mind, and locating it, instead, in the unmapped terrain of the

unconscious.

It is unclear how familiar Ford was with Freud's work on the unconscious; and according to Ford's biographer, Max Saunders, "apart from a passing reference to having known about—and disapproved of—*The Interpretation of Dreams*, there is no record of Ford's having read Freud."[17] Nonetheless, Ford employs psychoanalytic terminology that suggests at least a passing interest in the concept of a human subject that does not have full knowledge of, or access to, his desires and drives. Even without adopting an elaborate Freudian framework, the novel itself seems to suggest that Edward had repressed his desire for Nancy, and that, under the cover of night, encircled by tall trees and the wafting music, this paternal desire for his surrogate daughter found some way to evade the censoring agent that otherwise forbids expression of such objectionable wishes.[18] Thus, a desire that, for all intents and purposes, was not technically there before, suddenly finds its way into conscious existence via language and never diminishes from that moment until the end of Edward's life. As Dowell explains:

> And in speaking to her on that night, he wasn't, I am convinced, committing a baseness. It was as if his passion for her hadn't existed; as if the very words that

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[17] Saunders (1996).

[18] Certain attempts have been made to bring Ford together with Freud. For example, the critic, James Hurt, picks up on these kinds of narratological oddities, and tries to forge a relationship between Ford's novel and Freud's thinking of the primal scene. Hurt discovers in the narrator, in whose name he hears an echo of the words "do well," a figure that, rather than "does well," does nothing. (Hurt, 202.) Hurt's reading of the primal scene lapses into an analysis of Dowell's own stunted sexual ability (after all, Dowell appears in the unlikely position of being a married virgin) and he performs a kind of diagnostics on Dowell, tracking his unconscious attitudes towards sex. Adopting Hurt's terms, we might read Dowell's own narrative through a thinking of the primal scene, whereby the moment of narration would signify a birth of sorts. One must, of course, avoid the impulse to quarantine the novel's temporality in any kind of overly schematic way. It would be misleading to neatly divide Dowell's fictive life into a *before* and *after* the transformative moment of writing. Still, this might be a fruitful line of inquiry.

> he spoke, without knowing that he spoke them, created the passion as they went along. Before he spoke, there was nothing; afterwards, it was the integral fact of his life. (129)

If we were otherwise inclined to believe that language simply brings to the surface some *pre-existent* and hidden desire, here the novel works to challenge that view. Prior to naming it for the first time, the passion "hadn't existed"; the words themselves "created the passion as they went along." It is language that knows what the conscious mind does not. Through the utterance of desire, desire itself is born. And through its articulation, not only is desire called into existence, but the very notion of fulfillment or plenitude is imagined, but as something infinitely inaccessible. The "integral fact of [Edward's] life" will be this impossible fulfillment, plenitude as a promise held out.

The same night that Edward confesses his love for Nancy (if not in terms she understands, in terms that are nonetheless clear to both him and to Florence), Dowell also experiences the performative effects of language firsthand. Two hours after his wife's suicide, Dowell inadvertently blurts out the statement: "Now I can marry her" (116), referring to Nancy Rufford. His subsequent reflection on the utterance reads as follows:

> The odd thing is that what sticks out in my recollection of the rest of that evening was Leonora's saying: "Of course you might marry her," and when I asked whom, she answered: "The girl."
>
> Now that is to me a very amazing thing—amazing for the light of possibilities that it casts into the human heart. For I had never the slightest conscious idea of marrying the girl; I never had the slightest idea of caring for her. I must have talked in an odd way, as people do who are recovering from anaesthetic. It is as if one had a dual personality, the one I being entirely unconscious of the other. I had thought nothing; I had said such an extraordinary thing.
>
> I don't know that analysis of my own psychology matters at all to this story. I should say that it didn't or, at any rate, that I had given enough of it. But that odd remark of mine had a strong influence upon what came after. (115)

Dowell's self-analysis is remarkable for various reasons. He is the first to open the

conversation with Leonora, and the first to suggest the possibility of marrying Nancy (oblivious as he is at the time to Edward's abiding love for her). In retrospect, he attributes this first utterance to the hazy, confused state in which he finds himself after Florence's death, as if he were "recovering from anaesthetic." The implication is that he is out of sorts, "not himself," as they say. But then, rather than stop here and ascribe the comment to the shock of his wife's death, Dowell takes seriously the notion of being "not oneself" to find a much more nuanced conception of the human subject: "It is as if one had a dual personality, the one I being entirely unconscious of the other."

Dowell imagines himself split in two, whereby one side, "one I" is cut off from the other, which acts autonomously. Each side behaves according to its own constraints and demands, the effects of which produce the sense of an *inhabitation*—two separate I's that both belong to the same space. Thus, Dowell is shocked to hear his own "extraordinary" utterance. But, more surprising still is that his lasting impression of the night is not of his own initial desire to marry Nancy Rufford, or even of his own unconscious utterance; rather, his overwhelming impression is of Leonora's response to it: "Of course you might marry her." Now, it seems that Leonora's comment somehow jars him out of his unconscious state and he responds by asking "*whom*?," as though he himself had not been the first to reference the marriage to Nancy. Thus, when he later attempts to locate the origin of his desire, it is not, as in the case with Edward, his own initial utterance, but rather Leonora's repetition back to him of this desire. He says, "I had never thought about it until I heard Leonora state that I might now marry her. But from that moment until her worse than death, I do not suppose that I much thought about anything else" (134). Here, language's performative dominion becomes even harder to localize. It is not simply that

one's own words produce desire, but the words of another can *infect* the subject and leave desire in their wake.

Language's Constitutive Loss

It is not accidental that the novel's most overt demonstration of the performative power of language—its ability to produce desire, rather than merely describe it—is centered around the figure of Nancy Rufford, the character most tied to the condition of loss. Abandoned by her abusive, tyrannical father and her philandering mother, Nancy is the novel's catastrophic center. She is linked to the story's myriad losses: Florence's suicide, Edward's suicide, Dowell's perpetual state of unconsummated desire, and Leonora's own final abrogation of hope for a happy marriage. As if to insist on the totality of loss connected with this character, it is the sight of Nancy in the throes of madness that leads Dowell to finally relinquish the novel's own fantasy of plenitude in the form of Provence: "I have rushed all Provence—and all Provence no longer matters. It is no longer in the olive hills that I shall find my heaven; because there is only hell…." (254). The final acceptance of a narrative devoid of Provence, which once marked the presence of a sympathetic "you," and the recuperation of sadness in the form of gaiety, is the acknowledgement of some force within the novel whose destabilizing affects cannot be overcome with an invocation to some better place, some saving power, some fantasy of plenitude.

In her madness, Nancy becomes a kind of dead zone, the promise of an empty future, marked by her endless repetition of a few words. Dowell writes: "I have visited Asia to see, in Ceylon, in a darkened room, my poor girl, sitting motionless, with her

wonderful hair about her, looking at me with eyes that did not see me, and saying distinctly: *'Credo in unum Deum Omnipotentem….Credo in unum Deum Omnipotentem.'* Those are the only reasonable words she uttered; those are the only words, it appears, that she ever will utter" (254). Here, the future belongs to the endless repetition of five "reasonable words," the beginning of the Nicene Creed. Here, the liturgical refrain names God as the origin and guarantee of meaning itself. And, notably, it is a refrain uttered in Latin. It seems that, when this text finally gives up the *fantasy* of Provence, and replaces it with the *definitive source* of plenitude and meaning in the figure of an "Omnipotent God," it can only do so by resorting to a dead language from the mouth of a mad girl. That is, once it attempts to invoke some figure, or arbiter, of singular meaning it is constrained to using Latin. To be clear, however, it is not that language here undergoes its own fall—that it relinquishes its performative power and falls, instead, into the endless repetition of an utterance that becomes absurd in its echo-like and programmatic recurrence. This slippage into Latin does not mark some *new* loss for language. On the contrary, the very thing that enables language in this text to wield its performative power—the fact that it does not represent the world in any relationship of immediacy, but acts upon that world and creates it in the process—is why it must prohibit its own fantasies of plenitude, whether it means sacrificing Provence or naming God as the source of meaning only by means of a mad girl's Latin liturgy. And yet, we must still account for some form of loss that the narrative seems intent on naming.

From the first line of *The Good Soldier*, which heralds it as the "saddest story," the difficulty has been to locate the source of that sadness. As has been noted above, critics have responded to this open declaration of hyperbolic sorrow in a novel seemingly

devoid of the requisite emotion by concluding that it must be ironic—that the events of the novel hardly constitute the "saddest story" ever heard. Still, the narrator insists that it is the case. And so the reader is left to wonder whether the affective sadness is not due to something other than the narrated events themselves. Perhaps the sadness corresponds to a loss within the realm of language itself, rather than the content that it purports to describe. And we note that the one place within the novel where sorrow demands some pretense of consolation is precisely around the narrator's own discomfort with the language and form that his narration has assumed.

Re-reading his own writing, Dowell realizes that he has told the story in a rambling way, continually slipping into digression, retracting his words, scrambling the chronology. In response to this narrative disorder, Dowell writes, "I console myself with thinking that this is a real story and that, after all, real stories are probably best told in the way a person telling a story would tell them. They will seem most real" (201). Dowell is in need of consolation, not because of the death of Edward or Florence, or the madness of Nancy, or the difficulties that have befallen Leonora. He needs consolation for a larger concern that the act of digression has brought to light. It is one that has to do with the tension between appearance and reality that emerges through the act of writing, through the very decisions he makes in his capacity as a narrator. As the quote reveals, at first, Dowell insists on the realness of his story—he is, in fact, *consoled* by his belief in this realness, meaning, presumably, that narrative digression is evidence of an honest relationship to the events of one's life. And yet, one sentence later, he has already strapped reality to the problem of appearance—to what will make the story "*seem* most real." For the story to "be real" implies some kind truth *behind* the narration, that events

actually happened as Dowell's language describes them. For the story to "seem real" means that language works in the service of appearance, that it seduces readers into believing that things transpired in this particular way.

The problem raised here is twofold, it seems: one part has to do with Dowell's ability to gauge events correctly, and the other opens up a question about representation, whether language can ever perfectly "capture" those events, such that it is capable of describing the "real" world. Most of the critical literature, as we have seen, directs its attention to the first concern, and, in particular, as it relates to Dowell's "unreliability" as a narrator. *Did he get it right? Is this how things really happened?* But if, instead, we treat Dowell's concern—his need for consolation—as evidence of something inherent within language, some suspicion within the text that language's job is not to apprehend the world *as it is*, because there is no "world as it is." Events are not closed; their meaning is not present to them in any necessary or immediate way, such that a narrator would simply have to convert that meaning into words. It is language, rather, that brings events into being. And if we frame this condition in terms of a "loss," it is because it emerges as a loss of determinate or singular meaning, the loss of plenitude, even though that plenitude never existed in the first place, however the text may long for it. But, this "loss" is also the very thing that imbues language with its creative power. Thus, we might say that, indeterminacy belongs to language—and thus, to Dowell's narrative—on a structural level, regardless of how reliable or unreliable he is.

The novel treats this notion of a constitutive lostness inherent to language through Dowell's relationship to metaphor. On almost every page of the novel, the narrator makes use of the phrase "as if…," as if the perfect image to definitively settle the question of

meaning would have to remain perpetually deferred. This is not to say that Dowell accepts the inaccessibility of truth or plenitude; on the contrary, he searches for an image to unlock meaning, but it does not arrive. He writes: "I was aware of something treacherous, something frightful, something evil in the day. I can't define it and can't find a simile for it. It wasn't as if a snake had looked out of a hole. No, it was if my heart had missed a beat. It was as if we were going to run and cry out; all four of us in separate directions, averting our heads" (48). For all his desire to get past the ever substitutable "as if" and define what it *was* once and for all, his relentless substitution of one simile for the next, must be read as some kind of acquiescence, a surrender to a world of tropes that do not ultimately close with meaning.

Critics have read in Dowell's tireless use of metaphor, a frantic desire to grasp the nature of things, and the fact that the narrative can only produce more and more figures, as evidence that Dowell will always miss the mark.[19] These critics seem to subscribe to the view that language's access to the world is lamentably imperfect, but that, such a world exists in totalized form beneath, or independent of, language's relationship to it. John Hessler sees in this figure-making frenzy, Dowell's effort to turn the tables on the painful truth of his situation. That is, on Hessler's reading, there is a truth—one that pertains to Dowell's emotional world and his "enmeshed" role in the lives of others—and figurative language acts as a kind of inoculation against the truth that is too painful for Dowell to accept. Hessler argues that the "anarchy of metaphor in [Dowell's] narrative suggests how tragically out of control he is, how little he understands of his own

[19] In her reading of the novel, Carol Jacobs picks up on one of these moments of the "as if" to suggest that it reveals the "unimaginable hell" of a narrator who can only defer meaning, who can only speak obliquely, without ever settling definitively on what he means. (Jacobs, 90).

emotions."[20] Hessler continues:

> We have only to look at the outrageous metaphors Dowell uses to describe himself and his friends to see how he manipulates and distorts in a persistent attempt to deny his connection with the events, to fortify himself in his isolation. He calls his marriage to Florence "twelve years of playing the trained poodle." Leonora is "sound as a roach," while Edward is "an unconscious pigeon in a roadway" and Nancy "a phosphorescent fish in a cupboard." Florence herself, for whom Dowell's contempt is most consistent and cheerless, is, at the moment of her death, "a scrap of paper"—which, presumably, it would have been ignoble for him, trained poodle though he was, to chase. The emotional gain here is clear. Such metaphors distance and dismiss, by pathos, disgust, or trivialization, the characters and events they describe. By positing himself as detached, ironic observer, he avoids the necessity of seeing himself as enmeshed participant.[21]

According to Hessler, it is clearly for the purpose of "emotional gain" that Dowell presents metaphor after "outrageous" metaphor in an effort to shield himself from the burden of being overly implicated in the saga he narrates. Here, figurative language serves to "manipulate" and "distort" the truth. And the truth that Hessler posits behind Dowell's strategic narrative moves is really a question of connection—Dowell is connected to the story, "enmeshed" in it, but wants to pretend that he is not. As opposed to Hessler, I would argue that, although Dowell's indefatigable use of metaphor exposes something about the problem of connectedness, it is not out of reluctance to admit his entanglement within his own narrative, which presumes a fear and fragility that this narrator (whatever other limitations he may have) does not seem to exhibit.

Rather, Dowell's ever-substitutable metaphors problematize a different kind of connection—the connection between words and the things they are supposed to represent. The tireless use of the phrase "as if" attests instead to the fact that, at best, something can be described in terms of something else, but that this connection is neither necessary nor

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[20] Hessler, 113.
[21] *Ibid*., 113.

singular nor inviolable. Thus, Dowell's constant groping around for the right trope is evidence, not of a bad narrator who can't light on the correct expression, but of a world that is continually invented via the language that presents (rather than re-presents) it. This is tantamount to saying that, where one once sought singularity, one finds only multiplicity and plurality. The continually recycled "as if" reveals that language will not anchor down in the world. It will not provide definitive meaning nor will it fully define the things it purports to name.

In the novelistic space of *The Good Soldier*, where the losses turn out to be inherent to language, it is the pretense of identity—the positive link between a word and the thing it purportedly names—that is sacrificed. If this link is found *not* to be essential or necessary, then it becomes impossible to secure anything via language once and for all. This means that each term evoked in the novel maintains connection to a plurality of meanings. Thus, we return for a moment to a term that arose earlier in the chapter in relationship to language. *Desire* was shown to be an effect of language, instilled belatedly in the one who found himself in the midst of declaring it. But what is desire, if language works precisely to destabilize, and not guarantee, meaning? What is passion, for that matter, the very term invoked in the subtitle of the novel? Here, we may take issue with Schorer's claim that passionate situations are conveyed by the one character incapable of experiencing passion. Instead, we may counter by saying that the novel does not provide the reader one, singular definition of passion, or desire, or love, but rather, multiple associations that cannot be distilled or amalgamated or compromised.

When we turn to the question of desire, for example, we see how convoluted the associations become. Some descriptions of the term are charged with romantic

sensibility:

> [T]he real fierceness of desire, the real heat of passion long continued and withering up the soul of a man, is the craving for *identity* with the woman he loves. He desires to see with the *same* eyes, to touch with the *same* sense of touch, to hear with the *same* ears, *to lose his identity, to be enveloped, to be supported*. (127-my italics)

Here, desire and passion emerge in relation to one another, seemingly one and the same emotion, that together refer to the longing for a single, totalized identity—to be one with the beloved object. On this reading, desire is the very collapsing of difference. But then, not three pages later, desire surfaces in another guise, as soon as it becomes tied to matrimony. Here, matrimony is precisely marked by the "desire to deceive the person with whom one lives" (130). When passion is later invoked to describe Leonora's "love" for Edward, it is "a passion that was yet like an agony of hatred" (148). And Edward's own passion for La Dolciquita, one of his early mistresses, "was really discomfort at the thought that he had been unfaithful to Leonora" (176). And just to avoid confusion, Dowell tells the reader that "the sex instinct" does not "[count] for much in a really great passion" (127). In the end, "desire" appears to be a longing for oneness, but also a longing for secrecy and deception; "passion" is hatred; it is also discomfort; and the one thing that it does not involve is "the sex instinct." The point here is not to argue that these terms are so convoluted that we can hardly make our way through the text. On the contrary, the indeterminacy of meaning is not the failure of language to "get it right," but the failure of language to indulge in the fantasy of singularity.

THE INSTABILITY OF MEANING AND THE DISSOLUTION OF SEXUAL DIFFERENCE

On the shifting terrain of the novel's terminology, indeterminacy manifests most

acutely in the realm of sexual difference, where the very concepts of "man" and "woman" are evacuated of their definitive substance. In an often-quoted passage, Dowell writes of Edward's literary sensibilities, likening Edward's speech, as he often does, to some form of writing. Dowell says:

> He talked like quite a good book—a book not in the least cheaply sentimental. You see, I suppose he regarded me not so much as a man. I had to be regarded as a woman or a solicitor. (31)

Here, a connection is drawn between a mode of speech and the audience one addresses. If one were to read this passage in isolation of the surrounding paragraphs (and the novel at large), it would seem that talk, which was "not in the least cheaply sentimental" would, surprisingly, be suited better to women or solicitors. The inclusion of "You see…" suggests a natural logic, a link between the kind of talk that Edward produces—here the unsentimental kind—and his audience of women/solicitors. But this passage is more complicated than it seems. In the paragraphs leading up to it, Edward is depicted in the most saccharine terms. Dowell says, "[Edward] would pass hours in novels of a sentimental type"; "I have seen his eyes filled with tears at reading of a hopeless parting. And he loved, with a sentimental yearning, all children, puppies, and the feeble generally…"; and, of course, "his intense, optimistic belief that the woman he was making love to at the moment was the one he was destined, at last, to be eternally constant to…." (30). In fact, many of the descriptions surrounding Edward's maudlin language suggest that it is precisely a female audience that is required. That is, for the most part, the novel seems to posit that, only a female would be capable of receiving that kind of sentimentality. At this moment, then, when Edward drops the cheap sentimentality, it is because Nancy has departed for Brindisi (and eventually India), and

Edward is "trying to persuade himself and [Dowell] that he had never really cared for her" (31). Oddly, it is this talk—Edward's serious and unemotional one—that elicits the claim from Dowell that he must appear to be "a woman or a solicitor." Suddenly, the reader cannot be sure whether it is sentimentality, the unsentimental, or simply talk in general that belongs to the province of women and solicitors.

While Dowell's claim invites this kind of gender analysis, to move too quickly to any conclusions regarding the novel's attitude toward men and women is to overlook the unexpected inclusion of the word "solicitor" in this passage. So unexpected is it, that most of the critics who comment on these lines do not even acknowledge the lurking presence of the "solicitor" at all. Only the binary relationship of man/woman attracts attention. And this elision of the solicitor leads to far-reaching speculation about Dowell's specific relationship to Edward. Thus, one encounters readings like Bruce Bassoff's that make surprising claims about these lines, arguing things like: "Dowell secretly wants to be treated as a woman by Ashburnham."[22] This kind of psychologizing about Dowell's secret desires ignores the much more complex structure and play that inheres in the novel's treatment of sexual difference.

This coupling of woman and solicitor merits deeper consideration, if only because Dowell repeats the figure almost verbatim at the end of the novel. He says, again regarding Edward, "Poor devil—he hadn't meant to speak of it. But I guess he just had to speak to somebody and I appeared to be like a woman or a solicitor." (271). Interesting to note here is that, in the former passage, Dowell projects forward in the novel's chronology to describe the language Edward uses to *minimize* his love for Nancy. To

[22] Bassoff, 46.

distance himself from the pain of her departure, Edward assumes an uncharacteristic tone of un-sentimentality, which is why it strikes Dowell as remarkable in the first place. But, in this second passage, it is rather Edward's *admission* of love for Nancy that prompts Dowell to liken himself to a woman or a solicitor. Edward says, "I am so desperately in love with Nancy Rufford that I am dying of it" (271), and Dowell can't help but be turned into a woman or solicitor by this very disclosure— "I guess he just had to speak to somebody and I appeared to be like a woman or a solicitor." The woman/solicitor figure shows up only these two times in the novel, and they are also, notably, the only two times that Edward speaks to Dowell about Nancy at all. In one, he dismisses his love as passing fancy; in the other, it is his unconsummated love that destroys him. But in both instances, language pours forth uncontrollably, as though driven by its own volition, and then, only when the day has given way to night. In the former passage, Dowell says: "Anyhow, it burst out of him on that horrible night" (31). In the latter: "He talked all night" (271).

It seems that the novel's coupling of woman and solicitor around the discussion of Nancy Rufford has something to do with a question of value. The solicitors in this novel are consulted for advice, not primarily on legal matters, but on financial ones. They enable transactions; they broker deals; they assess the worth of a thing. When Dowell assumes the position of "a woman or a solicitor," he is simultaneously transformed into a figure capable of receiving "talk" in general, and one that assesses the value of that talk. By tying woman to solicitor around the topic of language suggests that language is something whose value is ever shifting, something whose value is yet to be determined. There are a number of references to solicitors in the novel, to bankrupted solicitors, to devious solicitors, to solicitors that advise Leonora and Edward on the catastrophic

financial matters regarding their home, Branshaw Teleragh. Only one solicitor, however, is given a proper name, and it turns out to be a woman, a kept woman, La Dolciquita. She is Edward's first mistress and, before sleeping with him, she performs a costs/benefits analysis, assessing the danger of embarking on an affair with Edward behind her wealthy lover's back. Dowell informs the reader, "there was risk—a twenty percent risk, as she figured it out. She talked to Edward as if she had been a solicitor with an estate to sell—perfectly quietly and perfectly coldly without any inflection in her voice" (175). To be a solicitor here is to speak in a certain way—"perfectly coldly and without any inflection"—and to negotiate the value of a body by the amount of desire on the part of the asker and the risk involved in the exchange. To be a solicitor is actually to be a woman, implicated in an economy of sexual exchange. Thus, when Dowell is transformed into "a woman or a solicitor" he does not simply become the comforting, supportive female. The terms are loaded, and to be in the position of receiving Edward's talk is to be already pulled into a kind of negotiation, whereby the listener assumes "her" own position of power, offering something for a price.

But all this notwithstanding, the conjunction "or" that stands between the terms "woman" and "solicitor" remains operative. Any reading that either ignores the solicitor, or too hastily collapses the two terms neglects the simple fact of their difference. That is, equally important to the investigation of Dowell's apparent gender transformation in the face of Edward's talk is the basic acknowledgement that Dowell does not become one singular thing through the act of exposure. On the contrary, his identity is doubled. Or rather, he becomes unlocalizable, to the extent that the word "or" implies that the matter remains unsettled. The very condition of Edward's disclosure is *not* that the recipient

must become woman, but that the identity of the listener remains indeterminate.[23] This is why feminist critiques of the novel that discover in Ford's writing only further evidence of an "imperialistic definition of masculinity" whereby possessing a woman is akin to the violent accumulation of the colonies, as Karen Hoffmann suggests,[24] seems to overlook the more nuanced treatment of identity and meaning in general, as an unstable force. When Hoffmann argues that, by means of "depicting Dowell as unsettled by the idea of powerful, scheming women, Ford can reflect upon anxieties common among many men of the time,"[25] we would respond by further interrogating Hoffman's use of the term "unsettled," rather than Ford's supposed demonstration of social conservatism. If Dowell is "unsettled," it is an unsettledness due not to "the idea of powerful, scheming women," but rather to a more fundamental way in which identity itself is always "unsettled." If one simply turns to the text in search of evidence, either supporting or challenging early 20th century "anxieties" about the role of women in society, one misses the novel's farther-reaching intervention into the very notion of meaning and identity, of which sexual difference is a significant part. The novel prohibits any straightforward or reductive thinking about what constitutes "man" and "woman" in the first place. Neither term denotes anything singular or circumscribable, but shifts perpetually.

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[23] In his analysis of the novel, Michael Levenson finds in Dowell's specific mode of failure the very source of his narrative success. It is Dowell's unsuccessful manliness, his limited his limitations and his possibilities, Not just that Dowell is nothing, as Michael Levenson says: "His very incapacities, his lack of physical and moral passion, his hesitations and confusions, his insouciance in grave circumstances, his self-avowed "faintness," release him from the definitions that circumscribe others. He is finally and frankly indeterminate, neither a creature of convention nor of passion. If this unsuits him for the task of living, it prepares him for the act of writing. Being nothing, he can call himself anything. His deprivation coincides with his freedom" (384).

[24] Hoffmann, 30.

[25] *Ibid*., 32.

This is not to say that some notion of "maleness" is not presented in the text. But, if anything, when it is referenced, it is rendered so absurd that it would seem to critique, rather than endorse early 20th century gender anxieties. The assurances that Dowell gives the reader that he is, in fact, a man just like any other man, perhaps portrays an anxiety, not about women, but about the very instability that inheres in gender identification. Thus, maleness must be guarded all the more urgently once its violability is shown by this novel to be its primary condition. To this end, Dowell makes extreme claims that deviate wildly from other information that he has provided about himself, namely that he is devoid of the "sexual instinct" entirely. So, when he says things like, "I suppose that I should really like to be a polygamist; with Nancy, and with Leonora, and with Maisie Maidan, and possibly even with Florence. I am no doubt like every other man; only, probably because of my American origin, I am fainter" (257-8), it is hard not to find it humorous. The belief that a ravenous desire for sex, and more, for a plethora of partners (notably, every female character in the novel) is what ensures one's manliness, reveals instead the tenuousness of gender attributes in the novel. And notable here is that, the thing that tempers Dowell's wanton desire is not a touch of femininity, breaking with any strict binary between man and woman, but rather, an abiding Americanism. That is, if anything seems "off" in terms of Dowell's manliness, he assures the reader, it is only by virtue of his nationality.

In one of the most famous passages in the novel, Dowell's virility is yet again called into question. And once again, it begins with a reference to Edward's mode of speech. Dowell says:

> If poor Edward was dangerous because of the chastity of his expressions—and they say that that is always the hall-mark of a libertine—what about myself? For I

> solemnly avow that not only have I never so much as hinted at an impropriety in my conversation in the whole of my days; and more than that, I will vouch for the cleanliness of my life. At what, then, does it all work out? Is the whole thing a folly and a mockery? Am I no better than a eunuch or is the proper man—the man with the right to existence—a raging stallion forever neighing after his neighbor's womankind? (14).

Here, danger is aligned with a certain kind of talk. It belongs to a purity of speech that supposedly covers over an underlying defilement in life. It is the congeniality of language, the abstention from vulgar and crude speech, which, nonetheless, masks a wantonness and libertinism that renders "poor Edward" dangerous. On Dowell's reading, it seems, that whether man is libertine or whether his offensive acts find expression in his offensive utterances, what separates man is an "impropriety" in his behavior. That is, to be a man is to indulge in the obscenity of "life." For, to "vouch for the cleanliness" of one's life is to be potentially stripped of virility, of manliness itself. Dowell's ostracism, his exclusion from the realm of "proper man" is due to his particular alignment of speech and life in the service of chastity. He stands alone to the extent that his innocuous speech is actually a sign of innocuousness. "Am I no better than a eunuch?" he asks, and with this question, turns his concerns about language into a concern about both sex and sexual difference. To be a "proper man," a man "with the right to existence"—that is, a man who is able to wield his sex in the service of reproduction—is to admit of a certain lasciviousness of behavior, whether language covers for one or not. This question of "dangerous" language, reveals itself to be a question aimed at the value of existence itself as it pertains to sexual difference—"*the man with the right to existence*." And in the end, Dowell wonders whether the very essence of man can only be framed in terms of a

certain kind of animality. Language is given up altogether when manliness is reduced to the impulse of a "raging stallion, forever neighing after his neighbor's womankind."

The novel reveals its interest in the question of gender, even in those moments when it does not collapse the distinction between man and woman altogether. We see this, not only through the character of Dowell, but in others as well. Leonora is subjected to her own version of gender-switching, which Dowell—via Edward's own analysis—identifies as the potential cause of her failed marriage. Edward's first encounter with Leonora and her sisters sets the tone for their marriage, and it is significant that she appears to him, not as a woman or a girl, but a little boy. The novel suggests that, because of Leonora's strict Catholic upbringing, the girls were trained to be guileless and austere. The effect of this obligingness on Edward, as Dowell later recounts it, was such that he barely registered her at all. We are told that, "the girls made really more impression upon Mrs. Ashburnham than upon Edward himself. They appeared to her so clean-run and so safe. They were indeed so clean-run that, in a faint sort of way, Edward seems to have regarded them rather as boys than as girls" (152). Dowell suggests that the romance-less marriage that follows this initial encounter, in which he chooses Leonora (because he has to choose one of them), has to do with the fact that she exuded none of the qualities of a woman. As we have seen, Edward loves sentiment and seduction, and can only bring to this "clean-run" girl, who stirs in him nothing that girls are supposed to stir, a marriage that functions more like a business, in which Edward turns out to be a kind of reluctant employee. While the novel, here, shows concern with the question of gender, we would be hard pressed to say that it topples gender categories and obfuscates gender division. On the contrary, in the case of Leonora, who appears to be a little boy, the integrity of

each term—boy, girl, man, woman—is preserved, even if characters are mistakenly aligned with the opposite gender. But we should also note that the novel does not work in heavy-handed ways, and the blurring of boundaries tends to happen when the novel appears to be concerned with something other than questions of gender.

Thus, we might turn to a different passage, where gender does not seem to be overtly at issue. Here, Dowell reflects on the complications of his marriage with Florence. We recall that, during Florence's lifetime, Dowell is oblivious to the total charade that she builds up around him, and that their marriage consists entirely of her feigned heart problem and his role as "nursemaid." In this passage, he attempts to explain to the reader what marriage to Florence felt like before her death. As a result of her elaborate network of distortions, by which she perfectly quarantines herself from her husband, Dowell begins to view her as a particular kind of specimen. He writes:

> She became for me a rare and fragile object, something burdensome, but very frail. Why, it was as if I had been given a thin-shelled pullet's egg to carry on my palm from Equatorial Africa to Hoboken. Yes, she became for me, as it were, the subject of a bet—the trophy of an athlete's achievement, a parsley crown that is the symbol of his chastity, his soberness, his abstentions, and of his inflexible will. Of intrinsic value as a wife, I think she had none at all for me. I fancy I was not even proud of the way she dressed. (100)

The passage begins with an impossibly delicate image of Florence, "a thin-shelled pullet's egg" that, in all of its fragility, is subjected to the most extreme conditions, to be carried on the "palm" of a hand from "Equatorial Africa to Hoboken." But quickly, this image of Florence is dropped and a new one picked up. Now she is nothing concrete, but rather "the subject of a bet." Moving on once again, Florence sheds this abstract identity for an even more abstract one. She is likened, not just to an athlete, and not just to his trophy, but more specifically to the crown on the trophy. And then, not just the crown,

but the very things that the crown represents. In this turn, Florence has become aligned with the sentimental and idealized attributes that belong to the man via his trophy, the emblem of his virtues. She does not merely stand for chastity and soberness, but "*his* chastity" and "*his* soberness." Florence has, inadvertently and subtly, picked up masculine pronouns in the process of Dowell's search for the perfect metaphor. Once she has been run through the mill of rhetorical language, she comes out the other side re-gendered and, then, deprived of value altogether. That is, in her capacity as wife, Dowell insists, her "intrinsic" worth is null. He adds, even her clothes are worthless.

To be clear, the argument here is not that the novel takes down gender division as one of its intended aims. Rather, if the topic of gender is complicated by this novel, it is to the extent that gender participates in the general indeterminacy of language, whereby even the most seemingly secure terms are shown to be riddled with difference. As such, the real story that this novel seems to tell is not about the specific experiences of these character, but one that takes shape in the form of persistent *questioning*, that is, questioning the value and meaning of words. Thus, Dowell's interest in describing Florence and the qualitative feel of their sham marriage seems to be less about exposing the truth of the matter, than it is about playing with language, experimenting with metaphor, testing out tropes. Florence becomes aligned with masculine pronouns because Dowell's language simply takes him there, riding the narrative momentum that carries him from one image to the next. Leonora is likened to a little boy, "man" in general to a raging stallion neighing after womankind, Dowell himself to a woman, a solicitor and a eunuch, because language is not restrained by a world of substantive or concrete things, because Dowell can shift these terms endlessly, exposing their malleability and

indeterminacy. Each time, they pick up new associations and connotations, such that *The Good Soldier* is also about the divagations of language, in which the adventures of gender are only one—albeit significant— component. Considering, then, Karen Hoffmann's claim that Dowell's efforts to narrate his life are nothing more than an "autobiographical act to redefine himself in more masculine terms,"[26] we are left to wonder what the categories of *masculine* and *feminine* even mean in this novel, once they have been subjected to Dowell's experiments with language.

INHERITANCE AND THE HORIZON OF MEANING

If the novel's treatment of language is partly an engagement with its limits, with the fact that words do not name positive entities, but participate in a much more complex network of relationships, this is not to say that the novel wholeheartedly embraces indeterminacy. On the contrary, through the figure of its narrator, the novel reveals its own ambivalence about this indeterminacy, which we have understood in terms of a constitutive loss of substantive ground—a ground that never belonged to language in the first place, but always only existed in the form of its absence. That is, the novel refuses to grant language any singular or definitive meaning, at the same time that it provides an image of desire for language and meaning to be shored up by some definitive ground. Returning to the opening section of this chapter, we recall the connection between Barthes's claim that inheritance belongs to the realm of unfulfilled love, on the one hand, and, on the other, that image of the "unknown heirs and generations infinitely remote" for whom Dowell claims he must write. For the sake of this novel, it is the figure of the heir,

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[26] *Ibid*., 39.

the progeny, the child that is offered in *contrast* to the novel's celebration of language's indeterminacy. The implication is that, to write "for the sake" of unknown heirs is to bequeath them a tale that bears a certain meaning, a definitive meaning by which to learn and to live. Thus, we turn to the novel itself to gauge its treatment of the child as the mark and promise of a future to which meaning is owed.

Notably, this novel, in which there is so much sexual activity, adultery, and secret rendezvous, is primarily a barren work, one in which no children are born. Not only does the foursome remain childless, but children seem to mark a particular limit of knowledge and experience. Describing the early stages of Edward and Leonora's marriage, Dowell highlights their utter innocence by referencing their confusion around the issue of procreation. Dowell says, "It will give you some idea of the extraordinary naïveté of Edward Ashburnham that, at the time of his marriage and for perhaps a couple of years after, he did not really know how children are produced. Neither did Leonora" (161). While this ignorance clearly does not last, Edward's very character development can be charted by his increasing awareness of "how children are produced."

For Leonora, the figure of the child—the child that she does not have and longs for with Edward—represents the possible recuperation of her failed marriage. Through giving birth, all wrongs will be righted, and the disorder of existence will be rendered purposeful. The illusion is that children transform chaos into order; they provide meaning where there appeared to be none. Even Dowell's early claim that he writes for the sake of some unknown progeny, aligns these non-existent heirs with the larger effort to untangle and to explain the convoluted events of his life, as though the simple fact of inheritors demands that accounts be sorted, that mysteries be solved. It is for the sake of these heirs

that the "unthinkable event" (8), as he refers to the Dowell/Ashburnham experience, must be rendered precisely thinkable. Writing, for Dowell, belongs to these heirs because they anchor it to meaning and to understanding. And the inheritors (even if they remain unknown) demand a kind of mapping out, an explanatory effort, the possibility of reading the past in view of everything that follows.

Thus, the debate that ensues around the topic of children in the Ashburnham house is worth looking at more closely, in part because here, the question of indeterminacy, religion, and sexual difference all converge. Throughout the novel, the tension between Protestantism and Catholicism builds. All the characters are Protestant, except for Leonora and Nancy, who are both Irish Catholic. As mentioned above, Leonora's primary desire is to bear children, and she suffers her entire marriage with Edward in hopes that one day they will procreate. The unexpected problem that arises for Leonora, the one that causes her "an agony more terrible than she could describe" (162), is that she had failed to solicit from Edward a promise that, were they to have children, the children would be raised Catholic. Around the spiritual future of their children—which would either be marked by salvation or eternal damnation, as each understood it—Edward intervenes. In his mind, there is no question: "Edward was perfectly willing that the girls should be Catholic; the boys must be Anglican" (161).

Dowell notes the irony of this scenario, as Edward himself had longed to be pressured into Catholic conversion by Leonora, a gesture he would make for his wife not only because it suited his romantic desire for sacrifice, but because Catholicism, with its premium on total emotional investment, better suited his temperament. Dowell says, "I believe he was even hurt that Leonora's confessor did not make strenuous efforts to

convert him. There was a period when he was quite ready to become an emotional Catholic" (156). Always searching for the origin of his marital demise, at one point Edward traces it back to precisely this inaction on the part of his wife to demand from him such a conversation. Again, Dowell says, "He has told me that if Leonora had then taken his aspirations seriously everything would have been different" (157). And yet, in spite of his own desire for conversion, he nonetheless makes a case for religious difference that breaks down along the divide of sexual difference. For Edward, it boils down to a logic of ownership and the relationship that each gender has to his/her own body and soul, that is, some fundamental right of self-possession. Dowell explains:

> Edward, that is to say, regarded himself as having his own body and soul at his own disposal. But his loyalty to the traditions of his family would not permit him to bind any future inheritors of his name or beneficiaries by the death of his ancestors. About the girls it did not so much matter. They would know other homes and other circumstances. Besides, it was the usual thing. But the boys must be given the opportunity of choosing—and they must have first of all the Anglican teaching. He was perfectly unshakable about this. (162)

On this particular reading, girls, it seems, do not belong to themselves. They belong to their family of origin and then, are passed on to their family of marriage. We might say that, to be a girl, is to exist in this mode of changeableness, to be something indeterminate, able to take on different attributes when needed. Around boys, the story gets more convoluted. That is, boys "must be given the opportunity of choosing" and yet, they must also "have first of all the Anglican teaching." While their bodies and souls seem to be within their own jurisdiction, their boundedness to the long line of tradition, operates as a constraint and a restriction. That is, while boys have the freedom of choice, they are nonetheless limited by the burden of inheritance. Although it is here grafted onto gender difference, the question of determinacy and indeterminacy, which we might

understand here in terms of meaning owed to the past and the future, is precisely at issue in the novel's treatment of progeny. In the case of Edward and Leonora, the issue does not actually arise in any urgent way, as their marriage remains childless, but the alignment of inheritance—as represented through the figure of the boy who carries on the family line—and the need for singularity, determinacy and meaning is further solidified.

If *The Good Soldier* posits children from the beginning as an obligation to a certain kind of meaningfulness, the novel's denial of any real engagement with children has to do with its own evasion of that legibility, the refusal to mine things for their essence. In fact, besides these concerns over hypothetical and nonexistent children, the only references to *actual* children in the novel are to a dead child and to an unborn one. Twice Dowell mentions the same deceased baby as part of an anecdote meant to reveal Edward's supreme generosity toward the workers who live on his land. The first reference is as follows: "[Edward] set to work to secure a verdict of not guilty for a poor girl, the daughter of one of his tenants who had been accused of murdering her baby. He spent two hundred pounds on her defense. …Well, that was Edward Ashburnham" (31). Here, the murdered baby is merely the occasion to describe Edward's generosity—"Well, that was Edward Ashburnham." When the text references this same event again at the end of the novel, it is only with a slight addendum. Here, we learn the actual context for Edward's generosity: Nancy has left for Brindisi, and Edward attempts to resume life as normal. Dowell says, "He began to look after the estates again; he took all that trouble over getting off the gardener's daughter who had murdered her baby" (273). But with this second reference to the deceased child, the mother is suddenly rendered guilty. Whereas in the first mention, her presumed innocence prompts Edward to pay for her defense and

ultimately secure a verdict of not-guilty, in the second, she becomes "the gardener's daughter who had murdered her baby." And whereas the first reference to the deceased baby seemed to be evidence of Edward's goodness—defending a woman wrongly accused of murder—once context is provided, that altruism turns out to be an act of self-preservation on Edward's part, an effort to throw himself into life again after the departure of his beloved. It is not until the second reference, which does not come until the end of the novel, that we learn to read the event of Edward's intervention differently. When the "murdered baby" is mentioned for the second time—this time, as the actual victim of murder—its arrival serves to reveal how changeable meaning actually is, how any singular reading of an event may always be submitted to revision.

How, then, do we read the novel's final mention of an unborn child, a child whose arrival the work anticipates? Like the murdered baby, this unborn child is also mentioned twice as the novel comes to a close. It belongs to Leonora, who, after Edward's suicide, marries Rodney Bayham. In the first reference to the child, Dowell simply slips it in at the end of a list-like rundown of each character's unfortunate outcome: Edward is dead; Nancy is mad; and Leonora re-marries Rodney Bayham. "Rodney Bayham is rather like a rabbit and I hear that Leonora is expected to have a baby in three months' time" (259). Here, the inclusion seems innocuous enough, merely an informative statement regarding Leonora's condition, a deferred achievement after a lifetime of wanting children. Does this not herald, then, the novel's much-anticipated "unknown heir," the arrival and promise of meaning, the one for whose sake writing must transpire? If the novel imagines some kind of future through this reference to birth, it also immediately aligns the unborn child with the closure of thought and the prolongation of mediocrity.

For the most part, as a narrator, Dowell refrains from making large, sweeping claims, particularly generalizations about abstract or conceptual topics. But in the build-up to this first mention of the unborn child, he digresses into a discussion of "Society" at large. In particular, Dowell laments the fact that Society, as an all-encompassing and determining force, seeks to ensure only "the preservation of the normal type" and the "extinction of proud, resolute, and unusual individuals" (258-9). According to Dowell, Society's efforts tend toward the exclusion of anything that betrays within it a "[touch] of madness." That is, Society places a premium on meaningfulness and sense, and naturally selects for the prosperity of its future. It is not by accident that Dowell mentions Leonora's unborn child for the first time in this paragraph. Society's instinct to render everything palatable and meaningful cannot be divorced from the promise of procreation, that is, for the preservation of Society at large.

The second and final reference to the unborn child actually marks the first official end of Dowell's narration, that is, before he remembers that he has forgotten to recount the details of Edward's suicide. It would have been the final sentence of the novel, were it not for Edward's last minute addendum. Thus, the first ending reads as follows: "[Leonora's] husband is quite an economical person of so normal a figure that he can get quite a large proportion of his clothes ready-made. That is the great desideratum of life, and that is the end of my story. The child is to be brought up as a Romanist" (276). Ensuring that the connection is clear to the reader, Dowell yet again aligns the novel's heir to the maintenance of normalcy, the "great desideratum of life," as he says. With a father like Rodney Bayham, a man so normal that he buys his clothes "ready-made," the child marks the promise of conformity and complaisance, qualities that have already been

associated with Society in general. Leonora's final submission to a world in which madness and eccentricity must be quarantined and removed, cannot help but recall that other image of Nancy, gone mad and locked away, repeating endlessly her belief in an Omnipotent Deity. One signals a future in which normalcy is triumphant and meaning is thus managed, the other, sequestered in her pervasive madness, references a horizon beyond meaning. The novel emphasizes this connection by lingering for one final moment on the figure of Nancy before moving to Leonora's unborn child. Immediately prior to this final reference, Dowell looks at Nancy, untouchable and inaccessible in her madness, and concludes the following: "—and to think that it all means nothing—that it is a picture without a meaning. Yes, it is queer" (276). This meaninglessness, this "picture" that resists final and definitive sense, serves to block any complete surrender to normalcy, which the novel's unborn progeny threatens to ensure. That is, through the mad figure of Nancy Rufford, the novel resists total acquiescence to the fantasy of singular meaning, even if it imagines it in the form of its "unknown heirs or generations infinitely remote." The recuperative promise of inheritance is held in tension with this empty constellation of Nancy's madness that bankrupts any final meaning. Thus, the seemingly definitive utterance, "The child is to be brought up as a Romanist," nonetheless refuses to settle matters once and for all, as we hear, set against this promise of a Roman Catholic future, the recitation of Nancy's Irish Catholic liturgy: *Credo in unum Deum Omnipotentem*. There is no untainted, perfectly circumscribable space, only one that the unborn heir and the mad girl must share. And the novel, which compounds these images with the final image of Edward's suicide, closes on the idea that meaning will remain in this tension, between the desire for definitiveness and singularity, and the

fact of its perpetual deferral.

CHAPTER III

Kafka's Fatigue and the Indeterminacy of Loss

THE REQUEST

In a postscript to the first edition of *The Trial*, Franz Kafka condemns all of his work to the most famous literary conflagration that never happened. He requests of Max Brod, his good friend and the eventual executor of his writings, that all of his diaries, manuscripts, letters, sketches and unpublished works be burned unread. Kafka places this order for arson with the one person who had explicitly and unequivocally vowed never to carry it out. How do we read this request for radical erasure, which Kafka knew would not be fulfilled? A hyperbolic moment of self-critique? A prophetic, last-ditch effort to derail what Maurice Blanchot calls the "universal misunderstanding"[1] that Kafka's work was destined to inspire? A challenge to the friend who must now negotiate between allegiance to the man and allegiance to the work? Or perhaps Kafka's writing always already stages a collapse of the distinct boundary between preservation and destruction, such that we can no longer be sure that the consuming flames of a fire destroy any more than they preserve.[2]

Whatever Kafka's incentive, it is clear that if the work is to be burned, the writer cannot do it himself. It is the task of the friend—the one who has most supported and encouraged the late night fits of frenzied writing—to receive the request and to defy it. So, Kafka's work comes to us in the form of the survivor, something slated to die,

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[1] Blanchot, *Work of Fire, 1.*

[2] In their book on Kafka, Deleuze and Guatarri pick up precisely on this unreadability, or logical scrambling inherent in Kafka's works. They suggest that, in his writing rules are subverted in such a way that "one can't really tell if submission doesn't finally conceal the greatest sort of revolt and if combat doesn't imply the worst of acceptances" [Deleuze and Guattari (DG), 82].

marked always by the fate it managed to escape. The work is haunted by the request of its creator; it remains with the work as a reminder of the alternative, of the possibility of its non-arrival. The figure of the "might have been," an absence or a loss that remains present to the work nonetheless, is not only appended to Kafka's texts anecdotally in the form of his strange request, but inhabits Kafka's writing from within by means of the subjunctive mode. It is as though Kafka's narratives unfold along a particular trajectory, but at the same time, will not relinquish the possibility that everything could have been otherwise. Hypothetical situations are called to life, denied and then resurrected again. "If he could reach the open fields how fast he would fly, and soon doubtless you would hear the welcome hammering of his fists on your door. But instead how vainly does he wear out his strength; still he is only making his way through the chambers of the innermost palace; never will he get to the end of them; and if he succeeded in that nothing would be gained" (*Complete Stories*, 5). The conditional space of Kafka's world opens widely, proliferating possibilities that cannot be realized. In his biography of Kafka, Elias Canetti writes, "a good part of his work consists of tentative steps toward perpetually changing possibilities of future. He does not acknowledge a single future, there are many; this multiplicity of futures paralyzes him and burdens his step."[3] Reflecting on the unending Kafkan if-clause, Günter Anders writes: "This discrepancy between the significance of what 'might be' and the insignificance of what 'is' characterizes the fate of those condemned to live in a world where they can consider many possibilities, but yet lack the authority to decide between them."[4] Rather than naming the impossible and closing with it once and for all, the impossible is identified, then dismissed with the confidence and

[3] Canetti, 32.
[4] Anders, 52.

resoluteness of the *"aber niemals, niemals kann es geschehen,"*[5] then asserted once again. As if the text itself were reluctant to foreclose any narrative possibilities, it keeps all of its options half alive in the purgatorial realm of writing.

And it is the feel of a liminal space, one in which discrete boundaries and binary oppositions fold into each other, that Kafka's works invoke. To suggest that his work comes to us in the figure of the survivor is already to presume too much—to presume that life and death stand oppositionally to one another, that survival would be the triumph of life over death. If we remain with this image of the fire that failed to burn Kafka's work, it is because it further complicates our understanding of the relationship between writing and death. Writing is always bound up with questions of survival: the written word functions in the absence of the one who writes it and continues to do so long after his death. Proleptically, we might say, writing bears witness to the death of the writer before that death arrives. It anticipates the day when it will lose the one who created it. The assumption here is that the writer and his writing are distinct: the writer dies; the writing survives. In Kafka's case, everything is, of course, characteristically twisted. It is writing, not the man, that faces death—*burn it all unread*. And to compound matters further, the man himself cannot be distinguished from the writing he produces. "I have no literary interests, but am made of literature. I am nothing else, and cannot be anything else" **(***Letters to Felice*, 304). Kafka invents a word for his unique mode of being: *Schriftstellersein*, being-as-writer. There is no way for him to exist other than by means of the written word. In a diary entry on January 3, 1912, Kafka writes: "When it became clear in my organism that writing was the most productive direction for my being to take, everything rushed in that direction and left empty all those abilities which were directed

[5] "but never, never can that that happen" (Kafka, *The Complete Stories*, 5).

towards the joys of sex, eating, drinking, philosophical reflection, and above all music. I atrophied in all these directions" (*Diaries,* 163). Lived experience enters into an economy with writing, whereby the sacrifice of one enables the possibility of the other. To Kafka's mind, the "compensation" is clear: "I need only throw my work in the office out of this complex in order to begin my real life in which, with the progress of my work, my face will finally be able to age in a natural way" (*Diaries,* 163). A kind of reverse Dorian Gray, to live outside of writing is to age aberrantly. If only he could inhabit the written word, pull his existence entirely into the space of literature, the pathology of living would be righted.

And if this compensatory exchange—life for writing—strikes Kafka with the "[clearness] of day," its transparency does not ensure its purchase. If anything, Kafka must now contend with the torture of the *Schriftstellersein*: "a nonwriting writer is a monster inviting madness" (*Friends, Family, and Editors,* 333). Always at risk of succumbing to monstrosity and madness, Kafka strives to exist in and through literature. And if he is able to achieve this kind of literary existence—that is, if Kafka is only literature—the salvation of his work from the fire that might otherwise have burned it is tantamount to his own salvation.[6] He survives his own death wish—the death of his work at the hand of his friend. And yet, it is far from clear what survival would mean for one who was never able to live his own life *as life* rather than as literature. Once literature and life become inseparable, our preconceived notions of loss, death, and survival cannot be sustained in the same way. The deeper one plunges into Kafka's work, the more one

[6] DG are critical of this opposition of art to life in Kafka's work. They claim that "it is so awful, so grotesque, to oppose life and writing in Kafka, to suppose that he took refuge in writing out of some sort of lack, weakness, impotence, in front of life. A rhizome, a burrow, yes—but not an ivory tower. A line of escape, yes—but not a refuge" (DG, 41).

senses a kind of abyss opening up, not only below, but above as well, as if one always already inhabited it, but simply failed to register the towering walls on either side.

This chapter will trace the complicated nature of loss in Kafka's writing, and as such, the Hunter Gracchus—the one suspended between life and death—is the figure that stands at the helm of this work. We will do this in spite of Henry Sussman's caution against treating Kafkan figures as paradigmatic, a conceptual framework that purports to capture the essence of the author and his work.[7] Instead, the Hunter Gracchus is a figure that haunts, resists and collapses temporal dimensions. It precisely prevents one from subsuming Kafka's oeuvre under the umbrella of a single parable or allegory. "The Hunter Gracchus" is the story of a death that does not come off, a death ship that because of "a wrong turn of the wheel, a moment's absence of mind on the pilot's part, the distraction of [his] lovely native country" (*Stories*, 228), now sails the earthly waters, unable to reach the next world. The loss remains incomplete. For hundreds of years, the Hunter Gracchus has carried on in this mode of suspension, ascending and descending "the great stair" that leads to the beyond, but never arrives there. The tragedy of the story is not death itself, not falling down the ravine after shooting the antelope and bleeding to death, but the failure to die: "Are you dead?" asks the Burgomaster. "In a certain sense I am alive too" (*Stories*, 228), the Hunter Gracchus replies. The loss is to loss itself—the inability to complete the loss by moving on to the realm of death. And the subversion takes down more than the boundary line between life and death; the hunter is re-gendered by "his" failure to complete the loss. "Before I stepped aboard, I joyfully flung away my wretched load of ammunition, my knapsack, my hunting rifle that I had always been so proud to carry, and I slipped into my winding sheet like a girl into her marriage dress"

[7] Sussman, 7.

(*Stories*, 229). By means of the aborted loss, the Hunter Gracchus is rendered woman, and now parades around in "a great flowered-patterned woman's shawl with long fringes" (*Stories*, 229).

To be expelled, barred from entering the next world, or the family, the law, the Castle: such is a thoroughly Kafkan trope, and his writing delivers us to the always-claustrophobic place of alienation, simultaneously cast out and hemmed in. The challenge that Kafka presents his reader is in establishing one's bearings, orienting oneself in the cramped quarters of Kafka's language. The reader does sense immediately that she inhabits a world where all is lost. Characters wake from tormented dreams to find themselves turned into vermin or placed under arrest. Kafka does not ease the reader into these predicaments, but drops one in as if through a trapdoor. To make sense of these losses, which overwhelm from the outset, the reader projects into Kafka's works some sense of plenitude, fullness, some trace of a pre-fallen state. This gesture is both beckoned and categorically denied by the work, and part of the reader's insatiable interpretive desire has to do with the simultaneity of these conflicting demands. If there is loss, we reason, there must be a world before the fall where everything still made sense, where logic governed, where affect was appropriate to the event that produced it.[8] Ultimately, this chapter will reveal in Kafka's portrayal of loss a much more complicated temporality, the breakdown of discrete subjectivity, and the emergence of a general weariness that hovers not only over the work, but over the author, unable to definitively

[8] Regardig the discrepancy between event and expected affective response, see Anders, who puts forth his theory of "soundless explosion" to evoke the Kafkan gesture in which extraordinary events fail to surprise the characters that they befall: "What makes the reading of his stories such a gruesome experience is his manner of treating the grotesque as everyday normality; not the fact that Gregor Samsa wakes up one morning transformed into a beetle, but that he sees nothing surprising in his fate. This principle, which might be termed the principle of 'soundless explosion,' consists in withholding even a pianissimo where a fortissimo is expected; there is no change in volume at all—the world simple goes on as before" (Anders, 13).

assert his own existence. The very nature of loss itself is submitted to critical re-evaluation through Kafka's writing.

INVOCATIONS OF THE PAST

Kafka's presentation of the past disrupts any straightforward relationship between an ostensible plenitude that precedes loss and the bereft world that takes its place. The past that surges up in Kafka's writings, usually at an oblique angle to the present, often arrives in the form of a lamentation and is always at risk of being entirely forgotten. The confidence with which the narrative voice describes the past is often tempered or undermined immediately, such that one can never accurately measure the distance and gravity of the fall. Representatives of that past—characters tasked with keeping its memory alive—are ironically those who cannot communicate sufficiently, cannot make the past legible, and can only mark it by their very *inability* to speak on its behalf. Stories such as "A Hunger Artist" or "In the Penal Colony" are crypts within which a remote past is prohibited from dying by the determined, though ultimately futile, efforts of its advocates. "A Hunger Artist" opens with the promise of a banished Eden, and we expect that what follows will recount the details of that perdition. It begins: "During these last decades the interest in professional fasting has markedly diminished. It used to pay very well to stage such great performances under one's own management, but today that is quite impossible. We live in a different world now" (*Stories*, 268). The extent of worldly disgrace is measured by the depreciation of the audience. The story paints a picture of bygone days when the hunger artist was adored, when his fasts were ceremonious and his audiences rapt. Flash-forward and everything has changed. Even those who had once

participated can no longer "understand themselves" a few years later when they reflect back on those early scenes of enthusiastic reception (*Stories*, 273). The past is not merely forgotten, but becomes alien to those who had experienced it, those who remember, but no longer keep community with their own youthful responses. In the style of free indirect discourse, the narrative voice tries to make sense of the change, at times assuming a sober and objective tone, at others, embodying the hunger artist's own disgust: "what did they care about fasting?" the narrative voice asks rhetorically as a group of onlookers passes by.

Of the change in attitude toward fasting, the narrative voice explains, "it seemed to happen almost overnight" (*Stories*, 273). In an instant, the plenitude of the past disappears. The hunger artist will have no place in the fallen present or future, which comes without warning and relegates his anachronistic existence to a lonely cage on the outskirts of the circus lot. Nostalgia is stopped short, however, as the narrative voice backpedals ever so slightly to modulate its claim: "Of course it could not really have sprung up so suddenly as all that, and many premonitory symptoms which had not been remarked or suppressed during the rush and glitter of success now came retrospectively to mind, but it was now too late to take any countermeasures" (*Stories*, 273). In the fullness of the past, signs of the fallen future betray themselves, and in retrospect, reveal that everything was already on its way. It is the belatedness of revelation—the way that understanding limps along behind the times—that ushers in the young panther at the end, bursting with life and energy. The hunger artist's dead body is tossed out after having been neglected for an indeterminate amount of time. The substitution of the panther for the dead hunger artist does not mark an end, however, as the narrative voice has already

assured us that the past lies not behind us but ahead of us: "Fasting would surely come into fashion again at some future date, yet that was no comfort for those living in the present" (*Stories*, 273). Time is conceived on a scale that spills over the boundaries of the text. No comfort may be had in the space of the narrative—no palliative for those living in the perpetual present of the story—but the past, which was, in any case, never simply one of plenitude, is still poised to arrive.

Fundamentally unstable and never fully readable, the past in Kafka's works still exerts a kind of gravitational force upon the narrative. Like "A Hunger Artist," "In the Penal Colony" stages the gradual, but determined fade-out of the old ways, in particular, the dwindling support for a defunct juridical procedure and the torture apparatus used for execution. We watch the death preparations performed by the officer, the lone remaining adherent to the Old Commandant's retributive vision, alongside the explorer who is passing through the penal colony as an honored guest. Questions about the past are compounded here, as the "elsewhere" of the story is marked by both time and place. We are in a colony, removed from a distant, unidentified homeland, tokens of which are the uniforms worn by the officer and soldier. Rather than conjure up comforting images of home, the uniforms, "too heavy for the tropics, surely" (*Stories*, 140), stifle easy movement and make breathing laborious in the wet heat. Home is marked by the out-of-place, by relics whose dead weight substitutes for remembrance.[9]

The greatest invocation of prior plenitude is not native land, but lost time, measured by the neglect and dilapidation of the execution apparatus. To convey the elegance of the machine in its heyday and the glory that the execution ceremonies had

[9] Even in Kafka's first novel, *Amerika*, Karl Rossman, who has been banished from his native country for impregnating a servant girl, tries to maintain linkages to home through a photograph of his parents, which he ultimately loses.

once inspired, the officer produces drawings made by the Old Commandant's own hand. The machine etches the death sentence on the body of the accused, whose guilt is never questioned, always assumed, turning him over and over until it delivers both Enlightenment and death in the final hour.[10] The explorer looks at the drawings, which he is prohibited from touching, but can make nothing out.

> The explorer would have liked to say something appreciative, but all he could see was a labyrinth of lines crossing and recrossing each other, which covered the paper so thickly that it was difficult to discern the blank spaces between them. "Read it," said the officer. "I can't," said the explorer. "Yet it's clear enough," said the officer. "It's very ingenious," said the explorer evasively, "but I can't make it out." "Yes," said the officer with a laugh, putting the paper away again, "it's no calligraphy for school children. It needs to be studied closely. I'm quite sure that in the end you would understand it too. (*Stories*, 149)

The grandeur of the past cannot be communicated, even if the officer talks incessantly and of nothing else. The source of that grandeur is an indecipherable scribbling that reduces the untrained reader to an inept schoolchild. Understanding is held out as a hypothetical and inevitable end for the one who commits himself to the proper logic. But it is far from certain what "in the end" refers to, and whether Enlightenment—here, nearly guaranteed by the officer—could ever arrive without death at its heels.

Kafka straps his characters with the burden of making the forsaken and inaccessible past legible without granting them the means to do it. The talking ape in "A Report to an Academy," who is called upon to give an account of the freedom he had known before capture and before his "ape nature fled out of [him], head over heels and away" (*Stories*, 258), can only deliver a failed report to the Academy. The Academy

[10] Günter Anders describes the characteristic inversion of guilt and punishment in Kafka's works. Rather than punishment following guilt, punishment precedes it. One's guilt is determined by one's punishment. Because Kafka's characters are originally excluded from the world, they are guilty. The furies arrive before the crime (Anders, 38).

solicits knowledge, but knowledge is the one thing that the report cannot produce. He apologizes: "I regret that I cannot comply with your request to the extent that you desire," as the price for becoming-human was that "my memory of the past has closed the door against me more and more" (*Stories*, 250). The consequence of this transformation is a radical forgetting. And the only trace of his forgotten history are two bullet wounds, one on his cheek and one below the hip. The body registers what the memory cannot hold. Memory begins after the shots, which remain part of an existence that he cannot communicate because, like a trauma that resists narrative integration, the event remains foreign to his experience. Testimony of its occurrence must come from the outside, from "the evidence of others" (*Stories*, 251). Exiled from his own experience, the ape cannot reproduce for the Academy a past to which he was both present and absent, and "with the best will in the world [he] cannot communicate" (*Stories*, 251). In the same way, the headstone of the Old Commandant of the penal colony, whose grave is hidden underneath a table in a teahouse by the sea, proclaims that his few allies "now must remain nameless" (*Stories*, 167). The past has lost its voice and, as such, can only bear a kind of mythical plenitude, no more or less than the anonymous force of rumor.

As critics have noted, rumors abound in Kafka's works.[11] They carry a momentum all their own, the *echo* of a gunshot at the starting gate of Kafka's narratives. "Someone must have slandered Joseph K." begins *The Trial*, and inaugurates not an explosion of text, but a muted stumbling around into the chameleon spaces of legal procedure—the candlelit bedrooms of lawyers, the cramped closets of courtrooms, the studios of painters in-the-know—all in search of answers to a question that no one has

[11] As Walter Sokel puts it, "the idea of a stable reliable world pertains for Kafka's protagonist to a quasi-mythic, legendary past of his own imagining. …This calm and stable world is literally based on hearsay; it is a product of language. The speaker has never experienced it himself" (Sokel, 89).

posed, but wafts around the pages of *The Trial* in the un-authored whisperings of an implied accusation.[12] As Stanley Corngold has suggested, to begin a novel in this way is to drop the reader into a world that is always already interpreted, always already filtered through the automatic lens of meaning-making.[13] Someone, a narrative voice, has already sifted through the facts, and comes up with this, most plausible explanation for things: it must have been rumor, because Joseph K. had not done anything "truly wrong" (*Trial*, 3). This elevates our thinking about the inaccessibility of the past to the level of form. There is no getting back behind the always-already-interpreted to some unadulterated, pure sequence of events. There is no "truth" to which the reader could appeal to say definitively whether Joseph K. was or was not guilty of an unknown crime. The plenitude of "truth," some fantasy of pure happening untouched by interpretation, is forever barred. There is only the "fallen" state of the already filtered and already processed perspective of the narrative voice. And voices, for Kafka, produce not clarity but obscurity, whether it is the feeble whisper of the hunger artist, whose last inscrutable words are that he fasted because he couldn't find any food that he liked, or the "persistent horrible squeak" of Gregor Samsa after his transformation from human to vermin, "which left words in their clear shape only for the first moment and then rose up reverberating around them to destroy their sense" (*Stories*, 91).

Perhaps it is not surprising that an author like Franz Kafka would resist depicting a space of lost plenitude, which would include the full potential of truth, abundance and

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[12] This resonates with Günter Anders's claim that Kafka's novels "always begin with a silent clap of thunder, a fait accompli from without. And the ensuing action consists in speculation or discussion about what the mysterious thunder-clap might mean" (Anders, 37).

[13] Regarding the opening line of Trial, Corngold writes: "The narrative begins not with the first event of the plot but with a first interpretation of the event; the interpretation of the arrest as part of a conventional trial provoked by K.'s defamation *is* the beginning. The novel is ahead of its own plot in the radical sense that Joseph K.'s manner of continually prepreading the events of his trial is itself preread by the narrator" (Corngold, *The Necessity of Form,* 223).

signification because, as Stanley Corngold puts it, Kafka's cross is "the curse of one who from the start found himself outside the human stall while craving a simplicity of vision and nourishment within it".[14] As this chapter progresses, we will explore the extent to which Kafka was relegated to the position of perpetual outsider, and what kind of "human stall" he was barred from entering exactly. For the moment, it suffices to hear in Corngold's words the sense of premature exclusion: the "one who *from the start* found himself outside." There was, for Kafka, no prior sense of inclusion, no utopian past that might make "return" more compelling than exile.[15] There is only exile and more exile.[16] From the place of original loss, one "could only go on and lose oneself further" (*Castle*, 41). The underlying question harbored in this discussion of past plenitude and subsequent loss is about the notion of continuum, the possibility of a secure and self-enclosed subject, place, or time that might persist in spite of the violence done to it. To explore this in greater depth, I turn to Kafka's last published novel, which he worked on but never completed, and eventually abandoned entirely. *The Castle* provides unique insight into these questions for two reasons. First, the past seems to function differently in the novel and so gives rise to a kind of compulsive interpretive scrambling; second, because subjectivity—in this case, the notion of a character's continuous identity over a sustained period of time—is submitted to a different kind of narrative pressure.

THE SEDUCTION OF APPEARANCE

[14] Corngold, *Necessity of Form*, 6.
[15] Writing of Kafka's unique exilic predicament, Dowden says: "[Kafka] ardently longed for solidarity and community, but he never dared to actually believe in them, not least of all because he longed just as ardently for the solitude and silence that were the precondition of his writing" (Dowden, 12).
[16] This condition of original exile is precisely what lends Kafka his subversive qualities, according to Deleuze and Guatarri who describe him as "a sort of stranger *within* his own language…." (DG, 26). As such, Kafka subverts the German language from within, a minor voice always destabilizing the dominant tongue.

In *The Castle* we are dealing with a classically Kafkan character, but one who nevertheless differs in significant ways from those we have encountered in this chapter thus far. If we find in stories such as "A Hunger Artist," "In the Penal Colony," or *The Metamorphosis* a plaintive lament for the past—however inaccessible and unreadable that past may be—by seemingly earnest characters, in *The Castle* we must contend with the possibility that the past returns only in the form of the lie. Most reductively, *The Castle* is about a character, K., who arrives in a village late one evening, asserts that he has been called by the Castle to act as a land surveyor under its auspices, and proceeds for the remainder of the novel to try out various strategies to gain access to the Castle, which subverts his every effort. Kafka scholars have championed the novel as a critique of the metaphysical belief in a transcendent reality that would precede and guarantee meaning-as-origin, or truth. Contemporary critics, influenced by post-structuralist and deconstructive reading strategies, have distanced themselves from Max Brod's early allegorical interpretation of the Castle as a symbol for God's grace. Instead, they propose precisely the opposite interpretation, that the Castle does not stand in for anything; it does not represent any one entity, neither merely a bureaucratic machine, nor a Judeo-Christian God. *The Castle* breaks with this kind of referential anchor, or faith in a transcendental signified. Rather, the Castle itself emerges as an all-encompassing textuality, producing the discourse that will determine the stakes of the novel and K.'s place within it. On these readings, K.'s challenge is to establish a literal meaning for his own existence within the elusive and figurative space of the Castle world. Critics disagree as to whether his seemingly aimless trudging around the novel constitutes progress—that he does, in fact, assure himself existential meaning by ultimately rejecting the Castle's

discourse—or whether his desire to enter the space of the Castle remains insatiable and incomplete—a desire for desire itself.

The novel opens in an apparently unproblematic way. It begins: "It was late evening when K. arrived. The village lay under deep snow. There was no sign of the Castle hill, fog and darkness surrounded it, not even the faintest gleam of light suggested the large Castle. K. stood a long time on the wooden bridge that leads from the main road to the village, gazing upward into the seeming emptiness" (*Castle*, 1). In this opening passage, the reader is told of an arrival. Someone—K.—arrives, as if out of a void. We know nothing of his past, nothing of his embarkation, only that he was on a journey that has now come to an end. Out of some unknown literary space, K. now stands firmly in the present of the novel. And yet, it is far from clear what kind of firm-footing K. actually has. When we look at the passage more closely, we notice that K. arrives at late evening, a time of transition and uncertain light. And this character, whose arrival announces a kind of liminal temporality, is marked only by a letter, sparse and pared down, a mere abbreviation for something we might believe to stand behind it. Of course, Kafka will force us to rethink the notion that behind every abbreviation is something fuller, more robust, some kind of complete subjectivity. Similarly, any effort to find solidity in the figure of the Castle is equally frustrated. Our first glimpse of the Castle is an absolute vanishing point. We are simultaneously told that it *does* and *does not* manifest. There must be a Castle, as the narrative voice tells us there is, and yet, the only trace of the Castle—its only existential evidence—is its non-appearance: "There was no sign of the Castle hill…not even the faintest gleam of light suggested the large Castle." It is not merely that, in this hour of sundown, the building is cast in shadow, nor is it simply

obscured by the density of the village around it. Somehow, late evening has progressed into total fog and darkness, effacing any mark of the Castle, which will ultimately become the novel's obsessive object.

The impossibility of K.'s pathetic search is the very promise made by the opening passage. The arrival, which is announced so casually in the first sentence, is complicated almost immediately. That is, K. finds himself neither in the village nor at the base of the Castle. Instead, he stands on a bridge, suspended one might say, between two points that are equally unstable—an infinitely held-out narrative past and a Castle that refuses to manifest. In this transitional space, at this transitional moment in time, K. looks up and stares into an emptiness that seems, nonetheless, to be filled with promise. The "seeming emptiness," which envelops the Castle is only a "seeming." If K. were only to register the emptiness, everything might have turned out differently. It is, perhaps, his adoption of the "seeming," called into existence by the narrative voice in this opening passage—the *belief* in a presence behind the absence—that sustains the novel itself. K.'s fate is sealed, we might say, the second the narrative voice lapses into the present. It does not say, as it very well might have, "the wooden bridge that *led* from the main road to the village," but "leads" ["führt"]. And it is as if the entire momentum of the novel—its relentless pursuit—inheres in this subtle shift.

On the first night of his stay in the village, after stumbling into the nearest inn in search of a place to sleep, K. is ordered to offer up an identity. "I am the land surveyor sent for by the Count. My assistants and the equipment are coming tomorrow by carriage" (*Castle*, 3). The reader has no reason to doubt K. That is, not until a phone call

is placed to the Castle, which denies K.'s existence, claiming that no land surveyor has been solicited. But then, in a strange twist of events, the Castle calls back to retract it.

> K. listened intently. So the Castle had appointed him land surveyor. On one hand, this was unfavorable, for it showed that the Castle had all the necessary information about him, had assessed the opposing forces, and was taking up the struggle with a smile. On the other hand, it was favorable, for it proved to his mind that they underestimated him and that he would enjoy greater freedom than he could have hoped for at the beginning. And if they thought they could keep him terrified all the time simply by acknowledging his surveyorship—though this was certainly a superior move on their part—then they were mistaken, for he felt only a slight shudder, that was all. (*Castle*, 5)

The stakes of the novel suddenly become much more complicated. K., figured as the one who must find or create meaning for himself within the discursive force field of the Castle, initially seems to welcome the challenge as if it were a game. He assesses the degree of his rhetorical triumph over the Castle, weighing both its pros and cons. Already, from this early passage, the terms and means of this challenge are clear. The novel will unfold as series of parrying moves, which K. will be forced to interpret and re-interpret *ad nauseum*. As Günter Anders explains: "If a man does not know what position he is in nor where he is going, what he owes nor to whom, what he may be suspected of, or why he is accused, or whether or not he is tolerated […], then all his energies will be consumed by an unremitting search for meaning, a kind of mania for interpretation."[17] But, the satisfaction of this interpretive desire is precisely denied in the novel. In the world of the Castle, there is no forward or backward movement, no clear ascent or descent. There is only a lateral stumbling around, following the ever-shifting signs of a logic that leads to nowhere in particular, but which K. determines to be his only weapon in his "struggle" with the Castle. The Castle is a world of endless movement, but a

[17] Anders, 51.

movement that does not grant the character or the reader any sense of progress. All journeys follow the figurative trajectory of K.'s first excursion into the village: "The street he had taken, the main street in the village, did not lead to the Castle hill, it only went close by, then veered off as if on purpose, and though it didn't lead any farther from the Castle, it didn't get any closer either" (*Castle*, 10). The Castle itself will turn out to be only a "so-called Castle," that is, "only a rather miserable little town, pieced together from village houses" (*Castle*, 8). While K. never doubts that the Castle does exist, its contours and its boundaries are never verified. It remains an unstable referent whose exact space can never be marked. A land surveyor is, then, both desperately needed and entirely worthless.

In this space that prohibits advancement or retreat, K.'s ostensible "self-presentation" is an act of assertion and authority,[18] even if it is followed by his astonishment that he is taken seriously, or at least, seriously enough for the Castle to accept "the struggle with a smile." But, in light of K.'s astonishment, the reader is now compelled to doubt the truth-value of K.'s claims. Whether K. *is* or *is not* lying, whether he *is* or *is not* a "real" land surveyor suddenly feels like a pressing question. And critics have debated the duplicity of this protagonist, hoping to determine what his deception means for this novel.[19] This effort to uncover the truth beneath the lie, objective reality beneath the assertions of the characters, is to adopt a logic of secrets, whereby reading is detective's work and analysis is mystery-solving. The reader falls victim to the same traps as K., who, for the majority of the novel, treats the Castle as if it were the arbiter and origin of meaning. He feels that there is something to discover, and attempts at every

[18] The very notion of self-presentation will be undermined, as this paper will adopts the idea that there is no "self" to present.
[19] Krauss, 47; Sokel, 39. Sussman 123

stage to narrow the distance between himself and the official, Klamm, who comes to represent both the Castle's omnipotence and unlocalizability.[20]

POSSIBILITY AND CONCEALMENT

In her reading of *The Castle*, Avital Ronell suggests that the unique freedom that K. assumes by the end of the novel is a freedom from representational forms of writing that might delimit or cordon off meaning. Instead, K. resists satisfying the desire for transcendental signification, as this economy of desire does not seek a final object, but one that is perpetually withheld. It is not presence, but absence, that is sought. Following Lacan's analysis of language, Ronell argues that K.'s is a longing for something that was never present to begin with. His desire is for desire itself. K.'s yearning, however, is not the only one produced by the novel, as one desire is grafted onto another in a kind of layering process. That is, the reader's own interpretive desire is also produced by the text. As Ronell writes, "'we' as K.'s coprotagonists figure as the intentional victims of a text that, while claiming to summon us, has from the very start demobilized our interpretive movements and resisted the interpretive Key."[21] This echoes Blanchot's claim regarding the same novel: "Who will not remember adding something to it and feeling guilty for having done so?"[22] There seems to be something about Kafka's work that calls to the

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[20] Krauss shows that: "At the beginning, Klamm was merely the name of the official in charge of the village, while later on his name is associated with any object of human aspirations, be it power, love, progress, security, comfort, respect, or spiritual gratification" (Krauss, 15).There is no single content that Klamm represents, and his signification is far from stable.

[21] Ronell, 185.

[22] Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, 391. We might here propose a thinking of existence in line with Heidegger's "being-guilty," which inheres in the "call of conscience," that content-less call that accuses you by way of your very indebtedness to the gift of being. Gustav Janouch relays a memory that Kafka conveyed to him during one of their walks about the family cook, who had unthinkingly called him a "criminal": "You called me a ravachol. That's a criminal. …The name of ravachol was never spoken again amongst us but it remained within me like a thorn, or rather like the broken-off point of a needle which

reader, invites interpretive intervention. We are beckoned and barred in the same instant. Our reading instincts seek stability, a referent, a demarcated and self-sustaining subject, who might be capable of something like lying, as lying presumes that there must, at the very least and underneath it all, be a concrete substance to dissemble.[23]

Even if our readings are no longer motivated by belief in aesthetic autonomy, by faith in a single, all-encompassing principle of explanation or by the hope that every detail can be symbolically decoded, the desire for an intelligible whole persists. The reader is not immune from very longings that plague Kafka's melancholic characters, pining for a past that they never really possessed and equally cannot bring to language. The reader, too, remains faithful to some mythical plenitude, a meaning behind, underneath, beyond the text, which renders the written word a fallen object and the act of reading the resurrection of this prior sense of fullness. This remains the case, even as we fully endorse a claim like Stanley Corngold's when he writes that one "can never possess the meaning of a text—neither in advance nor as a consequence of a finite act of reading: the text cannot give rise to a completed signifying act."[24] As we relinquish with one hand the belief in an all-encompassing, totalized textual meaning, with the other we import into our reading another logic of the secret. By arguing that K. is an imposter when the novel itself has clearly left the status of K.'s past undecideable, we construct an underlying notion of stable identity, one that is simply covered over by lies and dissimulation. The key to unlocking the *Schloß* is then bound up with discovering K.'s

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circulates about the body. The inflammation of the throught disappeared, but subjectively I remained a stricken invalid, a ravachol. Outwardly nothing had changed. People treated me in the same way as before, but I knew that I was an Ishmael, a criminal, in short—a ravachol' (Janouch, 88-9).

[23] Stanley Corngold has written on the centrality of the lie to "Das Urteil," ("The Judgment"), whereby Georg Bendemann includes a number of lies in his letter to his friend in Russia. His very suicide is the result of taking his father's judgment (that he is liar doing the devil's work) as though it were an official court ruling, replete with its own death sentence (Corngold, *Necessity of Form*, 27).

[24] *Ibid*., 293.

"true" identity. This is precisely what Avital Ronell condemns in those critics who respond with "moral indignation" to K.'s purported dissimulation tactics.[25] Ronell argues that, by calling K. an imposter, these critics must ascribe to him a "preconstituted identity," "[d]espite the fact that a prior identity has never been disclosed."[26] Ronell's insight is so astute, because it reveals the way in which Kafka's writing enthralls his readers, simultaneously fostering and denying a notion of the "right" interpretive track.

While I am in full agreement with Ronell's critique, it seems equally fruitful to linger momentarily on those seductive passages in *The Castle* where a sense of some "preconstituted identity" does seem plausable. It is on the fragmented, but suggestive allusions to K.'s personal history that critics make the case that K. is a liar. It should be noted that, with the exception of a few brief references to his past, K. seems constitutively amnesiac, alluding to and remembering his prior life infrequently, and mostly by means of comparison, a way to distinguish the contours of his present circumstances from that which they are not.[27] His first reference is to the family he left behind, who he mentions without any trace of emotional investment: "'I still haven't met the Count,' said K., 'they say he pays good money for good work, is that so? Anybody traveling as far from his wife and child as I am wants to have something to take home with him'" (*Castle*, 5). In her analysis of *The Castle*, Karoline Krauss reads this comment, along with K.'s other brief mention of his early military days, as play-acting,

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[25] Sokel, for instance, calls K. a liar, suggesting that he is either lying about having a wife and child or about wanting to marry Frieda. In response to this Dowden claims that this hard and fast categorization of truth and lies undermines the "novel's fundamental hovering between possibilites" (Dowden, 36).

[26] Ronell, 186.

[27] Dowden claims that, "K. shows no sign of nostalgia for the past. The past is gone; K. has come here to stay, a point about which he is emphatic. Emphatic too is K.'s striving toward an unnamed goal, which we should take to mean a future that is better." (Dowden, 127). I agree with Dowden's observation, with the exception of the final line. There is no indication in the novel that K. believes in a "better" future. In fact, I argue the opposite. There is no holding out for a better future. There is no such thing as a "better" future for Kafka.

testing the limits of his recently adopted role as Landsurveyor. She writes, "this statement is openly inconsistent with the rest of the narrative and the rest of K.'s actions, in particular his plans to marry Frieda."[28] According to Krauss, because K.'s (non-) encounter with the Castle is only a game, a "comedy," and a "struggle," he is free to invent whatever narrative strengthens his position.[29] On this reading, K. is posited as a self-encapsulated and fully formed subjectivity, able to present himself more or less authentically. To call him an imposter means that some true self can be discerned underneath the lies, and that we, as readers, can render him transparent and available to scrutiny. For Avital Ronell, on the other hand, this remains a structural impossibility. K.'s incompletion derives from the way in which his very name—the sparse and pared down letter—refers not just to a character strapped with a particular task in this novelistic space, but fundamentally, a "typographical character, a unit of signification without any meaning in itself."[30] Importing a Saussurian understanding of signification as a system of differences with no positive content, Ronell makes the case that K. also has no *positive* value. His "identity" is determined only by the differential relationship in which he stands with the Castle. Any notion of pre-existing subjectivity or self-same unity breaks down in this novel. Even when he manages to append to his abbreviated existence the loftier title of "Landsurveyor," K. remains "only a potential landsurveyor, as perhaps *The Castle* remains the potentiality of novel-being."[31]

Potentiality is the very power source of Kafka's writing. In his second novel, *The Trial*, there is a moment early in the narrative, where Joseph K.—not quite the lonely

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[28] Krauss, 45.
[29] K. himself claims that in spite of the difficulties that followed from his peculiar mode of introduction to the Castle officials, at least "it spared K. a great many lies and deceptions" (Kafka, *Castle*, 166).
[30] Ronell, 189.
[31] *Ibid*., 190.

letter of *The Castle*—tries to interpret the strange predicament of his mysterious arrest. The narrative voice relays Joseph K.'s thoughts as he tries to chalk up the charade of his arrest to a silly joke: "*perhaps* because today was his thirtieth birthday, that was certainly possible, *perhaps* all he had to do was laugh in the guards' faces and they would laugh with him, *perhaps* they were porters off the street-corner, they looked a little like porters" (*Trial*, 6-my italics). Kafka writes from the place of the "perhaps," harnessing its indeterminacy, the way that it opens up interpretive possibilities without deciding anything either way. Along this register, we may approach the references to K.'s personal history not as lies or stratagems for infiltrating the Castle's powerful discursive field, but instead as *possibilities*, modes of existence that remain ambiguous and that hold K. open, leave him exposed, a non-self-enclosed character in an equally amorphous novelistic space. To suggest that the "perhaps" drives Kafka's work is to move away from any binary thinking of truth that is at odds with lying.[32] If the lie has no place in *The Castle*, it is not because K. is an ethical character, only able to speak honestly, but because any such oppositional schema has no place in Kafka's work. Instead, Kafka endorses a logic of co-contamination, more in line with the priest's analysis of the parable "Before the Law" in the novel *The Trial.* As the priest explains, "the correct understanding of a matter and misunderstanding the matter are not mutually exclusive" (Trial, 219).

For Kafka, it seems, knowledge is fundamentally coterminous with deception. In his 105th Zürau Aphorism, he asks explicitly: "Can you know anything that is not deception? Once deception was destroyed, you wouldn't be able to look, at the risk of turning into a pillar of salt." Sight itself is made possible only because deception is a

[32] We might here turn to Nietzsche on the relationship between truth and lies, whereby all "truths" are merely lies whose fictive origins we have simply forgotten. For Nietzsche, there is no underlying truth distinct from the lie. See Nietzsche: "On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense."

buffer, a kind of protective screen that shields the looker from the fate of Lot's wife. Appearance alone—perhaps the very "seeming" mentioned at the beginning of the novel in conjunction with the Castle's apparent "emptiness"— makes sight bearable. Nothing presents itself fully, but is rather revealed and concealed in the same instant. As it turns out, K.'s himself possesses a kind of gift for divination, that is the ability to see that which has not yet arrived—a future presence in the midst of absence. As K. sits in the schoolhouse talking with the fourth-grade child, Hans Brunswick, the conversation veers onto the topic of Han's mother, who may or may not stand in a position to help K. in his effort to access the Castle. When K. learns that Hans's mother is stricken with an unidentifiable illness, K.'s interior monologue follows thus:

> …in a case as badly neglected as this, even illnesses that are quite minor in and of themselves can become quite serious. Well, he, K., not only had some medical knowledge but also, and this was even more valuable, experience treating patients. There were cases where doctors had failed and he had succeeded. At home, on account of his healing powers, they always called him "the bitter herb." (*Trial*, 145)

Unlike the protagonist of *The Trial*, Joseph K., who "generally didn't make it a practice to learn from experience" (*Trial*, 7), which means that he "always tended to take things lightly, to believe the worst only when it arrived, making no provision for the future, even when things looked bad" (*Trial*, 6), K. purportedly has experience in abundance. Leaving aside the nagging question of what accumulated experience would even look like in a Kafka novel where all events seem radically unprecedented and unanticipated, what is made clear in this passage is that knowledge is surpassed by life. Knowledge may even act as a hindrance—*K. succeeds even where doctors fail*. A kind of visionary, K.'s value seems to rest in his predictive powers, that is, in his ability to discover in the seemingly

benign present, traces of a fatal future. He is ascribed a name—"the bitter herb"—because of his healing powers, which refer to nothing other than his ability to *read* the potentially "quite serious" future in what otherwise appears to be an innocuous present, "quite minor in and of [itself]."

This simultaneity of truth and deception, concealment and appearance runs throughout Kafka's works. Claims are put forth and retracted immediately, such that the reader ultimately cannot separate truth from lies. So, we encounter passages like the following: "But the most beautiful thing about my burrow is the stillness. Of course, that is deceptive (*trügerisch*). At any moment it may be shattered and then all will be over" (*Stories*, 327). The stillness is both there and not there. It does not signify what it seems to. Or rather, it is only a seeming stillness, one that harbors the potential chaos of destruction. The same kind of changeable and uncertain conditions of K.'s world are legible in his abridged moments of remembrance. His first sight of the Castle on the morning after his arrival provokes one such memory. Initially and from a distance, the Castle corresponds to his "expectations," which means primarily that it resists being catalogued positively, but rather in terms of what it is not: "neither an old knight's fortress nor a magnificent new edifice" (*Castle*, 8). And even when it is described according to its actual qualities—"a few two-story buildings and many lower, tightly packed ones"—it is immediately cast in light of its illusory nature: "had one not known that this was a castle, one could have taken it for a small town." With this qualifier, K.'s own past comes to the fore. The narrative voice explains: "Fleetingly K. recalled his old hometown, it was scarcely inferior to this so-called Castle." As the past rises up into the present of the text, the Castle becomes increasingly dubious. Its identity is destabilized by

the recollection of his hometown, "where he had not been in such a long time" (*Castle*, 8). His relationship to home is characterized by his absence.

As the comparison continues, the church steeple of his native land is described as both more earthly—"what else can we build?" asks the narrative voice rhetorically, slipping the Tower of Babel into the comparison—and with loftier heights than the tower now before him. As he moves on to describe this Castle tower, it becomes even more obscure. Not only is it "mercifully hidden by ivy," but madness and melancholy must be invoked to convey it: "there was something crazy about this," the narrative voice asserts, as it grasps around for the right description, "*as if* drawn by the anxious or careless hand of a child"…"*as if* some melancholy resident, who by rights ought to have kept himself locked up in the most out-of-the-way room in the house, had broken through the roof and stood up in order to show himself to the world" (*Castle*, 8-my italics). The "as if" of these sentences further dislodges the Castle from itself. Here, the "*trübseliger Hausbewohner*," this miserable, pathetic resident who should have remained hidden and withdrawn, reveals himself. In spite of this exhibitionism on the Castle's part, it will still remain tainted—as are all things in this novel—by the concealment appropriate to it. That is, everything that manifests is tied to the multiple ways in which it maintains its concealment.

LOSS'S RESIDUE, OR WHAT PERSISTS

If it is the case, as this chapter has thus far argued, that nothing is simply given in Kafka's works—that whatever manifests also remains hidden and, as Sander Gilman writes, "[e]very truth is carefully crafted as a lie; and every lie is calculated to be the

truth"[33]—then any thinking of plenitude that is tied to a notion of fullness or presence is misguided. Plenitude is subverted by characters who are unable to articulate it; by pasts that bear traces of their fallen futures; by the expansion of narrative possibilities that prevent us from reading the text without simultaneously holding its alternatives in mind. Nothing in Kafka's work is simply what it appears to be, but is always bound up with what it is not. As such, the concept of loss, which I argue is the very condition of Kafka's writing, must be reconsidered. Loss does not merely await Kafka's characters as some ominous end or finality, hovering "out there" somewhere like a door waiting to be closed once and for all. Instead, loss structures every moment as the "not" to which presence remains riveted. To say the "not" inhabits Kafka's writing is to claim that characters are always fractured, perpetually incomplete, that events cannot be cordoned off, that space and time assume a kind of malleability, expanding and contracting in unpredictable ways. Even in a story like "First Sorrow," which purports to capture the very moment that loss occurs, we find that loss always already inhered where we thought there was only prior fullness and presence.

If there is a "first sorrow" in this story, it is a retroactive one; or rather, sorrow assumes the form of the retrospective glance. A trapeze artist, who sequesters himself up on his trapeze, "at first only from a desire to perfect his skill, but later because custom was too strong for him" (*Stories*, 446), descends ever so reluctantly when the theater group moves on to the next town. During the journeys, the conciliatory manager tries to ease the pain of travel in every way possible, allowing the trapeze artist to nestle up in the luggage racks on trains and ensuring that, before the group's arrival in the next town, his trapeze is already strung up and awaiting his ascent. On one of these journeys in

[33] Gilman, 60.

particular, the trapeze artist suddenly insists that, rather than one trapeze only, he would need two, "opposite each other" (*Stories*, 448). Although the manager appeases him immediately, assuring that he would never again swing from just one, the trapeze artist nonetheless bursts into tears: "'Only the one bar in my hands—how can I go on living!" (*Stories*, 448). In spite of his vociferous reassurance, the manager can't help but wonder: "[o]nce such ideas began to torment him, would they ever quite leave him alone? Would they not rather increase in urgency? Would they not threaten his very existence?" (*Stories*, 448). This threat to his existence does *not* seem to lie with actions of the future—surely the trapeze artist would never feel only one bar in his hands again. Instead, those "first furrows of care engraving themselves upon the trapeze artist's smooth, childlike forehead" (*Stories*, 448) refer to the past. The very placidity of the past, the integrity of memory itself, is at risk. That is, the potential horror of the future—that there *would be* only one trapeze—is nothing compared to the real horror—that there *had been* only one trapeze. It is as though, once questions slip insidiously into the space where prior peace and comfort used to prevail, everything will be submitted to critical review and found to *have been lacking* where it had once seemed full.[34]

Loss anticipates its own arrival in Kafka's fiction, revealing signs that it had always been on the way, even when it seemed most remote. Accordingly, I insist on a thinking of loss that moves beyond a mere analysis of death in Kafka's writing. While many of his characters die, and we might feel inclined to read those bizarre deaths as loss

[34] For another reading of "First Sorrow," see Sussman (96), who claims that the trapeze artist strives to gain "release from the laws of gravity" and that his wish for two trapezes is the desire for "perpetual suspension of his suspension," the "desire to internalize the freedom exercised by the performance over the ground below into the performance itself, that is, for the esthetic enterprise to dramatize internally its separation from the world of everyday concern. The realization that the temporal and spatial limits governing the ground below still hold sway, that not even the Artist is free to swing from two trapezes at the same time, brings on his 'first sorrow,' whose signs are the lines inscribed into a forehead previously unmarked by concern." (97).

par excellence in his work, I resist that for two reasons. First, as this chapter has argued, loss shows itself to be much more complicated than any notion of death-as-mere-end. On the contrary, death haunts from the first word, and the impoverished world is an immutable shadow that cannot be severed from the images of bountiful existence. Second, because when death does occur in Kafka's writing, the loss that it marks is inextricably bound to something that persists. For example, when Gregor Samsa finally succumbs, his monstrous body swept out by the charwoman, the family goes for a stroll. Mr. and Mrs. Samsa look at their daughter—their only remaining child—and notice that, "in spite of all the sorrow of recent times, which had made her cheeks pale, she had bloomed into a pretty girl with a good figure" (*Stories*, 139). The story closes: "And it was like a confirmation of their new dreams and excellent intentions that at the end of their journey their daughter sprang to her feet first and stretched her young body" (*Stories*, 139). Gregor's death—his corpse "flat and dry" (*Stories*, 137).—is registered in the youthful and vibrant physicality of his sister. His death is a liberation, his corpse counterbalanced by his sister's body, which blossoms into life and sexuality, as "it would soon be time to find a good husband for her" (*Stories*, 139). The sense of erasure, of forgetting and moving on, is powerful here, but gets tied to something that remains. We sense this elsewhere in Kafka's work around the event of death.

At the end of "The Judgment," for example, Georg Bendemann runs from his father's home, flees toward the water, and leaps over the railing of the roadway that passes above. As he drops to his death, he says: "Dear parents, I have always loved you, all the same" (*Stories*, 88). The story, however, does not end with his final utterance, but rather with the narrative voice's proclamation: "At this moment an unending stream of

traffic was just going over the bridge" (*Stories*, 88). Death is muted by the hum of traffic, the bustle of daily life washing out the tragedy, swallowing it up with the persistence of quotidian matters. This is to say, loss not only haunts any sense of full presence *before* it occurs, as I have argued thus far, it remains connected to the world it leaves behind, even if that remainder takes the form of forgetting or erasure.[35] Georg Bendemann's last words are covered by the passing traffic, but also merge with it, are carried along by it to join the collective rumbling of urban life. Even the end of *The Trial*, where Joseph K. is executed—one pair of hands at his throat, another thrusting a knife into his chest and twisting it there twice—does not simply close with his death: "'Like a dog!' he said; *it seemed as though the shame was to outlive him"* (*Trial*, 231-my italics). The loss is not final, not complete, even if it is only survived by the tenacity of shame.

At times, Kafka manages the ambiguity of presence and absence, death and survival, loss and plenitude by literalizing the indeterminacy. In short pieces like "Prometheus" or "Abraham," Kafka holds the text open, not merely by inviting disparate interpretations on the part of the reader, but by proffering various scenarios without settling on one definitively. "Prometheus" rehearses four versions of the legend. The first relays the traditional story of the fallen figure whose liver is variously eaten by eagles and restored, such that punishment for "betraying the secrets of the gods to men" would carry on interminably. By the fourth and final version of the legend, a general weariness settles on the entire myth: "the gods grew weary, the eagles grew weary, the wound closed wearily" (*Stories*, 432). Each scenario is asserted and differs from the one prior.

[35] Stanley Corngold writes of the narrator as a kind of remainder in "The Judgment," claiming that this narrator, "who survives the execution he has arranged—survives specifically in identifying the joy and brute power of the *Verkehr*, the erotic upsurge and infinite traffic of the concluding sentence" (Corngold, *Necessity of Form*, 25).

None is determined to be the correct one; all are merely held out as narrative possibilities, so that the text must negotiate between the announcement of one legend and its displacement by the next, until it ends with nothing but "the inexplicable mass of rock" (*Stories*, 432). What the narrative offers with one hand, it takes away with the other.[36] This same formula is operative in "Abraham," where the narrative voice runs through varied descriptions of the holy man. It begins with the description of one Abraham, but quickly veers off: "I could conceive of another Abraham…" it reads. And then, immediately on its heels, "But take another Abraham…." The work brings so many divergent narrative possibilities to life, each complicating the image before, compounding and distorting the text.

Part of Kafka's resistance to determinacy—his refusal to close with interpretive possibilities—is also a rejection of consolation. What calls for consoling is precisely the loss of stable ground and the fullness of presence. Held-out, exposed, fractured, Kafka's works will not be taken in by the illusion and the hope for plenitude. As Avital Ronell writes, "Language, the text holds, is never a plenitude itself; it is in its very structure a formed incompleteness waiting for the other's—the interpreter's—participation."[37] Kafka's writing is commentary on this structural incompleteness, even while it evokes the reader's desire to close with meaning once and for all. This disavowal of a final and singular meaning produces its own symptomatic response. That is, indeterminacy for Kafka manifests as *weariness*, perhaps the very weariness named in the final version of the Prometheus legend. Fatigue abounds in Kafka's work. It is the atmosphere of his

[36] Sussman reads Prometheus as an arrival "at progressive thresholds of oblivion" (28). It is a process of continual revision through a logic of negation and supplanting until that logic is rendered absurd. It is an example of "the degeneration of literary logic into chaos" (29), which results in the takedown of "orderly conceptions of time and space" (29).
[37] Ronell, 189.

writing and the weight of his language. Weariness is the way in which an all-pervasive loss seeps into the texts, slowing them down and dragging them out. How is that fatigue related to questions of existence, writing, and creative possibility? For this, we must turn to the letters, diary entries and personal musings of the ever-exhausted author.

WEARINESS FOR THE LIVING

In clipped remembrances of childhood suffering, Franz Kafka writes a letter to his father, detailing the history of their humiliating and tumultuous relationship. He describes his gradual fear of speaking, of eating too slowly, of bringing friends home; his beleaguered hopes for escape—through writing, through marriage; and his own annihilated sense of being as he stands as a child in the bathing hut, exposing his own "skeletal" and fragile body before the robust frame of his father. In Kafka's characteristic way of emptying words of their conventional sense—such that we can no longer be sure what it means to be under arrest, to be summoned, or to be transformed—the accused of his letter, Hermann Kafka himself—is also absolved of guilt from the outset: "you are entirely blameless in the matter of our estrangement. But I am equally entirely blameless" (*Father*, 116). And with this addendum, the prosecuting son reveals that he, too, stands in need of defense, or perhaps that guilt has no place in this text, even as charges are leveled and evidence is mounted.

In the nearly 100 pages that comprise the letter, Kafka presents a consistent image of his father—unrelenting, arbitrary, and above the law that he nonetheless enforces in his home. All this with one exception: a small paragraph that the reader almost misses, even though it is heralded as an "exception," the most fleeting of moments, gestures so

subtle that they seem practically insignificant. Kafka evokes here a rare sense of tranquility. He writes: "For instance, in earlier years, in hot summers, when you were *tired* after lunch, I saw you having a *nap* at the office, your elbow on the desk; or you joined us in the country, in the summer holidays, on Sundays, *worn out* from work…" (*Father*, 131). In every sense, this is a time of exception—Sundays, holidays, hot summer vacations, in the countryside, away from the city of Prague. The body of his father, bent over his desk, out of place, a nap in the office, propped up by his elbow. But the overall sense of this recollection is languor and lethargy: all images of a man worn out by life. These scenes are so permeated by inaction, by exhaustion, as though Kafka could find intimacy with his father only in this reduced state. In a letter that otherwise details so much pain, that traverses old memories in order to reach the other who has rendered himself unreachable, that eternally absent addressee—as Hermann Kafka never does receive the letter—fatigue nonetheless endows the father with a different kind of existence. It is as though Kafka's own boundless fatigue finds community in the weariness of his father, a lapse in his usual way of being, where something becomes possible that was not before.[38] And Kafka writes: "At such times one would lie back and weep for happiness, and one weeps again now, writing it down" (*Father*, 131). Already these scenes of vulnerability elicit an ambiguous response, pain and pleasure cannot be easily discerned, but fold into each other, indistinguishable from the outside—to *weep for happiness*. Years later, the act of writing, of describing those same scenes, dislodges the past and brings it surging up into the present, as though writing did more than evoke the

[38] Compare this to DG's reading, whereby "[t]he question of the father isn't how to become free in relation to him (an Oedipal question) but how to find a path there where he didn't find any" (DG, 10). Similarly: "Gregor becomes a cockroach not to flee his father but rather to find an escape where his father didn't know to find one, in order to flee the director, the business, and the bureaucrats, to reach that region where the voice no longer does anything but hum…" (DG, 13).

past, but reproduced it—*one weeps again now writing it down.* And the force of this remembrance, brought on by writing, evacuates the subject, the I, Kafka himself, and lapses into the impersonal pronoun, "one."[39]

It is this fracturing of the subject, the way in which Kafka's pronouns are always extended out beyond themselves, exposed and at risk, that must be tracked in his references to fatigue. And fatigue inhabits his writing both explicitly and implicitly. Not only do his characters lumber about on the verge of collapse, burdened by an unremitting exhaustion that prevents them from harnessing their interpretive energies, his texts exude their own lassitude: sentences run on for lines, piling up conditional clauses; unimaginable spaces and strange temporalities confound logic and sense.[40] Kafka's fatigue, however, refers to more than the depletion of one's stamina, the expiration of one's effort, or the end of one's labor. In the atmosphere of his exhaustion, existence itself is at stake. In March 1914, he writes in his diary, "I am too tired, I must try to rest and sleep, otherwise I am lost in every respect. What an effort to keep alive! Erecting a monument does not require the expenditure of so much strength." The terror of fatigue—of the insomniac who fruitlessly labors in order to sleep—involves the most cataclysmic loss: "*I am lost in every respect*." The stakes of this pronouncement are difficult to discern: what would it mean to be lost in every respect? A "losing" of a different order, the threat here is not merely that some *thing* in the world will be taken from one—some entity heretofore possessed will be stripped away—but that the "I," itself, is at risk.

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[39] "Etwa wenn ich Dich früher in heißen Sommern mittags nach dem Essen im Geschäft müde ein wenig schlafen sah, den Ellbogen auf dem Pult, oder wenn Du sonntags abgehetzt zu uns in die Sommerfrische kamst…..Zu solchen Zeiten legte man sich in und weinte vor Glück und *weint jetzt wieder, während man es schreibt."*

[40] On the relationship between form and the exhaustion inherent in the text, see Sussman, who says that in Kafka's novels, metaphoric extension "is allowed full play, and the effect of the effort required is registered in such occurrences as the attacks of breathlessness, dizziness, and physical exhaustion experienced" by the characters (Sussman, 98).

This kind of existential fatigue is not of any measurable order. It cannot be traced back to some productive action, as though it were the *telos* of all work. The most demanding physical labor—erecting a monument—will still fall short of the effort needed to sleep. And the entire project of "keeping alive," as Kafka calls it, seems bound up with the trials of sleep and fatigue, as though he were not quite up to the task. We hear this same resonance in his 34th Zürau aphorism: "His exhaustion is that of the gladiator after the combat; his labor was the whitewashing of a corner of the wall in his office." Never without humor, Kafka calls our attention to the disproportion between cause and effect, between action and reaction. Fatigue is never mild, always hyperbolic and determined *not* by the activity that seems to produce it, but by something that remains excessive and indeterminate. Born of some unknown origin, the fatigue that weighs on Kafka's works—his fiction, his letters, and his diaries—evokes a sense of primordial debt, as though his writing could never extricate itself from the ever-accruing interest of exhaustion.[41] And when it seeps into his work, it has real materiality, blanketing everything. One recalls the image of K. in Kafka's last novel, *The Castle*, whose fatigue is bound up from the outset with the heavy snow that covers the village—drifts so deep that walking is laborious. The combination of K.'s fatigue and the homogenizing effect of the snow, which wipes out the distinguishing features of the town, reveals something about how exhaustion operates in Kafka's work. In the Zürau aphorism, for example, any substantive distinction between whitewashing a wall, on the one hand, and engaging in combat, on the other, is dissolved in the exhaustion that follows. It is as though the wrong

[41] The German word for debt, "Schuld," is also associated with the notion of guilt. For Heidegger, for example, existence is always indebted, as long as one exists, one is owing. The idea of interest accruing in the form of exhaustion creates the sense that one is simultaneously depleted and yet further bound. Existence appears as a kind of indentured servitude.

exhaustion simply got linked up with the wrong action, and now the whitewasher is strapped with the gladiator's fatigue. But in this mix-up, the resulting fatigue seems to have whitewashed any difference between those two activities, effacing any hierarchy of value that we might otherwise have imported into our reading.

If fatigue is not merely the anticipated end of physical or mental activity, if, as Kafka's diary entry seems to suggest, it is constitutive of living itself, then weariness is of existential consequence. In one of the most sustained phenomenological readings of fatigue and insomnia, Emmanuel Levinas describes the experience of exhaustion in terms of a hand letting slip what it nonetheless holds onto.[42] Fatigue *is this* slackening even as it remains riveted to something. It is a hesitation, or weariness, in the face of existence itself—the horror of having to live another day. With all the gravity of ontological foreboding, fatigue reveals to us something terrifying that rustles beneath existence. Contrary to what we may otherwise believe, Being is not—at least not for Levinas—something that one *has* simply by virtue of existing. Instead, existence is presented here as a kind of effort, an event constantly initiated and renewed at every instant. Unlike for Heidegger, whose existential analytic treats Being as always-already embodied—which is why there can be no analysis of discrete Being apart from the world, from others, from one's projects, one's moods, one's death—for Levinas, Being is something that is constantly "taken up."[43] An entity commits itself to life by taking up a position in the *anonymous and endless current of existence*, which he calls the *il y a*, or "there is."

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[42] Levinas, 18.

[43] The point here is not to pit Heidegger against Levinas, but to note that from their various positions, different ethical implications follow. On Heidegger's read, a being always has its being still to be; there is no sense of containment. Death is always outstanding (and in this way, he too will break from the sense of "having" that I want to move away from). From this it flows that the most angst-producing condition is the confrontation with one's *own* finitude. For Levinas, on the other hand, for whom Being is constantly taken up by a being, the other's death will take precedence over my own.

Essential here is the idea that Being is not something that we are merely given—it is not a possession, or something we "have"—but is something that is achieved and enacted. In moments of fatigue, then, when defenses are down, one catches sight of that "impersonal, anonymous, indistinguishable" Being, the "there is" of existence. About this endless and impersonal flow of existence, Levinas can say almost nothing, except that one recoils from it in horror. Fatigue is so powerful, so consuming, because in it, we find ourselves in the intractable position of *wanting* to renege on the contract we forge with existence, and the hopelessness of doing so. Levinas writes: "Weariness is the impossible refusal of this ultimate obligation. In weariness we want to escape existence itself, and not only one of its landscapes, in a longing for more beautiful skies. An evasion without an itinerary and without an end, it is not trying to come ashore somewhere…it is a matter of parting for the sake of parting."[44] In this final line, we may hear Kafka's own refrain at the end of his story, "The Departure." A first-person narrator orders his horses to be saddled, and when his servant asks where he is headed, the narrator can only stammer, repeatedly, "*weg-von-hier*, "out of here, out of here." The destination is merely the departure, escape without direction and without end.

If fatigue is the condition of being somehow out of joint with oneself, exposed to the unthinkable, ungraspable fact that "one is," that "there is," sleep, on the other hand, is palliative.[45] In sleep, one syncs back up with oneself and is restored; one re-masters

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[44] Levinas, 12.

[45] In assessing the patterns in Kafka's letters to Felice, Canetti writes: "Most of all he complains about sleeplessness. Perhaps sleeplessness is simply vigilance over the body and cannot be switched off, keeps detecting threats, waiting for signals, which it interprets and combines, inventing systems of countermeasures and working toward a point at which those systems are secured: the point at which the threats balance one another out, the point of rest. Sleep then becomes a real liberation—sleep, in which the insomniac's sensitivity, this unceasing torment, finally lets him go, and disappears. There is, in Kafka, a sort of sleep-worship; he regards sleep as a panacea. The best thing he can recommend to Felice whenever

Being. One is, as Levinas writes, "already a name in the anonymity of night."[46] What might we expect, then, of an author like Kafka who is so distrustful of the proper name, who writes in his diary two days after meeting Felice Bauer, "what embarrassment before writing down names" and resorts, in his usual way, to substituting her initials (*Diaries*, 206). Kafka belongs to the space of fatigue, and sleep—restorative and promising as it may be—often augurs trouble in Kafka's works. Sleeping is at odds with guarding. The prisoner in "The Penal Colony" is sentenced to death for having fallen asleep on the job. The mole-like narrator of "The Burrow" dreams of doubling himself, such that he might both sleep and guard himself sleeping.[47] A diary entry in 1910 reads: "'don't fall asleep!' 'I'm not falling asleep […] If I were to fall asleep, how could I guard you then?" (*Diaries*, 21).

THE CASTLE'S EXHAUSTED QUARTERS

As vigilant as one must remain against sleep, it operates in Kafka's texts as a kind of hope held out against the eroding force of an indeterminate loss, the all-pervasive lethargy that issues from nowhere in particular, but subsumes everything, determining even the cadence of the work itself. Sleep is the coveted end of all journeys, the desire to let down and close off. It is temptation and reprieve. In *The Castle*, a novel that moves according to the various sleep and insomniac patterns of its characters, K. lumbers about, always in search of, and ultimately denied, the sleep he needs. So profound is his

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her state of mind troubles him is 'Sleep!' 'Sleep!" Even the reader heeds this exhortation as a magical charm, a benediction" (Canetti, 27).

[46] Levinas, 55.

[47] The mole-like narrator of "The Burrow," who has left his burrow temporarily, but cannot help but keep watch over it compulsively from the outside, frames his situation in the following way: "it is as if I were not so much looking at my house as at myself sleeping, and had the joy of being in a profound slumber and simultaneously of keeping vigilant guard over myself" (Kafka, *Stories*, 334). The problem is how to sleep and keep guard over oneself sleeping.

exhaustion, another character, Frieda, cries out from the midst of her own dreams, "Let K. sleep! Don't disturb him!" (*Castle*, 123). This plea is projected out into the void of narrative space, a vague appeal made at once to everyone and no one—the Castle, the narrative voice, the reader. The request hovers over the novel, suggesting in its ambiguous way that sleep amounts to something compensatory, without revealing what it would deliver were it finally to arrive in a restorative way. Perhaps a moment of gathering, a breath, a triumph undoubtedly. The narrative voice assures us that it would be nothing short of a "victory" when it seems, deceivingly, of course, that K. might finally succumb to the seduction of sleep. Instead, K. persists by way of fatigue, which is figured as a kind of fate that moves the novel along without advancing toward a definitive end. From his very first night in the village inn, K.'s journey syncs up with the sleep and restlessness of other characters. We learn later in the novel that K. was admitted to the inn only because the landlady "was about to collapse that evening from exhaustion" (*Castle*, 48) and therefore left her more conciliatory husband in charge. Her fatigue absents her from the space that K. must inhabit, and only in this way is he able to achieve even one night in the village.

Further, we learn that Schwarzer, the individual who initially announces K.'s arrival to the Castle on that first night, was also under the influence of fatigue, exhausted by his girlfriend's ill-humor the previous day. That is, everything unfolds the way it does because of "a bad-tempered mood of Gisa's that day, owing to which Schwarzer couldn't sleep and roamed about at night before finally taking out his woes on K." (*Castle*, 165). When he learns of this, K. allows himself to indulge in the pleasure of hypothetical imagining. He thinks to himself:

> Had it only been one night later, everything would have happened differently, smoothly, virtually out of sight. In any case, nobody would have known about him and they wouldn't have become suspicious or hesitated before letting him spend a day here as a journeyman, they would have noticed his usefulness and reliability, the news about him would have spread throughout the neighborhood, and he would probably have found a place somewhere as a farmhand. (*Castle*, 165)

K. spins out an alternate history whose trajectory would have been ensured, had it only issued from a different point of origin. That is, had the particular constellation of circumstances that initiated K. to the Castle village not been what they were—had the exhaustion of other characters not determined K.'s very existence from the outset—everything would have been otherwise: K. would not have been a Landsurveyor at all, but a perfectly useful farmhand. And instead of the conspicuous and public nature of his confrontation with the Castle, K. would have traveled along the channels of rumor, hearsay of a reliable and hardworking visitor, shielded by the armor of a good reputation.

In a novel so insistent on its own hypnagogic underpinnings, it is not surprising that the climactic moment of *The Castle* is a scene that turns on the tension between sleep and wakefulness, guarding and succumbing. At the height of his weariness, K. stumbles into the sleeping quarters of a Castle secretary named Bürgel. K. is merely looking for an empty bed in which to rest for a few hours, and so it is fatigue, once again, that facilitates the encounters of the novel. Bürgel himself acknowledges the generating power of fatigue, but here invests it with nearly cosmic power. He speaks of K. in the third person, even though K. sits at the edge of Bürgel's bed, lapsing in and out of sleep:

> After all, he barely notices anything on his own. To his mind, it was probably only for indifferent, accidental reasons—exhaustion, disappointment, inconsiderateness, and indifference—that he had out of exhaustion and disappointment penetrated into a room that was not the one he wanted, and sits there in complete ignorance, preoccupied with thoughts—if preoccupied with anything whatsoever—of his error or of his weariness. (*Castle*, 270)

If exhaustion motors this novel, it is far from "indifferent" or "accidental," as K. may mistakenly believe to be the case. According to Bürgel, it is not mere coincidence that K. opens the wrong door to the wrong secretary and suddenly finds himself in the most promising scenario of the novel. As Bürgel narrates the unprecedented circumstances of their encounter, the reader is seduced into believing that everything now hinges on whether K., delivered to this most-unexpected meeting by virtue of his own fatigue, can rise up out of that fatigue and name his request. But were he able to stave off the sleep that finally seems prepared to arrive at the most inopportune moment, what would he name, what plea would he make? It is not simply that K. desires access to the Castle, the unreachable entity that regulates the very conditions of his existence. It is, rather, an internal undividedness, proof of his own existence that K. would have to name.

The entire novel is a meditation on the status of the individual, which it depicts as the most precarious, least stable thing in the world. From the outset, characters are unable to persist in their own separateness. In a flippant gesture, K. effaces the singularity of his two distinct assistants by collapsing them into one. In an almost violent act of reduction, K. says, "I shall call you both Artur. When I send Artur somewhere, both of you must go, when I give Artur a task, both of you must do it […] How you divide up the work is immaterial to me so long as you do not try to excuse yourselves by blaming each other, I consider you one person" (*Castle*, 19). Further, when he first receives a letter sent by the Castle official, Klamm, K. is unable to read Klamm's signature, the mark whose illegibility destabilizes the illusion of the past presence of the signatory. Its indecipherability is echoed much later when we learn that Barnabas, Klamm's

messenger, cannot be sure "that the official identified there as Klamm really is Klamm" (*Castle*, 175).

K. finds himself in a novel where reference is unstable, where each character is elusive. But in K.'s case, the stakes seem higher, not only because the Castle both asserts and denies his position as Landsurveyor, but because K. himself is unsure of his own existence. When he meets Frieda, he is captivated by her gaze because it seems to have "already decided matters concerning him, whose existence he himself still knew nothing about, but of whose existence that gaze now convinced him" (*Castle*, 36). He must find evidence of his own existence through others, through their bodies and their language. Later in the novel, he interrupts another character's tragic narrative with banal commentary only because "[t]he world unfolding to him in Olga's story was so large, almost unbelievably so, that he couldn't refrain from touching it with his meager experience in order to persuade himself more clearly of its existence a*s well as of his own"* (*Castle*, 217-my italics). By inserting himself into the rhetorical space of Olga's narrative, by trespassing the boundaries of the Castle village—entering its stories and falling under its gaze—K. hopes to assure himself of his own existence. But none of these efforts deliver him finally to the place of security. This is why the scene with Bürgel is so heavily charged. It seems that finally K. is able to request official recognition once and for all, that he might finally achieve the conviction of his existence by virtue of the Castle's incontrovertible word. But just as quickly as fatigue opens certain possibilities, it forecloses them. K. cannot rouse himself. He cannot get his act together, and instead, slips into a state that is beyond fatigue: "K. slept, but it wasn't really sleep, he was still hearing what Bürgel was saying, perhaps better than earlier when he was still awake

though dead tired" (*Castle*, 264). In this catachrestic sleep that isn't sleep, K. becomes more attuned. He loses his opportunity to make a request of the only Castle secretary thus far who seems interested in helping. Instead of making his plea, K. has a dream in which he is engaged in a duel with a Castle secretary, who stands naked and exposed. K. advances with skill until the battle is won, and the secretary, "very like the statue of a Greek god" squeals like a little girl (*Castle*, 265).

Examining this scene in the novel, Karoline Krauss claims that everything changes from this moment forward for K. Because he is able to fall asleep, anchor down and settle into himself through a restorative act, K. is ultimately able to find meaning for his existence within the Castle world, which continually subverts it. Krauss writes:

> [T]he act of falling asleep allows K. the experience of internal undividedness, of being at one with himself in his present need. On first glance, the banality of this 'victory' seems inappropriate to the significance which K. previously attributed to his fight. At this point in the narrative, however, the fight has already lost significance for K., as is obvious in his complete indifference towards Bürgel.[48]

As if she were in dialogue with Levinas, Krauss reads K.'s sleep as a triumph: "After experiencing the limits of his subjectivity, K. enters a kind of womb-like state in which he is completely self-contained and utterly non-self-conscious."[49] In other words, Krauss claims that after this scene with Bürgel, K. comes to relinquish the struggle that has thus far structured his relationship to the Castle. He no longer feels bound to the imperative of understanding, freely claiming his non-knowledge: "*Ich weiß nicht*." Although it is far from clear what complete "self-containment" would look like in a Kafka novel, as every character is inextricably bound up with forces and entities beyond his control, Krauss is right to pick up on the importance of K.'s dream in this scene. While she argues that the

[48] Krauss, 61.
[49] *Ibid*., 63.

dream inaugurates a shift in K., who subsequently realizes that the Castle's discourse does not *reveal* an underlying objective reality but *produces* it,[50] I want to move away from the critical debates that focus on whether K. did or did not undergo a significant transformation by novel's end. Instead of assessing the degree of existential fulfillment that results from the dream, I want to linger for a moment on the mere fact that it is a dream that occupies the center of this climactic chapter. When we expand our discussion of sleep and guarding to include the concept of the dream, it seems we are already speaking the language of Sigmund Freud.

GUARDIANSHIP AND THE DELIVERANCE OF SLEEP

In the *Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud elaborates his theory of dreamwork, the constraints under which dreams are formed, and the psychoanalytic approaches to dream interpretation. On its most manifest level, the text reveals a narrative in which highly-charged unconscious wishes, which are met with resistance in waking life, are fulfilled through dreams, even when those dreams appear to be displeasing and disturbing. At night when those same resistances are down, these unconscious wishes pick up neutrally-charged residue from the previous day, material innocuous enough to evade the censoring agent at the frontier between the preconscious and the unconscious.[51] This neutral residue from the previous day serves as a front for the objectionable unconscious wishes and enables them to manifest in the form of a dream. Successful interpretation, then, depends

[50] *Ibid*., 82.
[51] "We will describe the last of the systems at the motor end as 'the preconscious,' to indicate that the excitatory processes occurring in it can enter consciousness without further impediment provide that certain other conditions are fulfilled" (Freud, 579); "We will describe the system that lies behind it as 'the unconscious,' because it has no access to consciousness *except via the preconscious*, in passing through which its excitatory process is obliged to submit to modifications" (Freud, 580).

upon the associations that the dreamer is able to derive from the manifest dream content in an effort to reveal the latent, or underlying, dream thoughts, those disguised unconscious wishes. While the text systematically covers the various operations of the dreamwork, it, too, harbors an underlying narrative, one that tracks the exploits and limitations of the psyche's "watchmen," the guardians and defenders of the psychic apparatus.

The concept of the "watchman" is first introduced in the *Interpretation of Dreams* through a reference to Friedrich Schiller. In a passage that links dream interpretation to poetic creation, Freud selects the following excerpt from one of Schiller's letters:

> It seems a bad thing and detrimental to the creative work of the mind if Reason makes too close an examination of the ideas as they come pouring in—at the very gateway as it were. […] On the other hand, where there is a creative mind, Reason—so it seems to me—relaxes its watch upon the gates, and the ideas rush in pell-mell, and only then does it look through them and examine them in a mass.[52]

In Schiller's architectural analogy, the mind assumes a spatial dimension, an enclosed and cordoned off structure where "Reason," the critical watchman, stands at the entrance gates. The mind, it seems, is in need of protection, unable to discriminate or limit the influx of ideas. But it is as though Reason has no inner equilibrating mechanism. Its vigilant presence at the gates is always already too much—too cautious, too circumspect—to allow for unhampered creative production. It must abandon its post somewhat, fall back in its alertness, if poetic creation is to be possible. Creativity is risk; there must be an inherent danger—an abandoned post at the gateway of the mind—in any poetic act. Freud borrows this analogy from Schiller in order to describe the necessary surrender of critical judgment when attempting dream interpretation. Because it is crucial

[52] Schiller quoted in Freud, 135.

to the process of interpretation that the dreamer follow whatever free associations emerge from each segment of the dream as if they were clues to uncovering its hidden meaning, any violent resistance that might otherwise issue from the censoring agency of the psyche must be persuaded to relax its watch upon the gates. Involuntary thoughts guide the interpretive process.

We hear nothing further about the critical watchman until the final chapter of the book, more than four hundred pages later. In a rare move, Freud opens the final chapter with reference to an *anonymous* dream, one that consequently cannot be fully interpreted, as the dreamer's free associations are unavailable for analysis. Nonetheless, Freud provides not only an initial interpretation of this anonymous dream, but returns later to provide a second interpretation, one which complicates the argument that the book has thus far presented. The so-called dream of the "Burning Child" is relayed to Freud by a female patient who overheard it during a lecture and proceeded to re-dream it herself, as if the dream harbored a kind of contagion, or rather spread like rumor, passed along from one dreamer to the next. As a result of this now-shared dream, the very stakes of Freud's book change, sending the reader back to the beginning to reassess the purported function of dreams, specifically, that they are the fulfillments of unconscious wishes, as it is laid out in the first six chapters. The background of the "Burning Child" dream follows thus: a man, who had been watching over his child's sick bed for days, finally lies down to rest after the child passes away. He leaves the child's body in the care of an old man, who is entrusted to sit beside the corpse and recite prayers. When the father finally falls asleep, he dreams that "*his child was standing beside his bed, caught him by the arm and*

whispered to him reproachfully: 'Father, don't you see I'm burning?'"[53] The father then wakes up to find that "the old watchman" had also fallen asleep, and during his slumber the child's body had been burned by a fallen candle. Initially, the explanation behind the dream appears straightforward enough to Freud: "the glare of light shone through the open door into the sleeping man's eyes and led him to the conclusion which he would have arrived at if he had been awake,"[54] namely that his child's body was actually burning. While this provides an *explanation* for the dream, it remains to be *interpreted*, and in the service of interpretation, Freud is compelled to ask why the man would produce a dream under such dire circumstances. Why undergo the labor of a dream when immediate action was required? Here, Freud ventures the first interpretation: by dreaming rather than springing to action, the father is able to see his child once again in the full bloom of life. Freud adds, "For the sake of the fulfillment of this wish the father prolonged his sleep by one moment."[55] That is, sleep is none other than the conduit to the fulfillment of this wish. The father's goal is to dream his child back to life, and sleep provides the necessary condition for this possibility. One sleeps in order to dream.

This is in keeping with everything the book has thus far asserted. That is, something about the state of sleep allows unconscious wishes to assume the form of dreams, whereas they are denied this expression during waking life. It appears that the uniquely enabling relationship between sleep and dreams has everything to do with *guarding*. Freud writes: "*the state of sleep makes the formation of dreams possible because it reduces the power of the endopsychic censorship.*"[56] The censoring agent,

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[53] Freud, 547-8.
[54] *Ibid*., 548.
[55] *Ibid*., 548.
[56] *Ibid*., 565.

which normally protects the psyche from offensive and intolerable wishes and impulses, is diminished during sleep. Its power to block or deflect the material of the unconscious is weakened, although not entirely destroyed. As Freud clarifies, "during the night the resistance loses some of its power, though we know it does not lose the whole of it, since we have shown the part it plays in the formation of dreams as a distorting agent."[57] That is, the form that the dream takes is determined by the evasions and constraints under which the unconscious wishes must operate in order to elude that resistance. In some ways, the very centrality of dreams to the project of psychoanalysis has to do precisely with the way in which dreams expose that censoring agent, who ensures the normal functioning of the psyche. Freud writes:

> Thus the censorship between the Ucs. (unconscious) and the Pcs. (preconscious), the assumption of whose existence is positively forced upon us by dreams, deserves to be recognized and respected as the watchman of our mental health. Must we not regard it, however, as an act of carelessness on the part of that watchman that it relaxes its activities during the night, allows the suppressed impulses in the Ucs. to find expression, and makes it possible for hallucinatory regression to occur once more? I think not. For even though this critical watchman goes to rest—and we have proof that its slumbers are not deep—it also shuts the door upon the power of movement. […] The state of sleep guarantees the security of the citadel that must be guarded.[58]

Freud's language here stresses the urgency of protection; words like "watchman," "guard," "security," reveal that the psyche is always exposed to danger from within. The unconscious threatens to destabilize any "citadel" that does not have its sentry in place; and the watchman must be trained on the very psyche that it protects, guarded against the unconscious as if it were a traitor at the very center of the organism it defended. The only

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[57] *Ibid*., 564.
[58] *Ibid*., 606-7.

real security that sleep ensures, once the "critical watchman" has retired, is to deny the body any power to act.

As if the climactic scene of *The Castle* were a depiction of this relationship between sleep and dreams, Bürgel's own speech sounds like a description of the censoring agent, the "watchman" of the psyche, whose guard is momentarily down. While K. passes in and out of sleep, Bürgel narrates the unprecedented circumstances of their encounter. He explains:

> At night, it is difficult or downright impossible to preserve the official character of the proceedings in full. […] [T]he capacity for making official judgments does suffer at night. At night one involuntarily inclines to judge matters from a more private point of view, the presentations of the parties are given more weight than should be the case, entirely irrelevant considerations about the parties' circumstances in other respects, their sorrows and their fears, interfere with the judgment, the necessary barrier between parties and officials, even if outwardly in tact, begins to crumble. (*Castle*, 262)

It is the notion of being "caught off guard," when the severity of "official" logic is temporarily suspended and the system inclines toward greater leniency, that something otherwise verboten comes to pass. In fact, Bürgel likens K. to "a strange, precisely shaped, small, clever little grain," as only such an evasive little thing could "slip through that incomparable sieve" of the system.[59] It is the Castle's "sleep," not K.'s, that interests us here. And if the Castle resembles the psyche under the conditions of sleep, with its diminished powers of guardianship, K. appears as a mark of the unconscious, an objectionable wish that emerges from deep within, both a part of the system and external to it. In this moment of tension, everything hinges on whether K. can articulate his plea or whether the Castle will keep him in check. Should he make his request, Bürgel assures him, it would perforce be granted, "as soon as it [were] uttered, even if it should, at any

[59] *Ibid*., 268.

rate insofar as one can perceive this oneself, literally tear apart the official system."[60] Of course, this "official system" always recalibrates once the night has given way to the daytime, as Bürgel explains, "a control agency will correct these errors, but this will only be for the sake of justice, since it is no longer possible to do that particular party any harm."[61] Once an objectionable wish is given form, it leaves behind an indelible trace.

If this scene in *The Castle* seems to take a page from Freud's study of the psyche, the *Interpretation of Dreams* aspires to the bizarre convolutions of a Kafka novel. Until the final chapter, guardianship seems to reside on the frontier between the unconscious and the preconscious—a buffer zone of selective permeability. Through a combination of relaxed vigilance at this border-crossing and the elaborate disguises that its objectionable wishes don, the unconscious is able to manifest in dreams. But suddenly, around the dream of the "Burning Child," the story of the psyche's watchman undergoes a new twist. As it turns out, this anonymous dream, which Freud first told us could not be interpreted, then claimed to be the father's wish to see his dead child alive once again, appears now to have harbored another wish, a second wish always already alongside the unconscious one at the navel of the dream. Freud writes: "But we may assume that a further motive force in the production of the dream was the father's need to sleep; his sleep, like the child's life, was prolonged by one moment by the dream."[62] With this seemingly innocuous claim, Freud's entire narrative about the function of dreams shifts. Now, it is not simply

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[60] *Ibid*., 269.
[61] *Ibid*., 263. Also, on this topic of compensation, consider the following passage about the system's ability to right itself in *The Trial*: "Try to realize that this vast judicial organism remains, so to speak, in a state of eternal equilibrium, and that if you change something on your own where you are, you can cut the ground out from under your own feet and fall, while the vast organism easily compensates for the minor disturbance at some other spot—after all, everything is interconnected—and remains unchanged, if not, which is likely, even more resolute, more vigilant, more severe, more malicious" (Kafka, *Trial*, 119-120). Perhaps this notion of self-regulating compensation is the very thing that the organization holds over the individual.
[62] Freud, 610.

the case that sleep promotes the formation of dreams, but that dreams turn out to be the real guardians after all: "There can be no doubt that it is [the day's residues] that are the true disturbers of sleep and not dreams, *which, on the contrary are concerned to guard it.*"[63] The logic is complicated here. Sleep provides the necessary conditions for the formation of dreams, but dreams are also tasked with protecting sleep. Why it is that sleep is in need of protection, Freud never directly addresses. But there seems to be something about sleep—something that Kafka goes in search of, something that Freud says needs to be guarded—that remains highly coveted. Quoting an earlier researcher of dreams, Freud writes, "'When asleep we go back to the *old ways* of looking at things and of feeling about them, to impulses and activities which *long ago* dominated us.'"[64] Sleep is valued here, not simply because it recharges, or resets, the organism, but because it is able to animate something primitive within. Severed from the constraints of the present, sleep effects a kind of temporal suspension, inserting into the time of the present something that belongs to the past. We return to the "old ways," an earlier, more primal mode of being. Sleep, then, shares its temporal strangeness with the very structure of the unconscious, whose processes "are indestructible. In the unconscious nothing can be brought to an end, nothing is past or forgotten."[65] That is, in the unconscious, time does not move according to measurable units; it is not calculable or susceptible to deterioration, but rather spared from the ravages of aging, immune from the threat of death. Sleep makes it possible for this exiled time of the unconscious to manifest in dreams, as sleep itself is a condition of being out of joint with time. Like for Levinas, for Freud sleep is a hiatus, although in this case, it provides momentary exemption, not

[63] *Ibid*., 603-my italics.
[64] Sully quoted in Freud, 630-my italics.
[65] Freud, 617.

through the act of hypostasis, but through the restoration of bygone time as respite from present.

If this respite is what Kafka pursues—if this is the desired end of his writing—it is also forever barred. Kafka's final novel does not end with sleep, not K.'s and not the Castle's. Instead, it ends with fire, as if maintaining the dialogue with Freud's "Burning Child." *The Castle* abandons the reader in an alcove, mid-sentence, with an image that unites burning and literature, reminding us that whatever restoration sleep would bring, it will always remain for Kafka in tension with writing itself. The novel's final, truncated paragraph reads:

> The room in Gerstäcker's cottage was only dimly illuminated by the fire in the hearth and by a candle stump in the light of which someone deep inside an alcove sat bent under the crooked protruding beams, reading a book. It was Gerstäcker's mother. She held out her trembling hand to K. and had him sit down beside her, she spoke with great difficulty, it was difficult to understand her, but what she said (*Castle*, 316)

The Castle ends on the figure of the maternal, bent, not over a child's sick bed, but over a book. She looks up from it, as if inspired by her reading to provide the final word, an utterance charged with the promise of closure. But as it is an utterance withheld, a "difficult" utterance that remains perpetually forthcoming without any hope for arrival, it persists, like the timelessness of the unconscious, suspended, never advancing to the conclusive word. Because the novel ends in the middle of a sentence, leaving off precisely at "what she said…," the reader cannot help but invest the non-utterance with transformative force. We, along with K., still await Gerstäcker's mother's words, and the novel closes on this unspoken sentence, united in this final image to the writing on her lap, a book that bears its mute secrets.

"Nothing But Literature"

If sleep is Kafka's coveted condition, it is writing that prohibits its arrival. That is, writing will be made to do the work that sleep cannot do for Kafka. In a haze of exhaustion his texts unfold, bearing their bleak apocalyptic predictions and promises. Fatigue will come to mark a constitutive loss, loss with no fulfillment and no prior plenitude, a loss without the possibility of recuperation. Fatigue becomes the sign of vigilance. But against what must Kafka remain vigilant? Against what must he keep watch? In the spirit of any provocative Kafkan tautology, it is sleep itself that must be guarded against, as it threatens to rob the author of his only means of escape, even if escape never delivers him from captivity. Escape always and only appears as the promise held out by writing. And because writing bids against sleep in Kafka's economy of reprieve—because all writing must take place late in the night, after he returns from his job at the Workers' Accident Insurance Institute, and after his family has gone to bed—writing must be done under the sign of fatigue. As desperately as he desires sleep, it must be sacrificed for the written word. In a letter to Max Brod, he claims: "Writing is a sweet and wonderful reward, but for what? In the night it became clear to me, as clear as a child's lesson book, that it is the reward for serving the devil. […] Perhaps there are other forms of writing, but I know only this kind; at night, when fear keeps me from sleeping, I know only this kind" (*Letter to Friends*, 333). With the lucidity of a schoolchild who lights upon a plain and incontrovertible axiom, Kafka gauges the measure of his servitude. Writing is the devil's to bestow. Punishment and reward, it is carried out in

fear, in the night, and with the sweetness and temptation of something longed for and never entirely possessed.

In this space of desire—desire for the written word, desire to be shored up by language, to be written into the secure space of being—Kafka knows only urgency. Echoing his earlier lament for the sleep that is perpetually denied him, he bemoans the often-barred harbor of work. He writes: "If I can't take refuge in some work, I am lost" (*Diaries*, 295). Always on the verge of total collapse, Kafka appears in the full precariousness of a fractured subject who ventures from the ledge to minimal safety and back to the ledge again. We hear in his plea for work the same concern over the "I," which is threatened at all times by an unnamed loss whose destruction will surely be totalizing. And this threat of indeterminate, yet all-encompassing loss is the very condition of Kafka's existence. He rises up and falls back into it, finding temporary hiatus before succumbing again. Everything for Kafka will issue out of this potentially pervasive loss. We hear evidence of it in the letter to his father when he writes: "But since there was nothing at all that I was certain of, since I needed to be provided at every instant with a new confirmation of my existence, since nothing was in my very own, undoubted, sole possession, determined unequivocally only by me—in sober truth a disinherited son—naturally I became unsure even to the thing nearest to me, my own body" (*Father*, 152). In some ways, this letter is nothing other than an effort to trace the origin of this conditioning loss, to follow the thread back to some explicable instant, or accumulation of instants, before which he might have *still* felt the conviction of existence, that is, before the very thing got derailed. But search as he may, maneuvering from one condemnatory anecdote to another, guilt refuses to be localized precisely

because loss is the very atmosphere through which he wades. It is the air he breathes, indistinguishable from life itself. Most importantly, it is the only condition of possibility for his writing. Plagued by a kind of existential hypochondria—*"unsure even to the thing nearest to me, my own body"*—Kafka's writing must shoulder the weight of this tremendous doubt. And writing itself will offer a different mode of existence, one that is proper to *"a disinherited son,"* for whom *"nothing was in [his] very own, undoubted sole possession."*

In his 46th Zürau Aphorism, Kafka makes the following observation: "The German word *sein* signifies both 'to be there' and 'to belong to him.'" He does not elucidate further, only notes the affiliation between the verb "to be" and the possessive adjective, "his." Citing this aphorism in his critical study on Kafka, Günther Anders finds a connection between the author's existential crisis and his fundamental alienation from the world. Anders writes: "The self which Kafka finds turns out to be an 'alien' self, a stranger with no *raison d'etre* in this world and therefore no being. […] He who 'belongs' can say 'ergo sum.' Existence is 'belonging'—a man 'is not' until he does 'belong.'"[66] On this reading, Kafka embodies the condition of the always-already exiled—the one who has no sense of home, no sense of belonging to a community, and no nostalgia for a past where this was once granted. He belongs only to the no-place of exile and is, therefore, denied the ability to say *"ich bin,"* "I am." That is, for Anders, Kafka's aphorism exposes the link between being and belonging, revealing that, one either lives within the fold and from this enclosure, can claim his existence, or he lives outside it and cannot. If, however, we are to read in this aphorism a slightly different emphasis, such that the implicit connection in the word "sein" is not simply between

[66] Anders, 20.

being and *belonging*, but being and *having*—that is, with the full sense of possession implied by a possessive adjective—then Kafka's failure to utter "ergo sum" has to do with his failure to *have*, to *possess*, in the conventional sense. And we note this when he writes: "Miserliness is, after all, one of the most reliable signs of profound unhappiness; I was so unsure of everything that, in fact, I possessed only what I actually had in my hands or in my mouth or what was at least on the way there" (*Father*, 140). One must hoard everything when one can claim nothing as properly one's own. If successful "being" involves successful "having," then Kafka's dispossession of the world is an existential disorder.

Unable to seal himself off, to find the self-enclosed and self-sustaining ground, the "ergo sum" of subjectivity, Kafka exists in the mode of rupture, extended out and beyond himself. As quoted in the beginning of this chapter, in a letter to Felice Bauer's father, which Kafka copies into his diary in August 1913, he writes: "I am nothing but literature and can and want to be nothing else" (*Diaries*, 230). [*Da ich nichts anderes bin als Literatur und nichts anderes sein kann ich will.]* In the letter, he explains why marriage will never rescue him from the temperament of the recluse, one who wants to close himself off within the sphere of language, as if he could only exist via the written-word alone. All things connected with vibrant human life—and he details them specifically: "the joys of sex, eating, drinking, philosophical reflection, and above all music"—in all of these capacities, Kafka "atrophies." To exist as literature—to forego the authority of self-possession—is to relinquish any pretense of certainty, mastery and enclosure. Rather than securing a safe place for the "I," literature further impoverishes it. "Self-forgetfulness is the writer's first pre-requisite," says Kafka in a letter to Max Brod

(*Letters to Friends*, 334).[67] Emptied out, absent to himself, the writer does not gain firm footing through the act of writing. It shatters him rather, tearing him from himself, delivering him—if deliverance is possible—to oblivion, where language leaves the writing subject behind. And if any notion of salvation is appropriate to Kafka, it can only be the salvation of oblivion, a temporary reprieve whereby the subject is not secured, but forgotten, left behind, if only so long as he writes. This self-forgetting is very different from the tentative, "disinherited son" who "needed to be provided at every instant with a new confirmation of [his] existence." For the latter, subjectivity is a burden, oppressive in its precariousness and insecurity. The writer, in the moment of writing, on the other hand, is able to unload the ponderousness of the "I," escape from its relentless demands. It is largely for this reason—the urgency of safeguarding those brief moments of respite through writing—that Kafka believes he cannot marry. He explains it thus: "in my writing, and in everything connected with it, I have made attempts at independence, attempts at escape, with the very smallest of success; they will scarcely lead any farther; much confirms this for me. Nevertheless, it is my duty, or rather, the essence of my life, to watch over them, to let no danger that I can avert, indeed, no possibility of such a danger, approach them" (*Father*, 164).

All effort must be secured for writing and the task of protecting it. Only in these moments of writing, when he has already left himself behind, when, evacuated as he is, he can never be sure what has transpired, only then does Kafka seem to exist. It is as though, in his rejection of that other form of being—connected as it is with appropriative

[67] According to Blanchot, this is the one thing that writing cannot do. The act of writing is the erasure of the world, and the "I" along with it. He writes, "The work requires of the writer that he lose everything he might construe as his own 'nature,' that he lose all character and that ceasing to be linked to others and to himself by the decision which makes him an 'I,' he becomes the place where the impersonal affirmation emerges." (Blanchot, SOL, 55).

and possessive modes of existence—Kafka manages to transcend the very death that awaits him. As literature, he is extension without end. To exist only as literature is to forget the self, to dissolve it. What would death mean to literature, to a being that was only literature and nothing else? It would be as though, in these moments of writing, fleeting as they were, Kafka simply left behind the limited world of cares and concerns, earthly demands like marriage, family and work, for the space of language. How, then, do we read his final deathbed request to Max Brod, that he burn all the unpublished manuscripts unread, that he commit the entirety of Kafka's writing to a giant conflagration—that strange request that his critics never tire of pondering. Perhaps Kafka was trying to will some finality after all, to re-finitize his existence, to return to the limit that being-as-literature seemed to surpass. Brod's defiance means that Kafka's work comes to us in the form of survival, marked always by the fate it managed to escape, tied to the loss of which it was born and that remains present to it in the haunting request of its creator.

CHAPTER IV

Imperatives of Elegy: The Constitutive Losses of Virginia Woolf

BOUNDARIES TRANSGRESSED

When Virginia Woolf claims that her writing can no longer labor under the sign of the novel but, instead, will have to adopt the new name, "elegy," she invests her prose with the poetic task of lamenting the dead. This shift to the mournful utterance of elegy also means that Woolf's writing will have to deal in some way with questions about the meaning and the weight of loss. In her diary entry of June 27, 1925, Woolf writes: "while I try to write, I am making up 'To the Lighthouse'—the sea is to be heard all through it. I have an idea that I will invent a new name for my books to supplant 'novel.' A new --by Virginia Woolf. But what? Elegy?" The process of "making up" *To the Lighthouse* seems to trigger something, to render the old unsuitable, to place a demand for the new. And this need for the "new"—a *new* way to identify her literary pursuits that breaks with the more traditional notion of the "novel"— does not instantaneously produce a successor. Woolf will settle almost immediately on the name "elegy," but before doing so, she lingers for a moment, hovering around a blank space. This silence, this momentary pause, will remain connected to the new name as something that resists any definitive surrender to another all-encompassing category. Even the tone in which Woolf presents it reveals her to be an experimenter, someone who plays with words, rather than pins them down. If there is any "supplanting" of the old "novel" by the new "elegy," it remains in the form of a question: "But what? Elegy?" We cannot even be sure that we know what elegy means anymore. After all, this substitution is not simply about appending a new name,

but *inventing* one. There is something *new* within this new name, even as it remains connected to all of its former associations with musicality and meter, lamentation, and the dead. The task of this chapter will be to survey the terrain of *To the Lighthouse*, in an effort to discern this link between Woolf's literary language and the underlying sense of loss that elegy presupposes.

Critics have attempted to trace Woolf's call for elegy back to the various losses that she sustained during her lifetime. Everything from the most personal (the deaths of her parents and her siblings) to the more general (the fallout of the First World War and the erosion of the old Victorian way of life) has been held responsible for this identification with elegy.[1] While it would be equally unreasonable to assume that these losses did not somehow inform Woolf's claim, it is unproductive to treat them as its unequivocal source, as if the turn to "elegy" were a symptom of a single, painful event in the world. In some ways, Woolf herself enables this psychologizing approach, by making claims that suggest an incontrovertible link between her fiction and her life. Thus, when she says, "I did for myself what psycho-analysts do for their patients. I expressed some very long felt and deeply felt emotion. And in expressing it I explained it and then laid it to rest" (Sketch, 81), Woolf sets readers loose upon her work searching for evidence of her own autobiography, and for traces of her demanding father and placating mother in the central characters of *To the Lighthouse*. Rather than mine the text for hints of Woolf's

[1] In particular, see Ann Banfield: "It is an elegy for the pre-war Victorian past, childhood, the war dead, her parents, above all, her mother" (236). Maria DiBattista will claim that the elegiac quality of Woolf's work has more to do with the very condition of writing: "Commemorating the dead is, however, the secondary function of these elegiac narratives. Their primary function is to liberate the elegiac mourner from the dejection of morality that is death to the imagination" (68). Others are interested in how loss manifests as silence, the disappearance of memory, not just what has perished, but what was never able to materialize as such. Theodore Koulouris suggests: "Woolf's project of mourning, her 'poetics of loss,' does not only refer to the past, to what has perished; it also seeks to lament the dead in a way in which their alterity is acknowledged, and lament the present so that its sociopolitical asymmetries and injustices, especially in relation to women's struggle, are highlighted" (Koulouris, 70).

"real life," this chapter will be sensitive to the effects of Woolf's language. We will not avoid the facts of Woolf's biography, as if they might contaminate the pure space of her writing, but instead will reference those events that Woolf herself turns into narrative and from which she attempts to cull and create meaning. For example, in her claim to have done "for [herself] what psycho-analysts do for their patients," we will note the way in which Woolf's writing—and *To the Lighthouse*, in particular—doubles its author, turning her simultaneously into analyst and analysand. This doubling will become important later in the chapter when we look more closely at what happens to the self, or the I, in this novel. We might also note that *To the Lighthouse* will be a plumbing of the depths—the surfacing of a "long felt and deeply felt emotion"—that constitutes for Woolf some kind of working-through of loss.

The urgency to resist any reductive approach to Woolf's treatment of loss is not just grounded in a general ethics of literary analysis, but is demanded by Woolf's own cautious engagement with loss. Part of what interests Woolf seems to be the relationship between loss and knowledge, between an experience and the effort to cognitively register it. For Woolf, it seems that loss always entails something excessive, and this means that it will not be rendered transparent, nor will it entirely succumb to language. This chapter will explore the ways in which loss both demands and resists language. But, for now, it is enough to note that Woolf is attuned to the limits that loss places on knowledge and expressibility. She pursues those moments when loss changes everything; and yet, as this chapter will show, the transformation that loss entails cannot be plotted on a simple linear map that distinguishes between "before" and "after." On a superficial read, Woolf, too, might seem to divide time neatly, separating prior plenitude from subsequent fall. In her

short work of fiction, "Sympathy," Woolf describes a woman whose husband, Humphrey Hammond, dies in the opening passage. The narrator struggles to envision the dead man's wife as she uncovers his body. The climactic moment of discovery is marked by blindness, rather than sight. Woolf writes:

> Celia. Yes…I see her, and then not. There is a moment I can't fancy: the moment in other people's lives that one always leaves out; the moment from which all that we know them by proceeds; I follow her to his door; I see her turn the handle; then comes the blind moment, and when my fancy opens its eyes again I find her equipped for the world—a widow. ("Sympathy" in Shorter Fiction, 108)

Here, loss seems to clearly cut time into before and after the transformative event. And the event, we should note, is not actually the death of Humphrey Hammond, but rather his wife's discovery of his body. She opens the door a married woman, unsuspecting and unassuming, and after the critical moment—which emerges here as a private encounter with death, the "blind moment" to which the narrator is not granted access—she assumes her new identity as "widow." This brief scene is about opening a door—a boundary between two spaces—and finding the world transformed. If we limit ourselves to reading this as a scene of transformation, loss remains a moment to be plotted on a chronological timeline. If, however, we pay closer attention to the opening door, along with all of the boundaries in the text that are held open and the various enclosures that are never entirely sealed up, we produce a very different reading.

Before moving too quickly to consider the transgression of boundaries in Woolf's writing, we will pause for a moment on the blindness that befalls the narrator at the moment of the wife's encounter with Humphrey Hammond's dead body. This moment is suggestive of something larger that seems to characterize Woolf's treatment of death in general. In her study of Woolf and the philosophical impact of the Cambridge Apostles

on her writing, Ann Banfield draws a connection between death and the unobserved. Woolf often tucks away her literary deaths, hides them in the interstices of her work. Banfield describes the figure of death here as an "absence that escapes all acquaintance."[2] There is no proper way to comport oneself toward death when it emerges as a kind of vacuum, obliterating the very possibility of relationship in the first place. Death is marked by a condition of utter absence, an absence so totalizing that it prohibits "all acquaintance." This would seem to imply that there is no definitive stance that one could take toward death, that either alterity is so extreme in this case that it escapes all relation, or conversely, that alterity itself is entirely eradicated in the face of it. Death is that which permits of no approach at all. This resonates with Woolf's own claim that death is a "round center of complete emptiness" (TL, 179), a "complete" vacancy in the midst of a pulsing and vibrant world. Woolf seems to paint a very clear picture whereby fullness is perfectly distinct from emptiness, where presence can be cordoned off from absence. As this chapter progresses, the concept of death's totalizing emptiness becomes more complicated. The very notion of discrete boundaries—between presence and absence, between seemingly separate entities, or even between two different temporalities—becomes increasingly difficult to sustain. Woolf's own writing will challenge the "completeness" of death's "complete emptiness." But it is, nonetheless, important to note that Woolf wants to represent death as something set apart in her works. So, we return briefly to this overarching concept of the "blind moment" that hovers around death and invests it with a quality of hiddenness, something that remains absolutely inaccessible and unknowable. To do this, we turn to Woolf's "elegy," *To the Lighthouse*. Here, she achieves this quarantining of death even on the level of form.

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[2] Banfield, 214.

Woolf describes *To the Lighthouse* as "two blocks joined by a corridor."[3] On the most manifest level, she is referring to layout of the book, which is comprised of three sections—"The Window," "Time Passes," and "The Lighthouse." The first and last sections each cover the period of one day in the life of the Ramsay family and their guests while they vacation at their summer home in the Hebrides. These two days are separated by a period of ten years, which transpire in the middle section, "Time Passes." During these intervening years, the First World War rages across Europe and the Ramsays do not return to their summer home. Rather than closely follow the events of the family during this time, the narrative voice remains focused on the summer home and its fall into decay, only occasionally relaying information about the Ramsays through the use of parenthetical remarks. The death of Mrs. Ramsay occurs in the middle section of the work, the "corridor," as Woolf calls it, revealing its function as a space of conveyance. A corridor is not for dwelling, but for moving from one place to the next, and the burial of this death—and all the novel's deaths—in the corridor of "Time Passes" is one of its most salient features.

Mrs. Ramsay is the central figure of the novel, the point around which all the other characters circulate, even after her death. She is the novel's obsessive object, and yet, her death is barely mentioned. It is stuck between parentheses, told from the perspective of the detached and disembodied narrative voice that takes over in the second section and seems to amble aimlessly around the vacant house, describing in detail its deterioration. The announcement of Mrs. Ramsay's death is told in an abbreviated and convoluted sentence, which reads: "[Mr. Ramsay, stumbling along a passage one dark morning, stretched his arms out, but Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night

[3] Holograph Draft, 11 (dated "Aug. 6, 1925").

before, his arms, though stretched out, remained empty.]" (TL, 128). The sentence, like Mr. Ramsay, stumbles along in its halting and grammatically awkward way, leaving the reader with the image of Mr. Ramsay's outstretched arms, as if their final emptiness and not his wife's death were the real tragedy.

The question that faces the reader is not, *why* does Woolf bury this death in parentheses in the corridor of the novel, but rather, *what effect* does this burial have on the text? In her critical assessment of the novel, Katherine Dalsimer claims that this act of withholding Mrs. Ramsay's death "is a disturbing violation of our expectations." She continues, "As readers we have been drawn into the fictional world of the novel and been led to feel entitled to more, to some explanation. […] The withholding in the narrative of Mrs. Ramsay's death plays cruelly with the reader's emotional engagement by ignoring it completely."[4] Dalsimer's concern is with the ways in which the reader is excluded from a certain intimacy with death, an intimacy that is supposedly merited after the extreme proximity to Mrs. Ramsay's character that the reader achieves in the first section. While Woolf may subvert expectations here, the effect of formally minimizing this death is not so much about "cruelly" toying with the reader's emotions, but about making death more conspicuous in its muted form.[5] By announcing it in this cursory and indifferent way, Mrs. Ramsay's death actually attains greater force and impact. The narrator's paucity of language, its restraint in describing and overtly lamenting, its terseness and brevity, do not allow this death to be easily assimilated into the narrative, but turn it into something

[4] Dalsimer, 21-2.
[5] Regarding Part II of To the Lighthouse, Howard Harper suggests: "But the impersonality, emerging as it does against the background of Part I, expresses a feeling which is not impersonal at all. The account of Mrs. Ramsay's death, for instance, becomes even more powerful because it is understated: how can the center of meaning for almost two hundred pages suddenly just vanish, in a single sentence? To encounter, within brackets, this offhand reference to her death seems too outrageous. It catches us unprepared" (145).

disruptive. One has to read it twice to make sure one has read it correctly. This central figure has taken up so much of the narrative space, and her character has shaped so much of the reader's encounter with the work up until this mid-point, it's difficult to imagine the novel proceeding in her absence. Of course, it will turn out to be precisely Mrs. Ramsay's *absence* that fails to materialize, as after her death, she haunts the work more pervasively in the form of "[g]host, air, nothingness" (TL, 179).

This sparsely narrated death that occurs in the middle section of the novel brings us back to the question posed earlier regarding the clear demarcation between before and after. Even the image that Woolf provides of the novel as "two blocks joined by a corridor" would seem to suggest a clear separation between the first "block," before Mrs. Ramsay's death, and the final "block" after it. Of course, Woolf describes the function of the "corridor" to be one of "joining" rather than separating these two blocks, and this already suggests that the event of death will not simply divide time into before and after, but also hold these times together. When we pull back to consider this division of time not in terms of the specific death of Mrs. Ramsay, but in light of Woolf's other allusions to before and after, we begin to understand how attuned Woolf is to the subtleties of this relationship. For example, in *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf describes a conversation at a luncheon party after the First World War, which immediately calls to mind an earlier experience, nearly identical, except for the fact that it occurred before the war. Regarding the differences between these two conversations, she writes:

> Nothing was changed; nothing was different save only—here I listened with all my ears not entirely to what was being said, but to the murmur or current behind it. Yes, that was it—the change was there. Before the war at a luncheon party like this people would have said precisely the same things but they would have sounded different because in those days they were accompanied by a sort of

> humming noise, not articulate, but musical, exciting, which changed the value of the words themselves. (Room, 11-12).

Whatever changes are brought on by the war, whatever losses, and whatever differences, they do not present themselves here in any ostentatious way. The change is, rather, something that remains inarticulate. Even if it does not register on the level of content, it is language that nonetheless surveys the damage. It is language that betrays the shift, even if the words themselves remain perfectly in tact. And each word preserves a link to its former signification, but as a ghosted version of itself. The change is not something that language could name definitively. Even if one could enumerate countless changes between the pre- and post-war years, the change that Woolf describes is much more subtle, more resistant to explanation. It is not surprising that the subtle shift would manifest for Woolf in relation to an underlying musicality, because music is a realm that does not aim to render everything knowable. One is sensitive to it without demanding from it any absolute answers. This music, this humming, this sound that used to run current behind or within language, has now fallen silent. Woolf, who listens "with all [her] ears" and is ever attuned to the background noise, be it the incessant pounding of the sea in *To the Lighthouse*, or this new silence that signals at once that everything has changed and everything remains the same, does not treat the concepts of before and after reductively. Rather, she explores them for their complexity and their ambiguity.

The categories of before and after emerge in Woolf's writing in this more nuanced way, in which difference is not totalizing and change preserves even as it distorts, because, in general, these kinds of discrete categories have no real place in Woolf's work. Woolf, instead, pursues the ways in which apparently secure concepts are destabilized from within. This chapter will refer to that destabilizing force, which

corrupts the boundaries between an inside and an outside, life and death, presence and absence, before and after, as a form of "constitutive loss." It manifests in various guises in Woolf's work, but always operates in the mode of holding something open, breaking something apart that otherwise pretended to enclosure. Whether it is the notion of an encapsulated ego, a circumscribed life, a discrete object, the closure of the past, all of these are subjected to the force of constitutive loss. To be clear, this is not to suggest that all boundaries between things disappear entirely. The force, or desire, for enclosure remains active, but it is checked by the outward expansion and disruption inherent to constitutive loss.

Thus, Woolf is interested in the way that loss inhabits the self proleptically, tearing open what otherwise seems sealed up. She explores this notion of the self that is composed not just of what one *is* at any given moment, but of all the things that one might be, might experience, might lose and might suffer eventually. Although philosophically complex, this idea is also extremely simple and, when Woolf puts it in the mouth of her maternal character, Mrs. Ramsay, it reveals itself to be the most basic fear that she has for her children. Woolf writes: "When [Mrs. Ramsay] read just now to James, 'and there were numbers of soldiers with kettledrums and trumpets,' and his eyes darkened, she thought, why should they grow up and lose all that? […] And, touching his hair with her lips, she thought, he will never be so happy again" (TL, 58-9). Mrs. Ramsay laments the future that will surely bring with it unforeseeable pain and suffering, in spite of whatever else it has in store. But the future does not simply stay in its futural form, threating vaguely to arrive. For Mrs. Ramsay, looking at her two youngest children, James and Cam, the future has already arrived in its haunting and threatening manner.

What begins with a seemingly innocuous comment—"Oh, but she never wanted James to grow a day older! or Cam either"—is followed by a more obscure and unreadable claim: "Nothing made up for the loss." It is not even clear whose "loss" it is, James's, Cam's, or Mrs. Ramsay's. But the fact that it appears to be a loss that has both already occurred and is still on its way, troubles any simple designation of loss. The present is marked not merely by what it contains, but by what it lacks, by the many potential losses that are heralded at every moment, and thus Mrs. Ramsay and her children are anticipatorily strapped with everything that might or might not take place.

What begins to emerge here is an understanding of the self or the ego that is not reducible to substance or essence. To be always already bound up with one's losses, constituted by possibility and not just actuality, is to break with the notion of an encapsulated subject. We return, briefly, to Woolf's short fiction, "Sympathy." After Humphrey Hammond has died, and after his wife has opened the door to discover his dead body and thereby find the world transformed, the narrator reflects back on the last encounter with the man before his death: "The simple young man whom I hardly knew had, then, concealed in him the immense power of death. He had removed the boundaries and fused the separate entities by ceasing—there in the room with the open windows and the bird's song outside" (Sympathy, 110). Death arrives preemptively to enact some kind of fusion, collapsing discrete "entities" into one amalgamated whole. The passage does not further describe this fusion, but it does make it clear that it is not *after* death that such a melding occurs, but rather, before death, in life. In a language reminiscent of Rilke's,[6]

[6] "And when I think of the others whom I have seen or about whom I have heard: it is always the same. They all have had a death of their own. Those men who carried theirs inside their armour, within, like a prisoner; those women who grew very old and small, and then on a huge bed, as on a stage, before the whole family, the household and the dogs, passed away in discreet and seigniorial dignity. Even the

Woolf describes a scenario in which the work of death—the obliteration of difference and separation—begins prematurely. Before he dies, Humphrey Hammond has already begun to "remove the boundaries" that make difference possible in the world. This notion of the subject, tied to his own death, which at once remains outstanding and yet is always already at work, is a self that is fundamentally exposed, bound up with loss even before it arrives.

This idea is reinforced in *To the Lighthouse* through Mrs. Ramsay's relationship to her own death. On the surface, this tripartite novel appears to be about the desire to recuperate a lost origin, to regain some sense of coherence and meaning after the death of the maternal figure. This myth of origin rests on an underlying notion of essence and a demarcation between plenitude and fall. Only in this linear way is recuperation possible. While the novel may seem to dangle before the reader this hope for recuperation—whether it comes in the form of the children's final arrival at the Lighthouse, or Lily Briscoe's final paint stroke on her previously unfinished canvas—the work prohibits these recuperative gestures if only because it continually works to dismantle any unproblematic conceptions of prior plenitude and subsequent fall.[7] Any notions of full

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children, and the very little ones at that, did not die just any child's death; they pulled themselves together and died that which they already were, and that which they would have become" (Rilke, Rainer Maria. *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*. Trans. M.D. Herder Norton. New York: W.W. Norton & Co. p. 23).

[7] Rachel Bowlby will suggest that for Mr. Ramsay, his wife marks a kind of "maternal plentitude—his own wife and child, the reverenced 'beauty' of the woman—which provides, restores, a form of compensation" (59), specifically for his failure to progress all the way to R. For a beautiful and complex reading of how Woolf avoids precisely this temporal division into "before" and "after," see Perry Meisel. In his reading, Meisel suggests: "By so taking part I as the origin it seems to be, however, the novel predictably enacts a myth of the modern—the fall from the plenitude of Mrs. Ramsay's Edenic presence that renders the later part III a fall into time and history. From this point of view, the priority of fathers oppresses sons and daughters alike; the sundering of "'subject'" and "'object'" leaves the question of "'the nature of reality'" in doubt; and the status of art remains one of recapturing secondarily some primariness forever behind it as both inspiration and inhibition" (185). As an alternative to this mythic reading, he conceives of another approach: "If on the other hand, we follow both the diurnal schema as well as the models of reading offered by Carmichael and Mrs. Ramsay, part III may be put first instead. Part I remains, to be sure, a myth of origins, but now a self-conscious myth retroactively (re)produced by memory" (185). Meisel continues:

presence and absence are already destabilized by a text in which characters are ghosted before they die and materialize with even greater force after death. In the first section, Woolf provides an image of Mrs. Ramsay in the fullness of life, dishing out the *Boeuf en Daube* to her guests, silently orchestrating the rhythm of her dinner party. But in the midst of all this vibrant life, the narrative voice resorts to simile to describe the way that Mrs. Ramsay moves around the room. The narrative voice says, she was "gliding like a ghost." And, if it seems that this image of ghostliness is imported merely to accentuate Mrs. Ramsay's effortless "gliding" motion, we note that, not one sentence later, the reference to gliding is dropped, while the image of the ghost remains. "[S]he went among them like a ghost" (TL, 87), it reiterates, as if to ensure that this image does not go unnoticed.

This premature ghosting of Mrs. Ramsay is balanced by the image of her haunting return, this time after her death. In the final section, Lily Briscoe, a guest at the summerhouse, paints on her canvas outside. With seeming innocuousness, she is revisited by a memory of Mrs. Ramsay as she had been before her death. But almost immediately, this memory besieges Lily, as it feels to her like the past has returned, not with the safe remove of memory, but as if the figure of Mrs. Ramsay has returned from the dead. Overwhelmed with emotion, Lily cries out to the dead woman: "Oh Mrs. Ramsay! she called out silently, to that essence which sat by the boat, that abstract one made of her, that woman in grey, as if to abuse her for having gone, and then having gone, come back again" (TL, 178). The strangeness of this sentence, its piling up of clauses so that the reader cannot easily follow any linear trajectory, reflects the strangeness of the event. It is

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"But to trope Mrs. Ramsay as such a lost primacy is, especially given the book's enormous range of epistemological cautions, simply to sanctify another, if grander, myth of the modern to account for a novel whose aim is to thwart all such notions" (190).

not that Lily calls out to a figment of her memory, or to the sea, or to the air, or to nothingness in general. In this moment, Mrs. Ramsay has returned in some form—attaining an "essence" in death, albeit an "abstract one made of her." When we parse it in this way, it is not clear exactly what Lily sees. An "abstract one made of her, that woman in grey" does not leave the reader with any clear sense of Mrs. Ramsay's materiality or non-materiality. She hovers in this in-between space, and Lily admonishes her for leaving and then for having returned. The narrative makes it clear that the past does not only return in the form of memory, something one could "play with easily and safely at any time of day or night" (TL, 178). The past comes back in the form of hauntings, whereby time becomes dislodged from its chronological place and threatens the seeming placidity of the present.

The reason for highlighting these two images of Mrs. Ramsay is to suggest that, through the treatment of its characters, and through the use of its narrative voice, which will be developed in the next section, the novel presents the reader with a concept of the self that extends across time and reaches out beyond its borders. This is not to say that the novel refuses any image of a totalized subject. On the contrary, it presents the fantasy of oneness and self-sameness through the figure of Mr. Ramsay, whose philosophical pursuits never quite shore up the secure space of being, so that he needs his wife to relentlessly reaffirm him. Even in Mr. Tansley's stammering "I—I—I" at the dinner table, we might sense an underlying fear about the precariousness of the subject, and thus his need to "assert himself" (TL, 106) in the face of any available listener. But, as if to subvert any real possibility of oneness and singularity, the novel counters these moments with images of doubling. For example, the eponymous Lighthouse, which stands on the

horizon, promises safety and singularity, guiding the lost into safe harbor, turns out to be doubled by the end of the novel. The narrative voice inhabits James's perspective as he finally docks at the Lighthouse with his father and his sister after years of seeing it only from a distance. The text follows:

> The Lighthouse was then a silvery, misty-looking tower with a yellow eye, that opened suddenly, and softly in the evening. Now—
>
> James looked at the Lighthouse. He could see the white-washed rocks; the tower, stark and straight; he could see that it was barred with black and white; he could see windows in it; he could even see washing spread on the rocks to dry. So that was the Lighthouse, was it?
>
> No, the other was also the Lighthouse. For nothing was simply one thing. (TL, 186).

A passage that employs the language of "then" and "now," nonetheless collapses that very distinction in its final lines. The initial view of the Lighthouse, blinking softly against the evening sky, at first lends itself to a Romantic image of the lone tower, the beacon of truth, idealized and absolute. But the second, an up-close view with its realistic partitioning of each entity—the rocks, the windows, the traces of mundane human life—would seem to shatter the former with the annihilating force of revision.[8] Yet, the final line concludes that the identity of the Lighthouse is multiple, "[f]or nothing was simply one thing."

And just as Woolf doubles the figure of the Lighthouse as an image of destination, she also performs this same act of doubling on the figure of origin. In her memoirs, she describes to the reader her first memory: "[I]t was of red and purple flowers

[8] Ann Banfield, argues against a simplistic thinking of relativity in Woolf's work whereby "everything in the physical world is relative to an observer" (145). She cautions against disregarding the "principle of non-contradiction" and suggests that seeming oppositions, like these two images of the Lighthouse, nonetheless "concern events in time" and so these "contradictions are resolved in time" (145). I do not argue against Banfield, nor do I ignore the theory of non-contradiction. I am not interested in whether in an objective reality a thing can both be and not be. Instead, I am interested in the way that loss inhabits Woolf's subjects and objects, and the consequences that follow from their failure to be perfectly cordoned off.

on a black ground—my mother's dress; and she was sitting either in a train or in an omnibus, and I was on her lap. I therefore saw the flowers she was wearing very close" (Sketch, 64). While the memory involves her own mother—another figure of origin—it is her dress that Woolf describes. And, as if to play with this very notion of origin, she homes in on the flowers—painted flowers, images of flowers rather than the real thing, even though the sentence reveals this only belatedly, after the em-dash. But the doubling does not really occur until Woolf reveals that this first memory is accompanied by another, unrelated memory. This new one, however, is not introduced as a second memory, or simply another memory. Rather, Woolf says, it "also seems to be my first memory" (Sketch, 64). This time, it is of her summer home in St. Ives in Cornwall. Woolf writes:

> If life has a base that it stands upon, if it is a bowl that one fills and fills and fills—then my bowl without a doubt stands upon this memory. It is of lying half asleep, half awake, in bed in the nursery at St. Ives. It is of hearing the waves breaking, one, two, one, two, and sending a splash of water over the beach; and then breaking, one, two, one, two, behind a yellow blind. It is of hearing the blind draw its little acorn across the floor as the wind blew the blind out. It is of lying and hearing this splash and seeing this light, and feeling, it is almost impossible that I should be here; of feeling the purest ecstasy I can conceive. (Sketch, 64-5).

This doubled origin of remembrance also emphasizes multiplicity through the use of repetition: "fills and fills and fills"; "one, two, one, two." And the break of the waves is born along by the opening refrain, "It is…," which relies on the rhetorical device of anaphora to begin each lulling and rhythmical sentence. This memory is grounded by a reliance on hard things: life has a base, it is a bowl. Yet, all rests on the fluidity of the sea. This doubled memory is one that breaks with discrete conditions. The self is suspended between states, half asleep, half awake. And this liminal condition, which is bound up

with the ever-coming and receding waves, is not disconnected from the expansion of self that is further developed in her novel.

In her fiction and her memoirs, Woolf is interested in the way that the self—in particular, the female self—transcends the constraints of her body and breaks from the boundaries of temporality. In her memoirs, Woolf imagines herself spread out across time, stretching into the past, anticipating her own arrival in the world. This thought is triggered by a sexual violation at the hands of her half-brother. She describes the event: "His hand explored my private parts too. I remember resenting it, disliking it—what is the word for so dumb and mixed a feeling? It must have been strong, since I still recall it. This seems to show that a feeling about certain parts of the body; how they must not be touched; how it is wrong to allow them to be touched; must be instinctive" (Sketch, 69). And with this notion of instinct, Woolf becomes dislodged from her own condition, her own time, her own enclosed self to commune with all the women who preceded her. According to Woolf, these instincts "[prove] that Virginia Stephen was not born on the 25th January 1882, but was born many thousands of years ago; and had from the very first to encounter instincts already acquired by thousands of ancesstresses in the past" (Sketch, 69). Triggered by this sexual violation, Woolf seeks solace and identifies with the "thousands of ancesstresses" whose traces are left on her body, in the form of her repulsion and her instincts. As a result of this act of abuse, the fixed times of her birth and, presumably her death, become unhinged from any calculable order. She is more than an enclosed subject, as there are active parts of herself that belong to the women who preceded her and to those who will follow.

Unity, Dispersal, and the Vicissitudes of Narrative Voice

If this chapter has thus far emphasized an image of the exposed and fragmented subject spread out across time and transgressing its boundaries, is has *not* been to suggest that boundaries are entirely obliterated in Woolf's work. On the contrary, Woolf's writing seems to negotiate between two countervailing forces, one that tends toward unity, pulling things together, transcending difference, and the other towards dispersal, cordoning things off, sending them apart. This notion of unity will be related to that other metaphysical image of the totalized subject, seeking to ensure its self-sameness and its enclosure, but it will also maintain certain differences. This chapter will interrogate the alternative possibilities for a different notion of unity, but before doing so, this tension between unity and dispersal must be further explored.

In her memoir, Woolf describes an image that recurs to her, one that is representative of her early memories at St. Ives. She writes: "If I were a painter […] I should make a picture that was globular; semi-transparent. I should make a picture of curved petals; of shells; of things that were semi-transparent; I should make curved shapes, showing the light through, but not giving a clear outline" (Sketch, 66). These brief lines are full of repetition—*I should, I should*—emphasizing over and over the curvature of the shapes, the semi-transparency of the image. The language itself, like a shell or like a wave, curves over and folds back upon itself. Here, at the threshold of sight, somewhere between opacity and lucidity, things stand forth, but indistinctly. Light penetrates without "giving a clear outline" of what lies hidden there. In this dusk, everything would be partially blended. The boundaries between objects would still be maintained, but dimly. She continues: "what was seen would at the same time be heard;

sounds would come through this petal or leaf—sounds indistinguishable from sights" (Sketch, 66). In a moment of synesthesia, the senses would intermix, sight and sound indistinguishable. And yet, things would nonetheless remain distinct; they would not entirely collapse in on each other, but maintain difference in the same instant that they became one. This gesture of simultaneously merging disparate entities while holding them apart is one that recurs and structures Woolf's work, particularly *To the Lighthouse,* and not just on the level of content, but of form as well.

On the level of content, the desire for unity manifests in the novel in subtle ways. For example, the first section of *To the Lighthouse* depicts Mrs. Ramsay, intervening in the lives of others in more or less overt ways, attempting to organize marriages among her guests. She exerts her quiet pressure on the young Minta Doyle and Paul Rayley in hopes of securing their engagement. She sees Lily Briscoe walking in the garden with William Bankes and immediately thinks to herself, "They must marry!" (TL, 71). And overshadowing all of these potential marriages is the union of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, who do not even have first names, but are identified only by their participation in a shared surname.[9] The critic, James Naremore, finds this urge to combine and to merge so strong in Mrs. Ramsay, that he identifies traces of it even in the poetry she recites to herself, which Naremore claims to be "about the elemental constancy of life, part of a vision of nature that enfolds all human existence in a unity."[10] And, when we recall Woolf's diary entry that aligned her work with elegy, we note that she tied *To the Lighthouse* to the

[9] See Bowlby: "The unification or bringing together of disparate things, of the 'discomposed,' which Mrs. Ramsay seeks to achieve by marryings and motherings, is also what Lily attempts in the field of art" (63). This is consonant with "Woolf's own interest in and endorsement of a particular modernist conception of the function of art: that the work of art makes in its own autonomous medium the unity which in the world itself is lacking" (64).
[10] Naremore, 136.

perpetual shifting of the waves: "the sea is to be heard all through it." The waves provide continuity, marking time with their endless, repetitive rise and fall. Whatever disjunction the work carries, the waves still beat a measured rhythm in the background, holding the disparate entities together.

But it is on the level of form that Woolf really explores this tension between unity and dispersal. She does this by manipulating the effects of narrative voice. As many of Woolf's critics remark, *To The Lighthouse* employs a unique mode of narration, combining stream-of-consciousness with free indirect discourse. The effect of this narrative style is that the perspectives of multiple characters are presented as though they seamlessly created an amalgamated whole. Critics have described this balance of unity and dispersal in various ways. Naremore repeatedly uses the term "qualitative unity"[11] to describe the "multipersonal subjectivity"[12] that is embodied in the narrator, who manages a plurality of voices "through the medium of a prose which tends to blur distinctions."[13] Justine Dymond claims that the narrator "moves fluidly in and out of characters' consciousnesses without barrier"[14]; and Ann Banfield suggests that, in order to "construct a public world out of the private, there must be continuity between perspectives."[15] These critics are referring to the way in which the narrator is able to not only follow the thoughts of a single character, but seemingly *ride* those thoughts out from one perspective and into another, in a fluid, often imperceptible way.

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[11] *Ibid.*, 113, 122.
[12] *Ibid.*, 121-2.
[13] *Ibid.*, 122.
[14] Dymond, 143.
[15] Banfield, 146. Also, she suggests: "Woolf created textual continuity by what she called 'the interludes.' The description of unoccupied places and times—the moors, the snowfield, the sea and the dunes of the seashore, the forest, the sky with its distant stars—is a constant feature of the novels' scenery, filling the interstices between characters' points of view" (147).

So, for example, we end up with a passage like the following. It begins with the narrative voice in the perspective of Mrs. Ramsay, who watches the shifting colors of the sea and experiences an immense existential fulfillment at the sight of it. But with the beginning of the next line, the perspective has already shifted, and then shifts back again. Woolf writes:

> …and the ecstasy burst in her eyes and waves of pure delight raced over the floor of her mind and she felt, It is enough! It is enough!
>
> He turned and saw her. Ah! She was lovely, lovelier now than he ever thought. But he could not speak to her. […] And again he would have passed her without a word had she not, at that very moment, given him of her own free will what she knew he would never ask, and called to him and taken the green shawl off the picture frame, and gone to him. For he wished, she knew, to protect her. (TL, 65).

As noted, what begins intimately in the mind of Mrs. Ramsay, who surrenders herself to the setting sun and the changing light as it plays off the sea, shifts at the paragraph break to Mr. Ramsay. And as quickly as the narrative voice has entered Mr. Ramsay's consciousness, it pulls back out and slips into Mrs. Ramsay's once again, this time, mid sentence: "he would have passed her without a word had she not, at that very moment, given him of *her own free will* what *she knew* he would never ask…" We know, in this sentence, what she knows, namely that he would never explicitly ask her to give of herself such that he might feel appeased. And in the final sentence, we seem to inhabit both perspectives: "…*he wished, she knew*..." The *content* of this passage, which has to do with the inability to ask for something explicitly such that communication must seek subtle, non-verbal channels, is mirrored on the level of *form*, where the narrative voice unites these two characters by performing subtle, almost imperceptible shifts of perspective.

Through the use of free indirect discourse, which combines the distance of a third-person narrator with the intimacy of a first-person narrator, Woolf is able to minimize the distance between the narrative voice and the characters, thereby achieving a sense of wholeness and unity. Ironically, this same style of free indirect discourse will also create a sense of distance. By merging so tightly at times with the characters, the narrative voice also inadvertently highlights all those moments where this perfect alignment does not occur. For example, in a scene in which Lily Briscoe and William Bankes stroll outside the Ramsay house, it occurs to Lily that William Bankes is in love with Mrs. Ramsay. The narrative voice says: "Such a rapture—for by what other name could one call it?—made Lily Briscoe forget entirely what she had been about to say" (TL, 47). This sentence is predominantly told from a third-person perspective. Yet, in the middle, separated by the em-dash, the narrative voice inserts an aside in the form of a rhetorical question: "for by what other name could one call it?" It is at this moment, when the narrative voice seems to most collapse any distance between itself and Lily Briscoe—as the reader can never be sure whose perspective exactly is represented here—that its distance from the character becomes most pronounced. Here, we become aware of the fact that the narrative voice does not maintain a single position, but instead vacillates between complete merger and conspicuous difference.

Perhaps because, at times, the sense of unity in the text is so strong, it is all the more destabilizing when that narrative voice draws significant attention to its own alterity. In a passage in which Mr. Bankes quietly reminisces about Mr. Ramsay, walking down a Westmoreland road as a young man, steeped in his solitude, Mr. Bankes recalls something he had forgotten, a detail about a hen and her chicks. The narrative voice

conveys it in the following way: "But this (reminiscence) was suddenly interrupted, William Bankes remembered (and this must refer to some actual incident), by a hen, straddling her wings out in protection of a convey of little chicks" (TL, 20). In the midst of narrating William Bankes's recollection, the narrative voice inserts a parenthetical remark about the validity of scene: "(and this must refer to some actual incident)." Why tell the reader this? It is hardly the case the narrative voice has been fact- checking every fleeting memory by every single character. It catches ones attention if only because it seems almost superfluous on the level of content. Its real impact is on the level of form, as it suddenly creates a distance between William Bankes and the narrative voice. It draws attention to itself. And by revealing the limits of its intimacy with the characters in this way, the narrative voice introduces into its telling an element of rupture. Suddenly the reader is conscious of a narrative voice that had, in other ways, camouflaged itself so well. Perhaps this observation is not unrelated to the "doubt" that Erich Auerbach discovers in the work's formal qualities, specifically as it relates to narrative voice. Auerbach claims that there are multiple narrative voices that inhabit *To the Lighthouse,* each responsible for a different section of the novel. According to Auerbach, these voices are "capable of penetrating the depths of the human soul, capable too of knowing something about it, but not of attaining clarity as to what is in process there, with the result that what they report has a doubtful ring."[16] The "doubt" that this section exposes is not exactly with regard to the multiplicity of narrative voices, but rather, in terms of the narrative asides, which lead the reader to suspect that the narrative voice does not always know its characters as intimately as it might otherwise lead us to believe.

[16] Auerbach, 534.

Similarly, the narrative voice exceeds its own reportage, when it projects into the minds of its characters more than they are capable of feeling. In the opening section of the book, the narrative voice describes the hatred that James, a six years old child, feels for his father, whose neediness robs the child of precious time with his mother. The description begins along unremarkable lines: "But his son hated him. He hated him for coming up to them, for stopping and looking down on them; he hated him for interrupting them" (TL, 37). The reader is carried along without necessarily acknowledging the narrative voice at all. But then, the passage increases in intensity: "he hated him for the exaltation and sublimity of his gestures; for the magnificence of his head; for his exactingness and egotism (for there he stood, commanding them to attend to him); but most of all he hated the twang and twitter of his father's emotion which, vibrating round them, disturbed the perfect simplicity and good sense of his relations with his mother" (TL, 37). What began as a believable description of a child's feeling for his overbearing father quickly morphs into an impassioned condemnation of the paternal figure, making the reader much more conscious of the displacement of the character by the internal world of the narrator. With this shift, the reader is compelled to reflect not only on James's anger, but on the source of this information. Does the narrative voice speak the mind of a future James? Or is the narrative voice importing into its diatribe remnants of its own untold existence, perhaps betraying hidden sentiments of its own Oedipal drama?

In moments where the text strongly asserts a sense of community or togetherness, the narrative voice often counters it with an emphasis on difference. In a scene where Lily Briscoe and William Bankes walk toward the sea, the content of the narrative stresses their connectedness:

> The both smiled, standing there. They both felt a common hilarity, excited by the moving waves; […] both of them looked at the dunes far away, and instead of merriment felt come over them some sadness—because the thing was completed partly, and partly because distant views seem to outlast by a million years (Lily thought) the gazer and to be communing already with a sky which beholds an earth entirely at rest. (TL, 20).

The repetition of "they both" creates a sense of merging, of sharing a single view. Even the scene upon which they look emphasizes the activity of "communing," and references a distant view that blends earth and sky and covers a world in which no life dwells. This merging and communing creates a sense of space in which there is no difference, no distinction, all homogeneity. But, as unity turns out to be shot through with internal division and potential rupture, the narrative voice, again, inserts a parenthetical remark: "(Lily thought)." With the inclusion of this parenthesis, the entire passage must be resubmitted to critical evaluation. What began with "they both" ends with Lily, sequestered between parentheses doing the thinking alone. Because the parentheses appears in the middle of the sentence, however, the reader is not sure where Lily's thoughts begin to diverge from those of William Bankes. Where does "they both" end and Lily's independent thought begin? The content of the passage depicts a view in which difference is erased, and yet the narrative voice here highlights separateness.

The tension that the text seeks to maintain between making whole, on the one hand, and dividing up, on the other, is not unlike the complicated image of the sea that emerges in the novel. It is undeniably a source of continuity, placating and calming, but Mrs. Ramsay also reflects on its duplicitous nature. She listens to the "monotonous fall of the waves on the beach, which for the most part beat a measured and soothing tattoo to her thoughts and seemed consolingly to repeat over and over again as she sat with the children the words of some old cradle song, murmured by nature, 'I am guarding you—I

am your support'" (TL, 16). But then, the image of the sea, with its endless repetition and soothing sound, morphs into something altogether more violent and haunting:

> [A]t other times *suddenly* and *unexpectedly*, especially when her mind raised itself slightly from the task actually in hand, had no such kindly meaning, but like a ghostly roll of drums remorselessly beat the measure of life, made one think of the destruction of the island and its engulfment in the sea, and warned her whose day had slipped past in one quick doing after another that it was all ephemeral as a rainbow—this sound which had been obscured and concealed under the other sounds *suddenly* thundered hollow in her ears and made her look up with an impulse of terror. (TL, 16-my italics).

In this passage, the sea shifts from the background, where it rhythmically plays out an "old cradle song," a hushed lullaby, to its place in the foreground. Here it rages, "[beating] the measure of life," waging its destruction. The message it conveys to Mrs. Ramsay is about the fleetingness of existence and the passage of time, which disappears in "one quick doing after another." This erosion of life, reflected in the erosion of the island, blurs things together in a haze of undifferentiated time. And yet, this sense of unity is punctuated with terms that signal abrupt temporal shifts: "*suddenly*"; "*unexpectedly*." They herald interruption and create a sense of urgency.[17] In her study of Woolf, Patricia Laurence reads these narrative interruptions and disjunctions, suggesting that they are not separate from the impulse toward wholeness, but are essential to it. As she writes, "The seeming opposition between notions of 'totality' and 'fragmentation' is collapsed in Woolf's narrative technique"; rather than being distinct from the unified totality, the "discontinuous" and "fragmented" are "part of 'capturing the moment whole.'"[18] Just as our reading of loss will not posit discrete subjects that have discrete

[17] Banfield: On the moment: "Within each moment, time remains suspended, 'the moment transfixed'" (118). "A window opening on the present, the moment is also, however, a door opened, then closed, between moment and moment. For the moment becomes part of a series" (118).
[18] Laurence, 94.

things to lose, but are instead open and exposed, simultaneously present and absent, Woolf's narrative impulses—toward unity and toward dispersion—determine and hold one another in check.

SELVES AND OTHERS

Constitutive loss, as this chapter has suggested, is a destabilizing force that belongs to entities in a *constitutive* way, holding them open, preventing them from becoming totalized or encapsulated, while at the same time, managing an impulse toward unity and enclosure. As we move away from the idea of an essence-driven subject and toward this more complex notion of subjectivity, we are still left to ask, what is the self, if it cannot be defined in terms of an underlying substance or quiddity? Woolf engages with this quest through the treatment of her characters. In a famous passage, Mrs. Ramsay reflects on this very issue, attempting to find within herself some answer to the question of being. She sits, knitting with her son James, who cuts out magazine images of appliances. Although from the outside, it seems to be a tranquil scene of domesticity, Mrs. Ramsay feels the weight of existence as the enormous burden of protecting her children from disappointment, of soothing her needy husband's ego, of orchestrating the love lives of her guests. For a moment, she rests in the silence and slips into her thoughts: "All the being and the doing, expansive, glittering, vocal, evaporated; and one shrunk, with a sense of solemnity, to being oneself, a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others" (TL, 62). This retreat into oneself is the dissipation of activity, a surrender to something intensely personal, but entirely impersonal at the same time. One loses the distinguishing features of one's own idiosyncratic existence. One becomes a

vacuum in which everything disappears except darkness. And this darkness is not some thing in the world, but rather, the covering over of difference so that nothing remains distinct. As Perry Meisel writes in his critical work on the novel, "Mrs. Ramsay's most solitary moments are precisely those when she descends so far within as to become part of a without—a world without a self."[19] To be most oneself is to lose the self. Similarly, James Naremore claims that, "Mrs. Ramsay feels she has drawn closer to an essential self which can only be defined negatively, as a vast dark realm which everyone has in common."[20] But the nature of this community at the heart of selfhood is one that we can hardly think, as that which everyone has in common is the darkness that obliterates any distinguishing characteristics.

This intensely personal darkness is countered in the novel by the image of light, which becomes associated with the world outside, the world where one stands forth in all of one's distinguishing features and where one interacts with others. Here, in the light, community becomes possible. At Mrs. Ramsay's dinner party, when all the guests sit at the table in the waning evening light, she feels them to be scattered, lost in their own worlds, non-cohesive. With the lighting of eight candles, however, everything changes. Suddenly, the guests become "conscious of making a party together" (TL, 97). The illumination in the room creates a separation between the night outside and the intimate gathering inside. Woolf writes, "the night was now shut off by panes of glass, which, far from giving any accurate view of the outside world, rippled it so strangely that here, inside the room, seemed to be order and dry land; there, outside, a reflection in which things wavered and vanished waterly" (TL, 97). The solidity and sturdiness of the inside

[19] *Ibid.*, 191.
[20] Naremore, 139.

is set against the chimera of the outside beyond the window panes, which "rippled so strangely" and tricked the eye into thinking that "things wavered and vanished waterly." The inside, on the other hand, is suddenly comprised of discrete people and things. There is a fruit bowl, for example, that comes into view once the candles are lit. The narrative voice describes what happens to the fruit: "[B]rought up suddenly into the light it seemed possessed of great size and depth, was like a world in which one could take one's staff and climb hills […] and go down into valleys" (TL, 97). Strangely, when the fruit is thrown in relief, it turns out not to just be fruit, but more than fruit, a rolling topography in which one could hike around uninhibited. The moment when light renders things visible, metaphorical language takes over, describing things in terms of what they are not. And yet, these metaphors are most proper to the things themselves, once the light exposes them for what they are.

Similarly, rhetorical language proliferates around Mrs. Ramsay, the very model for that internal darkness of self, after the candles are lit and the party becomes aware of itself as a cohesive unit. The narrative voice describes her and the things around her in so many different similes: "like a hawk suspended; like a flag floated in an element of joy," the stillness around her hovers "like smoke, like a fume rising upwards," the "coherence in things" shines "like a ruby" (TL, 105). Images pour fourth, separated only by commas, fragmented metaphors that build upon each other without creating any unified or whole image. Notably, in this moment, not when she has retreated inward to her "wedge-shaped core of darkness," but when she is spread out among so many metaphors, does Mrs. Ramsay finally feel a moment of "stability" and continuity. Only in this dispersed way, does she sense something enduring in existence. The narrative voice says, "something,

she meant, is immune from change" (TL, 105). This tethering of permanence to the ephemeral, such that a moment of "eternity" is constructed around a constantly substitutable language, is one of Woolf's most poignant insights. If the self emerges here as something always already bound up with loss, one that exists via a constitutive loss, permanence will not be erected out of anything substantive. Anything "made that endures" (TL, 105) will be made out of this very impermanence. What would erosion even mean to something that is in a constant state of transformation? It is that which one tries to hold down definitively, that which one tries to cordon off and preserve, that most risks destruction.

This same logic is at work in Woolf's treatment of memory, whereby she conveys that the best means of preserving something is to forget it. To remember too much and too precisely is to render those memories brittle and breakable, or simply to wear them down. To forget, on the other hand, is to store a moment of the past in a kind of crypt, to protect it. When Mrs. Ramsay is reminded of her old friend Carrie Manning after twenty years, she is struck by the contrast between a forgotten day, buried in the past, unchanging and permanent, and her own continual transformation. The narrative voice says, "while she had changed, that particular day, now become very still and beautiful, had remained there, all these years" (TL, 87). Here, the notion of permanence becomes aligned precisely with that which has faded away, exists no longer, is entirely impermanent. A long lost afternoon, something one has forgotten, is thereby preserved. Along these same lines, Woolf writes the following in her memoir: "In certain favourable moods, memories—what one has forgotten—come to the top. Now if this is so, is it not possible—I often wonder—that things we have felt with great intensity have an existence

independent of our minds; are in fact still in existence?" (Sketch, 67). Here, memories are defined by "what one has forgotten," not what one has always remembered. And these forgotten memories are not only preserved, but they assume an independent life. Woolf wonders if they exist on their own, in some still-living realm.

The image of the self that emerges in these passages through the figure of Mrs. Ramsay, alternates between the one comprised of an internal and indistinct darkness and the one spread out among metaphorical language. In both cases, the self's ownmost is nothing that one *owns*, nothing substantive that bears its characteristics as if they were simply more possessions. And this self is set against a world in which permanence and flux are so enmeshed, that permanence itself turns out to be built on ephemerality and transience. It is in light of these conditions, that any reading of the novel's complex treatment of relationships must begin. What kind of relationship can inhere between this exposed self and the world outside, in particular, the world of others? *To the Lighthouse* presents the reader with this very intimate access to Mrs. Ramsay's internal world. But the characters around her do not have that access, and so part of the novel's treatment of relationships has to do precisely with the inaccessibility and impenetrability of Mrs. Ramsay. The desire to *know* her is profound, among her children, her husband, William Bankes, Mr. Tansley, Lily Briscoe, everyone it seems. And while she feels herself to be a wedge-shaped core of darkness, they construct their own images of what makes her who she is.

Lily Briscoe sits at Mrs. Ramsay's feet, gazing up at her, this "dome-shaped hive" around which Lily can only circle "like a bee," without ever being granted complete access (TL, 51). In her relegation to the outside, Lily fantasizes about penetrating what

she believes to be the encapsulated space of this woman. The image she produces is one of various layers of enclosure, each of which requires its own separate mode of access. Woolf writes:

> [S]he imagined how in the chambers of the mind and heart of the woman who was, physically, touching her, were stood, like the treasures in the tombs of kings, tablets bearing sacred inscriptions, which if one could spell them out, would teach one everything, but they would never be offered openly, never made public. What art was there, known to love or cunning, by which one pressed through into those secret chambers? (TL, 51).

The image of obstacles multiplies: there are chambers, tombs, and tablets with their "sacred" and inscrutable writing. The innermost realm—the inscribed tablets themselves— which Lily imagines contain all the secrets to Mrs. Ramsay's existence, become linked through the use of metaphorical language once again, to holy tombs, a space that belongs to dead kings. Mrs. Ramsay's most intimate secrets are thus metaphorically aligned with this high-ranking order of men who lie in their final resting places. Death, then, makes its way into this most private space, even if only metaphorically, where the public will never have access. And Lily suspects that "art," here conceived as the skillfulness and dexterity that belongs to "love or cunning" is the only means of slipping into "those secret chambers." This pairing of "love or cunning," even if separated by the conjunction "or," works to destabilize both terms, as the passage does not indicate the nature of the relationship that inheres between them. This observation is not extraneous to Lily's inquiry, as love itself turns out to be at stake, only, it turns out that by passage end, it is unclear what love even means. Carried by the momentum of her own tropes, she continues:

> What device for becoming, like waters poured into one jar, inextricably the same, one with the object one adored? […] Could loving, as people called it, make her and Mrs. Ramsay one? for it was not knowledge but unity that she desired, not inscriptions on tablets, nothing that could be written in any language known to men, but intimacy itself, which is knowledge. (TL, 51)

The desire to penetrate the depths of Mrs. Ramsay is so strong in Lily, that she cannot be entirely sure what to name her desire. At first, it is total identification—"inextricably the same, one with the object one adored." She dismisses the idea of "knowledge," and instead calls it "unity." But as she further defines each term, "unity," then "intimacy," she ultimately circles back to the original rejected idea of "knowledge." One is left with the feeling that these terms, in the process of piling up, scrambling, and intertwining have only become more meaningless. The one thing that Lily is now sure of is that writing will never grant her access. Writing can never produce the answers Lily wants. In this utterance, however, it is not writing that ultimately seems suspect, but Lily's own desire for knowledge and complete unity. As Perry Meisel suggests, "There is, implies Woolf, no such 'art,' and no such 'secret chambers' into which it might penetrate. The figuration is ironic enough anyway."[21]

The irony of this figuration falls not just on Lily's belief that this hidden "art" or these "secret chambers" exist, but it extends to the very notions of love and knowledge themselves. In the novel, knowledge is most ironically treated in the figure of Mr. Ramsay, a professional philosopher, burdened with a reputation of minor note, successful enough to hunger for the title of genius, but not genius enough to earn it. For Mr. Ramsay, thought is organized into a neat and linear assemblage that one simply plods one's way through. Each level of thought is represented by a letter of the alphabet, and one makes one's way from A to Z with each successive philosophical achievement. As

[21] Meisel, 189.

the narrative voice relays, Mr. Ramsay's "splendid mind had no sort of difficulty in running over those letters one by one, firmly and accurately, until it had reached, say, the letter Q" (TL, 33). And while Q is admirable, it is certainly not R, not the letter of his name. "[H]e heard people saying—he was a failure—that R was beyond him. He would never reach R. On to R, once more. R—" (TL, 34). This image of making one's way forward, confronting each time a new philosophical problem, subduing it and marching on to the next treats knowledge as if it were a means by which to conquer the world, to assimilate it into the self. On this model, knowledge is calculable and measurable, and one is equally defined by the letters one has not surpassed as by the letters one has. Mr. Ramsay's entire being, his insatiable need for reassurance, is not distinct from this image of knowledge, which measures failure and success by the sheer amount of things one knows. His hope seems to be that more knowledge, more letters, more accolades will somehow secure for him a place of permanence, anchor him against the annihilating force of posterity. But in rare moments, he is also plagued (and at times, we should add, comforted) by the thought that even knowledge cannot ensure immortality. What good is genius anyway, when "[t]he very stone one kicks with one's book will outlast Shakespeare"?

Love, like knowledge, is equally submitted to the novel's quiet ridicule. For all the emphasis on marriage and unity, love looks bleak, if it ever shows up at all. If one were to seek it in the novel's images of marriage, one would be hard pressed to find it. Minta Doyle and Paul Rayley marry, after Mrs. Ramsay not-so-subtly pushes them into it. But by novel's end, each has taken up with another lover. Rather then ending their marriage, these extramarital affairs make marriage tolerable. "They were excellent

friends, obviously" (TL, 174). And the Ramsays' marriage, so totalizing as to provide the very atmosphere of the novel, turns out to be a death sentence. After Mrs. Ramsay's death, Lily Briscoe directs her anger towards Mr. Ramsay. She thinks to herself, he "never gave; that man took. […] Mrs. Ramsay had given. Giving, giving, giving, she had died" (TL, 149). If there was love there, then love stifled its object. Always grasping, love suffocates the beloved. And if there is any doubt about the connection between love and death, the novel makes it explicit: "what could be more serious than the love of man for woman, what more commanding, more impressive, bearing in its bosom the seeds of death" (TL, 100). Here, the novel drops its irony, but love fares no better without it. Love always anticipates loss, the loss of the lover or the beloved. Perhaps, here, the novel comes closest to presenting an image of union that is charged with something powerful and magnificent. Woolf describes the love that William Bankes feels towards Mrs. Ramsay. She writes that, it is "like the love which mathematicians bear their symbols, or poets their phrases, (it) was meant to spread over the world and become part of the human gain" (TL, 47). A mathematician does not possess his symbols or a poet his phrases as though they were objects. This love is created through the act of releasing the beloved into the world. Something remains inherent to the beloved that the lover does not and cannot fully contain—the mathematician's symbols and the poet's phrases assume their own lives and depart from their creators. But, as if the novel could not bear to leave this image of non-possessive love untainted, it presents another image of this same love forty pages later, caught in a moment where it appears very different. Sitting around the dinner table, William Bankes suddenly feels totally indifferent toward Mrs. Ramsay. And he is shocked to find that, "at this moment her presence meant absolutely nothing to him:

her beauty meant nothing to him; her sitting with her little boy at the window—nothing, nothing" (TL, 89). Perhaps this is because even non-appropriate love cannot claim a place of permanence without equally admitting of its ephemerality. In the next section, this tension between permanence and fleetingness will be shown to shape and determine the relationship that inheres between the self and all those external things around it.

THE PREDOMINANCE OF THINGS

In the previous section, Mrs. Ramsay emerged as a "wedge-shaped core of darkness," and in this effacement of all distinguishing characteristics, became most herself. Only by "losing personality" (TL, 63) does she become who she is. That is, only through *loss* does she access that darkness that, at once, belongs to her and that is not hers alone. In this same moment that she retreats inward to this personal/impersonal space, the third stroke of the Lighthouse passes across the horizon. This third and final shaft of light that cuts across the water and into the window is *her* light, she believes. Every time, the third stroke, as if sent out to her directly. The light passes at the same moment that she loses herself and the internal darkness takes over. In this moment, her identification with the third light coincides with her loss of self. Woolf writes: "It was odd, she thought, how if one was alone, one leant to inanimate things; trees, streams, flowers; felt they expressed one; felt they became one; felt they knew one, in a sense, were one; felt an irrational tenderness thus (she looked at that long steady light) as for oneself" (TL, 63). In this act of "lending," one externalizes oneself onto "inanimate things." As if the act of "losing personality" required a depository somewhere, *things* make themselves available. And while one is on *loan* to these "trees, streams, flowers," the things actually seem to

take on this self that belongs to the viewer. It is not simply that the world of things communes with the self, or that one simply feels a strong connection to inanimate objects. The passage is clear to say that it is as if these things "became one," "knew one," "*were* one." And the externalization of the self onto these things evokes an "irrational tenderness" on the part of the viewer who faces herself in her displacement. If identification with these things is part of that profoundly personal retreat to into a "wedge-shaped core of darkness," then the novel presents a scenario in which one is most oneself when one is externalized. That is, as object, one is oneself.

And yet, if merging with things is a critical part of that most personal and private act—simultaneously a retreat inward to a core of darkness and an expansion outward into the things around one—it entails its own risks, which manifest as an effect of language. In the scene in which Mrs. Ramsay "loses personality" and discovers that internal darkness, we find her staring out at the third light that pans across the sea. The narrative voice describes her "sitting and looking, with her work in her hands until she became that thing she looked at" (TL, 63). And, as in previous instances in which she felt herself merge with the light, she discovered "some little phrase or other which had been lying in her mind." Coordinated by some unconscious associative logic, each phrase would rise to consciousness and then give way to the next, equally unexpected, phrase, simply bearing Mrs. Ramsay along on this current of language. Here, the current begins with the phrase, "Children don't forget," which gives way to the next phrase, "It will end." Finally, she silently utters the phrase, "We are in the hands of the Lord" (TL, 63). With the intrusion of this last phrase, Mrs. Ramsay breaks away from the current. "[I]nstantly she was annoyed with herself for saying that. Who had said it? Not she; she had been trapped into

saying something she did not mean" (TL, 63). In the process of becoming something else, of merging with that third stroke of light, Mrs. Ramsay is compelled to speak in a language that she does not recognize as her own. The reference to the Lord, she feels, is an "insincerity [slipped] in among truths" (TL, 64). This smuggled-in phrase, which is simultaneously about the Lord as a source of protection, as well as a locus of control, is a phrase that emanates from some unknown source outside of her: "Who had said it? Not she." Through this act of becoming the light, Mrs. Ramsay becomes the mouthpiece for utterances that are not her own. Someone else's language fills her mouth. This substitution is not the replacement of one substantive thing for another. In Mrs. Ramsay's identification with the things around her, it seems to be language itself that takes over and pours forth of its own volition.

This relationship between self and thing manifests in other characters as well. We see it most prominently around the figure of Mr. Ramsay. While his work has to do with the philosophical problem of "subject and object and the nature of reality" (TL, 23), as his wife discloses, "[h]e never looked at things" (TL, 71). Subjects and objects are abstract concepts for Mr. Ramsay, dissociated from the things that make up one's everyday existence. When his son, Andrew, tries to explain the nature of his father's work to Lily Briscoe, he references an everyday object, but isolates it from the world of human experiences and relationships. He says: "Think of a kitchen table […] when you're not there" (TL, 23).[22] And this image implants itself in Lily's imagination and

[22] In her beautifully complex and subtle analysis of Woolf, Ann Banfied's reading grows out of this passage in the text, where the independent existence of an object in the absence of an observer is first asserted. She writes: "The possible persistence of objects, an assumption of common sense, becomes itself extraordinary. Raising the table's independent existence, the self discovers not only an unreal world outside which excludes it but its own ego likewise called into question, and like the table, stripped of its everyday dress, revealing a reduced subject" (Banfield, 62).

lingers there even after Andrew leaves. She looks up and sees "the branches of a pear tree, where still hung in effigy the scrubbed kitchen table, symbol of her profound respect for Mr. Ramsay's mind" (TL, 25). The "scrubbed" kitchen table, invested with the cleanliness, simplicity, and usefulness of Andrew's philosophical illustration, is here thrown up into the outstretched arms of a pear tree, whose fruit evokes a sense of femininity and fertility. The incongruence of the table's sterility hanging in the voluptuous fruit tree does not only reference Mr. Ramsay's stifling effect on the vibrancy and fullness of his wife, but subtly introduces death into this realm of things. When the narrative voice refers to the table as "a phantom kitchen table, one of those scrubbed board tables, grained and knotted" (TL, 23), it reminds us that this wooden kitchen table was once a living thing, much like the pear tree in which it now hangs in Lily's mind. Behind this "phantom" table, symbolic of "Mr. Ramsay's mind," there was a moment in which life passed over into death, a moment in which a living tree became a "scrubbed" block of wood. The haunting presence of death is reinforced by the gunshots that go off in the background as Jasper Ramsay takes his aim at a passing "flock of starlings" (TL, 25).

What often begins as a seemingly benign association between a character and an external thing often, and in subtle ways, ends up evacuating the character such that, what remains is only the thing itself. Lily Briscoe makes just this kind of association between Mr. Ramsay and a pair of boots. Here, it is the third section of the novel, Mrs. Ramsay has died, and Lily secretly blames Mr. Ramsay for his unremitting need and endless demand for female sympathy. He stands over Lily, imposing his need upon her, silently soliciting a restorative dose of sympathy. Unable to offer it, Lily avoids his eyes by

averting her gaze towards his boots. Lily thinks to herself, "sculptured; colossal; like everything that Mr. Ramsay wore, from his frayed tie to his half-buttoned waistcoat, his own indisputably. She could see them walking to his room of their own accord, expressive in his absence of pathos, surliness, ill-temper, charm" (TL, 153). The passage begins by identifying the boots, along with the tie and the waistcoat, as objects that belong to Mr. Ramsay profoundly. They could be no other's, "his own indisputably." But they turn out to be so entirely his own, so united with their owner, that they do not even need him. Lily can "see" the boots marching off of their own accord, leaving Mr. Ramsay behind, all the while continuing to express his "pathos, surliness, ill-temper, charm," even "in his absence." It does not matter if this absence ever manifests in the novel in the form of his death, it is here announced and becomes tied to the character through his most intimate belongings.

This gesture, whereby external things bespeak the absence of their owners becomes most pronounced in the middle section of the novel, "Time Passes." To recall, in this section, ten years elapse during which time the Ramsay family does not return to their summerhouse. No longer anchored to the perspectives of any of the characters, the narrative voice moves around the empty house in a disembodied, free-floating manner. With the exception of the occasional parenthetical remark conveying information about the Ramsays (most of the time, regarding the various losses that the family sustains), the narrative voice describes the slow process of decay that occurs there. A darkness seeps in through the windows and doors, swallowing up all the vestiges of life. The narrative voice says, "here a jug and basin, there a bowl of red and yellow dahlias, there the sharp edges and firm bulk of a chest of drawers. Not only was furniture confounded; there was

scarcely anything left of body or mind by which one could say, 'This is he' or 'This is she'" (TL, 126). The encroaching darkness does not discriminate between subjects and objects. It moves from the obliteration of things—jugs, basins, bowls, drawers, furniture—to the erasure of the people that once owned them—nothing "left of body or mind." And yet, while people and things seem equally susceptible to the darkness, it is notable that the list of objects proliferates as their vanishing is asserted. Things pile up: moldy books, forgotten clothing, Mrs. Ramsay's abandoned shawl, garden urns and wind-blown plants, flies, weeds, and floor mats, dishes and looking-glass mirrors. The narrative voice asserts that nothing resists the sea airs that blow in from the coast except "hangings that flapped, wood that creaked, the bare legs of tables, saucepans and china already furred, tarnished, cracked. What people had shed and left—a pair of shoes, a shooting cap, some faded skirts and coats in wardrobes—those alone kept the human shape and in the emptiness indicated how once they were filled and animated" (TL, 129). The ostensible erasure of things leads, instead, to the proliferation of things. And while these external things supposedly "alone kept the human shape," it rather seems to be the case that, in their preponderance, they take over and replace it. Not surprisingly, in this section where all the novel's deaths are announced, there is only one announcement of a *successful* birth, and it is the birth of a house, as if the world of inanimate objects simply staged a coup. Mrs. McNab prepares the house for the family's return, and the renovation is described in terms of childbirth: "Attended with the creaking of hinges and the screeching of bolts, the slamming and banging of damp-swollen woodwork some rusty laborious birth seemed to be taking place" (TL, 139). Here, reproduction gives way, not to new life, but to things.

Part of Woolf's interest in the relationship between things and people seems to relate back to an earlier discussion regarding permanence and ephemerality. If anything seems to achieve a degree of permanence on Woolf's register, it is the things themselves, and death is tied to their very encroachment. This idea complicates Banfield's assessment that, "Woolf's characteristic conception of death is the separation of subject and object, the possibility of one observing nothing and the other existing unobserved,"[23] that death "is both the death of the self and the annihilation of the world."[24] But it is not the radical independence of subject and object that interests Woolf—there is no radical independence, people and things collapse into each other, distorting what might otherwise seem to be a natural order of priority, whereby the person outlives its disposable things. What seems to interest Woolf, rather, is that once people have become aligned with their things, things survive while people perish. In her essay, "Haworth, November, 1904," she describes a visit to the Brontës' home, which had been converted into a small museum. Here, Woolf meditates on the strange relationship that inheres between death and external things. She writes:

> But the most touching case—so touching that one hardly feels reverent in one's gaze—is that which contains the little personal relics, the dresses and shoes of the dead woman. The natural fate of such things is to die before the body that wore them, and because these, trifling and transient though they are, have survived, Charlotte Brontë the woman comes to life, and one forgets the chiefly memorable fact that she was a great writer. Her shoes and thin muslin dress have outlived her" (Essays, 7).

Intrigued by Charlotte Brontë's clothing, by her accouterments and personal things, Woolf catches herself staring, as if a voyeur, without feeling "reverent in [her] gaze." The relative insignificance of one's things, their natural path toward obsolescence, their

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[23] *Ibid.*, 214.
[24] *Ibid.*, 217.

inherent transience would seem to ensure that one's own life would outlast them. But this is not the case. One is survived by one's things. And in the case of Charlotte Brontë, their lingering presence does re-animate the woman to some extent, but it does so by sacrificing her identity as a writer: "one forgets [this] chiefly memorable fact."

It seems that, for Woolf, there is a brutality to the relationship between people and their things, as the fleetingness of life is thrown into relief by the perseverance of those objects. As Rachel Bowlby suggests, things "only acquire their connotation of permanence by virtue of outlasting."[25] Returning once again to the short story, "Sympathy," the narrator expresses her own shock when she discovers that, only a short time after his passing, she can barely recall the dead man, Humphrey Hammond. She says,

> And yet he died; the utmost he could do gives me now scarcely any sensation at all. Terrible! Terrible! to be so callous! There is the yellow arm chair in which he sat, shabby but still solid enough, surviving us all; and the mantelpiece strewn with glass and silver, but he is ephemeral as the dusty light which stripes the wall and carpet. So will the sun shine on glass and silver the day I die. (Sympathy, 111).

In attempting to recollect the man, the narrator instead remembers his things: a chair, a mantelpiece, reflective objects like glass and silver. The brute existence of those very objects stands in contrast, not only to the dead man, but to all the living as well, whose deaths are merely outstanding. The dominion of things "surviving us all." Here, a community of the living and the dead is formed in contrast to external things, powerful only in that they endure. The narrator's own death is invoked in this passage, as she imagines a world of objects that will persist in her absence. One's own reflection will no longer "shine on glass and silver," but the sun will carry on as if nothing changed.

[25] Bowlby, 102.

In this passage where Humphrey Hammond's things outlast him, we hear traces of Woolf's own early encounter with death through the passing of her mother. She remembers walking into her mother's sick room after she had died, and, notably, the description of the scene is dominated by the details of the objects in the room. "I think the candles were burning; and I think the sun was coming in. At any rate I remember the long looking-glass; with the drawers on either side; and the washstand; and the great bed on which my mother lay" (Sketch, 91-2). The recollection, though evocative, is nonetheless conveyed with a degree of uncertainty: "*I think* the candles were burning," "*I think* the sun was coming in." But as it goes on, it gains greater confidence: "At any rate I remember the long looking-glass." Even as Woolf approaches the bed on which her mother's body is laid, it is the image of a crying nurse that asserts itself in her memory. The closer she gets to her mother's body, the more confident her memory becomes: "I remember very clearly how even as I was taken to the bedside I noticed that one nurse was sobbing, and a desire to laugh came over me, and I said to myself as I have often done at moments of crisis since, 'I feel nothing whatever'" (Sketch, 91-2). In a situation that might otherwise demand grief, Woolf claims to feel nothing. In fact, the "desire to laugh" takes over. Laughter, like crying, is a non-linguistic response that preserves its own ambiguity. In this moment, when Woolf admits her absence of feeling and her desire to laugh, it becomes clear that, in her writing, representations of death will maintain a link to that ambiguity. Mourning will not follow any predictable path, and so everything must be permitted as a potential response to death.

MOURNING'S GUISES AND THE DEMANDS OF WOMEN

This chapter began with Woolf's invocation to elegy, which, we suggested, did not treat loss as something calculable, but instead as something constitutive of the self, always bound up with concealment and ambiguity. But elegy, this poetic lamentation for the dead, is not simply about the exposed self, enmeshed with its past and future losses, which prevent it from full enclosure. Elegy also figures the self in the position of the survivor, lamenting those definite loses, the deaths of others, without reducing them to any calculable order or singular meaning. In this way, Woolf's work is elegiac in, perhaps, a more straightforward sense, as her characters are often in the position of mourning the deaths of others. And yet, the form that mourning takes in Woolf's work will resist any simple or final designation, because, for Woolf, writing on mourning means writing about the effects that death has on language itself.

As discussed above, by burying the deaths of the various characters in the "corridor" of *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf does not remove them from sight, but makes them more conspicuous. The paucity of language surrounding their announcements sets them apart. The narrative voice relays only the barest information about each death—that of Mrs. Ramsay; her children, Andrew and Prue; and Prue's only child—thereby shrouding these deaths in an air of silence. This silence that belongs to death, or more specifically, that befalls the survivor in the wake of another's death, is something that Woolf wants to preserve. Before her own death in the novel, Mrs. Ramsay learns of the imminent death of a stranger, the father of one of her housemaids, a Swiss girl named Marie. The passage begins in a seemingly innocuous ways, with Mrs. Ramsay insisting, as always, that doors should be closed and windows left open, a practice that the narrative voice hints might be linked to Mrs. Ramsay's own subsequent death. Here, we learn that

Marie is the only maid who follows these orders, and with this comment, the narrative voice turns its attention to her. The reader learns that Marie's father is dying back home in Switzerland. The grief that Marie experiences is displaced from the figure of her father and attributed, instead, to the beauty of the mountains back home, which she can no longer access. Mrs. Ramsay's response to the news is one of silence. "She had stood there silent for there was nothing to be said. He had cancer of the throat" (TL, 28). In its blunt tone, the narrative voice aligns language with the existence of hope, and silence with the inevitability of despair. And in this case, "there was no hope, no hope whatever" (TL, 28). But this absence of hope, which seems to demand silence—"there was nothing to be said"—nonetheless requires an outlet. So Mrs. Ramsay takes it out in the form of "irritation" toward her son, who fidgets as she tries to knit a stocking for the Lighthouse manager's tubercular son.

In her reading of *To the Lighthouse*, Katherine Dalsimer picks up on this same character, Marie, who otherwise occupies almost no narrative space in the novel. Dalsimer analyzes an earlier reference to this character in order to explore the way in which grief is treated on the level of form. She glosses the following passage, in order to show that grief is muted by the very sentence structure employed by the narrative voice. Ostensibly conveying something unrelated to Marie, the narrative voice describes the way in which the children always scatter after dinner. They tear around the house, "while the sun poured into those attics, which a plank alone separated from each other so that every footstep could be plainly heard and the Swiss girl sobbing for her father who was dying of cancer in a valley of the Grisons, and lit up bats, flannels, straw hats, ink-pots, beetles, and the skulls of small birds" (TL, 8). In response to this passage, Dalsimer

suggests that, in order to get to the end of the sentence, awkward in its structure, replete with lists of things, one must practically skip over "what intervenes, the sobbing girl." She continues:

> When the verb finally appears, it is immediately followed by a list, an itemization of the clutter of an attic, so that the sobbing of the girl becomes merely an item of that clutter—both of the attic, and of the sentence. Amid this clutter, the sobs of the girl are given equal weight with the sound of passing footsteps: everything in the structure of the sentence contrives to muffle her sobs, to silence her grief.[26]

Here, grief emerges as simply another useless thing, along with the discarded flannels, straw hats, ink-pots, all the things shoved up and forgotten in the attic. It is not the dignified and resolute silence of grief that Woolf depicts here, but, rather, the effort to impose silence on grief, to shut it up and remove it from sight. This is consistent with Ann Banfield's claim that, the "modernity" of Woolf's writing "partly lies in its not flinching before the reality of death in all its starkness."[27] She later adds, "It does not suffice for the modern elegy to set down the brutal reality, it must also end mourning. The call to weep must become that to 'weep no more.'"[28] Banfield finds in Woolf's treatment of mourning a resistance to the sentimental displays of Victorian grief. In a backlash against those spectacular performances of mourning, Woolf ignores the "call to weep" and, instead, allows mourning to exist in all of its contradictions and conflicting demands.

One of the tensions that Woolf tracks within mourning has to do with language. On the one hand, there is a need to produce language, to continue to speak even when silence appeals with greater force. Describing the aftermath of her sister, Stella's death,

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[26] Dalsimer, 8.
[27] Banfield, 236.
[28] *Ibid.*, 237.

which followed shortly after her mother's, Woolf says, "We never spoke of them. I can remember how awkwardly Thoby avoided saying 'Stella' when a ship called *Stella* was wrecked." She continues with the parenthetical remark, "(When Thoby died, Adrian and I agreed that we would go on talking about him, 'for there are so many dead people now.') This silence, we felt, covered something" (Sketch, 125). Thoby, who cannot speak the word "Stella" after her death, will continue to be named after his own. Speaking Thoby's name not only maintains a link with the dead via language, it also preserves the memory of his failure to speak Stella's name. The awkward silence is preserved at the same time that it is annulled. In this way, language holds something open, exposes something that silence "covered" over. And yet, this imperative to name the dead is countered by the imperative to relinquish a certain expectation of language. Describing the experience of her mother's death, Woolf writes:

> The tragedy of her death was not that it made one, now and then and very intensely, unhappy. It was that it made her unreal; and us solemn and self-conscious. We were made to act parts that we did not feel; to fumble for words that we did not know. It obscured, it dulled. It made one hypocritical and immeshed in the conventions of sorrow. Many foolish and sentimental ideas came into being. Yet there was a struggle, for soon we revived, and there was a conflict between what we ought to be and what we were. (Sketch, 95)

To "fumble for words" that are not one's own is to perform an act of mourning, as if it were something already written in a language that does not belong to the one who must speak it. Death's "tragedy" is not the intense sadness of loss, but the way that it transforms things into what they are not. It turns the mother into something "unreal" and the mourners into actors, reciting the "conventions of sorrow."

If Banfield is correct in suggesting that Woolf shuts down the "call to weep," it is, in part, because the "conventions of sorrow" do not provide the space for all of grief's

various forms. These conventions do not acknowledge grief's "unbecoming side; its legacy of bitterness, bad temper; ill adjustment; and what is to be the worst of all—boredom" (Sketch, 143). Like Woolf's realization, "I feel nothing," at the side of her mother's deathbed, boredom perhaps taps into an existential indifference that inheres in even the most intimate relationships. This is not to claim that indifference lurks in some conscious corner of the mind. But in those moments, for example, in which Mrs. Ramsay retreats so far inward as to become her ownmost wedge of darkness, the world simply slips away into irrelevance. This separation from the world remains operative even as one is fully immersed in it. In the novel, this trace of indifference in preserved in the blunt and unaffected words of Mrs. McNab's. Reflecting on Mrs. Ramsay, she thinks, "So she was dead; and Mr. Andrew killed; and Miss Prue dead too, they said, with her first baby; but every one had lost some one these years. Prices had gone up shamefully, and didn't come down again neither" (TL, 136). While Woolf does not tie these words to any of the surviving family members or friends, Woolf does include them in the novel, thus granting a space for a death-related indifference. These words force the reader to break with any purely sentimental reaction to death. Here, apathy, too, is given voice, and in its expression, denies any inherent difference between death and inflation. Both are simply unfortunate occurrences that befall everyone indiscriminately.

Acknowledging this indifference, as well as the boredom and irritation that accompany death, is part of the imperative to "weep no more," as Banfield calls it. But in this refusal to weep, one runs the risk of fetishizing death. In the first section of the novel, before Mrs. Ramsay dies, the narrative voice aligns her with yet another death, this time, not that of the Swiss maid's father, but of another man, who remains unnamed. Although

Mrs. Ramsay is the center around which the entire novel orbits, and even though we develop a strong sense of her character, she nonetheless remains elusive. And part of her mystery has to do with the pervasive silence that surrounds her, and that creates the impression that she has her secrets. One of the few times the reader gains insight into Mrs. Ramsay's past, it is a fleeting glimpse of one of those secrets, the rumored death of her fiancé when she was younger. The narrative voice begins by extolling the virtues of her immaculate beauty, but then wonders: "What was there behind it—her beauty and splendour? Had he blown his brains out, they asked, had he died the week before they were married—some other, earlier lover, of whom rumours reached one? Or was there nothing?" (TL, 28). In this passage, her fiancé's death is buried beneath her beauty and splendor. By framing the death as something that lies "behind" those qualities, the narrative voice not only draws a connection between these things, but turns that death into the potential *source* of that "beauty and splendor." And her reticence regarding this death—the fact that she displays no overt signs of having mourned a lost love, thereby preserving the rumors in their unconfirmed form— helps to create the idea that this death, which she carries around within her, is the very thing that makes her what she is. By refusing to weep, by refusing even to discuss the death, she comes to appear as a figure that is built on the loss of another. And according to the narrative voice, her silence and avoidance of mourning is, in some ways, a denial of community around pain: "For easily though she might have said at some moment of intimacy when stories of great passion, of love foiled, of ambition thwarted came her way how she too had known of felt or been through it herself, she never spoke. She was silent always" (TL, 28-9).

But if conspicuous mourning is momentarily imagined to be some grounds for community, when it actually surfaces in the novel in the figure of Mr. Ramsay, it turns out to be all about the self. After the death of his wife, Mr. Ramsay's grief is expressed in the form of *need*. He descends upon Lily Briscoe in the final section of the novel, sighing audibly, impatient, silently demanding of her an ounce of sympathy. If this is the form that his mourning takes, however, it is hardly distinguishable from his normal mode of being throughout the novel. The insecurity that had regularly beset him before his wife's death is different now only in that he must seek out another source of appeasement. He must solicit female sympathy wherever he can find it, "approach any woman," "his need was so great" (TL, 151).[29] And in this particular moment, the only available woman is Lily Briscoe. Unfortunately for Mr. Ramsay, she is the one woman incapable of providing it. Woolf writes, "there issued from him such a groan that any other woman in the whole world would have done something, said something—all except myself, thought Lily, girding herself bitterly, who am not a woman, but a peevish, ill-tempered, dried-up old maid, presumably" (TL, 151). Here, the combination of Mr. Ramsay's profound need and Lily Briscoe's utter avoidance of it opens up a question of sexual difference. Lily imagines that, to be a woman is to know how to respond to the suffering of another: "any other woman in the whole world would have done something." "Presumably," Lily's failure to assume this role is her failure to be a woman. And her imagined exile is so severe that she alone is not equipped to respond, thus stripping her of her womanhood

[29] Maria DiBattista claims that, "Ramsay, like all honest mourners, mourns for himself. His elegiac lamentations begin in self-pity and conclude in self-justification. Elegy can displace, but it can never disguise its origin in the indominable egoism of the living" (DiBattista, 103). This "indominable egoism of the living," which supposedly lies at the "origin" of "elegiac lamentations," does not appear to describe Mr. Ramsay alone. Rather, Mr. Ramsay's condition seems to expose something about the fundamental self-enclosure of mourning in general. While this self-referentiality may inhere in acts of mourning, this chapter has tried to develop a notion of elegy that is distinguished from mourning, such that "elegiac lamentations" and mourning itself are not one and the same.

and revealing her to be "a peevish, ill-tempered, dried-up old maid." Again, on the following page, Mr. Ramsay's need manifests as a gender test, capable of probing the sexual body to discover its true identity. Lily thinks, "a man, any man, would staunch this effusion, would stop these lamentations. A woman, she had provoked this horror; a woman, she should have known how to deal with it. It was immensely to her discredit, sexually, to stand there dumb" (TL, 152). This time, "man" appears to be the balm, if only in that his presence simply does not allow this demand for sympathy to take shape, while the role of woman has suddenly doubled. Thus, Lily seems to have been brought back into the fold of women, but this time, ends up on the wrong side. The figure that was supposed to soothe, the one who "should have known how to deal with it," also enflames. Here, woman emerges not as the curative, but as the provocateur.

If grief assumes the form of need for Mr. Ramsay, for Lily Briscoe it assumes the form of judgment. And it is not until Mr. Ramsay no longer solicits any sympathy from her, does she experience any desire to produce it for him. She snaps them both out of their self-absorbed and self-enclosed worlds by looking down at Mr. Ramsay's boots and, without thinking, exclaims that they are remarkable. Not until this break in the intense pressure of soliciting and denying sympathy, this moment in which Mr. Ramsay becomes animated about footwear, pontificating on the topic of good craftsmanship, demonstrating his knot-tying skills to Lily, testing her own, does she suddenly feel sympathy for him (TL, 154). Perhaps it is because sympathy is imagined by the novel to be a movement outward. Even Lily, before the feeling washes over her, chastises herself in these terms: "She ought to have floated off instantly upon some wave of sympathetic expansion: the pressure on her was tremendous. But she remained stuck" (TL, 151). Here, sympathy is

expansion; it is overflowing one's boundaries. And Lily's problem seems to be that she is "stuck" in herself. Thus, we might say that *To the Lighthouse* does not set up the problem of sexual difference in an effort to neatly cordon off the concept of *man* from that of *woman*. The meaning of the feminine for Woolf does not reside in its antithetical position to the masculine, as though they were simply binary opposites. Instead, this novel will complicate the notion of the feminine by countering Lily's condition of being "stuck" within herself with Mrs. Ramsay's condition of "expansion."[30]

Although Mrs. Ramsay does not mourn in conspicuous ways, and although she does not respond to Marie's imminent loss with overt displays of sympathy, she nonetheless exists by way of exorbitant giving. We see Mrs. Ramsay in her children's bedroom after dinner. She is there to negotiate a truce between the two youngest. A boar's skull is mounted on the wall. James likes it there, and Cam is terrified of it. To settle the fight, Mrs. Ramsay takes off her own shawl and wraps it around the skull, so that it appears simultaneously to be there for James, and to be gone for Cam. This physical act of giving, which we might note, settles a fight without deciding between presence and absence—the skull both remains and does not remain—also links Mrs. Ramsay's self-expansion to the fact of her own death. In this physical denuding, Mrs. Ramsay exposes her own uncovered body in a room where, as per her orders, the doors have been shut and the windows left open. Woolf writes: "Then feeling for her shawl and remembering she had wrapped it round the boar's skull, she got up, and pulled the window down another inch or two, and heard the wind, and got a breath of the perfectly indifferent chill night air" (TL, 115-16). Whether or not this is the "perfectly indifferent

[30] As Rachel Bowlby suggests, "In making of Lily a cultural and sexual rebel against 'the universal law,' the novel seems to place her as the antithesis to Mrs. Ramsay, whose energies are dedicated to the maintenance of all that Lily repudiates in her prescribed sexual destiny" (Bowlby, 63).

chill" that will eventually lead to her death in the next section is immaterial. In either case, the novel works to depict a correlation between this exorbitant giving and death. To exist in this way, to be so far extended out beyond oneself and into the lives of others, is to exist in the mode of depletion. The narrative voice describes this extreme self-deprivation: "So boasting of her capacity to surround and protect, there was scarcely a shell of herself left for her to know herself by; all was so lavish and spent" (TL, 38). In this way, Mrs. Ramsay is a woman, only at the cost of her own life. As Lily says after Mrs. Ramsay's death, "Giving, giving, giving, she had died" (TL, 149).

WRITING'S EPHEMERAL MOMENT

By complicating the figure of woman in the novel, such that we are not presented with a singular concept, but conflicting images on women, which tie self-expansion to self-containment, *To the Lighthouse* challenges its own tendency to create binaries. Thus, when the narrative voice describes Mrs. Ramsay as a character who "pitied men always as if they lacked something—women never, as if they had something" (TL, 85), the stark contrast between Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe already begins to destabilize any perfect binary between men and women. Similarly, it would seem that Woolf endorsed a binary thinking of men and women in her book, *A Room of One's Own*. Here, she draws an explicit connection between material conditions—not just the things one possesses, but the very notion of a private space in which to create—and intellectual freedom. According to Woolf, the denial of the former is the impossibility of the latter. Women, who have been denied this space of their own, "have not had a dog's chance of writing

poetry" (RO, 106). And yet, while this analysis seems to point to a clear demarcation between women and men, sexual difference also breaks down in subtle ways, particularly around the topic of creative action. Rather than simply calling women to arms and advocating a reversal of gender hierarchies, Woolf shows that women have always already been operative in creative production. According to Woolf, women have served as a kind of absent presence that, until the 18th century at least, has manifested only in the concealed form of a work's generating impulse. Here, Woolf articulates a thinking of creative regeneration and rebirth that is possible only via an encounter with something radically other than the self. Thus, women provide "some renewal of creative power which is in the gift only of the opposite sex to bestow" (RO, 85).

One must be cautious here not to suggest that sexual difference is eradicated in Woolf's work. On the contrary, she clearly states that women and men belong to "opposite" sexes. The point is rather to show that Woolf maintains this notion of difference at the same time that she overturns it. She does this, not by showing that men and women are the same, but by investing woman with the power of insemination in the creative process. As it turns out, woman is more man than man himself. Belonging to two heterogeneous spheres, man and woman nonetheless meet in the realm of creative activity. Woolf envisions this encounter between a husband and wife, who occupy totally different worlds that, "there would follow, even in the simplest talk, such a natural difference of opinion that the dried ideas in him would be fertilised anew; and the sight of her creating in a different medium from his own would so quicken his creative power that insensibly his sterile mind would begin to plot again. (RO, 85). Notably, man is associated here with sterility, and woman with the power to fertilize. By inseminating his

"dried ideas" with new life, "insensibly," she is able to revivify that which was impotent. While Woolf describes a shift that begins at the end of the 18th century and continues through her present, altering the conditions of women in the creative sphere, she claims that their creativity has always already infused the very spaces they inhabit. She writes, "women have sat indoors all these millions of years, so that by this time the very walls are permeated by their creative force" (RO, 86). Here, this figure of woman, whose creative force has "permeated" the "very walls" around her, but has never been rightfully claimed as her own, brings back the conflicting images of Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe. The former exists by means of self-expansion, but also at a deficit to the self; the latter searches for essences, contracting within herself. One seems to release the "I," while the other tries to shore it up and secure it. This stance toward the self—this relation to the "I"—is ultimately at stake in Woolf's reading of creative activity.

While Woolf advocates for a form of writing that is distinct from men's, that speaks to the experience of being a woman, she cautions against treating it as a kind of gender retaliation. In addressing this topic, Ann Banfield frames it in terms of subjectivity and the assertion of the "I." She writes: "What one expects the woman writer to defend is the right to say 'I.' But this is not Woolf's conclusion. The danger she sees is that the male egoism may provoke the woman's counter-assertion of self."[31] Thus, if Woolf is *not* interested in this "counter-assertion of the self," this "right to say 'I,'" what is she interested in? We sense here that it will not be about securing, cordoning off, or enclosing the self. It will have something to do with expansion, but not in the exact terms in which Mrs. Ramsay seems to exist. In fact, neither Lily Briscoe nor Mrs. Ramsay will completely determine the type of creative existence that Woolf imagines, but each will

[31] Banfield, 173.

contribute certain elements to it. Lily Briscoe, who otherwise appears to be concerned with securing the self and seeking out essences—we recall her sitting at the feet of Mrs. Ramsay, desiring to enter her most internal space in order to divine its secrets and thereby commune with her more fully—betrays her own more nuanced intuitions in spite of herself. She stands outside in the final section of the novel, considering the best way to finish her painting, and her mind wanders:

> 'you' and 'I' and 'she' pass and vanish; nothing stays; all changes; but not words, not paint. Yet it would be hung in the attics, she thought; it would be rolled up and flung under a sofa; yet even so, even of a picture like that, it was true. One might say, even of this scrawl, not of that actual picture, perhaps, but of what it attempted, that it 'remained forever.' (TL, 179).

In this critical moment, Lily provides a theory of permanence that posits something enduring, not in the physical object produced—not in any specific novel or painting—but in the *attempt* to create it. What would be preserved then, would be nothing tangible, nothing one could classify; instead, the element of perseverance would inhere in the most transitory part of the creative process.

One might challenge this privileging of creative energy over the created object, by reminding us of the closing scene in *To the Lighthouse*, where Lily's final brush stroke seems to endorse a thinking of completion, some kind of artistic recuperation that makes up for all the novel's losses. The last lines of the novel read as follows: "With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision" (TL, 209). With this emphasis on vision, this claim to completion, the laying down of her brush in exhaustion, all signs point to something rounded off and neatly wrapped up. But the problem is that time always intervenes to render ephemeral

something that seems permanent. Leaving aside the fact that the last lines already hint at this very transience, suggesting that the clarity of artistic vision only lasted "for a second," the reader has already been informed that, in any case, the fate of completed artistic projects is to be discarded and forgotten. Lily knows: "It would be hung in the attics, she thought; it would be destroyed. But what did that matter? she asked herself taking up her brush again" (TL, 208). It is not the final object, but the willingness to go on painting in the face of certain erasure that constitutes whatever permanence there is.

If the emphasis is on creative activity itself and not anything substantive, it is not surprising that some relinquishment of the self-contained and enclosed subject will be necessary. As Banfied claims, it is not the "counter-assertion of self" that enables artistic production; rather, only through "release from the 'I' flows artistic creativity."[32] It seems that, by attempting to assert the "I," one closes oneself off to the outside. We might say that one creates an outside through the very process of damming oneself off. Artistic creation would thus seem to require some encounter with an outside that no longer stands in opposition to an inside. Rather, by releasing the "I," one becomes open and able to give and receive freely. Woolf describes this notion of creative openness and availability during the period after her mother's death. She underscores her passivity in this moment of creative expression, "as if something were becoming visible without any effort" (Sketch, 93). The effect of her mother's death was that it "unveiled and intensified" the world, which seems to offer itself to Woolf in a new way. She remembers sitting in Kensington Garden reading a poem in the early days after her mother's death, when the entire family was still very much in the trenches of mourning. Suddenly, for the first time, the poem came together and seemed to present itself to Woolf's understanding. As

[32] Banfield, 173.

mentioned earlier, discussion of death within her home was stifled, and yet, her attunement to language became heightened. She writes: "It was as if it became altogether intelligible; I had a feeling of transparency in words when they cease to be words and become so intensified that one seems to experience them; to foretell them as if they developed what one is already feeling" (Sketch, 93).

In this instance, an actual loss is registered as a transformation in her relationship to words. Words here, filtered through the lens of death and loss, become more than themselves; they are no longer simply words. Rather, language achieves a degree of materiality, such that to read is to live via those words—"one seems to experience them." Seemingly born of the reader herself, the words "develop" what is already there, inchoate in Woolf's mind, as though written by the reader and not the writer; or perhaps, co-produced through some interaction between reader and text.

As a result of this maternal death, language disappears, becomes transparent, and the reader, Woolf herself, enters language so deeply that the boundaries between language and life cease to divide. Language anticipates the self, revealing "what one is already feeling," as though one only gains self-knowledge via this external encounter, a detour through the written word. This fusing of language and life, which follows from such a significant loss, describes for Woolf the very act of writing. It seems to her that "[t]he pen gets on the scent" (Sketch, 93). And with this supplanting of the intentional subject for the pen that moves of its own volition, tracking the "scent" of unconscious material not yet available, it is as though the writer learns of what has transpired only belatedly, through the act of writing itself. Perhaps writing only offers the subject security by pushing it out of the way. And yet, to suggest that the "release of the self"

constitutes a total abdication of agency, is misleading. It is not simply that the writer is written via the creative act. The writer also assumes an active role from the midst of passivity. We know, for example that Woolf stood in a complex relationship to her work, *To the Lighthouse*, which overwhelmed her in "a great, apparently voluntary rush" (Sketch, 81). She describes the writing process as follows:

> One thing burst into another. Blowing bubbles out of a pipe gives the feeling of the rapid crowd of ideas and scenes which blew out of my mind, so that my lips seemed syllabling of their own accord as I walked. What blew the bubbles? Why then? I have no notion. But I wrote the book very quickly; and when it was written, I ceased to be obsessed by my mother. I no longer hear her voice; I do not see her. (Sketch, 81).

This "exorcism," as Maria DiBattista calls it, this "verbal rite that casts out the resident ghosts haunting the mind"[33] is one that Woolf does not conduct herself; rather, it is somehow performed upon her, her lips "syllabling of their own accord." And yet, to liken the experience of writing *To the Lighthouse* to the treatment of psychoanalysis, whereby writing constitutes a working-through, means that Woolf also assumes some responsibility for her own liberation from the haunting sight and sound of her mother. And we note that, the end of the passage increasingly stresses the "I": "*I* ceased to be obsessed"; "*I* no longer hear her": "*I* do not see her."

The reason that Woolf is able to manage these dual positions of passivity and activity has to do with the ways in which she assumes the seemingly opposing roles of reader and writer. Woolf is a reader in that she receives the shocks that the world initiates. "I feel that I have had a blow," she writes, and that it "will become a revelation of some order; it is a token of some real thing behind appearances; and I make it real by putting it into words." Woolf continues: "It is only by putting it into words that I make it

[33] DiBattista, 67.

whole; this wholeness means that it has lost its power to hurt me; it gives me, perhaps because by doing so I take away the pain, a great delight to put the severed parts together" (Sketch, 72). Woolf is at once reader and writer, one who receives and one who transforms these received gifts into language. Both are necessary. And she claims, "the shock-receiving capacity is what makes me a writer. I hazard the explanation that a shock is at once in my case followed by the desire to explain it" (Sketch, 72). It is not simply that shock is converted into revelation or pain into meaning. Reality itself seems to hinge on this critical moment where one receives something, "a token of the some real thing behind appearances," and yet, one creates the real itself, as though nothing lies behind appearances, "I make it real by putting it into words."

The notion of reality, for Woolf, is not about access to a verifiable, objective world. There is no inherent quality of "realness" that one might discern. If it is the case, as Woolf suggests, that something gains reality via language, she does not equate reality with anything substantive. It is nothing tangible, nothing one can hold, but rather something lasting in the face of ephemerality and that is made of ephemerality. As such, it is something she both discovers and creates. The only definitive claims she makes about reality describe it precisely in indefinite terms. She says, reality "would seem to be something very erratic, very undependable." And the examples she gives of such moments of "reality" reveal no substantive common denominator: "now in a dusty road, now in a scrap of newspaper in the street, now in a daffodil in the sun. It lights up a group in a room and stamps some causal saying. […] Sometimes, too, it seems to dwell in shapes too far away for us to discern what their nature is" (Room, 108-9). Reality seems to fall equally and arbitrarily upon things seen close up, things seen at a distance, things

we can make out and things we cannot. For Woolf, reality is not about any essence that lies "behind appearances," but about the construction of a moment, a temporal quality, an encounter in which something "lights up." It is a scene, a fleeting instant in which things are revealed, not as distinct entities, but as part of a world.

Writing on the temporal component of reality, Woolf says, "whatever it touches, it fixes and makes permanent. That is what remains over when the skin of the day has been cast into the hedge; that is what is left of past time and of our loves and hates" (Room, 108-9). Here, Woolf seems to depict an image of remainder, reality as something left over "when the skin of the day has been cast into the hedge." But this remainder should not be understood in terms of a discrete entity that is left behind. Loss in Woolf's work never presents itself so neatly. As this chapter has shown, constitutive loss holds things open, prevents enclosure, and disrupts the very thinking of presence and absence, and plenitude and fall, that we might otherwise associate with it. Thus, when reality makes things "permanent," this permanence can only be conceived in terms of all of its many ephemeral moments, a "scrap of newspaper in the street," "a daffodil in the sun." And if, as Woolf says, the writer is the one who "has the chance to live more than other people in the presence of this reality" (Room, 109), that is, if the writer is the one who must survey "what is left of past time and of our loves and hates," then the writer is the one who must manage a complex temporality. This is because, for Woolf, the past cannot be excerpted from the present:

> The past only comes back when the present runs so smoothly that it is like the sliding surface of a deep river. Then one sees through the surface to the depths. In those moments I find one of my greatest satisfactions, not that I am thinking of the past; but that it is then that I am living most fully in the present. For the present when backed by the past is a thousand times deeper than the present when

> it presses so close that you can feel nothing else, when the film on the camera reaches only the eye. But to feel the present sliding over the depths of the past, peace is necessary. (Sketch, 98).

In this complicated relationship, neither the past nor the present has priority. The past is necessary to live "most fully in the present." But, the past only returns when the "present runs so smoothly." This image of the present as the "surface of a deep river" that illuminates the past beneath it brings back to mind the curved and semi-transparent petals that, for Woolf, reveal the world, but only obliquely. Here, both the past and the present simultaneously manifest and remain hidden. And for Woolf, the question of their coexistence is a question about living, about how to live "most fully." If the writer is the one who must receive and convert this past, it is likewise in the service of living. Woolf says, "I write this partly in order to recover my sense of the present by getting the past to shadow this broken surface" (Sketch, 98). The present is something that the writer must "recover," because the present is not guaranteed in any single moment. Here, the writer brings the present, creates the present: one writes in order to recover one's "sense" of the present, by allowing the past to shine through. Writing is the bestowal of reality because it treats the present as something that is not given, something that is always simultaneously lost and arriving and that must be continually re-negotiated through the creative act.

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