

Analecta Husserliana

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Volume CIX



Destiny, the Inward Quest,
Temporality and Life

Edited by

Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka

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ANALECTA HUSSERLIANA
THE YEARBOOK OF PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH
VOLUME CIX

Founder and Editor-in-Chief:

ANNA - TERESA TYMIENIECKA

*The World Institute for Advanced Phenomenological Research and Learning
Hanover, New Hampshire, USA*

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ANNA - TERESA TYMIENIECKA

*World Institute for Advanced Phenomenological Research and Learning,
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A-T.T.

SECTION I
THE SENSE OF LIFE

PRESENT ETERNITY: QUESTS OF TEMPORALITY
 IN THE LITERARY PRODUCTION OF THE «EXTRÊME
 CONTEMPORAIN» IN FRANCE
 (THE WRITINGS OF DOMINIQUE FOURCADE
 AND EMMANUEL HOCQUARD)

ABSTRACT

The term « extrême contemporain » is an expression currently used by scholars to indicate the French literary production of the last 20 years. This term was used in a work of literature for the first time by the French poet Dominique Fourcade in 1986 (*Élégie L apostrophe E.C.*) in reference to an epoch, but also to a new sense of experiencing time and space in the so-called « age of digital reproducibility ». The aim of this paper is to consider how the change in temporal protocols due to the triumph of *Big Optics* (Paul Virilio) affects the sense of teleology (destiny) and the quest for experience in French contemporary poetry (in particular, in the genre of the elegy). Including both memory and anticipation, the « extrême contemporain » production seems to prefer the “time of now”, *Jetzt-zeit* in Benjamin’s words, to past or testimony, and speaks to the present, whose responsibility is to give voice to a space where everything is simply allowed to happen.

Destiny, temporality, doom: these three words, that are put together in the title of this Issue apply to our sense of historical progression, as if the first and the last were linked, like “beads on a rosary,” through and by the middle one, invoking the notion of an *inner quest*.

This well-known image of the rosary is taken from “Theses on the Philosophy of History”,¹ an essay in which Walter Benjamin criticizes historians who content themselves “with establishing a causal connection between various moments in history,” instead of grasping “the constellation which [their] own era has formed with a definite earlier one”.²

In these pages I would like to share my thoughts about a supposed change concerning the notion of the teleological passing of time that has been taking place in the contemporary French “Literary era”; an “epoch”—I prefer this word to the previous one—which, following the suggestions advanced by Jean-Luc Nancy and Michel Chaillou in the mid-1980s, can be approximately called the “*extrême contemporain*” (the “contemporary extreme”).³

Since then, this label has seen myriads of formulations, and has come to identify a corpus of authors (mostly novelists, even if the term was primarily introduced for poetry) who interpret, each in their own specific way, their “avant-garde” work. One

could even say that this definition has become thoroughly debased by now, because of its broadness. Nevertheless, among all the possible interpretations of this expression, I will advance the one that describes a *contemporary age that includes its extremities*, where the word “extremity” is not to be taken merely in the sense of an extreme experience (somehow connected to the concept of necessity and, perhaps, *doom*), but rather in the meaning of outermost *and* farthest parts of it.

This allows me to preserve the idea of the “continuum of History” proposed by Walter Benjamin in his “Theses”, when he states that:

History is the object of a construction, whose site is not that of homogeneous and empty time, but one filled with now-time [*jetzt-zeit*]. Thus, to Robespierre ancient Rome was a past charged with the time of the now which he blasted out of the continuum of history. The French Revolution viewed itself as Rome incarnate.⁴

Jetzt-zeit and *extrême contemporain* poetry are, in my opinion, to be paralleled by this constructive principle (that Benjamin attributed to historical materialism) related to a sort of “cessation of historical time”. They both recognize

the sign of a *Messianic cessation of happening* [a sort of zero-hour, *Stillstellung*], or, put differently, a *revolutionary chance of events* [...] in order to *blast a specific era out of the homogenous course of history* – blasting a specific *life* out of the era or a specific *work* out of the *lifework*. As a result of this method the *lifework* is *preserved* in this work and at the same time *anceled*; in the *lifework*, the era; and in the era, the entire course of history. The nourishing fruit of the historically understood contains *time as a precious but tasteless seed*.⁵

The various aspects of time (past, present and future) are thus converging, so that they are all simultaneously autonomous *and* mutually constitutive, creating a sort of “temporal synaesthesia”⁶ that gives things a chance to happen.

What I intend to do in this essay is, first, illustrate how and why time has to be seen as a “precious but tasteless seed” in the *extrême contemporain* literary epoch (in France).

To do this, I will begin by discussing the notion of the “suspension of experience” in contemporary literature, recently proposed by several critics. Secondly, I will turn to think about the relationship between destiny and experience, as it results in some pages of two poets belonging to this epoch of extremes: Emmanuel Hocquard and, more specifically, Dominique Fourcade. And I will conclude with some reflections on an elegy poem in which, in my opinion, “*extrême contemporain* epoch” poetry best shows its peculiar interpretation of the link between *destiny*, *temporality* and *doom* through its *inner quest*.

I. NOTES ON LITERATURE AND EXPERIENCE: PROSE AND POETRY

There are two ways to explore the connections between literature and experience. We can initially wonder about what the experience *of* literature is today; secondly, we can investigate the relationship *between* literature and experience today.

The first approach implies the introduction of a new model when considering literature in the “age of digital reproducibility”. It is culturally fashionable today

to speak of literary *device* rather than of literary *structure*, which implies a trans-semiotic approach to literature, including a strategic combination (*agencement*) of utterance (textuality) and visuality.⁷

It is undeniable that what Paul Virilio called the “Big Optics” (the switch from an anthropometrical vision based on geometrical perspective, which involves the distinction between near and far, to “the active optics of time passing at the speed of light”, typical of Information Technology)⁸ has affected both temporality and the horizon of life and experience. We are beneath (or better, floating into) an *open sky* full of promises, or full of emptiness. The epoch of horizons has passed away and contemporary storytelling often explores the erosion of the line between Story and History.⁹ Therefore the contemporary literary scene looks like a theater where the wings of the stage, and the stage as well, are placed in front of the spectators’ eyes.

After the advent of photography, that informs the Nineteenth century “imageries”—as Philippe Hamon calls them, after Arjun Appadurai’s considerations about social imaginary—,¹⁰ montage and video composition techniques are now influencing our contemporary literary *perspectives* which have been left, as we have seen, without a horizon. We can dance “photographically”,¹¹ we can write “hypertextual” poetry, which is not necessarily the incorporation of images, sounds, touch or other interactive multimedia tools along with alphabetic writing,¹² but rather the necessity of reading poetry and novels as a “multilayered” devices, as a multitrack abridgement of possibility. This is the legacy, I dare say, the *destiny* of our visual culture era, and not only for writers, but for scholars too, who are more and more often asked to cross the boundaries between disciplines (in particular, those between literature and the arts), as I am doing in my paper.

Considering now the links between experience and literature, that is to say experience *in* literature, in *Infancy and History*, under to sub-heading “Modern poetry and experience”, Giorgio Agamben writes:

Modern poetry from Baudelaire onwards is seen to be founded not on new experience, but on an unprecedented *lack of experience*. Hence, the boldness with which Baudelaire can place shock at the centre of his artistic work. It is experience that best affords us protection from surprises, and the production of shock always implies a gap in experience. To experience something means divesting it of novelty, neutralizing its shock potential.¹³

Here Agamben is thinking about Baudelaire and Benjamin. In “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire”,¹⁴ the German philosopher asserts that “the replacement of the older relation [to storytelling] by information, and of information by sensation, reflects the increasing atrophy of experience”.¹⁵

As another scholar noticed,

it is not that experience disappears because of the exposure to ‘shock’. Rather, experience becomes devoid of meaning, empty, voiceless. It speaks no more, and with its silence comes the nakedness of the subject. But exactly what is it that we mean by nakedness (*nudità*) [. . .]? By nakedness we mean here the simple event of being devoid of experience, which in turn means that moment devoid of historiography [. . .], the present-now (*Jetzt-zeit*) to which Benjamin devoted so many pages and so much thought. In other words, by nakedness we mean here the suspension of historiographical existence by way of which existence manifests itself as pure existence; existence as-such.¹⁶

Not only does this nakedness of the subject take precedence over experience, but the contemporary writer doesn't believe in Humanism any more, that is to say s/he denies the possibility of having a posterity and a message for it.

If s/he refutes the judgment of posterity, what about retributive judgment of God, where the destiny is decided according to our merits or lack thereof? Let's stop for a second here and we'll come back later to this question.

Some contemporary fiction is looking for a factual grounding, by investigating the only experience that seems to be fit for those who are the "survivors" of Story and History: war, war as an absolute, and violence.¹⁷ If destiny is, as I believe, a horizon, destiny is more and more in the horizon of death.

Paradoxically, the so called "homme imaginaire"¹⁸ (Imaginary Man) of Mass Culture materializes the erosion between *fictional* and *factual* precisely in relation to the event of *death*: what is the sacrificial theme of "dying for me" in cinematographic truth? Always the others are dying "instead of me".

On the other hand, the Imaginary Reader, nowadays, knows much about the wearing down of the line that distinguishes meta-narrative literature from narrative one, to the extent that "today, while the lack of experience in literature is exploding, every novel, even the most autobiographical, the most naïvely up-to-the-minute, is written like an historical novel".¹⁹

The beginning of this century is rather similar to the beginning of the last one, except for this indifference not only to "these fragments [we] have shored against [our] ruins",²⁰ but to posterity and future. *We* are now in Klee's *Angelus Novus* position, and the storm forces *us* irresistibly into the future to which *our* back is turned.²¹

Poetry could seem, at first sight, to be more protected from these shocks related to the end of teleology than narrative literature. But that is not the case; and how could it be different, given that poetry is the quintessence of the permanent oscillation of words and worlds? One could extend to poetry what Benjamin said about the thinking of historical materialism:

Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad.²²

Each poem contains a blueprint of the world, each poem has a "constellatory essence". By dialectically canceling-out the specificity of an event or epoch, it elevates and preserves its specificity in relation to the entire structure of messianic time.²³ Thus, in a poem, the etymology for *destiny* shows all its properties: it actually implies the sense of *firmness*, of *arrest* ("that which has been firmly established", from Latin *destinatus*, pp. of *destinare* "make firm, establish").

In this sense, a poem is so established that it *includes its extremities*; it is *filled with now-time (jetzt-zeit)*; its parts are all autonomous *and* reciprocally constitutive; in it, "everything happens", despite *and* because of its firmness: in language there is always "too much play"—as you could say for a steering wheel. It is precisely in this "play" that we can look for its "inner quest".

II. AND STILL EVERYTHING HAPPENS!

Everything happens is the title of one of the central poems of the Parisian poet Dominique Fourcade.²⁴ He wrote this composition in 1999 for Charles Bernstein, Susan Howe and their students at State University of New York in Buffalo. In *Everything happens*, the Edouard Manet's letterhead, "*Tout arrive*", stands for the principle (of life, of language or writing, which contains both life and language) that illuminates poetry: "Be ready but not prepared".

A "shimmering apprenticeship"²⁵ can then take place, leading to a "shockwave":

The effect that of a shockwave on a tightwire the wave travels the wire bounces off the mooring doubles back amplified to the starting point I don't dare follow; we walk a wire known to us alone sometimes we even walk a wire unknown to us this time I knew of the wire but nothing of the shock that awaited me – no tightrope artist's allure here – just plain old sleepwalking and the wire is buried – no ambiguity or metaphor²⁶

In the "great openness" of the contemporary epoch, these two words (i.e. "everything happens") show all their complexity and become aspects²⁷ of the world:

everythinghappens objects sentinels like Marcel Proust's childhood Kaleidoscope lamp
 everythinghappens moments Dominique Mercy's solo in *Nur du* it's the structure's suppleness that
 authorizes the stunning man-moments
 simplest regard magic lantern of discrete series
 Dickinson Stein Oppen
 no decrees
all the instant of time fit one in the other towards the outsides
*and the points on the surface want one another escape immobile*²⁸

The categories of *time* and *space* are hence here reversed.

Time blasts to its extremities, being, simultaneously, *fit* (this image recalls here the "now-time", *jetzt-zeit*, "blasting a specific work out of the lifework, where the lifework is preserved in this work and at the same time canceled, containing *time as a precious but tasteless seed*"). In the same way, space condenses everything, being, simultaneously, *still*:

all the points of the page's surface, of its swerve to the frontiers all diagonals included, all this in a nearly madding simultaneity, is not a happy story, because it means breaking not only with what is established but also with your most advanced and cherished masters, and even giving up on your brothers, and because, of all the phases spoken in a line, not one is natural in the first place,
 I'm lying a little
 Because this gaping
 I don't mention
 That I engulf myself in today
 And that the subject
 contains dying²⁹

The subject contains dying. "Dead subject" is included in "Everything happens".³⁰ And his/her death and nakedness are not necessarily due to a lack of experience, but surely to a suspension of historiographical existence, that reveals when existence manifests itself as pure existence.

Modernity, in Manet's words, "gave a larynx back to the art-maker, and changed the rate of indecision to quicksilver. Finally [it] *let happen* [. . .]. *Let, and not force to happen*. Discovery of disorientation. Work of elimination of defenses".³¹

There is no *fate* forcing to take place. Hence, there is no *doom*.

What is more, place is always displaced: "These two words so reliable [are] traveling by balloon [. . .], *going farther and farther towards their destination whose nature is to never arrive, never happen*, including the highest-quality *chance, young*".³²

So poetry is *still* an experience, but an experience of sorts. As the poet states, it's "an experience over the page, into which you enter as the experience of each time-space unit of the word on the level of the letter, multitrack".³³

In this way,

the truth and the possibility of this experience, a force at least equal to its necessity comes into play from the start to eject you. Eject you from what? From the immense point we were getting to, of the page language world and so of all experience. I'm certain that only a method can make everything happening plausible, otherwise it is unfounded: art today stands so little to reason. This method [. . .] is something I don't have [. . .]. Or shut up and schuss, I'm sure that what's at stake is the planning of death. At any rate everything is art. And I should pretend what, I'll do anything you ask, to be a writer?³⁴

Everything happens is ending here, suggesting that death has *to be planned* (no more verdicts, just a choice). That is the "*en-jeu*" of art: that is its very serious play in action.

This is a real "revolution" (it was announced in the poem *Le ciel pas d'angle*, whose title announces *The Unangular Sky*—the Big Optic's open sky?).³⁵ This revolution contradicts, for the first time since the neo-platonic era poetry, the tradition of "negative theology" that has devoted literature to testify its own failures and impossibilities, according to Jacques Rancière words.³⁶

And this is the meaning of the title that I chose for the final part of my essay. The sentence is actually a quotation of the epigraph opening the first version of an elegy by Dominique Fourcade published in 1986: "the elegiac experience that I have of the Contemporary" ("*Le sentiment élégiaque que j'ai du contemporain*").

III. "LE SENTIMENT ÉLEGIAQUE QUE J'AI DU CONTEMPORAIN"

In the text *Outrance utterance et autres élégies*, which has not been yet translated and that presents the final version of the poem *Élégie L apostrophe E.C.* (something like *Elegy L apostrophe E.C.*, where E.C. stands for *Extrême Contemporain*), this inscription is found just in a footnote, whereas in its first version, published in installments in several issues of Claude Royet-Journoud's journal *L'in-plano*, it was in the foreground.³⁷

Starting from the early 1980s the poetic genre of elegy, used according to the classical tradition to digress about the conditions of the author's own time and fate, and not plot-driven, became crucial to some French poets referring to the American Objectivist Poets (we have already read the quotation of Oppen's *Discrete Series* in Fourcade's *Everything happens*). Among them, Emmanuel Hocquard,³⁸ who has

never abandoned the reflection on this genre, “listed under the heading *Lyric Poetry*” in the various entries of his “dictionaries”.³⁹ The last work in which the elegy is “at stake” is *Conditions de lumière* (*Conditions of Light* not yet published in English—the translation is expected in October 2009), where he writes without punctuation the poem “In a glass flute” (“*Dans une coupe en verre*”). Here a passage, in my translation:

The elegy is not in the words of mourning It is in the repetition of the utterance of language It is this repetition Language as a whole is elegy One never speaks of self Never a subject of enunciation has existed There is only the grammatical subject There is no beginning There is no primary utterance There is just to collect In a glass flute Even if one doesn't understand very well what's going on a disjunction has taken place A difference in pitch and velocity The pitch of utterance is neutral Its velocity steady An interval taken has place or an exit space Since never it was the case to enter in In speaking or writing or reading or translating one looks for the exit. Or to come out.
Writing is this openness⁴⁰

Emmanuel Hocquard, influenced by Wittgenstein, maps language to show the limits of thought and meaninglessness. A scholar defined Hocquard's poetic process a “negative modernity”, stressing the difference between his connotative “inverse elegiac” and the “classical” one. If in the latter the poet “ruminates” the representation of the past making a denotative use of it, in the “inverse elegiac”, writing in the openness, the poet “*redoes the past*, thus relating to it empirically”.⁴¹

In “*Dans une coupe en verre*” Emmanuel Hocquard is underlying one important thing that Dominique Fourcade would have said with another “image” (even if he never uses images): utterance is *always* elegiac because it is *the horizon of the voice*.⁴² In other words, “elegy is always less *about* someone [. . .] and more in anticipation”⁴³ of something-someone (a “third person account”)⁴⁴ that makes its way through the multidimensional *space* of language, of utterance.

Is, then, our *étranger contemporain* a “negative modernity”? I'm not so sure that one can apply this label on the works of these French authors, especially if we associate the expression “negative” to a new declension of the “negative theology” in poetry. Surely, this is not the case for Dominique Fourcade, whose poetry calls for the *responsibility* of language.

Language is in its impulse and floating,⁴⁵ in the horizon, in the blank of the voice: “The voice is the horizon; the voice is every horizon; every horizon. The poem, the impulse, the voice are one”.⁴⁶ And being a voice, language implies a moral obligation, which is all but a burden: it is more like a call for a attention, like when someone pours out his/her anxieties to you and you do the same to him/her.⁴⁷

In the final part of *Oustrance Utterance* an angel comes (the lyrical subject says that he “raids” the poem), not only to provide consolation (like in the classical elegy), but to redo the past in a very concrete way. This angel is a woman (we can read that he is “sister in virginity” with the poet, since the poet himself is, according to the poem, a woman)⁴⁸ and he/she gives substance (“*donne corps*”)⁴⁹ to the contemporary. Contemporary age is nothing but clamor. The angel has thus come to pronounce this clamor “with the weight of he who spreads some big wings to dry”.⁵⁰ He/she has also come to put his/her wings round us (Fourcade uses the verb “*ceinturer*”, that gives the idea, simultaneously, of a grip and an embrace): to

hold us, to talk to us with sharp notes, but without saying anything we didn't know before. The angel just testifies his/her commitment in the poem.⁵¹

Outrance, utterance. Utterance rhymes with *outrance*. It is necessary to avoid any drift that the image of the angel can recall. The angels here have both feet planted on the ground, just where the things of the poem do happen.

The language of poetry cannot but be excessive (it exceeds a proper limit: its own limits), language is exorbitant (it exceeds a horizon: that of a world *pas d'angle*). In short, language is extreme when it frees from the grip space-time: "Space is the unique place for a poem which refuses to be yesterday's".⁵² So, elegy is not in the mourning over a (tragic) destiny, but in the promise of a (happy) happening. Its *inner quest* is for space and this space is that of the surface of the page, it is that of a line regardless of time, the tasteless fruit.

The next to last phrase of *Outrance utterance*, originally written in English, affirms:

We are aiming at a line without trauma. Aiming at space within language regardless of time within language. We have in mind a novel that would loose information, and deprocess words – a metric novel. Temperature? But depth has none, nor fever. Voices are bodies more real than bodies and so is rose, loaded with blue. It all comes as an inundation on the page. The sea is flesh-colored, and we are being paged on the beach, it's disconcerting. A poem demands light, not clarity. Light ever more, we shall not understand. Aiming at not aiming. The light which is within the light and the well which is within the well within the light and the air within the word are the poem's subject and we shall be anxious.⁵³

Who is this "we"? It is all the contemporaries of the poet who have wings: E.E. Cummings writing the verse "nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands" (a line that becomes, in Fourcade's version, "no one had smaller hands, even the rain")⁵⁴; Simon Hantai, who teaches us that utterance is singing, with its breathing, modulation and scansion⁵⁵ and that nowadays painting is "with hands behind the back and with eyes scratched out"⁵⁶; John Barrow, with his *Dictionarium poly-graphicum* about the *Body of Arts*, poetically describing the colors in the Eighteenth century⁵⁷; Cézanne, Rembrandt, Manet, Fra Angelico, their angels, their wings.

And last, the most contemporary embodiment of this elegy is the side mirror of a famous race car⁵⁸: in that mirror, in the way it reflects the world, in the way we look at it disappearing at our back, there is the emblem of the cancellation of our deformed perception of time. Time here becomes space, surface and it is up to the writer to hold it back like space, or to redo it in time. Very, very slowly.⁵⁹

BIOGRAPHY

Silvia Riva earned her BA from the Istituto Universitario di Lingue Moderne (Milan) with a dissertation entitled "The Sky and the Abyss. Cosmology and Poetry between the Renaissance Hermetic Tradition and the Baroque", and she gained a PhD in Francophone Literatures from the University of Bologna. Since 2001 she has been working as Tenured Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Milan, where she teaches courses in Francophone Cultures and

Contemporary French Literature. Her research follows two main lines of development. The first deals with semiotic intertextuality, with special reference to the French and European contexts. The core of her research consists of a comparative and interdisciplinary analysis of various artistic expressions of the contemporary age, with a special interest in visual and narrative textualities: the literatures in French of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries; contemporary poetry; visual and digital culture and the application of scientific theories to literature. Among Silvia Riva's major publications in this field, a monograph devoted to Byzantium in French Literature (ed. Liana Nissim and Silvia Riva, *Sauver Byzance de la barbarie du monde* (Milan: Cisalpino-Monduzzi, 2004, 502 p.) and several essays dedicated to the work of Dominique Fourcade, Yves Bonnefoy and Pascal Quignard, to name but a few. The second field of Silvia Riva's research aims at re-defining the edges, that are still critically fluid and open, of the literary and cultural productions of Sub-Saharan Africa through a comparative analysis with other Francophone cultures, especially from the Antilles, Asia and Europe. Her most recent publication in this area is a History of the Republic Democratic of Congo Literature and published in Paris (*Nouvelle Histoire de la Littérature du Congo-Kinshasa*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006, 422 p.)

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NOTES

¹ Benjamin, Walter. 1999. *Theses on the philosophy of history* [Gesammelten Schriften I:2. Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1974]. In *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zorn, 263. London: Pimlico.

² Ibid.

³ In 1986, Dominique Fourcade, Michel Deguy and Jacques Roubaud went to a conference organized by Michel Chaillou, in which Chaillou coined the expression "extrême contemporain". In 1987, the French magazine *po&sie*, edited by Michel Deguy, started a new collection by the same name. Today the term is used mostly to indicate prose production (cf. Blanckeman, Bruno, Aline Mura-Brunel, and Marc Dambre. eds. 2004. *Le Roman français au tournant du XXI^e siècle*, 8. Paris: Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle).

⁴ Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, cit., pp. 252–253.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 262–263. The emphasis is mine.

⁶ Modern, John Lardas. 2006. Walter Benjamin's 115th dream, In *Epoché: The University of California Journal for the Study of Religion* 24, 127–128: "When reading Benjamin one becomes privy to a temporal synaesthesia – not a convergence of past, present, and future into a kind of cosmic consciousness but a sensitivity to the ways in which the past, present, and future are *both* independent *and* mutually constitutive".

⁷ Vouilloux, Bernard. 2008. *Du dispositif*. In *Discours, image, dispositif. Penser la représentation III*, ed. Philippe Ortel, 15–31. Paris: L'Harmattan.

⁸ Virilio, Paul. 1993. Big optics. In *On justifying the hypothetical nature of art and the non-identity with the object world*, ed. P. Weibel. Köln: Walther König.

⁹ Cf. Ricoeur, Paul. 1983. *Temps et récit. Tome I: L'intrigue et le récit historique*. Paris: Seuil; Ricoeur, Paul. 1984. *Temps et récit. Tome II: La configuration dans le récit de fiction*. Paris: Seuil; Ricoeur, Paul. 1985. *Temps et récit. Tome III: Le temps raconté*. Paris: Seuil.

¹⁰ Hamon, Philippe. 2006. *Imageries. Littérature et image au XIXe siècle*. Paris: José Corti; Appadurai, Arjun. 1996. *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

¹¹ Waternaux, Isabelle, Mathilde Monnier, and Dominique Fourcade. 2001. *MW*, 57. Paris: P.O.L. “C’est plutôt la danse moderne qui danse photographiquement, produisant, à tout instant de sa propre durée, de l’immobilité et de l’espace, en un déploiement muet”.

¹² Narayanan Vivek. *Hypertextual Poetry: A Study of MSN Poetry Communities* (April 26th, 2005) <http://mail.sarai.net/pipermail/reader-list/2005-April/005496.html>. In this post you can read: “hypertext renders obsolete, not ‘literacy’, but ‘post-literacy’”. It foresees a ‘revival of typographic culture’ (. . . in a truly dynamic, truly paperless environment”).

¹³ Agamben, Giorgio. 1993. *Infancy and history: The destruction of experience*, trans. Liz Heron, 41. London: Verso. The emphasis is mine.

¹⁴ Benjamin, Walter. 2003. *Selected writings*, vol. 4: 1938–1940, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, 313–355. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

¹⁵ Benjamin, Walter. *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire*, In *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, vol. 4: 1938–1940, cit., p. 316.

¹⁶ Bartoloni, Paolo. *The suspension of experience and modern literature*. In *Le simplegadi. rivista internazionale on-line di lingue e letteratura moderne* 3, III (November 2005), <http://all.uniud.it/all/simplegadi/>

¹⁷ As far as “war” is concerned see Bruno Bosteels (with Peter Hallward), Hallward, Peter. ed. 2003. “Beyond formalisation: An interview with Alain Badiou, In *The one or the other: French philosophy today*, Angelaki 8, 2, 111–137. As for “violence”, cf. Appadurai, Arjun. 2006. *Fear of small numbers*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

¹⁸ Morin, Edgar. 2005. *The cinema, or the imaginary man (1956)*, trans. Lorraine Mortimer. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

¹⁹ Scurati, Antonio. 2006. *La letteratura dell’inesperienza. Scrivere romanzi al tempo della televisione*, 78. Milan: Bompiani Tascabili. The English translation is mine.

²⁰ I’m clearly paraphrasing from T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*.

²¹ I’m paraphrasing Walter Benjamin’s considerations on Paul Klee’s *Angelus Novus (Illuminations*, cit., p. 249).

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 262–263.

²³ I’m paraphrasing the assumptions about the term “monad” in Benjamin’s understanding of messianic time contained in Owen Ware, “Dialectic of the Past / Disjuncture of the Future: Derrida and Benjamin on the Concept of Messianism”, *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 5, 2 (April 2004), p. 102.

²⁴ Dominique Fourcade was born in 1938. He lives in Paris. His first book of poetry dates back to 1961. He is also an art historian and a curator (he has worked on Henri Matisse, Simon Hantai and David Smith, to name but a few). His books of poetry include *Le ciel pas d’angle* (Paris: P.O.L., 1983), *Rose-déclit* (P.O.L., 1984), *Son blanc du un* (P.O.L., 1986), *Xbo* (P.O.L., 1988), *Outrance utterance et autres élégies* (P.O.L., 1990), *IL* (P.O.L., 1994), *Le sujet monotype* (P.O.L., 1997), *Est-ce que j’peux placer un mot* (P.O.L., 2001), *en laisse* (P.O.L., 2005), *sans lasso et sans flash* (P.O.L., 2005), *éponges modèle 2003* (P.O.L., 2005), *Citizen Do* (2008). *Rose-déclit (Click-Rose)* and *Xbo* have been translated into English by Keith Waldrop and Robert Kocik respectively, and have been published by Sun and Moon Press. *Tout arrive (Everything happens)* has been translated by Stacey Doris for the Post Apollo Press. Other translations into English are: from *Three Things on the Commode* and from *The Unangular Sky*, trans. Cid Corman and Dominique Fourcade, in *Origin* V, 5 (Spring 1985), respectively pp. 74–76 and pp. 67–74; *Rose the Click for 23*, trans. Charles Bernstein, in *Série d’écriture* 3 (1989), p. 19; *Rose-Click-Click*, trans. Keith Waldrop, in *Série d’écriture* 3 (1989), pp. 15–18; *Mural*, trans. Douglas Oliver, in *Scarlet* 4 (Spring, 1991), p. 21; *Click-Rose 2 (X-XIII & XV-XIX)*, trans. Keith Waldrop, in *Sulfur* 27 (Fall, 1990), pp. 74–78; *On a leash*, trans. Peter Consenstein, in “French Poetry and Poetics”, *Verse* 24, 1–3 (2007), pp. 52–59.

²⁵ Fourcade, Dominique. 2000. *Everything happens*, trans. Stacy Doris, 11. Sausalito: The Post-Apollo Press.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

²⁷ I take this word in the sense of a category of the verb designating primarily the relation of the action to the passage of time, especially in reference to completion, duration, or repetition.

²⁸ Fourcade Dominique. *Everything happens*, cit., p. 16. My emphasis.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 25–26. My emphasis.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 28. My emphasis.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 32–33.

³⁵ Fourcade, Dominique. 1983. *Le ciel pas d'angle*. Paris: P.O.L.

³⁶ Rancière, Jacques. 1998. *La parole muette. Essai sur les contradictions de la littérature*, 12. Paris: Hachette: “[la] tradition de la théologie négative, vou[e] la littérature au témoignage de sa propre impossibilité, comme celle-là se vouait à dire l’indicibilité des attributs divins”.

³⁷ Fourcade Dominique. *Outrance Utterance* (Paris: P.O.L., 1990), p. 91: “L’édition originale de *Élégie L apostrophe E.C.* a paru en 1986 aux éditions Michel Chandeigne, avec les indications suivantes: ‘La première partie de cette élégie a été écrite pour répondre à une invitation de l’ADILC, qui organisait à l’université de Paris VII, les 19 et 20 février 1986, une réunion sur le thème de *L’extrême contemporain* où ces pages ont été lues; simultanément elles étaient publiées dans le quotidien *L’in-plano*, fait par Claude Royet-Journoud. L’existence même de ce journal, son rythme très prenant, l’impulsion infiniment imaginative de son créateur m’ont incité à poursuivre. La deuxième partie du texte porte sur l’expérience qu’a été pour moi la lecture de *Son blanc du un* au Théâtre National de Chaillot, le 3 mars. *L’in-plano* a donc publié ces notes dans ses numéros 4, 18, 20, 21, 33, 44, 48, 56, 63, 71 et 77; après l’arrêt du journal, une suite est encore venue (sur la vitesse acquise?). Mais le titre ‘Ozone’, donné parce qu’il fallait en toute hâte trouver un nom au feuillet mis en route, traduisait mal *le sentiment élégiaque que j’ai du contemporain*; il ne traduisait pas non plus l’émotion très mêlée qu’il me procure. Je dédie *Élégie L apostrophe E. C.* à ceux qui, lors des lectures du 19 février et du 3 mars (et d’une autre à l’A.R.C. le 11 juin), m’ont donné le privilège d’être leur contemporain.’” The emphasis is mine.

³⁸ Emmanuel Hocquard was born in 1940. Several of his books have been translated into English. Among them, Scott, John A. trans. 1989. *Elegies & other poems*, Plymouth: Shearsman Books; *Theory of Tables*, trans. Michael Palmer (Stockbridge: o-blek editions, 1994); *This Story is Mine: Little Autobiographical Dictionary of Elegy*, trans. Norma Cole (Instress Press, 1999). He has published many American poets in his publications *Orange Export*, *Un bureau sur l’Atlantique*, and the anthologies *21+1 Poètes américains d’aujourd’hui* (Delta, 1986), and *49+1* (Royaumont, 1991).

³⁹ Cf. Hocquard Emmanuel. “Cette histoire qui est la mienne”, in *Petit dictionnaire autobiographique de l’élégie*, (rpt. in *Ma Haie*, Paris: P.O.L., 2001, pp. 461–490); “Comment en suis-je arrivé là? Conversation avec Henri Deluy du 20 mars 1998” (rpt. in *Ma Haie*, cit., pp. 443–459); *Tout le monde se ressemble: une anthologie de poésie contemporaine* (Paris: P.O.L., 1995). See also *Les Élégies* (Paris: P.O.L., 1990) containing « Une élégie », « Élégies 2 » and « Élégies 3 » published in *Les Dernières Nouvelles de l’expédition sont datées du 15 février 17...* (Paris: Hachette, 1979).

⁴⁰ Emmanuel Hocquard & Claude Royet-Journoud, “Le Cahier du Refuge” 164 (Marseille: cipM, December 2007), p. 13. Published in Emmanuel Hocquard, *Conditions de lumière* (Paris: P.O.L., 2007); english translation, *Conditions of Light*, is not yet published (expected for October 2009, Fence Books). The English translation of this text is mine: “L’élégie n’est pas dans les mots de la plainte Elle est dans la répétition des mots de la langue Elle est cette répétition La langue tout entière est élégie On ne parle jamais de soi Il n’y a jamais eu de sujet d’annonciation Il n’y a de sujet que grammatical Il n’y a pas de commencement Il n’y a pas de formulation première Il n’y a que recueillir Dans une coupe en verre Même si on ne comprend pas très bien ce qui s’est produit un décrochage a eu lieu Une différence d’intonation et de vitesse L’intonation de la récitation est neutre Sa vitesse constante S’est mis en place un intervalle ou une espace de sortie Car il ne s’est jamais agi d’entrer En parlant ou écrivant ou lisant ou traduisant on cherche la sortie À s’en sortir / Écrire est cette ouverture”.

⁴¹ Fetzer, Glenn Williams. 2004. *Emmanuel hocquard and the poetics of negative modernity*, 126. Birmingham: Summa Publications.

⁴² Fourcade Dominique. *Outrance Utterance*, cit., p. 25.

⁴³ Fetzer Glenn Williams. *op.cit.*, p. 13. Cf. also Fetzer, Glenn. 2005. *L'élégie en jeu chez Emmanuel Hocquard*, In "Élégies", *Babel* 12, 287–297.

⁴⁴ Hocquard Emmanuel. *Ma Haie*, cit., p. 465.

⁴⁵ Fourcade Dominique. *Outrance Utterance*, cit., p. 26, "La contrebasse. La pulsation blanche. La pulsation derrière le poème? Devant le poème? La pulsation-horizon."; p. 19: "Je vois une île flottante"; p. 35: "[Language] est l'immobile vibrant du poème".

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 25: "La voix qui est l'horizon; la voix qui est tout horizon; tout horizon. Le poème, l'impulsion, la voix sont un". The translation into English is mine.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 18: "De tout ceci il ressort que nous avons, vis-à-vis du contemporain, une responsabilité. Une responsabilité totale et incompréhensible, une responsabilité irréversible mais somme toute légère, du genre de celle que l'on éprouve envers quelqu'un qui libère en confiance son angoisse en nous, et vice-versa. C'est la langue qui crée ce rapport. C'est la langue qui ne clarifie pas ce rapport."

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 32: "(nous sommes sœurs en virginité)"; p. 9: "Nous les poètes, les meilleurs d'entre nous tout au moins, nous sommes des femmes."

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 32–33: "L'ange est venu dire une élégie. Faire son raid. Une élégie, un raid. En fa dièse. Dire des choses diésées. Nous ceinturer ne rien nous annoncer que nous ne sachions (nous sommes sœurs en virginité), seulement nous signifier son engagement, dans le poème. Une élégie convaincante. S'engageant dans ce raid donner corps au contemporain qui n'est que des rumeurs, prononcer les rumeurs avec le poids de celui qui a ces grandes ailes qui sèchent à l'air, ôter la ponctuation, ne pas lever le bras dans la commune noyade qui s'ensuit. // Bien rester au sol, là où le poème (les choses de l'ange) a lieu. Avec les ailes la seule chose à faire est de les ouvrir, immobile au sol, pour les sécher."

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 35: "L'espace est le seul lieu pour un poème qui se refuse à être d'hier."

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 37. Originally in English.

⁵⁴ Cummings, Edward Estlin. 1970. Somewhere I have never travelled, gladly beyond. In *W ViVa* [1931], LVII, ed. Malcolm Cowley. New York, NY: Liveright Publishers.

⁵⁵ Dominique Fourcade. 2008. *Pour simon hantaï. Thème, motif, motet*, 9. Paris, Chandeigne: "Les *Tabulas* de Hantaï disent: parler c'est chanter. Fréquence modulation scansion".

⁵⁶ Fourcade, Dominique. 1976. Un coup de pinceau, c'est la pensée. In *Hantaï. Exhibition catalogue*. Paris: Musée National d'Art Moderne/Centre Georges Pompidou, n.p.: "Le problème est de ne plus rien avoir dans les mains, de se mettre dans les conditions de peindre les mains attachées derrière le dos. La question serait de peindre les yeux crevés. C'est pourquoi Hantaï fait des pliures."

⁵⁷ Barrow, John. 1735. *Dictionarium polygraphicum: or, The whole body of arts regularly digested . . . adorned with proper sculptures, curiously engraven on more than fifty copper plates . . .*, 2 vols., vol. 1, M 2. London: C. Hitch and C. Davis.

⁵⁸ Fourcade Dominique. *Outrance Utterance*, cit., p. 34: "Les rétroviseurs de la Ferrari Testa Rossa – de quoi ne pas mourir".

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 34: "Il incombe à l'écrivain de maintenir l'espace comme espace – ou de refaire de l'espace avec du temps"; p. 37: "Je voudrais parler très lentement, avec ceux de mes contemporains qui ont une connaissance de la profondeur. Je voudrais leur écrire, très lenetement. Être emmené".

A SENSE OF LIFE IN LANGUAGE LOVE AND LITERATURE

ABSTRACT

The fundamental human activity of telling stories, extended into the cultural tradition of literature, leads to the creation of alternative worlds in which we find resonance with the whole range of human thought and emotion from different and often conflicting perspectives. Fiction has no obligation to the ordinary strictures that bind our public lives, so the mind is free, engaging in literature, to become for the moment whatever imagination can conceive. So we become, in fictive reality, madman and poet, sinner and saint, embrace and embody sorrow and joy, hope and despair and all the rag tag feelings that flesh is heir to. But the sense of our own lives bleeds into the lives of others and our characters are formed and our lives enriched or impoverished by the relationships we develop. Literature extends the possibilities and scope of human experience and understanding of relationships that vary in dimension and depth—that develop in their own ways broadly between the good, the bad, and the ugly. Some relationships are given, some chosen, some forced. Some are nurturing, some useful, some inspiring, some destructive. But in any event and in every instance our sense of life in the connective tissue of human relationships is transformed through literature.

In what follows, I will try to give a general account of literature as it provides a creative space in which a sense of life finds full expression, that is, where such human questions discover their origin and depth.

I have wondered about the question itself: *a sense of life*? I know what or about a sense of humor, a sense of taste, a sense of proportion, a sense of propriety. . .but in what sense do we wonder about a *sense of life*? . . . and a sense of life *in literature*? Several senses come to mind: A sense of life in literature first attends to the vitality of expression in literature, the sense in which literature is a living resource and recourse of human reference and concern. A second sense concerns the resource itself, whether literature embodies and encompasses the field and manifold of meaning that gives expression to the diversity and depth of life. Even more basically, I suppose we could wonder whether life has a sense at all, whether it makes sense, whether it can be given some definite sense. But the question here is not and is rightly not about knowledge. To ask for a sense of something, is to ask for a prior and deeper, and more intimate thing than knowledge. It is to ask for a feeling, a perception, a discernment, a purpose, a reason, a meaning, a thread of understanding. . . In our case we want an *intimation*, a presentment of sense that literature can bring to our understanding of ourselves, of our individual and collective lives.

By some miracle of life, human beings are graced with the capacity of speech. It sets us apart from the whole of the natural world in which life is ordered by instinct and bound by necessity. Aristotle's definition of Man as a creature with *logos* summarized an already long history of discourse about the facility of language and the ensuing and compelling interest of human beings in expressing the meaning of their existence. Human life centers in this capacity in such a way that the meaning of human life grows out of the activity of *logos*. The fact that human beings are creatures graced with reflective consciousness, with the capacity for giving expression to their lives, begins the tradition of telling stories. There is a compelling impulse to put our lives into some coherent story to understand the meaning of our lives individually and collectively.

Sense of life is an expression that seems to carry a depth that, by comparison, the simple fact of being alive does not bring with it and does not entail such a sense. Rather, developing a sense of life requires that one have reflective distance, have a perspective on her own activities and commitments and the corresponding activities of those around her. There is arguably a sense of life apparent in some straightforward way of "being alive", in that understanding requires reflection even in the mundane and everyday interactions we have with others and the world. But in the life of creative literature (and I will be referring throughout only to great literature) we are released from the yoke of everyday factive existence into a fictive world in which there is a tear in the fabric of ordinary time and place, in which a world of imagination opens to past and future, to what has never been and could or could not ever be. It is in such a world that a sense of life may discover its source.

The great virtue of literature in the telling of stories is the creation of alternative worlds in which we find resonance with the whole range of human thought and emotion from different and often conflicting perspectives. Fiction has no obligation to the ordinary strictures that bind our public lives, so the mind is free to become for the moment whatever imagination can conceive. So we become, in fictive reality, madman and poet, sinner and saint, embrace and embody sorrow and joy, hope and despair and all the rag tag feelings that flesh is heir to. But the sense of our own lives bleeds into the lives of others and our characters are formed and our lives enriched or impoverished by the relationships we develop. Literature extends the possibilities and scope of human experience and understanding of relationships that vary in dimension and depth—that develop in their own ways broadly between the good, the bad, and the ugly. Some relationships are given, some chosen, some forced. Some are nurturing, some useful, some inspiring, some destructive. But in any event and in every instance our sense of life in the connective tissue of human relationships is transformed through literature.

In this most obvious and general way the characteristic activity of human beings, is comprehended in language. We do not merely behave, as lower forms of life do; we have the faculties necessary to *act* and in the process become aware that it is language that provides the distance for reflection that in turn enables action. But action, conceived in freedom, also is intended to fit into some ongoing and meaningful story of a life. Individually and collectively, we live within the stories we tell of our mutual lives.

The point to understand here is that story telling is not some late invention of a refined culture; it is rather a fundamental activity of human-being. We sometimes think of literature as centered in and responding to this primal activity—a compounding exercise of the energy focused in *logos*. The sense of life of an individual or of a people is carried by a narrative, by a story line that holds the sense of it all together. Myth, the elemental form of narrative expression, is a natural outgrowth of the freedom of human imagination. As mythic expression develops into a tradition and separate body of human activity in the tradition of literature, it sets itself apart in its proliferation of stories and perspectives on possible lives, on possible ways of living.

We can mark the evolution of culture in the form of stories that record a particular era or a particular people. But that too—history—is a story we tell in terms of the interest we have in our own past. We fashion the past in ways that provide us with the continuing sense of our own lives. So long as we comprehend the past in stories it remains a resource for the continuing and living thread of our existence as human beings.

In any given period there is a retrospective on culture, on the sense of history as it leads up to one's own time. We want to have some sense of what we have come through, of what we have learned about how to survive and prevail, and we look to the body of historical literature for links and inklings to the resources that exist for endurance and renewal.

But apart from the documents that record the events of history, and which seek out coherent meaning in the conflicting tensions of public life, there also is a parallel record of creative activity which is reflective of the deeper life of individuals embedded in the sweep of history. In an important sense the world of imaginative literature is a *spiritual* repository—it constitutes a diverse realm of fictive reality open to every speaker and reader of a natural language. In the world of this literature we are drawn into the fictive life of an era, into the characters and concerns of actors within that era, and find therein—in the activity and lives within this fictive reality—perspectives and resources for our own lives.

There is a remark of Santayana's that a people who fail to understand their history are doomed to fulfill it (not "repeat it" as it is often misquoted and attributed to Winston Churchill in after-dinner speeches.) We may indeed need to reflect upon past mistakes that determine the present, that if, unheeded, project a future we should if possible avoid both as individuals and as a people. But the great value of the history of literature is that it is a place of possibilities, not a record of necessities. Whatever imperatives are discovered therein have only the binding force of choice. The world of fictive literature exists as a resource apart and embodies a wealth of generative power on which we can draw without apologies to the past.

Nietzsche searched the archaic literature of the Greeks to find a sense of mythic vitality that could model a renewal of moral and spiritual life. He looked past the rational paradigms of Greek philosophy to the tragic poets, to the passion embodied in a literature that could find virtue in the aspiration to great deeds not bound by rational mediation. The point here is not that Nietzsche was right in his moral advocacy, but that he had a sure sense for the vital life of literature. Among Nietzsche's

sweeping remarks in his early book on *The Birth of Tragedy* was an analysis of the crucial role of myth in culture. This was a book which Nietzsche himself later characterized as youthful exaggeration, but apart from any rhetorical excess, it serves to recommend a critical resource for understanding the life of *mythos*—story— and the importance of literature in the life of a people: We are now

... able to approach the once-living reality of myth only by means of intellectual constructs. Yet every culture that has lost myth has lost, by the same token, its natural, healthy creativity. . . . Man today stripped of myth, stands famished among all his pasts and must dig frantically for roots, be it among the most remote antiquities.

Again, we need not concur with Nietzsche's lament about the present age, but may better appreciate the need to renew our sense of the life to be found in the stories of our lives.

In our reflections about the body of literature that we have available to us, the genre of story—*mythos*—is crucial; it is the crucible from which the rest of literary genres emerge. But we should be mindful again of the even earlier focus of *logos*, of (literally) "word". Literature does indeed embody stories that draw on the expression of language that makes possible coherent lives through which we understand ourselves. But prior even to the stories we tell, there is a power of the word alone that we should acknowledge. The structure of speech, of language, is such that before the sentence as a element of meaning, we have the word. The power of words themselves to capture thought, the facility that words have to fix our thoughts, bind our sensibilities is elemental to meaning. The magic of words is hardly a mystery to those who read poetry, or enjoy a story, but there is a special reverence for words which is functional, for example, in the lives of a tribal people still living in an oral culture. Scott Momaday, speaks of his grandmother in *House Made of Dawn*, an old Kiowa woman, whose use of language was confined to speech such that her regard for words was always keen in proportion that she depended upon them: for her, words were medicine; they were magic and invisible. Momaday goes on to remark that the tradition of telling stories is an act by which human beings strive to realize the capacity for wonder, meaning and delight, that the possibilities of storytelling are precisely those of understanding the human spirit.

In particular, the mix of language and human imagination results in the magic of metaphor, in the capacity of words to open and stretch the mind to comprehend seeming contradictions. Metaphors form the living tissue of the genre of poetry, no longer bound by narrative line, a form of thought and feeling in which language is crystallized into images that quicken the sense of whatever it touches.

By contrast, ordinary language is used and used up in the activity of speech. Political language, where it is not misused in rhetorical persuasion, is committed to fix boundaries of human relationships in law and legislation. Scientific language is similarly determined in its systematic structuring. Religious language binds itself in rite and ritual. Surely the language of literature is not alone in the employment of creative expression, but it is singular in its celebration of the imagination and is bound by no theory, or policy, or ritual in its modes of expression. It can delight in

the free expression of language and direct its appeal not only to human possibilities but the full reach of human imagination that defines the world of reality.

II

Mallarmé reminded us that poetry is not written with ideas, but with words. But in the work of art, words open up into a world of meaning and truth. Goethe wrote that literature has its own depth and power, crystallizing the highest moments of surface phenomena, discovering in them the dignity of significance, the height of passion. There are no apparent limits to the expression of language in literature and while the discourse of literature can intensify the sense of reality, Wordsworth reminds us that it can also discover the still sense of humanity that chastens and subdues. While the painter works to discern and express the outward forms of things, the poet seeks the depths of inner life. In these and other ways, the languages of art deepen and broaden our sense of life.

The aesthetic experience invites a different perspective from the mundane ease of everyday life, but it also engages a focus different from the abstractions of theory or the juridical discourse of morality. The task of the artist, as da Vinci expressed it is *saper vedere* to learn and know how to see, and then, of course, to lend out her mind so that others may see in new and different ways. Aristotle put it that we see the world through our language; the languages of the arts, by extension, are lenses through which we see the range of possibilities open to imagination, of emotions, of relationships, of forms of life that enrich our own.

The genius of literature, even what we think of as philosophical literature, is less the pursuit of transcendent ideals than discovering a depth of immanence in the appearance and complex surfaces of the life-field of human activity. We are, as human beings, born into language. It is through the learning of speech that we become human beings. As Von Humboldt expressed it in the most basic and general terms it is only speech that enables a person to be the living being he is as man. But something more is needed here. There is a standardizing use and abuse of language that can rather distract and disengage us from a sense of the life of language. If we think only of and in the language of everyday discourse, there is a failure of translation into the full meaning of human life. Our sensibilities are often enough dulled simply through the commonplace of routine. It is a continuing task of fictive literature to keep the imagination alive to the finer and deeper sensibilities of the human spirit. The tortured language of Heidegger's search for a poetic idiom free from the metaphysics of traditional grammar and from the calculating perspectives of contemporary culture is a philosophical measure of the problem. From the anguish embedded in that philosophical impasse one may be encouraged to return, and in a manner less encumbered than Heidegger's, to the simple expressions of sense and life found in poetry itself.

Regarding the irregular insights of the imagination in literature, Shakespeare in *Midsummer Night's Dream* famously remarks that the seething brains of poets, lovers and madmen apprehend more than is open to cool reason—the lunatic sees

more devils than vast hell could hold, the lover in the grip of passion sees Helen's beauty in a passing moment, while the poet, as imagination bodies forth, discovers forms of things unknown, turns them into intelligible meaning and gives to airy nothing a local habitation and a name.

In the broad corpus of world literature both realistic fiction and representative art exist which form only an extension, albeit meaningful, of shared and ordinary sensibility. But the experience of a fictive break from the ordinary of experience itself gathers imagination into its own world and provides a reflective depth of vision into both the larger and deeper meanings of life. It is a common experience that it is in the disruptions of our lives that we are brought to a more acute sense of meaning. Fictive literature draws on the same kind of disjoint—we are cut free from the ongoing currents of life, and drawn into the reflective ground of possibility.

III

The picture I am trying to capture here in the unique frame and activity of literature is the concrete immediacy of visceral imagination as it opens into an understanding of the sense of life—how literature both disconnects and reconnects the resource of imagination to our quickened sense of life. As Momaday's remarks above suggest, *logos* exists in primal forms even in the modern world. In tribal cultures that still center their cultural life in spoken language authors tend to write in the spirit of telling stories in the remembered sense of living voices. Many of these writers were graced by a poverty of space and disconnect of time growing up within a tradition not under the obsession or urgency of print--of speaking not yet reduced to writing, of talking not yet reduced to e-messages or media sound bites. This literature testifies to some degree that there is still an accessible cultural model, in this case preserved in story telling, in sand paintings, dances, and curing sings that celebrate and keep alive a vital sense of life. But the terms of accessibility here also suggest that stories must be lived, must be experienced in both the shared silence of intimate association and in the public turmoil of a continuing tradition within which they are told and heard. In an oral tradition there is no point of beginning or end, only telling of the same stories which are never the same, which simply take up and leave off: the residual wisdom of time and place come to presence only in the occasion of their telling. The lesson in this is that a living culture is sustained even against a dominant and static civilization through stories that are shared. What is vital in any culture may be found in the form as well as the content of the stories that are told. The frame of literature that defines a generation or a people can create a sense of common dwelling, a sense of sacred place no less than secular space of mutual understanding and acknowledgment.

It is irresistible in this context to cite the familiar but keenly moving moment in the life of the deaf and blind child Helen Keller when she first discovered language, and the sense of life it opened to her. In the still dark of her life she had no strong sentiment or tenderness until her teacher came into her life. Despite repeated efforts over months of teaching Helen to spell, to move her fingers, she learned only to

make “monkey-like imitations.” But walking with Ms. Sullivan her teacher into a well-house one morning when someone was drawing water, her teacher placed the child’s hand under the water:

As the cool stream gushed over one hand she spelled into the other the word *water*, first slowly, then rapidly. I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motions of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten—a thrill of returning thought; and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. The living word *water* awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free. There were barriers still, it is true, but barriers that could in time be swept away.

Everything now had a name and each name gave birth to a new thought, and each thing she touched now seemed to quiver with life, and indeed in time the barriers were swept away. In the reading of this remarkable document, from *The Story of My Life* written later by this remarkable woman, it is plain to see not only the power of language, but the incredible strength of the human spirit awakened by language.

IV

The provocations of fiction bring not only an acute sense of life to the living of it, but bring also the creative and paradoxical distortions of sense. The familiar genre of tragic literature contextualizes the extreme anguish of questioning existence, for example in the crushing paradigm of Macbeth’s realization that all our hopes and yesterdays may be brought not only to dusty death, but resolve into a sound and fury, signifying nothing.

While literature invites reflection it is also self-reflective so that the value of words and reflection can themselves be brought into the contrast of paradox. Consider Addie’s memorable soliloquy in Faulkner’s *As I lay Dying*: in which she is struggling to express a sense of life, in her discovery as a teacher, as a mother, as a living person, of the inadequacy of language:

I knew that motherhood was invented by someone who had to have a word for it because the ones that had the children didn’t care whether there was a word for it or not. I knew that fear was invented by someone that had never had the fear; pride, who never had the pride. I knew that it had been, not that they had dirty noses, but that we had had to use one another by words like spiders dangling by their mouths from a beam, swinging and twisting and never touching, and that only through the blows of the switch could my blood and their blood flow as one stream.

One is here reminded of Nietzsche’s insistence that one must write as if with her own blood. Even so, of course, the claim of the inadequacy of words requires words for its expression. Victor Fankl famously noted, in his recollections of the dreadful extremes of experience of survival in the death camps in Germany and Poland, that human beings seem to be creatures who need meaning—*logos*—simply to survive. Sartre speaks of the common thread of suicide as an impasse of spirit, in which an individual has lost any sense of a project that would draw her into the future. The sense of life contextualized by literature is dramatic rather than discursive; there is no continuous thread of meaning but discontinuous episodes in human possibility.

From mythic and tragic literature to lyrical expressions and comic vignettes, literature surprises and pleases, terrifies and reassures, it gives us leave of the binding inconsistencies of life, and like the grace of sleep can knit up the raveled sleeve of care.

People are drawn to literature for as many reasons as there are human beings with intelligence: some seek only relief or entertainment, for others it is challenge, or insight, or understanding, and for some reassurance or solace. But whatever the reason, within the space of literature a world appears in which the perennial questions of life: of truth, happiness, beauty, death, and the sacred come to presence and find resonance with human need.

So far we have left out the theme of love as it engages our sense of life in language and literature. *Eros/Philia/Agape*: there is a sense in which love holds dominion in the search for a sense of life, or rather it is the fabric within which sense runs the course of any life which has a sense. All inquiry begins with a sense of lack, a longing for what would complete the emptiness of desire. Aristotle, after explaining why poetry is more philosophical and more worthy of serious attention than history, once again speaks from the beginning to the point: all men desire to know, and philosophy (that is, the love of and search for wisdom) begins in wonder, in a sense of wonder. As language unfolds into literature and literature opens into and enfolds the sense of life we have a resource that we can enter at any point to discover therein the sense of our lives. There is, of course, only promise not certainty that literature will provide the insight needed to locate one in the larger sense of meaning that constitutes humanity in all its diversity. There is an old adage that a book is like a clear pool: if an ape peers in, one cannot expect an angel to peer out. We may or may not have grown any new emotions since our emergence from the primal forests or Eden, and the sense of life may or may not have been accessible and a resource of understanding throughout our journey. But here we are, *in medias res*, surrounded by centuries of expression that genius has wrought. If we come to this resource with wonder still alive in our hearts, then the sense of life that literature holds in trust will reward our presence.

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NOTES

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THE GARDEN THEN AND NOW; SENSE OF LIFE –
CONTEMPORARY AND IN GENESIS

ABSTRACT

The sense of life in Walker Percy's *THE LAST GENTLEMAN* has reverberations of human life throughout the history of literature. The first sentence of the book is "One fine day in early summer a young man lay thinking in Central Park.¹ The man is in a wonderful park, a garden far away from Eden, yet closely associated with a very old literature, the *BOOK OF GENESIS* which tells the same story, the story of the fallen man in a fallen world.

THE GARDEN IN CENTRAL PARK

The sense of life in Walker Percy's *THE LAST GENTLEMAN* has reverberations of human life throughout the history of literature. The first sentence of the book is "One fine day in early summer a young man lay thinking in Central Park.¹ The man is in a wonderful park, a garden far away from Eden, yet closely associated with a very old literature, the *BOOK OF GENESIS* which tells the same story, the story of the fallen man in a fallen world.

Will Barrett, in Walker Percy's *THE LAST GENTLEMAN* represents an everyman, a twentieth century contemporary businessman, a figure embodied throughout the old literature that touches humanity from the time of Genesis and the Exodus in particular, a literature that expresses human desire, with its conflicts and rewards, its possibilities and perils. Will Barrett, the universal man in the philosophical novel, is on a journey which is geographic and mythic. He encounters gods and demons on his quest for salvation, and ends up in a pseudo-heaven, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

It is Edmund Husserl who maintains that "From what rests on the surface, one is led into the depths."² So it is with Will Barrett, who represents a new Adam, bewildered on his journey, resting in a garden, then deliberately beginning a labor of mercy that reverberates through the historical quests of the human imagination.

As Walker Percy introduces the man in the garden in the first paragraph of the novel, he says that the man is a "young man" who in the first 14 pages doesn't even have a name. Being nameless, he could be anybody, an everyman, lying in Central Park, as Adam had rested in the Garden of Eden. The author notes that "the sky was no more than an ordinary Eastern sky, mild and blue and hazed over."³ Is the place where Will finds himself on a "beautiful day" somewhere just East of Eden, in a post-lapsarian world? The park, says the author, "belonged to the animal kingdom

rather than the vegetable.” The place then is a kingdom under the Eastern sun where the grass is coarse and yellow “as lion’s hair” exposing “the tough old hide of the earth.” The author places the protagonist in a place that is ancient and recognizable, a garden. While the place is a kingdom for animals, the man can think; he is “homo sapiens.”

John Hardy, emphasizing that the place where we first meet Will Barrett is a place where no one is at home; he claims that Percy deliberately delays the start of the hero’s adventures by “displacing” him. While millions of people visit Central Park, they do not live there.⁴ Moreover, Will has a particular difficulty with all the folks he meets in the park. He has a problem with balance and has to “get a footing” with those around him by first discovering their infirmities, a condition that is set directly in the context of the Myth of the Fall. Because something once happened to cause imbalance for every one, Will perceives a condition like his in those around him. In the story of the Fall, a catastrophe took place (Genesis 3, 15–19) because of which Adam and Eve’s lives were changed, and death, with all its accompanying infirmities became ever present in their lives and in the lives of all their children.

THE ANCIENT GARDEN IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS

Cleanth Brooks, in discussing the doctrine of the fall, claims that its tradition accounts for alienation as man’s essential infirmity.⁵ Brooks notes that the Judeo-Christian schema provides for reconciliation with God, but the bliss of perfection and peace is to be recovered elsewhere than on earth, not in the world of time. The sense of life as a condition of imperfection pervades our literature through the ages. Walker Percy’s character, Will Barrett is on a quest for his own identity. He is modern man who does not know how to pose the questions. He loves to use the telescope and eavesdropping so he can discover secrets. While “getting a footing” pertains to the age in which Will is living, it is also an attempt to deal with his own personal infirmities which give him clues to the fact that something is amiss with the world. “For some years he had a nervous condition and as a consequence he did not know how to live his life” (11).

It may be that the time, the age in which he lives, is an unbalancing factor in Will’s particular infirmity. As Percy claims, the modern world has no theory which will give satisfaction to the quest of the “uneasy” questioner (MB 25). Thus, for a fiction centered in an uneasy quest, Romano Guardini’s *End of the Modern World* provides the epigraph: “Love will disappear from the face of the public world, but more precious will be that love which flows from one lonely person to another.”⁶ Will is representative of Guardini’s lonely person set in the public world. He sees signs that all is “not well.” He is Adam alone in a great garden of the fallen world, a modern-day Adam in reverie about his own incompleteness.

In New York City a network of unplanned incidents and bungling encounters brings Will Barrett into contact with the Vaught family. The Vaughts are in the north

seeking a cure for the youngest son, Jamie, who is dying of Leukemia. Will, who is unsatisfied with his life as it is, agrees to become chauffeur for the family on their journey home. Will Actually sees Kitty Vaught, Jamie's sister, the first time as she saunters in front of his telescope while he is watching a beautiful bird.

An aspect of Central Park, that contemporary well cultivated space in the center of a boisterous city, is the marvelous peregrine falcon that Will watches with his telescope. The bird's eclipsed eye has a hypnotic attraction for Will, for the half-opened eye resembles the half-knowledge that the engineer senses in himself.

And every morning the pilgrim bird patrolled the cornice, making an awkward sashay in his buff pants, cocked a yellow eye at the misty trees below, and fell like a thunderbolt, knocking pigeons out of the air in all directions. The engineer took a dozen photographs in magnification one fifty, trusting that at least one would catch the fierce eclipsed eye of the falcon. (43)

Life in the park includes the essential presence of the human and the divine. The peregrine is a godly figure in that it patrols its earth, and falls "like a thunderbolt." It is Zeus falling from the heavens knocking pigeons out of the air in all directions.

Besides being the benign place where humans and birds find shelter and peace, the contemporary garden, like that first garden of human memory, is a place of peril. Through the span of literature we find the paradise and the inferno, the wilderness and the cultivated land, the desert and the rain forest, the garden of delights and the valley of tears. As literature is the reflection of human life, so the garden is the reflection of the innocent and attractive environment we await in our intense longing for Paradise. The two novels that present Will Barrett to our imaginations, *THE LAST GENTLEMAN* and *THE SECOND COMING*, both address the identity of Will Barrett essentially as the everyman, the figure bewildered by his presence in a perilous world. In one place he says, "I will bear it," talking about his life. Even his name is the affirmation that he will live this life, his greatest gift. He will carry the holy grail to its appointed place.

Certainly in the first novel, Jamie incorporates the greatest peril, for he is a dying youth for whom Will has been hired to be a companion. Jamie's sister Rita is the one who seems to comprehend the situation of Will's relationship with the family: "The extraordinary part of it is that though you are a new friend--perhaps because you are a new friend--you have more influence with them than anyone else" (LG 92). According to Rita, Will has achieved something extraordinary and his "new friend" status gives him certain advantages, one of which he is now an heir of relationship. Indeed, he gains more influence with the members than anyone else. Adam, alone in a New York City garden, has found a family.

However, the ever imminent catastrophe associated with our humanity, especially in the life of Jamie Vaught, is an old story told throughout the history of literature. Death is the central unbalancing event of the Myth of the Fall, Jamie is living out the very graphic promise of doom "you will die" (Gen. 3:17). and his guiltless infirmities are his sharing in the human condition which reverberates with the ancient message of the fall: "Then you will return to the ground from which you came. For you were made from the ground, and to the ground you will return" (Gen. 3:19)

THE GARDEN IN THE SOUTH

SO it is that Will Barrett and his young companion embark upon a journey across the country, from New York to New Mexico. It is a mythic journey where the road unwinds along the countryside, with the affable driver steering the Trav-L-aire, through some lonesome savanna and on "the faraway hummocks where jewel-like warblers swarmed about misty oaks" (161). While the environment is one of common everydayness, the *alltaglichkeit* of Heidegger, the presence of the jewel-like warblers in the misty oaks portends the "bigger than life" sight viewed by Will as he watched the magic birds through his telescope in Central Park. Will and Jamie are children of Adam enjoying glimpses of an ancient land just east of Eden and their camper makes the rest-times as pleasant as the strolls of a new couple with God in a distant past evening.

Nights were the best. Then as the thick singing darkness settled about the little caboose which shed its cheerful square of light on the soil of old Carolina, they might debark and, with the pleasantest sense of stepping down from the zone of the possible to the zone of the realized, stroll to a fishing camp, or a service station or a grocery store. (161)

On this unplanned journey, while the darkness is thick and singing, the two men live in the atmosphere of the cheerful light emanating from their zone of possibility, their camper.⁷ Perhaps the most significant discovery of Will is that in the "misty oaks" he was at home. Even though he was hundreds of miles from home and had never been here before, in this more decorous, more tended place. He senses that the journey itself is his home. This strange land, hundreds of miles from Will's earthly home is older, the lost and forgotten Garden of Eden "where it all started and which is not quite like home" (161). In the thick singing darkness, Will has a glimpse of his own journeying soul, which has a sense of being at home, because as a wayfarer, he is aware of the stage-set moss and the Glynn marshes, the passing world around him, as being his domicile "Like an old house revisited" (161).

The discovery that Will makes, namely, that his home is in his journey, gives him a sense of finally being at home. However, the homecoming that Will is aware of, is an inner aspect of his journey. It is the psychological realization that the journey is where he belongs. But the journey in the camper cannot go on forever. It is on one of the evenings when the two travelers are looking through the telescope, that Will brings up the private topic of the future, "What are we going to do next?" Breaking into the harmony with nature, the question arouses the terrible reality of a present family home and a present serious infirmity lulled into repose by the trip.

THE GARDEN THAT IS PROMISED

The literature represented here, the twentieth century story of an individual and a family on a journey outside of one garden into another, all the while, carrying the human infirmities of a human condition, is the enduring story of literature through history. It is the story of loss and discovery, of pain and joy; it is the story misery and happiness, the sense of human life.

It is in the hospital in Santa Fe, New Mexico, (where the atmosphere is remarkably clear) that Will Barrett realizes the terribleness of Jamie's illness.⁸ His sojourn with Jamie has taken place between hospitals, beginning with the one in New York city, where he first met the Vaught family and agreed to be the companion of Jamie who wanted to travel south. Jamie's experience with hospitals emphasizes the condition of illness, a particular plight of Adam's children illuminated by T.S. Eliot, "The whole earth is our hospital/ Endowed by a ruined millionaire"⁹ In his encounter with Jamie, Will can see with one look that the boy is dying. Percy uses the language of earth to present the scene. Jamie's "dusty friable hair lay on the pillow as if it had been discarded" (390). There is a sense of "crumbling" associated with Jamie's appearance, and the word "dusty" has the connotation of the aged, the old house, the old man. In the present context, the youth is encountering the aged and ominous action of death, always inherent in the sense of life, the journey into the dusty earth. Will can hardly bear it.

It was the shame of it, the bare-faced embarrassment of getting worse and dying which took him by surprise and caught his breath in his throat. How is this matter to be set right? Were there no officials to deal with the shame of dying, to make suitable recompense? It was like getting badly beat in a fight. To LOSE. Oh, to lose so badly. (390)

The shame of death, the bare-faced embarrassment is too much to bear. Death is the naked outrage which lies hidden in the sense of life of every individual, and which has been present throughout the ages. It is the old beast of guilt, first realized by Adam and his wife in an ancient garden where they experienced shame. Death is the great loss, which is absolute in its finality. Moreover, death holds within itself some great wrong, compelling Will to ask, "How is this matter to be set right?"

The wrong is in the loss of the fight, and the shame that accompanies the embarrassment of loss. While the paradigm of the Myth of the Fall necessarily includes the loss of grace, which is the gift of spiritual life, The story of the Great Fall also includes the possibility and the promise of salvation, continuing life for eternity. The wrongness which began somewhere in the history of the human race, which is revealed in the story of the shame of Adam and Eve, is an enduring theme in the story of Will Barrett and his engagement with the dying youth. Will deliberately embarks on the task of finding some officials to make suitable recompense in the desperate situation.

So it happens that Will actually trusts Val, Jamie's older sister, who is a nun. Over the telephone line, she commissions Will, "Call a minister, for God's sake." And thus the hospital chaplain is called, Father Boomer, an ungainly figure, who represents faith in another garden, where there is no shame, no misery, no death. Using the Sacramentary, he follows the anointing of Jamie with the solemn declaration,

Today I promise you that you will be with our Blessed Lord and Savior and see him face to face. (309)

In the anointing, Father Boomer's hand, though it is what Will calls a "paw," becomes analogous with the marvelous hand of the God of creation painted on the Sistine Chapel ceiling by Michaelangelo. The hand becomes the metaphor for the touch of the human with the divine. Something right has happened in the encounter

with the great wrong of human death. Shame, even the overwhelming shame of death, has receded into the background.

However, the greater recompense from the experience of the hospital room resides in the fact that Will has control. He is finally, although still a stumbler, an engineer. He has completed a good action, designed a suitable recompense in a desperate situation. Is this then an example, a replica, a figure of the sense of life in our human journey? Through history, does the story constantly continue to tell about the quest and intense desire for happiness, for goodness in life, for Paradise? The ancient story of the Fallen Man in the Fallen World is not then a tragedy, for the story essentially holds the promise of redemption, the light that fills the darkness. Our literature through history often ends with the tragedy, the end of existence, while this particular novel, like many of the encounters in literature end with the whole story that comes from that first garden.

In the twentieth century, our formost authors are still telling the enduring story of the Fallen Man in the Fallen World. Our literature always includes a protagonist on a journey through the wilderness and barren deserts toward some magnificent destiny. Northrup Frye claims that the story is the same. The individual in literature, as in life, has infirmities of some kind, be they physical or spiritual. However the inhabitants who people the literature of the ages have gifts, good qualities that help in overcoming the demons on the road, the struggles, conflicts, and dark situations that lead to loss of direction. In this great Myth that we read from the Book of Genesis, the story does not end in loss, but in the marvelous light that comes from the promise that all will be well. Salvation will come and be ours. The garden remains where the roses bloom in Central Park, and in the backyards of our homes. It also remains in a perfection of spiritual life which is the eternal world. The story in the garden is a wonderful recompense, and it permeates our literature with the sense of life.

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³ Percy (p. 4).

⁴ Hardy, John. 1987. *The fiction of Walker Percy*, 8. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press.

⁵ Brooks, Cleanth. 1986. Walker Percy and modern gnosticism. In *Harold bloom*, ed. Walker Percy, 54. New York, NY: Chelsea House Publishers.

⁶ Guardini, Romano. 1962. *The end of the modern world*, 132. New York, NY: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux.

⁷ Pindell, Richard. 1986. Place, language and death in the last gentleman. In *Harold bloom*, ed. Walker Percy. New York, NY: Chelsea House.

In discussing the meaning of place in the novel, Pindell uses the Old Carolina episode to show the now-presence of the characters (74).

⁸ Schwartz, Joseph. 1987. Life and death in the last gentleman. *Renascence* XI-2: 112-128. Schwartz points out the marvelous association of the action of the novel with the place: Santa Fe (hly faith) situated

in the shadow of the Sangre de Cristo (blood of Christ) mountain range where the camino real (royal or real road) leads to the Santa Fe (holy faith) river where Jamie will be baptized (124).

⁹ Eliot, T.S. 1971. East coker IV, 11–12. In *The complete poems and plays*. New York, NY: Harcourt and Brace & World. In this poem about health and sickness, Eliot refers to Adam as the “ruined millionaire,” from whom we inherit death.

SECTION II
THE INWARD QUEST

THE EVOLUTION OF JUSTICE IN *THE ORESTEIA*

ABSTRACT

Classicist Robert Fagles's translation of *The Oresteia* includes an introductory essay in which he articulates an Hegelian reading of Aeschylus's trilogy. While provocative, Fagles's application of Hegel's dialectic to the three plays that comprise *The Oresteia*, is nonetheless problematic. Fagles's two Hegelian-inspired arguments fail to comport with Hegel's theory of the Dialectic. Robert Fagles touches on, but fails to develop, a possible connection between *The Oresteia* and the theories of Friedrich Nietzsche. The events of *The Oresteia* correspond more closely to Nietzsche's political philosophy than Hegel's. Friedrich Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* provides readers of *The Oresteia* with a more informative notion of the nature of Aeschylus's representation of Greek social progress.

Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, has stimulated critical attention concerning the nature of Greek social life. This is due, in large part, to fifth-century Greek artistic standards, which emphasized art's imitative function. In the introduction to his translation of *The Oresteia*, Robert Fagles asserts that Aeschylus's trilogy articulates social progress as predominantly Hegelian in nature. It is certainly true that Aeschylus explores a myriad of struggles in the plays that comprise *The Oresteia*. Conflict arises between men and women; the *oikos* and the *polis*; parents and children; the individual and the state. Some of these struggles remain unresolved, while others come to a definitive conclusion, if not always a satisfying one. Great societal change is also brought about by a succession of events in the *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, and *The Eumenides*, as all of these plays document the evolving nature of justice. It is not clear that the resulting process instituted at the end of *The Eumenides* is benevolent, progressive, or balanced. An Hegelian approach presupposes that conflict resolves into synthesis and a closer approximation to the truth. I will show that this is not the case in *The Oresteia*. I believe that a Nietzschean, as opposed to an Hegelian, analysis is a more informative way to approach the trilogy.

Although G.W.F. Hegel considered Sophocles's *Antigone* the apotheosis of Greek tragedy, he also had opinions concerning *The Oresteia*. Hegel observes that generally, the opposition of the ethical, social life, and family life was the basis for moral relationships among people.¹ Athena's vote at the end of *The Oresteia* "promises altars and a cult to the Eumenides no less than Apollo."² The Aschylean trilogy also illumines the fact that "humanity is engaged in a self-imposed conflict with what is intrinsically moral, true, and worthy of reverence."³ For Hegel, "the end of the tragic conflict is the denial of both the exclusive claims. . . Sometimes it can end as a divine being, the spiritual unity reconciles by some adjustment the claims of the

contending powers (*Eumenides*)."⁴ Hegel's comments are cursory, and he does not develop his analysis of *The Oresteia* much beyond this.

Robert Fagles attempts to extend the Hegelian analysis of Aeschylus's trilogy. Specifically, he relies on Hegel's dialectic method of explaining history. An outline of Hegel's Dialectic is essential to a complete understanding of Fagles's hypotheses. Hegel postulated a philosophy of history in which, according to Peter Singer, "there is no objective reality independent of thought."⁵ Hegel believed that "reality is to be found in what is mental or intellectual, not in what is material."⁶ Reality, therefore, consists in the mind that shapes the world, and logic that the human mind can grasp. In Absolute Idealist schemes, logic is "the study of. . .ultimate reality in its pure form, abstracted from the particular forms it takes in the finite minds of human beings or in the natural world."⁷ Each individual strives to fully comprehend the nature of reality, and "a study of rational thought will reveal the principles on which the world has been shaped."⁸ One must engage in the dialectical method, which is the only means "to uncover the form of pure thought."⁹

There are three parts to the Dialectic, all of which work to illumine the nature of reality. Simon Blackburn explains that the thesis and antithesis, combining to form the synthesis "is the necessary process that makes up progress in both thought and the world."¹⁰ Singer offers an example of the Dialectic at work. A community based upon custom, such as ancient Greece, comprises the thesis. The questioning of Socrates would constitute the antithesis. Finally, these two opposites are "brought together, unified in a manner that preserves them, and avoids their different forms of one-sidedness."¹¹ The new synthesis will preserve the organic community, while allowing for individual freedom.¹² The synthesis can still be one-sided, which will make it the thesis of some new dialectical movement. The goal of each individual is to comprehend The Absolute Idea itself, and the Dialectic allows one to know the Absolute better.¹³

The evolution of justice is a product of the dialectic between posited and implicit law. According to Hegel, "when a nation begins to acquire even a little culture, its customary law must soon come to be collected and put together. Such a collection is a legal code, but one, which as a mere collection, is markedly formless, indeterminate, and fragmentary."¹⁴ The immature, codified law works with common law to form a concept of rightness. Hegel asserts that "this unwritten law, however, is as good as written."¹⁵ He concludes that "it is only because of this identity between its implicit and its posited character that positive law has obligatory force in virtue of its rightness."¹⁶

Law and the nature of rightness are primary concerns in *The Oresteia*. Robert Fagles's interpretive stance concerning the trilogy is, however, open to two unsatisfactory and contradictory interpretations. Fagles's reading of *The Oresteia* fits within an Hegelian framework in two ways. First, "not only do its three plays form a thesis, antithesis and synthesis, but its final synthesis is a spur to further struggle."¹⁷ Here, Fagles observes that the dialectical struggle never ceases. Instead, "conflict remains the medium of our destiny in the *Oresteia*."¹⁸ In an historical context, the further struggle is illumined by *The Eumenides*, which "launch[es] an expansionist, imperialistic Athens on her way."¹⁹ Athenian imperialism, according to Fagles,

would eventually lead this great power to civil war.²⁰ In essence, Athens's various dialectical struggles lead it to near ruin. Unending conflict, with the risk of backtracking, however, seems anti-Hegelian.

Fagles's first attempt at an Hegelian analysis results in an infinite regress. There may be no progression towards the Absolute Idea, as Hegel envisioned as the purpose of the Dialectic. Instead, "we see as Cassandra sees. Civilization rises from barbarity and it is perishable, its progress is the fruit of human struggle, a new barbarity may engulf the future."²¹ Hegel's method, is supposed to bring one closer to the Absolute. Fagles suggests that it can take one away from enlightenment. A relapse into barbarity is not only anti-Hegelian, but it does nothing to inform our notion of the progression exhibited by particular political systems like the one seen in *The Oresteia*.

Fagles next argues for an optimistic Hegelian approach.²² As a self-contained entity, *The Oresteia* is the "only trilogy that remains to us from Greece embodies 'the offense, the counter-offense, and the reconciliation.'"²³ Here, Fagles contends that the trilogy results in a sense of closure. He argues that the gender conflict resolves itself in the sense that, "the *Oresteia* grows into its final unions mainly by re-establishing the feminine and its powers."²⁴ According to Fagles, Aeschylus re-establishes the feminine as a "counterweight essential to the democratic balance."²⁵ Aeschylus, however, presents the reader with a decidedly biased view of democracy, in which the feminine does not act as a counterbalance within the newly formed social scheme. The representation of democracy in *The Oresteia* is not as a system accessible to its entire people, but only to the most powerful. Fagles's alternative Hegelian explanation of *The Oresteia*'s conclusion seems doubtful.

The feminine does not rise to provide balance in Greek democratic systems, nor does it do so in Aeschylus's trilogy. In "Clytemnestra and the Vote of Athena," R.P. Winnington-Ingram's reading of *The Oresteia* directly contradicts Fagles's interpretation. Winnington-Ingram's evidence suggests that Aeschylus clearly divests women of power. According to Winnington-Ingram, "the cuckold of Aegisthus is to be *reduced* to effeminacy. . . . As a person he is effeminate and [Clytemnestra] can dominate him."²⁶ The term, "reduced" is interesting because it suggests that the feminine is less than the male and not an equal force of balance or influence. Winnington-Ingram also suggests that the feminine necessarily takes a subordinate role: "Apollo, in defending Orestes, speaks. . . . as man; he disparages the motherhood of Clytemnestra, denying the right of the female to be regarded, in the full sense, as parent of the child. Athena "casts her vote for Orestes frankly on grounds of preference for the male."²⁷ Winnington-Ingram's reading points out a defect in Fagles's second resolution. According to the traditional view of *The Oresteia*, "the subjection of women was not only just preferable to the liberty which they had formerly enjoyed [but] is an adequate description of the dramatist's [Aeschylus's] views."²⁸

Elsewhere, Fagles asserts that "the *Oresteia* is the triumph of the Mean."²⁹ It is "the resolution of discord into harmony, the triumph of democracy' . . . the Areopagus resolves the tragic burden."³⁰ Fagles approvingly quotes George Thompson's assertion that "Hegelian opposites. . . crown the advance of history, idealized and perfected."³¹ Fagles suggests that, with the advent of just the right conditions,

synthesis is magically achieved. The solutions to major social difficulties, however, are rarely so simple.

Robert Fagles provocatively suggests that Nietzschean concepts also apply to *The Oresteia*. He finds that the Furies are evocative of “the Process, like the Great Mother as Nietzsche saw her, ‘eternally creating, eternally driving into life, in this rushing, whirling flux eternally seizing satisfaction’ . . . They are [Dionysus’s] wild maenads gathering moral force.”³² Fagles, however, does not analyze this Nietzschean connection to its full potential.

Friedrich Nietzsche proposes a distinct view of societal development in *The Genealogy of Morals*. In the early stages of any society, the principles of vengeance govern the ways in which the powerful deal with wrongdoers. Nietzsche observes that “for an unconscionably long time culprits were not punished because they were felt to be responsible for their actions. . . rather, they were punished the way parents still punish their children, out of rage at some damage suffered, which the doer must pay for.”³³ This rage created a desire in the wronged “to bask in the glorious feeling of treating another human being as lower than himself—or, in the case the actual punitive power has passed on to a legal ‘authority,’ of seeing him despised and mistreated.”³⁴ In other words, one who finds herself a victim in this type of society discovers that “to behold suffering gives pleasure, but to cause another to suffer affords an even greater pleasure.”³⁵ Nietzsche believes that this delight in cruelty was “a normal trait, something to which one’s conscience could assent heartily.”³⁶

What occurs on an emotional level in tragedy may have a connection to this Nietzschean idea. Aristotle asserts that tragedy is “[achieved] through pity and fear a *catharsis* of such affections.”³⁷ In some accounts, *catharsis* means to relieve pent-up, violent emotions through drama. Philosopher Eva Dadlez notes that other translations of the term, *catharsis*, “focus not on ridding ourselves of emotions like pity and fear but on relishing them.”³⁸ As I progress through Fagles’s own translation of *The Oresteia*, it will hopefully become apparent that Aeschylus dramatizes not the Hegelian dialectic, but the Nietzschean formulation of societal evolution. From the first scene, Aeschylus depicts the cycle of vengeance that plagues Agamemnon’s family.

The Watchman in *Agamemnon* reminds the audience of the tragic history of the House of Atreus. He cries, “Aye, but the house and these old stones,/give them a voice and what a tale they’d tell.”³⁹ The House of Atreus has suffered under curses that caused great misfortune to the family. A series of horrific actions from Tantalus down through subsequent generations has brought the blight upon the House. Agamemnon, who is also a member of the unfortunate family, cannot escape from the curses and resulting cycles of vengeance.

The Chorus in the *Agamemnon* provides further indications that the early notions of justice in this society were based upon vengeance. The old men of Argos tell of the sons of Atreus, who launched a thousand ships to revenge the absconding of Helen by Paris. The Chorus observes that this was “true to revenge, a stabbing Fury!”⁴⁰ Agamemnon had to murder his daughter, Iphigenia, in order to get a favorable wind to Troy. The Chorus pleads with Apollo to “soothe [Artemis] before/her crosswinds hold us down and moor the ships too long,/pressing us on to another victim. . ./nothing sacred, no/no feast to be eaten/the architect of

vengeance."⁴¹ Clytemnestra, they assert, "waits/the terror raging back and back in the future/the stealth, the law of the hearth, the mother—/Memory womb of Fury child-avenging Fury!"⁴² Just as the Greeks sought retribution on Troy, so Clytemnestra harbors resentment for the murder of her child. The cycle will continue when Agamemnon returns home, bringing his spoils with him.

Clytemnestra's enjoyment of her husband's gruesome murder supports Nietzsche's theories concerning the nature of justice in early communities. Clytemnestra says, "Here is Agamemnon, my husband made a corpse/by his right hand—a masterpiece of Justice./Done is done."⁴³ She claims that she is justified in her action because "he sacrificed his own child, our daughter."⁴⁴ Clytemnestra also says that "the spirit lives within me,/our savage ancient spirit of revenge."⁴⁵ She not only avenges her child, but she seems to take delight in the murder of her husband. There is strong evidence to suggest that she takes sexual pleasure in the act of killing Agamemnon. She says, "So he goes down, and the life is bursting out of him—/great sprays of blood, and the murderous shower/wounds me, dyes me black and I, I revel/like the Earth when the spring rains come down,/the blessed gifts of god, and the new green spear/splits the sheath and rips to birth in glory!"⁴⁶ Classicist Elizabeth Vandiver observes that "In Greek erotic poetry, rain fertilizing the earth is a standard metaphor for sexual intercourse—for the male fertilizing the female. . . [Clytemnestra] seems to be saying that she got a sexual enjoyment out of killing her husband."⁴⁷ Agamemnon's murder does not satiate Clytemnestra's appetite for vengeance, but she chastises the Furies when they fall asleep on the job. As the Furies slumber, Clytemnestra begs them: "Never forget my anguish."⁴⁸ She is in torment as a result of her own death at the hands of her son.

Like Clytemnestra, the Furies love their bloody work. Apollo is quick to point out the delight that the Furies take in revenge: "Go where heads are severed, eyes gouged out,/where Justice and bloody slaughter are the same. . . /castrations, wasted seed, young men's glories butchered,/extremities maimed, and huge stones at the chest. . . So, you hear your love feast, yearn to have it all."⁴⁹ Later, the Leader, herself, says, "the reek of human blood—it's laughter to my heart!"⁵⁰ They are a primal force, a power that is prior to the Olympians themselves. They chant, "Even at birth, I say, our rights were so ordained./The deathless gods must keep their hands far off—/no god may share our cups, our solemn feasts. . . So now, striving to wrench our mandate from the gods,/we make ourselves exempt from their control,/we brook no trial—no god can be our judge."⁵¹ As noted earlier, Fagles believes that the Furies represent process. It is Athena, however, who casts her vote for Orestes and authors a new role for the Furies. She cannot circumvent the Furies, nor can she ignore them completely. Instead, Athena changes them into the "guards of Athens."⁵² This transformation marks the shift from a vengeance-based society to one ruled by "impartial" law.

Nietzsche anticipates this shift from a system of personal revenge to third-party justice. Robert Fagles also makes note of this move when he says that "it is in our progress from savagery to democracy, it would seem, that the gods may find the balance which they lacked, and earn a better warrant for authority."⁵³ Nietzsche, who eschews reliance on supernaturalism, has a different perspective: "as the commonwealth grew stronger, it no longer took the infractions of the individual

quite so seriously. The individual is no longer represented so grave a danger to the group as a whole. The offender was “no longer outlawed and exposed to general fury.”⁵⁴ As a result, “whenever a community gains in power and pride, its penal code becomes more lenient.”⁵⁵ According to Nietzsche, once a state has accumulated enough riches, it can afford to be less cruel. In such a system, “all acts of highhandedness on the part of individuals or groups are seen as infractions of the law, as rebellion against the supreme power.”⁵⁶ No longer is justice exclusively personal. The State mediates this part of human relations. There is the risk in such a system, however, that it will become so lenient that criminals will go unpunished.

The society encompassed in the world of *The Oresteia* has struggled to achieve a more workable dynamic for this particular community. Robert Fagles asserts, “struggle is salvation, as Nietzsche would say.”⁵⁷ In *The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche indeed suggests that struggle is imperative: “to accept any legal system as sovereign and universal—to accept it, not merely as an instrument in the struggle of power complexes, but as a *weapon against struggle*. . . is an anti-vital principle which can only bring about man’s utter demoralization and, indirectly, a reign of nothingness.”⁵⁸

The struggle to attain a democratic form of justice seems to be documented in *The Oresteia*. Athena, while arguing with the Furies says, “two sides are here, only half is heard.”⁵⁹ It is here that the adversarial process appears to have been born. Although the Furies claim that they trust Athena to judge Orestes fairly, they are not satisfied with the outcome. They assert that “all’s lost, our ancient powers torn away by their cunning.”⁶⁰ It actually seems as though one repressive regime has replaced another, at least in the short term. Athena is eventually able to appease the Furies, but she makes it clear that they will need to keep a constant vigil as protectors of Athens. She says that she “will never endure the overthrow of Athens.”⁶¹ In a sense, therefore, the Furies answer to Athena now. The Leader says, “I will embrace/one home with you, Athena,/never fail the city.”⁶² Athena seems to triumph over the Furies, and as an instantiation of male values, invalidates the feminine. The central conflict is indeed resolved, but Orestes goes free.

The Furies, who embody the old religion, lose power. They make a vow to Athena that they cannot break. Therefore, they are no longer independent. Oaths held special importance in Athenian society, and in the short term, at least, the changing society is detrimental to feminine autonomy. Oaths in Ancient Greek culture had particular significance. This resonates in *The Eumenides* when Apollo accuses the furies of coming between oaths. He says, “why, you’d disgrace—obliterate the bonds of Zeus/and Hera queen of brides!”⁶³ According to Judith Fletcher, oaths are so powerful because they were especially important in Athenian society, behaving as an adhesive to solidify a burgeoning democracy.⁶⁴ Oaths seem to control the action in *The Oresteia* as well. Electra and Orestes avenge Agamemnon’s murder, and they agree to “work together step by step.”⁶⁵ When Athena assembles the jury that will try Orestes she says, “And I will pick the finest men of Athens,/return and decide the issue fairly, truly—/bound to our oaths, our spirits bent on justice.”⁶⁶ Oaths ultimately move the action to its final resolution.

Promise-keeping is also important to Nietzsche's broader philosophical system, because the advantages of promises are great in an evolving society. Nietzsche observes that, "[people] lived sheltered, protected, in peace and confidence, immune from injuries and hostilities to which the man 'outside' was continually exposed, since they had pledged themselves to the community in respect of such injury and hostility."⁶⁷ The Greeks unite and pledge to seek revenge on Troy. Paris, the "man outside," interceded in the bond between Helen and Menelaus. The Herald in *Agamemnon* recounts Paris's crime and the outcome: "Neither Paris nor Troy, partners to the end,/can say their work outweighs their wages now./Convicted of rapine, stripped of all his spoils,/and his father's house and the land that gave it life-/he's scythed them to the roots. The sons of Priam/pay the price twice over."⁶⁸ Nietzsche asks the important question, "But supposing that pledge is violated?"⁶⁹ At first, oath breakers were harshly punished in civilized societies. Vengeance was an acceptable means of retribution in the early days of communities. This sensibility is present in the *Agamemnon* when Clytemnestra says, "And so/our child is gone, not standing by our side,/the bond of our dearest pledges, mine and yours."⁷⁰ She may be alluding to Agamemnon's murder of Iphigenia here, which supplies Clytemnestra with a reason to kill her husband due to his oath breaking. In *Libation Bearers* Orestes wavers about whether he should kill his mother, but Pylades tells him, "What of the Prophet God Apollo,/the Delphic voice, the faith and oaths we swear?/Make all mankind your enemy, not the gods."⁷¹ Orestes cannot violate his oath to the gods because their vengeance will be more terrible than one a human could exact. There is, however, a radical shift in *The Eumenides*.

The Furies are not able to exact revenge on Orestes for his act of murder. Nietzsche explains that "it is possible to imagine a society flushed with such a sense of power that it could afford to let its offenders go unpunished."⁷² This is exactly what happens in *The Oresteia*. Athena casts her vote for Orestes, who goes unpunished. Nietzsche's predictions have come true: "Like every good thing on earth, justice ends by suspending itself. The fine name this self-canceling justice has given itself is *mercy*. But mercy remains, as goes without saying, the prerogative of the strongest, his province beyond the law."⁷³ The contest in *The Oresteia* is the male Orestes's claims against those of the female, Clytemnestra. There is no reconciliation of these opposing forces. R.P. Winnington-Ingram observes that "the outcome of the trial turn[s] on the social relations of the sexes."⁷⁴ Men are in charge in this society, and they inevitably win. Therefore, there is no Nietzschean struggle. Male domination is inevitable. The outcome has nothing to do with an objective notion of justice. It is called justice, but as it happens, the socially subordinated party is the loser. Athena's vote is cast "not out of pity not out of respect for the suppliant, not in order to gain advantage for her city."⁷⁵ She finds as she does because she identifies with and prefers the male.⁷⁶ Mercy is a construct by the powerful in favor of the powerful.

Robert Fagles's interpretive stances are predicated on the belief that "The *Oresteia* is Hegelian in its challenge."⁷⁷ There seems to be much conflict in the trilogy, especially between men and women. As has been shown, however, the conflicts do not result in balance and greater enlightenment, which would be the

end result of an orthodox Hegelian dialectic. Men and women do not struggle for societal improvements on an equal playing field in *The Oresteia*. The Athenian society begins as one in which justice is a personal system of vengeance, and where women may autonomously seek retribution as well as men. Throughout the trilogy, this independence and power is stripped away from women. Females can no longer act as agents on their own behalf. Instead, a third party system, dominated by males, takes on the full burden of judging and punishing. Because Fagles's analysis is unsatisfactory, we must look for an alternative model. As I have argued, Nietzsche provides a structure that better accords with the events and outcome of *The Oresteia*.

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WHAT MAISIE KNEW IN *WHAT MAISIE KNEW*

Si [quelq'un] est autre chose que l'une des innombrables victims d'une enfance malheureuse [...] c'est que, de tout ce qu'il ait vécu, il a réussi à faire un moyen d'interpréter le monde

Merleau-Ponty

ABSTRACT

This paper sets forth what I consider the two only phenomenological visions of life: the material one and the formal one. Briefly, the former focuses life from the discontinuous flow of time, whereas the latter focuses it from the transcendental unity of a consciousness that orders experience not in accordance with the temporal development thereof (that always hinges upon the arbitrariness of chance) but with its absolute freedom regarding it; in other words, the formal vision concentrates in how everyone knows what he has lived, which allows to vindicate a vital fullness even when the material structuring of the own experience seems to implicate a total failure, which is as far as I see the question the only possibility of vindicating a truly personal existence, which is what, according to our exegesis, James shows in the work that we have mentioned in the title of these lines. Thereby, we shall divide the content of them in three sections: in the first one, we shall explain in great detail the conceptual difference of the two visions of life; in the second one, we shall show the stints of the material vision through some characters of James's novel; in the third one, we shall unfold the formal vision through the consciousness of the protagonist of the work, whose literary originality will lie in her being a badge of the modern self-rule.

THE DOUBLE VISION OF LIFE

What is the sense of living? What is the substance whereof life is made? The answer to these questions stands doubtlessly for the first and foremost knowledge that one can attain, above all considering that there are two downright different visions of life and that each one of them implicates an array of values and vital aims: *prima facie*, "life" means simply the material or anecdotic unfolding of the multitudinous diversity that goes to meet everyone at any moment, the irreducible content of time that reverberates through all the hardly fathomable reactions that the environment brings about in the own consciousness, which is shaped the amorphous concatenation of happenings; in accordance with this anecdotic or material approach, life is like a Lockean *tabula rasa* whereon the unforeseeable chance writes topsy-turvily among the good intentions, the blunders and the wickedness of everyone, which

would even at best lead to an awful final scrawl unless there were a *sui generis* proofreader that inadvertently erased the wrong lines and strengthened the correct ones while allowing everyone to believe furthermore that he has freely chosen what has remained on the sheet or, which would be practically the same, unless the own person had a mysterious intuition, an unshakeable conviction that what he has lived is right throughout. Thus, the problem with this vision is that it demands to assert the existence of a supernatural determination, whether it is a miraculous providence or a sublime spirituality, which stands in the end for an ideal stark alien to the average human being, who more often than not fluctuates between scepticism and fanaticism and acts by the fatal force of wonts and drives that keep him on a level not very much different from the sheer animality. And this simplistic appeal to the fatalism of life reveals the oddest feature of the anecdotic vision whereof we speak, namely, that it postulates a preposterous passivity for the part of the individual; if life is at bottom made up by the incidental content of time that goes hand-in-hand with the aberrantly uneven repartition of endowments and possibilities, everyone has to live what has fallen to his lot because there is no other option. Life, considered as the pure succession of the material content of chance and reduced to a circumstance that after all none has chosen, ends up being subjected to that preposterous determinism that works efficaciously just for the few that are born under a lucky star; however, taking into account that even the luckiest ones could mar their own advantages due to some psychological stint or to mere shortsightedness, life would at any rate be absurd for most people and should be fatalistically reduced to the material exteriority of time whose final unity would be a blurry image of the own success that would always be questionable even for the most self-assured people, a consequence that (as Schopenhauer knew better than any other great thinker)¹ would be unbearable both for the handful of the fortunate ones who would always hinge upon chance and, above all, for the majority of the unfortunate ones who pass their existence among bales of every ilk, which is why the common sense wisdom (which in these matters is deeper than whatever metaphysical lubrication) always has branded a conception of life that vindicates the aleatory content of time and/or the uneven potency of chance, which are the two possibilities that make up what we have called the material vision of life. Of course, it is needless to say that to be handsome or to have been born in an illustrious lineage are by far desirable and that none would reject that willingly unless he were mad; but the philosophical value of all that would be practically zero because what the material structuring of the own life, whether desirable or not, is solely one's business and by no means stands for a standard of ideal frame of every existence.²

Let us proceed to the second vision of life, which we shall call the formal or the conscious one, which dismisses a priori whatever anecdotic content and the purely emotional reaction to that, for, instead of centring on the lot or on the incidental development of the own existence through time, focuses on the consciousness wherewith one grasps everything, from the vertiginous succession of temporal situations and bodily determinations to the aesthetic fullness of each circumstance, the coexistence with the others and, above all, the complexity of the own being that

comes to light thanks to the shift of the focus, since for this vision the vital kernel is not located on the surface of what has happened or on its emotional structuring but in the transcendental consciousness thereof; in how one has literally lived what one has experienced. And this last difference is worth emphasizing: *life is an intuition, not an outward experience*. Which does not entail either that it must be mistaken for a mental framework with no further commitment with reality or for a subjective representation of the material content of experience, which are the two most common wrong interpretations of the issue; in both cases, life would at any rate be kenned as a reactive structuring, an always questionable interpretation of facts and intentions however much it could be “spiritualized” or intellectualized, which is why the vindication of an all-embracing subjectivity that asserts itself over the temporal content of life and intends to live in the recesses of its own fantasy (which is also a possibility of posing the material approach and agrees with the so-called individualism that has reigned over the modern thought) is in essence the other side of the objectivity that the material approach is after. Thereat, in order to really set aside the anecdotic content of experience it is necessary to carry-out a “transcendental reduction” to the unity of consciousness and leave outside the objective qualities whereof one has lived, whether it has been positive or not.³ Thus, the transcendental reduction will allow to fix the consciousness “beyond good and evil” (as Nietzsche would have posed the issue)⁴ and will show the final relativeness of time, so that life can be accepted in all its fullness at any moment without remonstrance and not only when chance has been favourable to the individual (which, as we have just remarked, is rather rare and contingent) or when the latter has attained a certain aim whose possession is nevertheless meaningless once it has been achieved. Still more, insofar as the vital whole, defined this way, has nothing to do with the unevenness of chance and time (that privileges solely the prime and rejects the authentic maturity of age as an unnecessary appendix), the possibility of coming by a real personal balance and, why not, a real happiness is more than ever at hand even in the most problematic situation, provided none the less that the person is able to vindicate a minimum self-rule and is not crushed by something that reduces him to those awful conditions of tyranny, humiliation or blindness that set the very limit of humanity, which, withal, has the advantage of bringing to the fore a truly personal life that will not hinge anymore upon factors that, despite the uniqueness wherewith desire endows them, are abstract and vulgar because everyone can have them, at least in a certain proportion, or because their link is incidental: consequently, richness, youth, beauty, if received by birth or by the mechanical advance of time, are valueless for everyone unless he acts in such a way that he changes them into a badge of his being; otherwise, they are merely objective features that are as indifferent for the final appraisal of life as the features that he never had. Due to all this, the conscious sense must be conceived as the sole adequate approach to the insurmountable finitude of life and to the stints that it imposes over the individual will. To be self-conscious is, in fact, more than to be aware of an objective reality or of the would-be personal capacities; it is rather to aim at some unheard-of possibilities that must be fulfilled temporarily although not in according to a foregoing anecdotic development since they have nothing to

do with the sheer exteriority of experience, let alone with the artful exploitation of the own being but with the accomplishment of a conscious determination that is accepted wholeheartedly because one knows that it is what one has chosen to live.

Now, the difference between the two approaches that we have so far outlined on a purely logical plane must also have a phenomenological and a dramatic structuring in the concrete existence however much most people are unaware thereof and take the vital realities for granted as a thing in itself. This means that there are at least two basic ways of appraising life and that the difference between them is qualitative, not quantitative, and hinges entirely upon a *sui generis* consciousness that unfolds through values and emotions that are starkly incompatible one another, all of which allow to grasp the complexity of the vital experiencing from a double slant that substitutes the ancient metaphysical dualism of the present and the future life, which can in accordance with this be understood as a very imperfect approach to the question. And since this double slant is for explaining concretely the reality of life, we want to set it out through the analysis of Henry James's literary masterpiece that we have mentioned in the title of this paper⁵: as a matter of fact, however much the anecdotic content of *What Maisie Knew* is appalling for itself and full of peripeteias and sudden turns that resist a clear exegesis even after several readings of the book, that content simply furnishes the ground for kenning the elementary phenomenological framework that belongs to the formal or conscious vision of life, together with the values and aims that agree with it despite the iron material vital determinations. In other words, before the question concerning the concrete vision of life that someone has and the possibilities to change it, James will give us an outright answer: that that vision does not lie in what one has experienced but in how he has redundantly lived it and shaped it even against the weight of whatever outward dispositions.

ON THE MATERIAL APPROACH TO LIFE

The very ground of this vision is that life is the unfolding of something that one faces through time and that one has originally received from someone else in the same way that one receives an object whatever that has certain characteristics that one must get to know to a certain extent if one wants it to work well or also, to say it otherwise, if one wants it to be suitable to one's desires, ideals or capacities, which makes comprehensible why this vision leads one way or another to the anecdotic content that serves to compare one's life with everyone else's, considering that a good life should provide the subject with experiences ad hoc that allowed him to exert himself to his utmost in any moment, which is at any rate very relative if one takes into account that life itself is perceived and assessed only through objective features or, so to speak, through the sheer appearance of things and happenings that have at best only an incidental link with the own individual that intends to define the sense of his life through them. This abstract reduction of the vital whole to the appearance of a determined moment or object is not something, however, that can be dispensed with without further ado; it stems at bottom from the idea that life stands for someone or for something that that have given it to us, which is determinant for

the development and sense thereof in every plane and regardless the own person that has received it, who is coerced into accepting something that has been shaped by the mixture of the most hideous emotional strengths: hatred, heartlessness, hypocrisy, covetousness and all that embodied in the people that gave one's life, which is the situation that James puts forward in *What Maisie Knew*: the heroine of the novel, a little girl that is more or less six years old when the work begins, faces from the first instant a life nurtured by the mutual hatred of her parents, neither of whom loves her and just wants to use her as a weapon during a thundering divorce and the subsequent withdrawal; taking advantage of the abstractedness of the legal system that has sentenced the girl to spend six months with her father and six months with her mother, without specifying who will take care of her school education and without pondering the emotional cost of such a compromise for the girl, both parents devote themselves eagerly to scheme means to tantalise his or her former spouse, and their daughter, who is in the middle of the fight, appears as the scapegoat of the glaring fight: "Nothing could have been more touching at first than her failure to suspect the ordeal that awaited her little unspotted soul. There were persons horrified to think what those who had charge of it would combine to try to make of it".⁶ Thus, the life that should have stood, if not for a great parental love, at least for a minimum respect and for a free election, is from the onset doomed to sorrow and unsettlement because no child is supposed to resist such a wickedness for the part of the two people that should have been the most loving and caring of all for her. The full contradictoriness of the material vision of life is so as plain as a pikestaff from the outset of the novel: because of her age, Maisie is stark defenceless both on the psychological and on the social planes; her innocent makes her the unintentional accomplice of her own abuse and she does neither have anyone to resort to because the legal authority of her parents prevents anyone else from taking care of her, as it happens to a distant relative of Ida, Maisie's mother, who immediately after the divorce tries to convince the former to allow her to breed the girl as a child of her own and just gets an outright refusal because Ida knows that her daughter is a priceless expedient in her vengeance against Beale, her former husband, who for his part also knows that and has decided to send through Maisie the most vulgar insults against the own Ida: "Then, it was that she found the words spoken by her beastly papa to be, after all, in her little bewildered ears, from which, at her mother's appeal, they passed in her clear, shrill voice, straight to her little innocent lips. 'He said I was to tell you, from him', she faithfully reported, 'that you are a nasty, horrid pig!'"⁷ Due to her innocence, there is no way that Maisie grasps her father's intentions, so that she repeats parrot fashion and must suffer the consequences of her mother's anger. Reduced to be the loudspeaker of a discourse that she does not understand and the unwilling witness of a fury that she understands still less, the girl falls, without knowing it, in a vicious circle instead of growing with the sweetness and the tenderness that should logically be the food of her age.

In essence, the abuse of her is not only a kind of moral perversion and psychological heartlessness, although it could be seen so; it is something much more perturbing, that is to say, the symbolic assassination of her at the hands of her parents; Maisie has one way or another died before her having started to live for she is

the upshot of a perversity that instead of calming down is more and more venomous for she was not able to reconcile her parents just by her birth, and although such a burden could seem to be unfair, the fact is that her parents hate her for that and make the most of their legal right to do with her life what they like as a way for making up for what they take almost as the original sin of her daughter. The hatred changes so into a brutal desire of annihilating whoever had thwarted the own schemes, and Ida is very clear on that respect to Maisie: “Your father wishes you were dead – that, my dear, is what your father wishes. You’ll have to get used to it as I’ve done – I mean to his wishing that *I’m* dead”.⁸ And this brutality stems from the conviction of both parents that they can ill-treat and forsake Maisie because with that they are simply retrieving whatever they have given the child, which for its part strengthens the awful abstractedness of the material vision of life and is at bottom a awful version of the idea that props what we could call the mythic formulation of the same approach, i.e., that who has given life has the limitless right to do with it as he likes without having to justify himself before anyone else.⁹ And although two wicked people are by no means the best incarnation of a transcendent agent such as the one that the mythic thought postulates, Ida and Beale have after all the legal sanction to do what they do: for her parents, Maisie is, as we have said, either a lifeless object that can be thrown away at once or, at best, a scapegoat, but without the halo that normally encircles whom plays that part; for the rest of society, she is the token of a sentimental and social failure, which is perfectly normal when there is neither natural law nor economical want that constraint the unrelenting heartlessness of the people that pretend to have a family on behalf of feelings and values whereof they do not know anything. In other words, in a society ruled by the most lurid individualism, wherein everyone looks after number one and where ideals and options hinge entirely upon the arbitrariness of selfishness, life ends up being an abstract value that even the most brutal subject interprets and dispenses with arbitrarily, which in the novel is depicted through the cold blood wherewith Maisie’s parents sacrifice their daughter to their mutual abhorrence, which shows the abstractedness of a childhood that bounces time and again between the respective house of the parents and the only form of transcendence within the reach of all these characters, i.e., baseness and violence, which imposes itself over Maisie like a doom:

She was abandoned to her fate. What was clear to any spectator was that the only link binding her to either parent was this lamentable fact of her being a ready vessel for bitterness, a deep little porcelain cup in which biting acids could be mixed. They had wanted her not for any good they could do her, but for the harm they could, with her unconscious aid, do each other. She should serve their anger and seal their revenge [...]¹⁰

This fatalistic surrender to the frightening affinity of wickedness and defencelessness explains why we have more than once said that Maisie is symbolically dead from the onset of the work: she does not have life whatever beyond the miserable war that her parents wage on each other. And this must not be mistaken simply for the outcome of a baleful circumstance that would be different if the case arose, that is to say, if the child’s parents had been affectionate and thoughtful of her; far from that, the dramatic development of the novel confirms that the ineluctable fulfilment of a vital determination is not due to who knows what transcendent agent but to

the groundlessness of the material framework of life that expresses itself through a failed marriage just like through a failed paternity, which are factors that always hinge upon the unforeseeable chance of wedding the wrong person and, which is a lot worse, upon the malleable nature of feelings and goals that change when least expected notwithstanding the legal and moral duties. Considering that the vital unity is defined by the incidental sum of factors like the ones we have mentioned, which do not have anything to do with freedom or self-rule and that more often than not contradict the most elementary common sense, the material approach leads one way or another to the tenet that there is an all-embracing determination, whether supernatural or not, that rules the vital development even against the individual, who can at best fight to attenuate the drive of the determination although he knows full well that his exertion will be stark useless because of the disparity of strengths. In other words, *the notion of fate or doom arises from the material vision of life and is for compensating the lack of a solid ground that we have just mentioned*, which has, nevertheless, a decisive function that is oddly enough kept in silence: it allows everyone, above all the wicked one, to justify what he does with the pretext of his impotence before the would-be evil determination. If doom is adamant and there is no way to dodge it, then none is responsible for what he has or has not done and he will not be to blame on the sorrow that he has brought about. But then everyone is finally alien to what he has lived or done unless he has been fortunate enough and can claim the totality of his actions, which is at any rate inconceivable in the sullen light of the average existence, which is, by the by, the situation of Maisie, specially after her having been forsaken by her parents.¹¹

Indeed, the lack of a real base for identifying a conscious attitude with the real development of life is all the more evident in the novel through the hardly believing psychological and even bodily ill-treatments whereto Beale and Idea subject their daughter, which culminates in the final abandonment of her. In view of that, Maisie must learn very quickly to separate herself from what she lives in order to preserve a minimum independence regarding the brutality that she faces at any moment, which is even more crushing because her parents measure it according to the most vulgar conventionalism. Instead of distinguishing their parental duty from their matrimonial failure and spare Maisie the ordeal of their everlasting revenge, both of them use her as a hobbyhorse until they decide to get rid of her, which takes place almost simultaneously. Beale, who is the first to take the step, tries to the last moment to compel Maisie to justify him before his own conscience; unable to stand his own cowardice, he wants nevertheless to appear as the dutiful father of a monstrous child that rejects his bounteous offer of taking her with him abroad:

Then she understood as well as if he had spoken it that what he wanted, hang it, was that she should let him off with all the honours – with all the appearance of virtue and sacrifice on his side. It was exactly as if he had broken out to her: “I say, you little donkey, help me to be irreproachable, to be noble, and yet to have none of the beastly bore of it. There’s only impropriety enough for one of us; so you must take it all. Repudiate your dear old daddy – in the face, mind you, of his tender supplications.”¹²

It is pathetic the absolute contrast between the intentions of the two characters in their final farewell: the father wants his daughter to protect him from shame and the daughter wants her father to release her from an authority that he has exerted

on behalf of the legal arbitrariness. The girl prefers to face the possibility of a total defencelessness before going on standing a would-be protection that just coerce her into pretending to respect someone that has done everything within his reach to harm her. And in this case the so-called family ties show how absurd they can be: Maisie is perfectly aware that Beale only has used her for his own purposes and never has had the least feeling for her bar disparagement, which is more obvious at the end of the scene when Beale repeats to his mistress, a wealthy American that arrives suddenly and in whom Beale sees a salvation for his numerous economical troubles, that the girl is a hopeless case and that the best is to send her back home in a cab that he does not deign to pay, whereby his mistress has to throw a large sum through the window of the carriage, which is the sole kind of economical compensation that Maisie sees for the part of his father. And this unbearable contradiction between niggardliness and monetary resources, which has one way or another been axial through the development of the novel, arises too in the final meeting of the child with her mother, when she hears Ida's rough *apologia pro vita sua* wherewith the latter wants her daughter to grasp with no veil the whole extent of her selfishness and of her need of getting rid of her as soon as possible on the pretext of her not understanding the terrible sufferings of her abnegated mother; and while she tries to be taken for the good mother that she never has been, Ida hints with the movements of her hand that she is going to give the child some money as a kind of minimum help, whereof she nonetheless repents on the spot when Maisie, who just want to finish with all that at once, makes a mistake on mentioning one of Ida's lovers, which sparks off a frightening fit of anger of her mother, who stares her with a ferociousness that awakes in her a similar reaction: "[. . .] she had at least now, with the first flare of anger that had ever yet lighted her face for a foe, the sense of looking up quite as hard as any one could look down".¹³ If the child has to look after herself as if she were an orphan or as if she were an adult, then it is absurd to go on vindicating a filial respect or, why not, a filial love that neither of her parents deserve. She has a fate, yes, but not one that stems from an unfathomable agent or from the shortsightedness and cruelty of other people. The sense of responsibility that goes hand-in-hand with the discovery of that allows Maisie to realize that her parents are stark irrelevant in her life and that she can consequently get rid of them just like they have got rid of her. The material reality of her life disappears as soon as she kens the groundlessness of the so-called fate.

The fundamental discovery that Maisie attains when her parents forsake her is strengthened throughout the novel thanks to the introduction of the girl's putative parents, Mrs. Beale and Lord Claude, who would be supposed to make up for the brutality wherewith Maisie has been treated and who, notwithstanding their good will and the advantage that represents their own love relationship for the situation of the girl, are unable to give her the love and the protection that she wants. Although both of them try to play the part of a responsible parent, neither of them can do it due to a simple reason: their link with Maisie is not as intense as their own link, which is why the former never gets a clear definition beyond the sentimental trammel that always prevent Maisie from having a family and being happy. After all, the girl is alone before her would-be fate because there is none that wants to share it, as the

own narrator says: “with two fathers, two mothers and two homes, six protections in all, she shouldn’t know ‘wherever’ to go”.¹⁴ The putative parents are then for Maisie’s security and welfare as useless as the biological ones or still worse. In fact, although Mrs. Beale proclaims loudly her love for Maisie, it would rather seem that she just goes in for availing herself from the first moment of all the opportunities to improve her status with the aid of the girl without minding what happens to her, which is, for instance, evident when she moves to Maisie’s father’s house as a governess to shortly after become the mistress of the owner while she pretends to be there only for Maisie’s sake, and she is aware enough of the questionability of her behaviour so as to confess to Maisie: “I don’t know what in the world, darling, your father and I should do without you, for you just make the difference, as I’ve told you, of keeping us perfectly proper”.¹⁵ Later, when she is already Beale’s wife, she does not seem to care anymore about the education of Maisie and she never compels Beale to keep his promises of a good school and additional lessons. Above all, in her first encounter with Sir Claude, when both of them feel that something has occurred between them, she is fully aware of the convenience of relying on the girl, as she says to him: “[. . .] I assure you that I shall never give up any rights in her that I may consider that, by mi own sacrifices, I’ve acquired. I shall hold very fast to my interest in her. What seems to have happened is that she has brought you and me together”.¹⁶ This last phrase becomes in fact a kind of refrain that is in the climatic moments repeated until the end of the novel, when Mrs. Beale turns to it one more time as the justification of her relationship with Sir Claude: “What in the world is our connection but the love of the child who is our duty and our life and who holds us together as closely as she originally brought us?”¹⁷ Without Maisie, Mrs. Beale would be a woman of a very dubious morality, whereas with the girl she vindicates herself before society and before her own conscience, which is something wherein she seems to be more interested than in fighting for the welfare of Maisie, as Sir Claude insinuates in one of his first colloquies with Maisie, when he has already a certain perception of Mrs. Beale:

Then he had said, in abrupt reference to Mrs. Beale: “Do you think she really cares for you?”

“Oh, awfully!” Maisie had replied.

“But, I mean, does she love you for yourself, as they call it, don’t you know? Is she as fond of you, now, as Mrs. Wix?”

The child turned it over: “Oh, I’m not every bit Mrs. Beale has!”

Sir Claude seemed much amused at this. “No, you’re not every bit she has!”

He laughed for some moments; but that was an old story to Maisie, and she was not too much disconcerted to go on: “But she’ll never give me up”.¹⁸

The trust of the girl in Mrs. Beale’s love is or at least seems to be then a ridiculous delusion whereto she has resorted lest she should face the groundlessness of her life; but it is just that, and she cannot pretend to have a loving mother in the person of an opportunist young woman that is for her part haunted by loneliness and poverty and must fight to secure a living. This possibility that is hinted through the novel explains to a certain degree the sudden change in the feelings of Maisie for her stepmother; however, at the end of the novel, when Maisie has already decided to “kill” Mrs. Beale symbolically, she discovers that the latter was sincere with her,

which only adds a tragic note to the impossibility of their relationship. At any rate, if Mrs. Beale cannot be Maisie's abnegated mother it is simply because she is willy-nilly her rival in the love of Sir Claude and the girl is not ready to share him with anyone, let alone with whom could claim the whole possession of him for her age and her beauty. Which leads us, by the by, to the analysis of the character that rouses so much passion.

Sir Claude shows throughout the novel that *sui generis* psychological complexity that is not the outcome of a willpower that reasserts itself against the sundry hindrances that reality puts in its way; on the contrary, his complexity stems from a weakness that dodges at the least shadow of responsibility. He is mild and joyful but lacks self-assurance and, in particular, perseverance, so that he always hinges upon someone else to try to make up for that.¹⁹ As a matter of fact, all his emotional links are tainted by the resistance that somehow or other he offers to a real engagement, and his relationship with Maisie is not the exception of the rule: he wants to be a father for the girl but rejects the consequences thereof in terms of personal pledge and even respectability, for although he holds wholeheartedly some personal values, he never seems to be up to them when he should; instead, he prefers to live among the convulsed emotions and the scandal that the marriage with Ida or the affair with Mrs. Beale bring about, which, if allows him to experience the whole gamut of a passionate life without risking his independence (since, for him, all that is almost oneiric or imaginary), prevents him from experiencing the emotional consistence of life; for instance, he knows that his wife has had several lovers but he does not care it, and when he comes across her rambling in Kensington Garden with one of them, he just starts to guess together with Maisie who the gentleman can be: "Is it Mr. Perriam?" "Oh dear, no – Perriam's smashed". "Smashed?" "Exposed in the City. But there are quantities of others!" Sir Claude smiled.²⁰ His marriage, then, is finally as meaningless for him as his passion for Mrs. Beale or for any other woman, and the same occurs with the aristocratic value of honour or the bourgeois value of respectability, which are practically unknown to him despite his social position: in fact, more than being a nihilist in the strongest sense of the word (which would imply a real indifference to life), he is a stark cynic, someone for whom the material content of life is not at bottom worthless but is not worth fighting for either. From this slant, Sir Claude's love for Maisie is, on the one hand, the expression of a genuine tenderness and, on the other, the sublimation of an odd impulse that preserves him from committing himself with an adult woman: due to her age and her kinship with him, Maisie stands for a feminine presence such as the ones he desires but does not have all the other attributes that change for him whatever woman into a burden; thus, his love for Maisie conceals something beyond the normal affection of a man for her stepdaughter, as Ida makes the child see in a moment when she treats her almost as a rival: "Don't lie about it – I hear you all over the place. You hang about him in a way that's barely decent, and he can do what he likes with you. Well then, let him, to his heart's content; he has been in such a hurry to take you that we'll see if it suits him to keep you".²¹ Which, independently of Ida's madness concerning some perverse erotic appeal, shows doubtlessly that Sir Claude's feelings for Maisie has nothing to do either with a superficial kinship by marriage or with a sublimation

of a thwarted fatherhood; far from that, he sees the girl from the onset as his *alter ego*, someone with whom it is possible to wander without having to stop in a determined place, and the best proof of that is his odd wont of speaking to Maisie as if she were a boy and not a girl. Thus, when he takes her to France after her having being forsaken by her father, he must all of a sudden face the want of breaking up his affair with Mrs. Beale, and not precisely because of that respectability that he disparages: what is at stake between them is the want of a total engagement such as the one that exists between two persons beyond the average standards of social and moral life, as Mrs. Wix eagerly emphasises when she arrives after the final abandonment of Maisie by Ida. Everything would be fine for both of them if there were a way to get rid of time and respect, if Mrs. Beale were not his mistress and, above all, if he were not as tremendously afraid of life as he is. But he is, as he confesses before Maisie when she asks him why he wedded Ida, whereto he answers: "Just because I was afraid".²² Afraid, that is to say, conscious of the worthlessness of all the sentimental and imaginative projections face to his own feebleness. For in his heart of hearts he is not afraid of an objective limitation or of the countless possibilities that go to meet everyone and demand ceaselessly to make a decision; no, he is afraid of facing the distance that spans between him and his ideals: "Why was such a man so often afraid? It must have begun to come to her now that there was one thing just such a man above all could be afraid of. He could be afraid of himself".²³ It is not then the vital materiality what rouses fear, it is the conscious structuring thereof what unsettles the possibility of fulfilling an ideal. Sir Claude is free and wants to be so but that does not make him able to stand the ilk of life that he would like to have because he knows that he should at any rate commit himself with the achievement of an ideal and that is precisely what he does not want to. Why? Because his ideals are imaginative and do not lead to anything in particular bar the instantaneous excitement. Therefore, when after having trying out Maisie's consciousness he must recognize his own being before everyone, the only note that measures it is his impotence, not his inward freedom:

They stood confronted, the step-parents, still under Maisie's observation. That observation had never sunk so deep as at this particular moment. "Yes, my dear, I haven't given you up", Sir Claude said to Mrs. Beale at last [. . .and. . .] I never, never will. There!" he dauntlessly exclaimed.

"He can't!" Mrs. Wix tragically commented.

Mrs. Beale, erect and alive in her defeat, jerked her handsome face about. "He can't!" she literally mocked.

"He can't, he can't, he can't!" Sir Claude's gay emphasis wonderfully carried it off.²⁴

This scene epitomizes the dramatic and psychological development of the material approach to life: Sir Claude accepts his impotence because he knows that, in view of his preposterous lifelong resistance to responsibilities, he has no other choice; his emotional framework imposes certain behaviour and he confines himself to carry it out by sheer nonchalance although he is aware that he would have preferred to do anything else, which confirms that even when nothing prevents in appearance someone from doing what he wants, the anecdotic concatenation of life leads one way or another to the blind reiteration of a certain determination against the subjective effective possibilities that are a priori the very essence of the vital

plenitude whereat everyone aims: past, that cornerstone of whatever fatalism, ravages present and future and the most regressive drives take over the goals that would otherwise have led to a change in the situation beyond the imaginary rebelliousness that all of a sudden makes believe that one can be the master of his chances. Due to the fact that “he has no strength. No – none at all”,²⁵ to challenge his vision of life, Sir Claude is incapable of getting rid of Mrs. Beale right away although that is what he wants to do: after all, she clings to him so fiercely that he submits to a union that will make both of them unhappy, not of course through the overwhelming bale that claims a liberation but through that attenuated kind of meaninglessness that mars the whole life. For despite the brightness of youth, of beauty, of an spontaneous friendliness and of a certain social status, when life goes on as if it were the sheer sum of some coincidental outward features, it ends up sinking into a boredom that is unavoidable since there is no real consciousness of whatever vital unity beyond the accidental agglomeration of occurrences that take place among the unfathomable intentions of the others and the recesses of the own spirit. No life, not even the best one, would be worth living if it were subjected to a fatal drive that worked so to speak by itself and through the materiality of facts, which is, nevertheless, what the attitude that Sir Claude takes up implies: for him, it is preferable to yield to another will provided that he will not have to show his innermost weakness, which, taking into account the material determination of his personality is an expedient that will be fatal in the long run: in spite of his most vehement desire, he must put forward what he would have most eagerly rejected if he were able to release himself from the anecdotic causality, which is, nevertheless, out of his reach, as we have seen, so that he, who boasts of his having “produced life” for Maisie,²⁶ is unable to produce anything but a lasting, venomous disappointment for him.

This as a whole reveals the contradiction inherent to the material vision that we have so far analysed, which is, on the one hand, grounded on the abstract or rather arbitrary anecdotic development that everyone faces as best he can and, on the other hand, by an in principle unforeseeable chance that transcends the individual purposes, so that everyone must resign to a relative freedom to make up for the limitations of the objective reality and, above all, of his own will that all of a sudden flickers before the terrible potency of time. But insofar as the material approach does not overcome the opposition of the adamant chance and the will that tries to tame it, opposition that spans the anecdotic realm throughout, it solely offers the despicable consolation of a fulfilment whose conventional value tries to conceal the vacuity that somehow or other waylays at every moment when one kens it in the light of the always mutable aspect of the world. This opposition that comes to meet us on figuring out the anecdotic materiality of life that in the case of James’s novel every character and above all Sir Claude embodies each to his own, must then be considered a vulgarization of the dualism pertaining to the ancient metaphysical and religious conception of a present and a future life that is at bottom a bad answer to the unbalance existing between the finitude of the individual will and the multiplicity of the vital strengths, unbalance that solely the formal vision of the question can solve, as we shall see in the after section.

ON THE FORMAL APPROACH TO LIFE

The main problem of the material vision is that it leaves largely in the shadow the factor that determines life beyond the intertwining of happenings, chance and will that make it appears like an unfathomable conundrum: is it subjected to the sheer coincidence, to some transcendent chance or to the will wherewith everyone intends to find a minimum sense when circumstances around him seems to be absurd? In view of the impossibility of reducing the unfolding of the anecdotic trend to a sole factor that allows to act freely and transform a would-be fatidic determination (for it must be clear that all this question does not spring from a theoretical interest but from a want that cannot be left aside), one must strive to explain it in accordance with the own imaginativeness that, if gives on the one hand cause for a perpetual reappraisal whereof one has lived that can be the basis of a very interesting reflection and perhaps of an endless intercommunication, prevents on the other from attaining the total sense of life. Even the most tedious, the most soporiferous existence furnishes at least a few anecdotes wherewith it would be possible to reinvent at any moment that sense, so that a man that had intensely lived in a moment could perfectly recreate it the rest of his life and, on the contrary, someone that had suffered terribly in an instant could change his whole life in a hell although it were the luckiest of the world.²⁷ The measure of life is subjected so not only to a multiplicity of forces and shades but to the arbitrariness of the individual that strives to make the most of his experience whether for being happy or unhappy. Thus, it is a waste a time to resort to the material content of existence to prove the soundness of this or that standpoint, above all because it changes into a questionable outlook the only reason whereby life has a specific philosophical interest, that is to say, the all-embracing strength of sorrow that is suddenly perceptible even in the middle of the utmost pleasure and with all the more reason in an existence that has from the onset been under an ominous fate, which is what James shows in *What Maisie Knew*, whose heroine is, so to speak, predetermined before her having been conceived to be the perfect scapegoat of the heartlessness of the people that should have loved her wholeheartedly. If Maisie had approached her life according to the material conditions thereof, she had had to accept that she was beforehand damned to an everlasting bale because she had not been able to placate the senseless hatred of her parents with her birth and because, far from that, she roused in them an aversion as intense as that hatred. The original situation of the child is then beyond what the most elementary commonsense would allow to expect: it is true that a lot of children are the offspring of an incompatible marriage and that they suffer up to a point the unbalance that that implies, but Maisie is literally a monster for her parents and her only possibility of escaping that would be to disown them or, which would be the same, to kill them symbolically, which would be an outlandish actualization of the ancient tragedy if it were present a factor that is instead stark alien to Maisie's ordeal: the transcendence of destiny. Although Beale's and Ida's animosity could stand for a *sui generis* ilk of transcendence insomuch as it provides the material ground of Maisie's drama, it lacks completely the augustness inherent to the ancient fate however much it were as cruel as Oedipus's or Antigone's.²⁸ Maisie's parent's wickedness has nothing to

with a fate that somehow or other is for overcoming the unbalance that someone has sparked off with his actions, and that is why the scorn that the child endures at the hands of her parents is not tragic but dramatic, that is to say, it does not lead either to the encounter with fate or with a providence that make up for the ill-treatments but with a consciousness free from the burden of the material determinations of life that always are subjected to a natural law that should a priori have assured the child's welfare and that expresses itself instead as the ominous causality that throws Maisie directly to her doom. In other words, since in this case the natural law that should have provided a minimum responsibility for the part of the parents has on the contrary been for justifying their wickedness (insofar as the psychological causality explains clearly why they do what they do), then the unavoidable outcome is that the child has to face an endless bale that will transmogrify her life into an everlasting nightmare; and since the identification of the natural law and the justification of cruelty in the light of past and the strength of the emotional drives is outright, then all this causality would be as useless as the material whereof life is made if someone like Maisie would try to avail himself of them so as to overcome an undesirable birth and a miserable infancy that has to be spent among quarrels and ceaseless disparagement. Before such a concatenation of causes and behaviours, the whole vital process would be doomed to woe, which is whereto the material approach more often than not leads in the end unless an odd providence or, at least, an extraordinary good luck goes to the rescue of the individual's aspirations.

All this shows that since there is no way of getting out the issue resorting to the natural law that is on the contrary for explaining through the psychological mechanisms why sorrow must not end, the material vision of life has to be substituted for the formal one, which dispenses with the apparently infinite diversity of the vital process and just heeds the consciousness that the individual has thereof, consciousness that can show some shades but that at any rate implies a total restructuring of the vital content because it implicates that independently of the natural causality and of its psychological manifestations, every vital phenomenon hinges of a transcendental determination and not on the contrary, as the material approach upholds.²⁹ In other words, the structuring of the vital reality is possible thanks to the action of a consciousness that, through a literal phenomenological reduction,³⁰ unifies occurrences and emotional movements in a whole that by no means could be supplied by the sheer disconnected temporal flow or by the fortuitous apparition of someone or something that make up the natural background of life. Of course, insomuch as consciousness works as the formal framework of a process that integrates sundry elements, it must be differentiated from the psychological image that the subject has of himself, for the latter is just other manifestation of the materiality of life and, as such, is subjected to the contradictoriness that shapes it.³¹ At bottom, what everyone thinks of himself is merely an aspect whereof he lives and, instead of revealing the possibility of overcoming it, strengthens the process through the memory and the mechanic reiteration of some psychological models, which has nothing to do with fulfilling an ideal that can even be contrary to the psychological appraisal of oneself. And if from the plane of the philosophical elucidation we pass to the plane of the literary criticism, we shall see that the difference existing between the material and

the formal approaches is for Maisie tantamount to the difference of accepting her being almost a freak whose only function is to embody the failure of a couple of heartless people and her rejecting all that for the sake of a life free of the horrors of her origin and whose final sense she just can intuit formally although not abstractly because her motif to break up with the preposterous fate that her parents have traced is the consciousness of her being free to choose how she want to live what she has to live; thereat, if her parents try to change her into a burden for each other by means of the insults that she is supposed to communicate between them, she will strive to discover a wise to challenge that and to keep the status quo in her favour. In sooth, Maisie should have been the perfect telltale, the typical insidious child that revels in scheming, gossiping and siding with this or that parent, and in that case her story would have been the narration of the baleful childhood that is so usual in real life and that has been the theme of a host of realistic works of every ilk wherewith the nineteenth-century brimmed and whose zeal for verisimilitude and dramatic accuracy led indefectibly the protagonist in turn to a happiness or to a bane that should rigorously be stemmed from the original setting of the story.³² Nevertheless, in the case of Maisie the situation is quite different: *she does not fit in with her story* or rather with the fate that her parents had so blindly determined for her, and what is astonishing is that she, unlike the hero that simply rebels against the parental order, sets it aside from the onset by means of an intuition of her being that is alien to the psychological appraisal of her scant chances of escaping her fate, which would at best lead her to search for other parents so as to substitute hers, following the dramatic solution that a material approach to the girl's predicament should have had: a little girl must have parents because she cannot take care of herself, and if the people that were supposed to fulfil that duty do not want to, then she must find some other people who want; but the fact that that solution is dispensed with at the end of the novel shows the originality of Maisie as a character and of James himself as a writer that could get rid of the material conditions of life and discover a really philosophical perception thereof.³³

Thus, if Maisie's consciousness unfolds independently of her story it is because she intuits not so much her catastrophic personal reality as the fullness of the vital stream that passes through her; in other words, it is not that she asserts an iron willpower against her parents (which would have deprived her of any psychological verisimilitude and would have changed her into the caricature of a romantic heroine), it is that she is able to perceive how the passional strength of existence carries everyone away whether the individual wants it or not. Thereat, what Maisie grasps is not the hardness of her situation; it is the concreteness of her consciousness that anticipates whatever movement of the others, which is nothing but "[...] that lively sense of the immediate which is the very air of a child's mind [...]",³⁴ sense wherewith the girl gets rid of her original fate and attains a new and deeper one:

It was to be the fate of this patient little girl to see much more than, at first, she understood, but also, even at first, to understand mucho more than any little girl, however patient, had perhaps ever understood before [...]. She was taken into the confidence of passions on which she fixed just the stare she might have had for images bounding across the wall in the slide of a magic-lantern. Her little world was phantasmagoric – strange shadows dancing on a sheet.³⁵

For Maisie, life is before anything else a perception of the strengths that determine the behaviour of everyone behind what the situation *prima facie* reveals, which in her case is manifest through the lurid incongruity existing between the parents that she should have had and the parents that she has; of course, this perception takes place little by little, through the emotions that the girl experiments before her parents or her stepparents, which demands her utmost ability to separate her own reactions from the perception of the vital phenomenon as such, and that is why her ill-treatment and her sorrow have after all a positive sense for her: in the very kernel of her innocence she discovers that her suppositions concerning her parents' intentions towards themselves and towards her are more often than not wrong and that she must be very careful so as not to be punished, for there is a double plane in existence that remains normally invisible among the vicissitudes of the existence and that only comes to light when one stops heeding what the others do and start to heed why they do it.³⁶ As anyone else at her age, Maisie takes for granted the absolute continuity of reality and believes that everyone's intentions are, so to speak, skin-deep, so that when her parents ask her something they really want to know about it or when they order her to do something they really want her to do it; nevertheless, insofar as she gets a punishment when she expected to get a reward, she discovers the ambiguous line that runs through what people do and what they want or what they know about it, and tries to avail herself of that, feigning that she has not understood or that she has not heeded something. This behaviour, which has more to do with the instinct of self-preservation than with hypocrisy, points at a consciousness prior to whatever anecdotic determination and that only deals with the part that the girl plays unwillingly in her life:

The theory of her stupidity, eventually embraced by her parents, corresponded with a great date in her small, still life: the complete vision, private but final, on the strange office she filled. It was literally a moral revolution, and it was accomplished in the depths of her nature [...] She had a new feeling, the feeling of danger; on which a new remedy rose to meet it, the idea of an inner self, or, in other words, of concealment.³⁷

It must be emphasised that the thread of the child's consciousness is not the sorrow of the refusal but the perception of the terrible potency that the vital strengths have over everyone and of how she herself seems to be alien to them by her origin; in fact, and unlike some other children that are subjected to a physical or to a psychological violence perhaps a lot more brutal than what Maisie endures (and with whose lot, on the other hand, James himself dealt in other works),³⁸ the girl is doomed to remain before life without her revelling in it because she willy-nilly embodies the failure of her parents and cannot claim any identity of her own; like the biblical sinner haunted by a curse, she is haunted by a hatred that changes her into a shapeless object that cannot be even defined, as her mother makes clear in her last words to her: "You're a dreadful, dismal, deplorable little thing".³⁹ In the eyes of her parents, Maisie is not only the irksome memento of an undesirable past, she is undesirable in herself because of the drabness that prevents her from serving as a telltale of each one of them; in the eyes of Maisie, her parents are a barrier that prevents her from having a full life either because of her would-be monstrosity or because she is from the first instant as lifeless as Clara Matilda, the girl who was

run over by a hansom and with whom Maisie establishes a symbolic sisterhood, or as her dolls, to whom the girl treats on and off as roughly as her parents treat her. But precisely because she cannot vindicate her life and has to remain far away from the experiences that the children or her age usually share (for instance, going to school), Maisie perceives with an incomparable intensity the awakening of her consciousness, which, instead of being a mental compensation of her bereavement, asserts itself against the whole anecdotic orientation of her life; still more, as the phenomenological ground of the child's existence, consciousness springs from the emptiness that spans from a miserable childhood to a experience of oneself beyond whatever emotional link with that misery, so that Maisie can get rid without further ado of the fate whereto her parents had doomed her; her only fate is rather to start from scratch a life whose concreteness is a lot more perceptible because none perceives it under the mask of the feigned dullness, not even the only people that take more care of her, for that is the sole way that she discovers to preserve her inward independence from the heartlessness of the adults that surround her:

Things then were in Maisie's experience so true to their nature that questions were almost always improper; but she learned on the other hand soon to recognise that patient little silences and intelligent little looks could be rewarded from time to time by delightful little glimpses [...] This was the second source [...] of the child's consciousness of something that, very hopefully, she described to herself as a new phase.⁴⁰

The newness here lies in the discovery of the transcendental character of consciousness, of its independence of whatever material determination: existence does not have that homogeneous consistency that child had taken for granted in accordance with the innocence of her age: quite the contrary, it unfolds through different planes, and the horizontality of the anecdotic structuring, which always slides on the same temporal dimension and with regard to the same objects, whether physical or mental (the parents' love, or course, in the first place), loses its preeminence. And the reason why this elementary fact changes into the cornerstone of the whole existence of Maisie is because she, unlike again what would have occurred in normal circumstances with every other child, cannot resort to the security that her parents stand for, which is the sentimental ground of infancy. She is alone in the world and the only thing whereon she can rely is the knowledge she has little by little got of the relativity of everything and of the stints of everyone: the parental devotion is worthless face to the selfishness of two thwarted people, and the same occurs with the rest of the values that people pretend to revere, for, at the end, passion is the sole thread of life, and ideals such as responsibility or respect are just abstractions that go hand-in-hand with the shallow sociability wherein existence usually unfolds.⁴¹ Now, since Maisie has no other mean to shirk the lack of affection and the bereavement bar her knowledge, it is comprehensible that there is throughout the novel a constant and simultaneously elusive reminder of the complexity that the former possesses in the attitude that she adopts towards her preposterous origin and in the way she breaks with it before her realizing it. For, contrary to the image of a progressive understanding that culminates in the total transparency of truth (such as what some romantic presentations of the issue uphold),⁴² the fact is that Maisie gropes most time and just grasps what has happened and how it has affected her too much time

later. Her consciousness is not then comparable either to the Cartesian cogito that discerns the import of a certain concept on a theoretical plane, or to the romantic soul that tries to shape a destiny projected on a mythical plane; it is rather similar to the intuitions wherewith every little child brings to light the sense of reality while he gropes in the middle of a world ruled by representations that are mostly incomprehensible for him or, also, to the intuition wherewith every creator tries to gather a cluster of forms within a work.⁴³ The process, of course, aims at the total vision of a life free from the absurd coincidence of being the offspring of a hideous hatred; but this is not communicable in a formula ad hoc that the girl could use at her ease:

She judged that if her whole history [...] had been the successive stages of her knowledge, so the very climax of the concatenation would, in the same view, be the stage at which the knowledge should overflow. As she was condemned to know more and more, how could it logically stop before she should know Most? It came to her in fact as they sat there on the sands that she was distinctly on the road to know Everything.⁴⁴

The great deed of Maisie is then transmogrifying a miserable fate into a lucid destiny by means of a comprehensiveness that allows to throw away at once the material conditions of life that are subjected to an anecdotic development and to a linear temporality⁴⁵; whereas the usual approach to the question points at the domination of the vital strengths by means of a would-be iron willpower, Maisie aims at a total revelation of life by means of a consciousness whose potency is a lot more evident in opposition to the total carelessness of her scholar education; thereby, her knowledge does not concern to a particular issue but to the consciousness that she has attained of the so many emotional phenomena that arise through every deed independently of the outward aspect thereof, so that “*knowing Everything*” is for her synonymous of “*making oneself conscious of everything independently of the material determinations*”, which is by the by what the philosophical ideal of wisdom stands for in its sundry versions, above all in the Stoic and in the Rationalist ones.⁴⁶ It is necessary a *sui generis* detachment so as to ken life as a drive that one has to fathom and to recreate through the own actions and choices, and this works as a law or destiny that there is no way to flee.⁴⁷ Thus, whereas the material determinations that seem *prima facie* overwhelming are more often than not dispensable in accordance with the circumstances or rather with the shrewdness of the person, the formal ones, which hinge altogether upon consciousness, must be fulfilled even against the innermost desire. In other words, the idea of a material, outward fate is a shallow interpretation of the unavoidable, adamant destiny that one must obey because one has realized that it is necessary to do it: as a matter of fact, what could have been more desirable for someone like Maisie than revelling at last in the family environment that for her age she had desire for so much time and that for the heartlessness of her parents she had not had? The most obvious solution for the predicament of the girl would have been the substitution of her parents with her stepparents who, furthermore and by the luckiest coincidence, had a relationship of their own and were ready to give Maisie tenderness and cares; if she had accepted what Sir Claude and Mrs. Beale offered her, she would have enjoyed what she had been after her life throughout; however, she rejects *motu proprio* this happy end, and the reason for that is by no means easy to understand, at least from the common

sense that goes hand-in-hand with the material approach; in the light thereof, her refusal of the substitute family is apparently the outcome of the frustration accumulated through the years that she has spent among the baseness of her parents. But this appraisal is utterly wrong when one changes the key of interpretation and understands that the cause of the girl's behaviour lies in the consciousness of hers, which advances on two parallel planes towards its final fulfilment. On the first one of these planes, we encounter again the question of the symbolic value that the main figures in Maisie's existence, Sir Claude, Mrs. Beale and Mrs. Wix have for the girl once the natural parents have disappeared, and of how each one of them stand for a peculiar vital development in the eyes of her; on the second, we witness the adumbration of a moral sense face to the passional structuring of life that has until then been alien to it for Maisie. Let us see these two planes separately.

We have shown that Mrs. Beale and Sir Claude are extremely contradictory: both of them are in general tender, bounteous and self-assured, but when they should be more so regarding Maisie, they are unaffectionate, mean and feeble, as Sir Claude makes clear in one of his first conversations with the girl:

Sir Claude promptly took her up: "What do I offer you, you naturally inquire? My poor chick, that's just what I ask myself. I don't see it. I confess, quite as straight as Mrs. Wix". His companion gazed a moment at what Mrs. Wix saw. "You mean *we* can't make a little family?" "It's very base of me, no doubt, but I can't wholly chuck your mother".⁴⁸

He is ready to give all his love to Maisie but he does not want to assume the responsibilities inherent to that, and although he represents for her all the beauty and the joyfulness of life, he cannot supply her with the ground of a real life that they could share, which, in view of their circumstances would solely be possible through the mediation of the family institution, since there would be no social justification so that a mature bachelor lived with his stepdaughter when either of the two natural parents should take her under his or her protection⁴⁹; thus, however much the feelings of Sir Claude are sincere, they are situated on a field more mental than practical, which leads to the logical end of their relationship once he has asked her the question that must start in her a new self-consciousness: "*Can you choose freely?*"⁵⁰ The context wherein he asks the question (they must come back right away to the hotel where Mrs. Beale and Mrs. Wix wait for them to begin a new life) sets out a possibility that exceeds by far their hopes and promises an unsuspected happy end to their predicaments; nonetheless, since Maisie has inwardly rejected the possibility of living with Mrs. Beale, the question shows her again the impossibility of fulfilling that, of experiencing, in a word, the natural development of a child of her age and class in the bosom of a family that would make up for her bales, which is nonetheless already unimaginable because of the enmity existing between Mrs. Beale and Mrs. Wix and because she does not want anymore to share Sir Claude with either of them; the situation, in a word, leaves a lot to be desired in terms of the happiness that anyone can expect, for to choose would be for Maisie the same as to get the family that she needs provided that she will part with Mrs. Wix, or to remain with her and then lose forever Sir Claude. Thus, on demanding Maisie to make a decision, he has all of a sudden put her whole life before her, since she

knows unmistakably that whatever option she takes, she will never be as happy as she should have been although she will have a life of her own. And right then, the formal framework of consciousness reveals itself independently of whatever nexus with the material determinations⁵¹: Maisie knows that her decision will one way or another imply the sacrifice of the happy end whereto her story seemed to lead and the confrontation with the fate that she had tried to shirk; she cannot be anymore beneath the reassuring protection of her innocence, just like the others cannot be anymore under the symbolic values wherewith she had enhanced them; she must finally face the risk of being as base as her parents and desert someone that really loves her or lose forever someone that she loves more than anyone else. The lack of any objective hindrance for either option shows her that she must make the decision by herself and relying only on her knowledge, which is more elusive and simultaneously more concrete than never before because it displays all the possibilities as equally problematic and, on the other hand, shows her the sole ground for her decision: "Somehow, now that it was there, the great moment was not so bad. What helped the child was that she knew what she wanted. All her learning and learning had made her at last learn that".⁵² Free from the natural or material order of life, Maisie must be equally free by her choice from the burden of the symbolic stints and values through which that order asserts itself over consciousness; instead of seeing her life by the side of Sir Claude as the highest ideal, she must opt for a life of her own whose kernel cannot however be other than the opening to reality that her knowledge stands for, which goes hand-in-hand with the perception of others, above all of Sir Claude, as they are without the lustre of the idealization wherewith she has endowed them, which is at bottom a memento of the material order that is useless for living in a world as relative as the girl's; thereby, when at the train station she is able to understand and speak French as if by magic while she still hopes that Sir Claude will take her to Paris, she perceives that she is already in a new reality, not illusory but astonishing, unsettling, hardly conceivable, and that she has altogether broken with the logic of the natural determinations that crush instead Sir Claude, which explains why, whereas she is able to make the decision he asks her to do, he cannot do the same; the reason thereof is that "he was afraid of his weakness – of his weakness".⁵³ He is as he is and it is senseless to hope that he will give her the life that she sighs for; no, only she can do it, not, of course, on the material plane, which to the very end of the novel remains unsolved (Sir Claude promises to take care of some resources of Maisie whereof Beale unduly used), but on the formal one, wherein every happening changes into a deepening of consciousness.

Because of all this, to say that "she knew what she wanted" implies in this case a lot more than what is usually understood by that phrase: it means that she has solved by herself the eternal dilemma that had prevented her from kenning herself and that she does not want to look after what the others will say or think concerning her behaviour. The contradiction between her and the others has finally vanished: she needs them to sustain the material order of her existence, not to have a life of her own or, which is the same, to experience her freedom in the middle of the heaviest material determination. This is feasible by the knowledge that she has of the complexity of the world and of the simplicity of her want, knowledge that does not

imply so much the absolute brightness of the logical concatenation as the capacity of choosing a formal element of life (i.e., living alone or living with her stepparents) even against the material convenience. With this, Maisie makes everything meaningful by her own choice and can dispense with what would be the best option for anyone else so as to have a really personal life,⁵⁴ which would undoubtedly smack of the vulgar subjectivism that is embodied in the novel by her parents (who ride roughshod over everyone provided that they will get what they want), if it were not because Maisie, unlike them, just want to liberate herself from the subjection to a conventional existence that in her case is tantamount to a predetermined misery.⁵⁵ As a matter of fact, whereas Beale and Ida seize everything and everyone trying to assure a material stability through the two privileged elements of a would-be successful life (sexual passion and power), Maisie, who always seems to lag behind her opportunities (remember that she is almost an idiot for her parents), manages to accomplish what she most eagerly wants without further ado, as Mrs. Wix realizes: “[. . .] her young friend’s mind has never moved in such freedom as on thus finding itself face to face with the question of what she wanted to get”.⁵⁶ The knowledge of this allows Maisie to go beyond her material needs and changes her whole life into the development of an attitude altogether different regarding her vital framework, unlike anyone else in the novel. This *vita nuova*, or rather, this *vita vera*, liberated from the incidental conditions that weigh instead upon the others, gives Maisie back a sense of childhood that has nothing to do either with a certain age or with a preposterous innocence (that is at bottom sheer ignorance); it displays before her eyes an imaginative experience utterly alien to the social conventionalisms that estipulate that the basic feeling of a child must be the parental love; she, for her part, has discovered a richer vein in the links with Sir Claude, which stands for an oneiric felicity that cannot be carried out, and with Mrs. Wix, which stands for a truly personal life because it grounds the material determinations (Mrs. Wix will have to work very hardly for Maisie) on a consciousness that unfolds through every phenomenon. And the originality of this life shines through the final scene of the novel, wherein Maisie has to make her decision and break with the last remnant of an illusory childhood, i.e., the link with Mrs. Beale and the respect for the values that she embodies.

We have shown that the novel could not have had a happy end because it would have implicated the action of an array of outward factors that are alien to the development of the protagonist’s consciousness; notwithstanding that, it is by no means *prima facie* comprehensible why Maisie breaks so violently with Mrs. Beale while she keeps her affection for Sir Claude, if the former is throughout the work as tender as the latter and fights to the very end fiercely for the girl. The explanation of this appears during one of the conversations of Mrs. Wix with Maisie, when the girl all of a sudden realizes a sentimental possibility whereof she would not otherwise have thought:

That uneasiness had not carried her far before Mrs. Wix spoke again and with an abruptness so great as almost to seem irrelevant. “Has it never occurred to you to be jealous of her?” It never had in the least; yet the words were scarce in the air before Maisie had jumped at them. She looked at them hard; at last she brought out with an assurance which there was no one, alas, but herself to admire: “Well, yes, since you ask me”. She hesitated, then continued: “Lots of times!”⁵⁷

The discovery of a new feeling, the jealousy, unsettles the whole sentimental frame of Maisie's life and throws her beyond the circle of a childhood under the protection of the family values: all of a sudden, she starts to see Mrs. Beale as a rival that wants to snatch from her the love that she most care for, and from that instant on all her actions are aimed against Mrs. Beale. But the change, as we have just underlined, does not imply solely the feeling for a person, on the contrary, it implies the totality of the affective framework of the girl and, through it, of her existence: she cannot be anymore the daughter of any woman because she is beyond the innocence of childhood and has grasped, although blurrily, the passional consistency of adulthood, which would have lead the novel to a very different ending (perhaps one of those terrible dramas that would have been the delight of a realist writer)⁵⁸ if the action thereof did not take place on the purely formal plane of the child's consciousness. Thus, instead of going the whole hog so as to defeat Mrs. Beale (which would have been impossible due to Sir Claude's weakness), Maisie drops right away her illusions and accepts to lose the felicity that she had expected by the side of her two stepparents. The double plane of this movement, psychological and practical, gets its final unity in the child's decision of "killing" her stepmother because Maisie always keeps in mind that the real dimension of her life is not in the interplay of circumstances but in her consciousness thereof, so that she can easily dispense with someone that embodies a feeling and a symbolic value that are already meaningless for the child: with no motherhood to vindicate and with a fatherhood hardly represented by Sir Claude, she is free from the subjection to any natural authority, and although Mrs. Wix seems to take the relay of the maternal symbol, she is more an *alter ego* for the girl than a figure of respect, as the latter makes clear when the lady asks her if she would live with Mrs. Beale and Sir Claude:

"Not the two now?" Mrs. Wix had caught on; she flushed with it. "Only him alone?"

"Him alone or nobody".

"Not even me?" Cried Mrs. Wix.

Maisie looked at her a moment, then began to undress. "Oh, you're nobody!"⁵⁹

Although this phrase seems a sign of disparagement, it is not, for Maisie knows that Mrs. Wix is, somehow or other, the only person that loves her with no conditions or double intentions; as a matter of fact, it is Mrs. Wix who first rouses in the girl the feeling of her uniqueness, of a way of intuiting the world that has nothing to do with the brutality of her parents or with the sophistication of Mrs. Beale, for it springs from the bale of the death of Mrs. Wix's only daughter, Clara Matilda (with whom, as we have already said, Maisie identifies herself at once), and also from a respectability that allows Maisie to perceive the existence of an ideality that had been utterly unknown for her until then and that is very different from the natural respect for the parents or even for the social conventionality that Mrs. Beale, instead, cares about so much. The ideality whereof we speak is the moral sense of life that Maisie grasps as such while waits with Mrs. Wix for Sir Claude in France. In the course of their conversations, the old lady makes her see that her stepparents

are lovers and that in the case that she went to live with them, she should share their immorality. And just like Sir Claude's question concerning her possibility of choosing freely sheds light on her whole life, Mrs. Wix's question regarding her having or not a moral sense ("haven't you really and truly *any* moral sense?"),⁶⁰ allows her to discover a new depth in her life that complements the discovery of a rivalry with Mrs. Beale that marks out the end of Maisie's childhood on the sentimental field and harbingers the final break with the happy end that she had dreamed of. However, Mrs. Wix's efforts to make Maisie reject the immorality of her step-parents do not have the outcome that she expected because the girl, who has been from the onset in the middle of the most outlandish circumstances and has faced the most unbalanced people, hardly can think of the relationship of two lovers as something execrable or sinful, and if at the end reacts against Mrs. Beale, it is because of the jealousy and not of the immorality. At bottom, the very existence that she has led prevents her from seeing all that as Mrs. Wix does, so that her behaviour shows clearly that she is indifferent to values or ideals that do not spring from the own consciousness.

This extraordinary array of discoveries and transformations culminates in the scene where the girl releases her life both from the ominous "fate" whereto she was supposed to be predetermined and from the conventional morality that Mrs. Wix has unsuccessfully tried to instil into her. The double liberation whereto we point is carried out through the confrontation of her stepparents and Mrs. Wix with her; for the last time she behaves like a child that intends to make a good impression with her elders while takes an examination on the moral sense that Mrs. Wix insists on teaching her. And all of a sudden, the submission and the question itself vanish and she just perceives "[. . .] something deeper than a moral sense",⁶¹ which is neither the strike of desire nor the rebelliousness against a value that she does not understand, but the simple drive of her life:

She looked at [Mrs. Wix]; she looked at [her stepparents]; she felt the rising of the tears she had kept down at the station. The only thing was the old flat, shameful schoolroom plea. "I don't know – I don't know".

"Then you've lost it". Mrs. Wix seemed to close the book as she fixed the straighteners on Sir Claude. "You've nipped it in the bud. You've killed it when it had begun to live" [. . .]

"I've not killed anything", he said; "on the contrary, I think I've produced life. I don't know what to call it – I haven't even known how decently to deal with it, to approach it; but, whatever it is, it's the most beautiful thing I've ever met – it's exquisite, it's sacred".⁶²

This thing that Sir Claude does not know how to name is precisely the life that has been released both from the materiality of incidental facts and from the ideality of transcendent values (Mrs. Wix in a certain moment invokes the authority of the Bible to prop her condemnation of the relationship of Maisie's stepparents). After having lost every link with her past and with an uncertain future, Maisie has no identity of her own to vindicate and is ready to face with a truly critic attitude what may come. The way she does it will entirely hinge upon herself, which explains

why, in the final line of the work, the narrator says that Mrs. Wix “[...] still had room for wonder at what Maisie knew”.⁶³ *Vale*.

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NOTES

¹ As a matter of fact, Schopenhauer’s philosophy can as a whole be understood as the first and perhaps most lucid analysis of the impossibility of asserting the material vision of life in the light of the modern individualism that has broken with the natural law wherewith the ancient thought tried to solve the contradictions inherent to human lot. Vide above all the paragraph 68 and ff. of *World as Will and as Representation*.

² Regarding this, vide mi article entitled “An Enquiry concerning the Dialectics of Personality and its Practical Consequences” in Tymieniecka, Anna-Teresa. ed. 2006. *Logos of phenomenology and phenomenology of the logos. Book two. The human condition in-the-unity-of-everything-there-is-alive. Individuation, self, person, self-determination, freedom, necessity*, 61–89. Dordrecht: Springer.

³ This is precisely the main aim of the existentialism that has tried to bring to light the consequences of the disappearance of the natural law that grounded the human existence. As an introduction to the question, vide Chiodi, Pietro. 1962. *Il Pensiero Esistenzialista*. Milan: Garzanti.

⁴ Beyond the book entitled so, Nietzsche (in a sense utterly opposite to Schopenhauer’s and without the theoretical tools that phenomenology furnishes) was the pioneer of the analysis of existence independently from whatever material determination and of the chronological framework, as the decisive concept of the “eternal recurrence” proves. Vide the chapter seventh of Danto, Arthur C. 1965. *Nietzsche as philosopher. An original study*, 195–213. New York, NY: Macmillan.

⁵ The edition of the work that we shall use will be the following one: James, Henry. 2003. *Novels 1896–1899. The other house. The spoils of poynton. What maisie knew. The Awkward age*. New York, NY: The Library of America. *What Maisie Knew*, which reproduces the first English edition of the novel, appears on pages 395–649. In the quotations of the work, the Roman numeral will mean the respective chapter and the Arabic numeral will mean the page. Whatever italics will be James’s.

⁶ *Ibid.*, introduction, p. 399.

⁷ *Ibid.*, I, p. 404.

⁸ *Ibid.*, XXI, p. 551.

⁹ This is the situation that Job must face in the homonymous book, which shows that the material approach that we analyze now is the cornerstone of the ancient religiosity and of the alienation of the individual concerning his own existence, which was the justification of the endless sacrifice thereof whether to compensate a would-be original sin or the arbitrariness of fate.

¹⁰ *What Maisie Knew*, introduction, p. 398.

¹¹ This unbearable contradiction was metaphysically solved thanks to the appellation to a would-be divine justice that would work in the afterlife to punish the evil ones; however, since such a solution contradicts the modern immanence of existence, the only possibility of facing the natural unfairness of the individual lot lies in defying the notion of fate and/or the establishment that leads to the exploitation of the individual. Concerning this, vide Rivas, Victor G. 2003, Jan–June. Lo Femenino como Poder Conciliador del Cosmos en el Pensamiento Trágico. *Graffylia* I(1): 39–46, Hall, Edith. 1997. The sociology of athenian tragedy. In *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, ed. P.E. Easterling, 93–126. Cambridge: CUP, , and the chapter eighth of Eagleton, Terry. 2003. *Sweet violence. The idea of the tragic*. Oxford: Blackwell.

¹² *What Maisie Knew*, XIX, p. 528.

¹³ *Ibid.*, XXI, p. 554.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, XII, p. 467.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, VI, p. 424.

¹⁶ Ibid., VIII, p. 442.

¹⁷ Ibid., XXXI, p. 646.

¹⁸ Ibid., X, p. 452.

¹⁹ It is very meaningful the fact that most of James's male characters are feeble individuals that cannot cope with the sundry situations that go to meet them. In *Roderick Hudson*, for instance, the protagonist ends up committing suicide (as Hyacinth Robinson in *The Princess Casamassima*), while in *The American*, in *The Portrait of a Lady*, and in a lot of the short stories the respective protagonist (the best example is perhaps *Georgina's Reasons*) ends up defeated by the circumstances or by his ideals. A tangential analysis of the issue will be found in my article "The Portrait of a *Real Live Man*: Individuality, Moral Determination and Historical Myth in the Light of Henry James's *The American*", which will soon be published by Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka.

²⁰ *What Maisie Knew*, XV, p. 496.

²¹ Ibid., XI, p. 460.

²² Ibid., XII, p. 477.

²³ Ibid., XXX, p. 623.

²⁴ Ibid., XXXI, p. 649.

²⁵ Ibid., XXIX, p. 615.

²⁶ Ibid., XXXI, p. 643.

²⁷ The absurdity of the temporal framework of the material vision is denied so by the potency of imagination and also by the own metaphysical reversibility of time that Nietzsche tried to set forth throughout his work (vide note 4).

²⁸ On this issue, vide the book by Eagleton that we have mentioned in the note eleven, which contains the most brilliant and accurate refusal of the odd idealization of tragedy that has prevailed in the cultural and literary domains from Nietzsche onwards.

²⁹ This is the kernel of the "Copernican revolution" that Husserl started and that has allowed to overcome the modern opposition of a subject consciousness and an objective reality whose final identity cannot be solved on the vital plane without resorting to a certain kind of metaphysical revelation even if the latter is conceived, as in the case of Nietzsche, as the revelation of an endless vital drive. Vide *The Birth of Tragedy*, sections 1–4. On how the literary criticism has reinterpreted Husserl's philosophy, vide the first chapter of the following book: Cameron, Sharon. 1989. *Thinking in Henry James*. Chicago, IL: Cambridge University Press.

³⁰ Merle A. Williams, on commenting Husserl contributions to a new understanding of life, underlines that the phenomenological reduction allows everyone "[...] to slough off the cocoon of familiarity and to approach the world in wonder" [*Henry James and the philosophical novel. Being and seeing*, 35. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993]. This wonder is the psychological engine of the knowledge that Maisie attains on breaking with the natural attitude that sentenced her to unhappiness and self-contempt.

³¹ James himself emphasizes this difference in his preface to the novel, wherein he says that his major task as a writer was to preserve Maisie's consciousness from the incidental development of her life: "So handsomely fitted out, yet not in a manner too grossly to affront probability, she might well see me through the whole course of my design: which design, more and more attractive as I turned it over, and dignified by the most delightful difficulty, would be to make and to keep her so limited consciousness the very field of my picture while at the same time guarding with care the integrity of the objects represented". I quote the preface, which originally appeared in the volume 11 of the New York edition, as it appears in the following electronic site: <http://www.henryjames.org.uk/prefaces/text11.htm> (.)

³² The ineluctable fulfillment of the realistic setting cannot shun the bathos inherent to the material unfolding of life that somehow or other unsettles the individual on confronting him with his impotence before the normal course of the facts, as we see in all the works of the supreme master of the realism (or, rather, of the naturalism, which is the culmination of the former): Zola. In *Thérèse Raquin*, Zola's first novel, the protagonist tries to defy the cruelty of her destiny by means of adultery and crime but she only sparks off a hellish situation that leads her finally to her death; in *La Bête Humaine*, Jacques kills brutally Severine, his lover, although he is happy with her, because he is the victim of the would-be ancestral hatred of men against women. Thus, the realism or naturalism, on trying to grasp life as it is and without idealization whatever, just shows the stints of the material vision (which, of course, does not prevent its

major instances from being masterpieces of narrative and characterization, as it occurs in the two works that we have mentioned).

³³ For an appraisal of this subject, vide the conclusions of the book quoted on the note 30.

³⁴ *What Maisie Knew*, II, p. 405.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, I, p. 401.

³⁶ Millicent Bell undertakes a thorough analysis of this double plane of the inter-personal communication in her book Bell, Millicent. 1991. *Meaning in Henry James*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, wherein she speaks of the wonder wherewith Maisie discovers the innermost intentions that the adults hide behind verbal language: “wonder’ [...] is James’s peculiar word for Maisie’s form of wordless knowing” (p. 251). As a matter of fact, the whole novel unfolds through the intuition of the sense that everyone intends to express without stating it.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 405–406.

³⁸ The best instance of this is undoubtedly *The Turn of the Screw*, but there are some other works where the children are brutally mistreated: for instance, the protagonist of *Georgina’s Reasons* abandons her child without the least remorse.

³⁹ *What Maisie Knew*, XXI, p. 554.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, XVII, pp. 511–12.

⁴¹ Of course, this is not only a reference to the famous doctrine of the absolute power of passions over reason that Hume sets forth in the third book of the *Treatise on Human Nature*, but to the general trend of modern sociability that is ruled by an individualism reduced to the most elementary hedonism.

⁴² On this issue, vide my article “Rivas, Victor G. 2005. A life beyond Go(o)d: A criticism of wisdom and the foundation of a poetic conception of life based on Goethe’s *Faust*.” In *The enigma of good and evil; The moral sentiment in literature*, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, 749–785. Dordrecht: Springer.

⁴³ On the phenomenological affinity of a creative imagination and a personal life, vide the third chapter of the following work: Bachelard, Gaston. 1960. *La Poétique de la Rêverie*. Paris: FUP.

⁴⁴ *What Maisie Knew*, XXVI, p. 592.

⁴⁵ From this slant, *What Maisie Knew* unfolds the opposite situation of *The Portrait of a Lady*: whereas Isabel Archer has everything in her favour and manages to spoil it by her blindness, Maisie, who has everything against her, manages to avail herself of its scant possibilities of having a personal life. Thus, Isabel could be seen as the embodiment of the false sublimity of the material vision, which always ends up unsettling the individual. For a further analysis, vide my article “On the Modern Opposition of Fate, Destiny, Life, Doom and Luck in the Light of Henry James’s *The Portrait of a Lady*” that will soon be published by Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka.

⁴⁶ Spinoza emphasizes in the Ethic that there is no better remedy against pain than knowing its causes and acting in consequence otherwise. Vide, for instance, the scholium to the proposition IV of the fifth book of the work.

⁴⁷ Which, as we know, is the utmost revelation of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* concerning the possibilities that everyone has to create a life of his own despite the everlasting menace of death and the unstoppable strength of time.

⁴⁸ *What Maisie Knew*, XIII, p. 482.

⁴⁹ Although James had shown a similar riddle in *Watch and Ward* and he had solved it there by means of the odd marriage of Roger and Nora, which shows that the writer very soon abandoned the romanticism that is clearly perceptible in his first work.

⁵⁰ *What Maisie Knew*, XXX, p. 629.

⁵¹ This must be not mistaken with the idealization of the process of liberation, for *What Maisie Knew* by no means tallies with those novels that show the process of self-consciousness that ends in the utter inward freedom of the protagonist, as it happens in *Crime and Punishment*, or, by and large, in Dostoevsky’s work throughout.

⁵² *What Maisie Knew*, XXXI, p. 645.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 637.

⁵⁴ On the import of this concept, vide my article “A Reflection on the Autobiographical Memory and on the Current Meaning of the Individual Life”. In Tymieniecka, Anna-Teresa. 2004. *Mystery in its passions. Literary explorations*, 215–235. Dordrecht: Kluwer.

⁵⁵ This shows why Nietzsche so eagerly tried to overcome the traditional moral values that for his time were simple conventions without the strength required to really inform the individual existence, which is the other face of the contemporary nihilism. Vide the analysis of the question that the philosopher undertakes above all in *Daybreak* and in the final book of *The Gay Science*.

⁵⁶ *What Maisie Knew*, XXVIII, p. 605.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, XXVI, p. 596.

⁵⁸ In the two works that we have mentioned in the note 32, Zola revels in depicting the most grotesque excesses of the protagonists, who appear time and again behaving like the victims of a instinctive animality that no civilization has been able to defeat, which is perceptible in the assimilation of the characters of *La Bête Humaine* with the locomotive and vice versa, to the point that the latter seems to be more a whimsical, tyrannical woman than a machine.

⁵⁹ *What Maisie Knew*, XXVIII, p. 611.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, XXVI, p. 590.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, XXXI, p. 643.

⁶² *Idem.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 649.

STYLE MATTERS: THE LIFE-WORLDS OF ANCIENT
LITERATURE

ABSTRACT

Positing first that the history of literature, like the history of any art, is a history of style, this paper attempts to develop an ontological theory of style, in which style becomes the means whereby artist and audience share in a way of experiencing the world as a whole, as a “life-world” of connected existential possibilities. The history of literature and art therefore constitute, from this perspective, a history of the ways in which we as humans have experienced “being-in-the-world,” as my closing comparative analysis of Homer and Herodotus in terms of Archaic and Classical Greek statuary and philosophy attempts to show.

The Baroque gives way to the Rococo. . .stone-washed denims supplant the once ubiquitous acid-washed. . .Punk Rock becomes New Wave.

In attempting to discuss the history of literature, we would do well to remember that the history of any art – be it plastic or musical, fine or applied, representational or abstract – is always experienced, first and foremost, as a succession of *styles*. The reason for this is not far to seek: in any art, it is primarily the style that engages us, that draws us toward this or that artist, musician, or designer. A characteristic preference for heavy, electric instrumentation over acoustic, for genuine leather over polyester and plastic; the choice of *terza rima* over heroic couplets, of thick, heavy brush strokes over fine and carefully applied ones; any of the countless stylizing gestures, in fact, which Aristotle so summarily describes in his *Poetics* (1447a) as differentiations in media, *en heterôî*, and differentiations in mode, *heterôs* – it is just these things which, in any living artistic context, tend most powerfully to call out to us, to move and “speak” to us.

Of course, when it comes to the history of literature – ancient literature in particular – nothing seems easier to neglect than the style of a given piece. In ancient literary studies, discussion of the “what” takes near universal precedence over the “how.” Not that we lack information on ancient stylistics. Classicists have in fact been singularly diligent in cataloguing and classifying almost every conceivable feature of ancient literary style. The real trouble, as I see it, is that we simply do not know what to do with all these observations once we have them. We recognize, for instance – to use the most basic example – that Herodotus wrote in prose (not in epic hexameters), and that he wrote in a particular Ionic dialect (not in the synthetic *Kunstsprache* of Homer). This much, anyone can see. What no one seems to be willing to address, however, is *why and in what way these variations in medium and mode would have excited Herodotus’ original audience*. For exciting to them they must have been – exciting in precisely the same way that a filmmaker’s decision

to use jump cuts, or a designer's decision to use topstitching, is exciting to us. We know hundreds of things about Herodotean style. What we lack is any sense of why that style mattered.

Now one might suppose that this is just one of those many things that we have to accept as being lost to us forever – as though a defunct sense of the significance of ancient stylistics were just one more item lost to us through the ravages of time, right along with the missing 116 plays of Sophocles and Phidias' Olympian Zeus. I would suggest, however, that this is not really the case. What we are lacking is not one or two key pieces of information – what we lack is a theory of why style matters in general. If we have nothing to say about the appeal Herodotus' stylistic technique might have had for his original audiences, it is (I submit) because we have so little to say about the deep inner appeal that simple things like bell-bottom flairs seem once to have had for us. What we lack is a general account of the significance of style. With such an account, we might be able to reconstruct, in some manner, the genuine aesthetic event that was a Herodotean or Homeric recital, a Greek pot, a new votive statue; without it, all our observations on style lie inert, a collection of bare facts, useful – at most – for the tiresome and almost tautological exercise of identifying this piece as coming from the “workshop of Andocides,” of labeling that piece as only spuriously Aeschylean, and so forth. What is needed, if ever we are to make such observations live for us aesthetically, if ever we are to *put the color back in* to the history of literature, so to speak, is a theory of the inner significance of style.

Perhaps the most important clue, for me at least, towards the formulation of such a theory comes from the work of Martin Heidegger – it does not come, however, from his later, explicitly thematized (and more heavily tendentious) philosophic works on the topic of art as such; as I see it, the most valuable hint Heidegger has to offer on the meaning of style comes from a single, almost errant passage found in Division One, Section 34 of *Being and Time*. In that section, Heidegger attempts to show how our grasp of the world is always already conditioned by discourse, *Rede*: in the words and statements it makes possible for different speakers of actual language, discourse gives us these or those worldly objects for the understanding; and in its “articulation” of the world into specific intelligible things, speech bestows upon us the specific kinds of projects we can (and must) embark upon as beings-in-the-world. Yet the objects that speech articulates do not occur in isolation – they come, as it were, as parts of whole sets; and these sets are determined by what Heidegger calls *Befindlichkeit* – a “finding oneself within a certain kind of world,” an “attuning” of oneself in a certain way into the world as whole; in short, a *mood*. Famously, a mood for Heidegger is not an inner “psychological” state that warps or masks the true state of things outside our minds; a mood is what gives us a world to be within in the first place; moods set for us the range and connection of objects that can show up for the understanding to work upon: “Mood has always already disclosed being-in-the-world as a whole and first makes possible directing oneself toward something” (Heidegger, p. 129). Moreover, in this disclosing of the world as a whole set of connected possibilities, mood is that which lets this or that thing *matter* to us, or another thing matter not at all. As Heidegger puts it, “this mattering. . .is grounded in attunement” (ibid).

But even as discourse conditions the objects that can show up for the understanding in the specific words, phrases, and statements it makes available to us, so too it can condition the moods that determine the object-sets that constitute the world as a whole. And this is precisely the insight that drives the passage I find so helpful for a formulation of a theory of style. Discourse, Heidegger notes, yields not only the articulated objects within our world, but informs the kinds of world-producing moods we can have as well. It does so, however, not through the words and statements *Rede* makes possible – but in the various *ways* of speaking those words and statements that belong to the act of speaking itself: “Being-in and its attunement are made known in discourse and indicated in language by intonation, modulation, in the tempo of talk, ‘in the way of speaking’” (Heidegger, p. 152). The possible ways of speaking set the possibilities for the moods we can have, and thereby the worlds we can inhabit. In other words, *the style of our speaking yields up for us the world as a whole*. It is at this point that Heidegger makes the connection to literature explicit: “The communication of the existential possibilities of attunement, that is, the disclosing of existence, can become the true aim of ‘poetic speaking’ (*dichtende Rede*)” (ibid.). Taking into consideration what Heidegger would have us understand by “communication” – not an imparting, but a “sharing” in (ibid.) – we have presented to us within this small passage an implicit theory of the significance of literary stylization. Literary style – and, I would hasten to add, artistic style in general – is a sharing in the possibility of being in the world.

Or to put it another way, style’s referent is not ontic, but *ontological*. The highly stylized ragged tear in the jeans we purchase new from the store are not meant to refer in some strained fashion to an allegorical “tear in my heart” – that tear refers to nothing in the world whatsoever (indexically, symbolically, iconically, or otherwise); no, the torn, ragged condition of the jeans we buy new lets us share (and share in) an experience of the world itself *as a ragged place as a whole, prey to and in some ways constituted by the act of tearing*. What excites us so deeply about the stylization of medium and mode that is art, what makes it matter so deeply to us, is the way in which it sets (and resets) for us the world as an existential whole. With every strum of the guitar, with every patterned rhythmic pulse given to a spoken word, the world matters anew, as a fresh set of living possibilities. Art, as stylization, yields up the “life-worlds” in which we get *to be*.

This ontological understanding of style, incidentally, yields a surprising result when applied to the *objects* of artistic representation. Aristotle claims in the *Poetics* that an artist creates a work by selecting (as we have seen) amongst different media, then amongst different modes within that media, and finally – something we have not yet discussed – amongst different objects for representation within that medium and mode (what Aristotle refers to as the *hetera* of artistic composition, to match the *en heterôi* and *heterôs* of medium and mode). With Heidegger, we have seen that the stylistic choices of medium and mode let us share in a mood, a mood that yields up a certain possibility of world, and being-in-the-world. It should be noted, though, that the objects that appear within that mood are not detachable from it. The kinds of objects that appear within a given attunement speak to us just as powerfully then as the medium and the mode about the kind of world it is ours to be within through

them. My suggestion, in other words, is just this: as surely as the medium and the mode that appear in a given artwork constitute its “style,” so too in a way does its characteristic choice of objects for representation (or the total lack thereof, as in the case of much modern, abstract art). The objects too are part of the style.

This is not such a surprising claim, really. It is not only “natural wood” acoustic guitars strummed in consonant legato harmonies that make up the style of 1970s “Singer/Songwriter” music (to say nothing of the natural fabric clothes and the loose-flowing hair of the singers themselves); part of what it means to belong to that style is to choose certain objects for representation over others: “chewing on a piece of grass. . . in the sunshine.” Such objects are not selected for some intrinsic interest they might have outside the song (the song I just quoted in part, “Ventura Highway” by America, was not written to explore either herbaceous or astronomical interests); in a sense, these objects do not exist apart from the song’s medium and mode; for just like it, they are selected, I would contend, for their suggestive power, for their ability to let us share in a certain way of experiencing, or re-imagining, the principles that ground the world as a whole. In this case, for instance, they help us experience the world-in-general as a nurturing, organic totality (an experience of the world, by the way, which virtually defines the Singer/Songwriter movement of the 1970s; ubiquitous references to the disconnected, alienating experience of wearing “black sun-glasses” would have to wait for the severity of the 1980s).

Like the medium and the mode, therefore, the objects too – as part of the style of the piece – refer us not to what is in the world, but to considerations of the principles whereby we have a world in the first place; they refer us not to features of some supposedly mood-independent existence, but to an experience of mood-dependent “worlding.” Again, the significance of style is not ontic, but ontological.

This characterization of style and its primary forms of expression yields then the method of investigation we have been looking for – namely, a way to understand the *significance* of the stylistic innovations that constitute the history of literature and all the arts. We should try to understand the media, modes, and objects characteristic of Homer and Herodotus and others as a means by which a certain possibility of being-in-the-world gets shared among poet/writer and listener/reader; indeed, this is a method that would help us understand the stylistic innovations of any art, in any era; each art would use the sensual means of appeal unique to itself to involve us in a world reset to a given ontological perspective.

Moreover, to the extent that we could presume certain ontological perspectives and possibilities to dominate the artistic “scene” at any given time, we might expect a loose coherence to obtain amongst several art forms and their distinct stylistic practices (as I briefly suggested is the case for music and fashion among the singer/songwriters of the 1970s). The history of literature and the arts would thus form an approximate “history of Being” – the record of the successively new ways in which life-worlds have been formulated, shared, and experienced over time.

This, then, is the thesis I would like to put to the test in the remainder of this essay. I would like to survey, first, some of the basic stylistic features that belong to the plastic arts in two successive “eras” – the so-called Greek Archaic and Classical; I would then like to show how this succession of styles could in fact be interpreted

as the record of a “sharing in” two successive ontological perspectives; and finally, in closing, I would like to return to the study of literature itself, and demonstrate how the stylistic peculiarities of Archaic Literature share a common ontological referent with Archaic statuary, and likewise how Classical Literature could be seen to correspond in terms of ontological reference to Classical Sculpture. In the end, I hope it shall become clear just why and in what ways the stylistic innovations which mark Greek literature would have so deeply and powerfully moved its successive audiences.

As is well known, one of the fundamental points of difference between Archaic and Classical sculpture is the invention of the *contrapposto* pose. The traditional (but increasingly untenable) interpretation, of course, is that this represents some sort of objective advance in the art of sculpture, or, at the very least, an advance for the Greeks away from the artistic models of Egypt and the Near East toward a more essentially “Greek” artistic ideal. From this perspective, Archaic works like the Kroisos Tomb *Kouros*, or the Apollo of the West Pediment at Olympia, should be understood as mere “steps along the way,” as works that advanced toward but ultimately proved unable to achieve the “naturalistic” Classical ideal of Polykleitos’ *Doryphoros*, *Diadoumenos*, and the like. Less tendentially, of course, what we can see happening is that the earlier, so-called Archaic sculptors worked primarily in flat planes – the severe turn of Apollo’s head into profile in the West Pediment, lining it up with the dominating gesturing of the extended right arm, keeps the action in a two-dimensional plane (very much as though it were occurring upon an Archaic Greek pot); the shoulders and the head of the *Kouros* are likewise squared off, the advancing feet of the figure creating but another flat plane of action, one turned at right angles to that of the shoulders. The primary effect of the *contrapposto*, contrariwise, is a certain twisting of the figure into the round. What I would like to suggest is that this stylistic change, far from representing the triumphant unfolding of some implicit and inchoate idea buried within the Archaic sculptor’s imagination, manifests for us instead a radical ontological break; what has changed between the *Kouros* and *Diadoumenos* is a sense of how the world most essentially is and by what principles it comes to be.

The late Mircea Eliade once remarked, in his famous essay upon the character of archaic and prehistoric ontology, that “for the archaic mentality, reality manifests itself as force, effectiveness, and duration. Hence the outstanding reality is the sacred, for only the sacred *is* in an absolute fashion, acts effectively, creates things and makes them endure” (Eliade, p. 11). On Eliade’s interpretation, the Archaic era possessed a radically bifurcated notion of existence – on the one hand, there is the world that surrounds us, a world of corruptibility and flux, a world of non-being; above and apart from this world, however, transcending it, is a sacred realm, a realm that proves its “reality” through activity, through its forceful ability to impose upon our otherwise inconstant world an order that does not intrinsically belong to it. Such was Eliade’s view, a view which more recent scholarship, though somewhat more rigorous and precise in its methods, has done little to alter. In my own work, for instance (Stocking, 2007), I have attempted to show how, in Homer, reality is indeed conceived as force, as power, as an ability to render things “otherwise” in the world.

(The Homeric self, for instance, to the extent that it can be said to exist, exists only as *biê*, *îs*, and *menos* – all words designating power and force; the person who cannot change the course of things, however, is *outidanos*, a “nothing” (Iliad, I. 293); see also the words of Apollo’s priestess in the opening scenes of the *Eumenides* – terrified, crawling upon her hands and knees, with no strength in her, she too is literally *ouden*, “nothing” (*Eumenides*, 38).) In Homer, of course, power and force belong principally – one is tempted almost to say entirely – to the gods. Likewise, Jean Rudhardt, in his examination of the Greek adjective *hagios*, “holy, sacred,” finds that it refers to a form of power (*la puissance*), one that exists as a divine creative force, anterior or transcendent to the act of creation, i.e., to the putting-in-order of the cosmos “elle existe comme force créatrice, antérieure ou transcendante à l’acte de création, i.e., à la mise en ordre du cosmos” (Rudhardt, p. 43).

Now what I would like to suggest is that Archaic statuary, as a presentation of certain stylizing gestures, is in fact meant to help us share in just this archaic ontological perspective – the perspective, that is, that sees our world as grounded upon a transcendent, enduring force, a force that orders what lacks any intrinsic order whatsoever. The squared-off right angles characteristic of Archaic art convey, for instance, stability – the enduring stability of the sacred realm that grounds our being-in-the-world (the right-angle stability of Apollo in the West Pediment, as well as its physical separation from the writhing figures of Lapiths and Centaurs, makes this transcendent stability particularly clear). This stability, however, must be combined with forceful dynamism – and this challenge is met in several different ways. In the West Pediment, it is precisely the flat-plane presentation of figures that achieves this end – for keeping the figures in a single plane puts Apollo in a kind of confrontational vector-relation with the other figures (a similar effect of almost trireme-like confrontation is achieved in Greek pottery by the constant habit of placing faces opposite one another in severe profile; there is no other place for them to go, so they must meet and confront one another on the two-dimensional plane). In the *Kouros* the effect of dynamism is achieved by having the figure stride out, once again, confrontationally, into our space (and in fact, the very object of representation here – a man in his youth – would also suggest to an Archaic-minded Greek this same quality of disruptive dynamism: “in the flower of youth is the greatest *kratos*, power” (Iliad, XIII. 484)). Now it should be noted that both gestures, the maintenance of the figure in a flat-plane, and the striding forward of a rigid, squared-off body, introduce what we might think of as a certain unnatural tension into these works; what we designate as “unnatural” however would have been greeted, as I see it, with great enthusiasm and excitement by contemporary viewers – for what the seemingly unnatural postures of the Apollo and the *Kouros* seek to convey is a simultaneous sense of stability and dynamic power, an involvement with the most basic principles of the Archaic world, and it is that which would have most impressed the Archaic audiences of these works (not the fact that they do not look like so-called “real life”).

But what then are we to make of the introduction of *contrapposto* figures in the Classical era? These, I submit, answer to a desire to share in a new conception of what might ground the world as a whole – a new conception brought about by the ontological revolution we most commonly associate with the Pre-Socratics. This

revolution first reveals itself – in discursive, philosophic terms at any rate – with Thales’ dual pronouncements that the *archê* of all things is water, and (less famous, but equally decisive) that all things are “full of gods.” Whatever else such statements might signify, one implication stands clear: there is no longer any thought of an anterior, exterior, or transcendent force shaping the world from without. *The world as a whole is now conceived as a fully immanent, self-defining totality.* And this was the single perspective common to every Pre-Socratic, each of whom was engaged in thinking this newly conceived totality in a more precise way. In particular, each was attempting find a “ruling principle” of change that would keep itself interior to the world. Thus Anaximander proposed an *apeiron* that “revenged itself” on any definite form emerging from it by destroying that definition back into itself, presumably into yet another definite form; thus Anaximenes proposed the rushing air (*aêr*) as the primary stuff of the world, a stuff whose very own rushing would be sufficient to account for the solid things of the earth (by condensation) and its less solid things too (by rarefaction). And this new notion of an autonomous, self-relating world is what underscores the Pre-Socratics wildest speculative experiments – Anaximenes’ desire to think the turning of the sky in the same terms one would describe the turning of a felt cap upon a head; Pythagoras’ (and Heraclitus’) obsessions with the tension of the strings of the lyre, producing its sound out of ratios that always relate their difference back to the whole.

The excitement that must have attended Polykleitos’ work, then, so I once again submit, was not based upon the “greater naturalism” of the *contrapposto*, but was generated by the way this pose let its viewers share in this newly grounded, immanent and autonomous, self-defining world. For the effect of the *contrapposto* is to turn the figure into the round, *and out of relation with anything else outside it.* The abstracted stare and downward glance of Classical figures confirm this (as does, in a more explicit way, the self-crowning gesture of the *Diadoumenos*). And Polykleitos too, as we know, was obsessed by the ratios that obtained amongst the various parts of his free standing figures – for these ratios were a means by which apparent differences could be related back to an underlying whole. To view a work by Polykleitos was not merely to view a representation of this or that person, this or that ontic item – it was to share in an ontological experience, a mood-creating resetting of the world as a whole, a “life-world” in which to be.

But literature too engaged the Greeks in this same kind of experience. In its changing employment of media, means, and objects of representation, literature too partook in a succession of ontological perspectives, the very same succession in fact we have just described as grounding the history of Greek art. In terms of the medium of the literature, for instance, we have (as we have already mentioned) a change from the Homeric *Kunstsprache* of epic to a commonly spoken Ionic dialect in the work of Herodotus. Commenting on the amalgamation of dialects, archaisms and neologisms that make up Homer’s art-language, Barry Powell remarks that “The medium of the Greek oral poets was a special language, with the odd quality of being spoken by few men, but understood by all speakers of the vernacular” (Powell, p. 224). This quality, I suggest, would have enforced the sense that Homeric song issued (as the poems themselves like to insist) from the Muses – that is to say, from a

transcendental source, one that shapes and informs our existences here in the world, but is somehow never touched by it, something simultaneously close to our experience, but essentially foreign to it as well. Even to hear such a language was to share intimately in the Greek Archaic ontological point of view, quite apart from what was said in that language, or how.

But Herodotus of course, with his consistent retention of *etas* for *alphas* and so forth, wrote and spoke in a common dialect – one immanent to the world, available to it. It was heard and experienced, moreover, as only one dialect among many – even as Herodotus, as the self-announced and fully immanent source of his own book, consistently presents himself as one perspective on things amongst many: “So this is what the Persian and Phoenicians say. . .but I will talk about the man who. . .” (Herodotus, *Histories*, I.5); or again, “I suppose, having criticized the theories of others (on the flooding of the Nile), I should state my own theory. . .” (*Histories*, II.21). Herodotus’ dialect, as well as his own self-representation throughout the entirety of his history, engages us directly in conceptions of a world defined by its own interior tensions, a fully immanent world with no one part privileged over another, in which each is related to but in conflict with the other.

This of course is the principle of composition guiding Herodotus’ choice of objects for representation throughout the *Histories*. Of great settlements and small, in a way that could be taken to apply to Persians and Greeks, to minor, contemporary figures and major great ones, Herodotus states right at the outset of his work: “I will mention both equally” (*Histories*, I.5). For Herodotus is no passive recorder of what he hears and sees; his selection of objects is controlled throughout by the same ontological sense that dominated the work of the Pre-Socratics. Whether depicting the way embryonic flying snakes revenge themselves upon their own mother by consuming her from within the womb, even as she revenged herself earlier upon the fertilizing father, or the way the Greek land revenged itself upon the Persian king who violated it, Herodotus represents only those objects that underscore the self-opposing immanence of the world as a whole. Though he likes to emphasize difference, these differences, as Rosalind Thomas insightfully remarks, are always “brought in as samples, to determine the common features crossing all” (Thomas, p. 66). Nothing could be farther from this than the kinds of objects the Homeric poems select for representation – poems that do not “treat all equally,” but focus rather on those instances of excellence by which heroes rise above the common world, and win a *kleos* that continues, imperishably and steadily (*aphthiton*, *Iliad*, IX.413), to inform the lives of men in this otherwise variable world (one thinks especially, in this regard, of Achilles’ refusal to eat or drink in his final *aristeia*, or his refusal to partake in the funeral games that he himself has brought into being at the end of the poem).

We have seen then how successive media and objects in the literary productions of “Homer” and Herodotus can each be seen as reflecting a desire to share and share in certain ontological perspectives. I would like to conclude this partial account of literary history, therefore, by suggesting the ways in which the *modality* of these works moves us in the exact same way – for the mode is perhaps the most direct and

potent way in which a literary piece engages us in a world-defining mood; sadly it is also the most neglected.

The most basic mode in which Homer speaks – or rather, sings – is of course the dactylic hexameter. What effect did this modality have upon those who listened to Homer sung? A.P. David, in a bold and very recent work, has suggested (quite persuasively, to my mind) that the origins of dactylic hexameter are to be discovered in the constantly renewing pattern of Greek circular dance. Under David's theory, once disparate prosodic issues (such as caesurae, diaeresis, terminal anacapa, enjambment and the like) can now be viewed as deriving from the articulated moments of turn and counter-turn within the circling patterns of *choreia*, the ever-circling folk dance than instantiates the sacred "dance of the Muses." If David is correct, the words of the epic poet (in distinction from later poets who invent their rhythms) enter into a rhythmic movement that pre-exists them (a fact which would of course count for the ways in which Homeric poetry casually lengthens and shortens its words, where other forms of poetry do not). "The speech style of Homer," David declares, "flows with an energy that is. . .external to the language" (David, p. 220). That energy is, of course, the sacred energy that grounds the order of the otherwise meaningless and decaying world that surrounds us. And thus we see, once again, that even the modality of the speech in Homer (and perhaps, especially that modality) would have excited its listeners into a certain way of experiencing their being-in-the-world, would have engaged them in a "re-setting" of the world as a whole.

Herodotus, of course, does not use dactylic hexameter – which means, perhaps shockingly to a Greek audience, that he does not incant a song from sources outside the world; Herodotus speaks. And importantly, he speaks to us informally, available, pressingly. This, I believe, is the principle modality of Herodotus – the conversation that holds us, the speaker and the listener, in all our sense of mutual difference, in a moment of common tension. In his discussion of Herodotean stylistics, Egbert Bakker notes that basic "joint" in use throughout Herodotus' grand *logos* is the unaccented discourse marker *nun*. This *nun*, meaning "now," as Bakker saliently notes, is not the "now" of a time exterior to a discourse (this would be the accented particle *nûn*); it is rather the "now" interior to discourse, as when we say, amidst a long conversation, "Now I think what the author is trying to say. . .". This kind of "now" does not imply that "now" I think such and such about the author, but once I didn't. This form of "now" points to – and in Bakker's phrase, "ensures" – the presence of the discourse itself, the presence of the speaker "even millennia after Herodotus presented his work in real discourse contexts" (Bakker, p. 97). Herodotus' constant use of this unaccented particle, *nun*, may seem like a minor stylistic peculiarity of his: "Now this is what the Persians say; but I. . ." (Histories, I.5). But its consequences, ontologically speaking, are tremendous. For Homer, reality is transcendent; the sources and grounds of our world lie in a separate place, informing our world, but untouchable by us, utterly outside our temporal experience of things. But Herodotus, with his simple use of conversational particles that bring all the universe into the present moment of the discourse that is happening now, destroys all sense of anterior or prior reality – the entire ontological schema of Homer tumbles all around him: only the present matters, a present in which all

things are brought into living contact, no matter how far apart in space or time. Herodotus' stylistic peculiarity refashions our experience of the world as a whole – as does each and every moment in the history of literary and artistic style. What could be more exciting?

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JAMES JOYCE'S "IVY DAY IN THE COMMITTEE
ROOM" AND THE FIVE CODES OF FICTION

ABSTRACT

James Joyce's short story "Ivy Day in the Committee Room" from his book *Dubliners* has often been criticized for being chaotic or at least random. Traditional methods of analysis, such as plot analysis, do not yield an idea of coherent structure. They thus appear to support the criticisms. However, when the story is subjected to an analysis based on Roland Barthes' five codes from his book *S/Z*, the story is revealed to have both an overall structure and an intricate, detailed sub-structure of twelve scenes. The overall structure is largely provided by the operation of what Barthes called the Enigma Code. The detailed structure is provided by what Barthes called the Action Code. Barthes suggests using the Action Code to create a table, and one appears in this article. Barthes says that the elements in the table will "articulate" with each other; and an examination of the table created to Barthes' specifications shows that the elements do indeed articulate both horizontally and vertically. Thus, an interesting irony arises in that both Joyce's story and Barthes' book have been accused of anarchistic construction, yet when Barthes' system is applied to Joyce's story the rigorous structure of the story emerges and the orderliness of the five code system is confirmed.

My plan is to explore a small portion of the question: How does fiction convey a sense of life? A concomitant idea is the issue of structure. In this exploration, I call upon the French theorist Roland Barthes, who, in his book *S/Z* (Barthes, 1970), suggests that while all discourse consists of interlacing codes, five codes predominate in fiction: (1) the symbolic code, (2) the enigma code, (3) the action code, (4) the reference code, and (5) the connotative code. These, Barthes calls "the five major codes" (19).¹ Along the way, I would like to point out how Barthes' code-system corresponds with various elements of Phenomenology, illustrating the operation of the codes with the example of one of James Joyce's short stories from *Dubliners* (Joyce, 1916b). In the absence of traditional plot, Barthes' codes open insights into the structure and meaning of James Joyce's "Ivy Day in the Committee Room."

The codes require little explanation beyond their names. The symbolic code can arise from any text feature when the reader decides that such a feature provokes a meaning not literally stated. The enigma code arises when a textual feature introduces a question or mystery, plus any proposed solutions, and/or the actual solution if given. Under this code "we list the various (formal) terms by which an enigma can be distinguished, suggested, formulated, held in suspense, and finally disclosed," says Barthes (19). The action code can technically arise from any action not already coded by the enigma code, but in Barthes' use of the action code in the story by

Balzac called “Sarrasine,” around which he structures his book *S/Z*, Barthes picks out the major repeated actions. The reference code includes textual features that could be looked up in a reference book or basic text in a number of academic subjects. As Barthes says, “a History of Literature. . . a History of Art. . . a History of Europe.” Or perhaps it could refer to “an Outline of Practical Medicine,” or “a Treatise on Psychology, (erotic, ethnic, etc.).” Further examples are “an Ethics. . . a Logic. . . a Rhetoric, and an anthology of maxims and proverbs about life, death, suffering, women, ages of man, etc.” (205–206). Being made up of oblique references to such works that the reader is tacitly assumed to have read, the reference code becomes a shorthand route to the “as-everybody-knows” mentality. This fits with what Alfred Schutz and Thomas Luckmann say about the life-world in *Structures of the Life-World* (Schutz and Luckmann, 1973): “What is taken for granted does not form a closed, unequivocally articulated, and clearly arranged province,” they say (9). Instead, “What is taken for granted within the prevailing lifeworldly situation is surrounded by uncertainty,” and this arises from the movability of the horizon. “One experiences that which is taken for granted as a kernel of determinate and straightforward content to which is cogiven a horizon which is indeterminate and consequently not given with the same straightforwardness. This horizon, however, is experienced at the same time as fundamentally determinable, as capable of explication” (9). The semiotic ideas of Barthes intersect in the reference code with these phenomenological ideas of Schutz and Luckmann. When the reference code is activated, the reader’s lifeworld horizons suddenly shift to include ideas the reader knows from having studied them in text-books and reference books.

In contrast, the connotative code involves more direct implications of the text, especially in the conversations of the characters (but not limited to dialogue) that tend toward the thematic, but which would not be referring to the specific types of texts involved in the reference code. The connotative also interrelates to ideas in Phenomenology. “In short, context and social reality are interwoven, and it is only in terms of this interdependence that relevance and typicality are to be understood” say Richard M. Zaner and H. Tristram Englehardt in their introduction to Schutz and Luckmann’s *The Structures of the Life-World* (xxix).

Barthes’ five codes help solve the puzzle of a story like James Joyce’s “Ivy Day in the Committee Room,” which, when subjected to conventional methods of analysis appears to be made of a random series of actions and fragments of dialogue, adding up to nothing coherent, and yet the story still strikes readers as a worthy work of narrative art. The first route into the story may be through application of the action code. For Barthes in *S/Z*, “the notion of structure does not support the separation of. . . insignificant and significant,” because “everything signifies something” (51). “For proof,” Barthes continues, “we have only to examine the basic (and thus seemingly insignificant) proairatisms” (51). By “proairatisms” Barthes means actions, once they have been subsumed, in analysis, under the umbrella of the action code. He alternately names the action code the proairetic code, but I find it easier to use his more self-evidently descriptive title of “action code.” Barthes says “the usual paradigm” of these seemingly insignificant actions “is something like begin/end, continue/stop” (51). Thus they are not random, but “capped by a conclusion and

consequently. . . subject to some logic (as long as temporality appears: the classic narrative is basically subject to the logico-temporal order)" (52).

In "Ivy Day in the Committee Room," one major set of actions are entrances and exits and I suggest that these create what Barthes calls "begin/end, continue/stop" logical units such as Barthes suggests exists within narratives. Once we employ the action code, we see that there are twelve such units opened or closed by the entrance or exit of a character. These units become roughly equivalent to scenes in a play. John Jackson and Bernard McGinley, in fact, say that the story "resembles a play" because of the story's high percentage of dialogue (121). The remainder of the action codes and the other four codes then fall into a meaningful pattern.

Scene One begins with the opening of the story in the Committee Room of a candidate for office name Richard Tierney. Old Jack, who is a custodian, and Mr. O'Connor are present. The following breaks down the codes: *Action Code*—difficulty in lighting a fire. "Old Jack raked the cinders together with a piece of cardboard and spread them judiciously over the whitening dome of coals" (118).

Symbolic Code—the need for more light, symbolically and the difficulty in getting this symbolic clarity arise from the action. "When the dome was thinly covered his face lapsed into darkness but, as he set himself to fan the fire again, his crouching shadow ascended the opposite wall and his face slowly re-emerged into light" (118). Since the symbolic code takes all discourse units as its possible field of action, it is not at all unlikely that an element might be simultaneously participating in the symbolic code and some other code as in this example where an action participates in both action code and symbolic code at the same time. This is in agreement with Paul Ricoeur's concept of the symbol in which a textual element retains its original meaning and becomes symbolic by provoking a second meaning as well. In fact, as I pointed out in a previous article, "Ricoeur's 'Allegory' and Jacobson's Metaphoric/Metonymic Principles," (Wilson, 1994) Paul Ricoeur "denies symbolic effect to expressions where the original sense of an expression is destroyed in the process of interpretation, calling such discourse 'allegory,' the mere 'rhetorical' and 'didactic' procedure in which the literal meaning is 'eliminated' once it has done its job" (293). A further point is that the symbolic quality of difficulty in lighting a fire in the stove may not be apparent except in retrospect, as more units of the story come to the reader's attention.

Reference Code—Irish History, Ivy Day is the day on which Ireland honors Charles Stewart Parnell who united Ireland in its effort to gain independence, but who had been denounced by the Catholic bishops when a divorce case revealed that he was living with a married woman. Many Irish turned against him, and though many also stood by him, the lack of unity derailed the independence movement.

Connotative Code—"The Royal Exchange Ward" is the location of the Committee Room (119). This ward is located in a working class and lower middle class neighborhood, connoting moderate income.

In *Scene One*, the *Enigma Code* is not operating.

Thus far I have only discussed a single scene (otherwise known as a sequence). However, Barthes says that "sequences can be arranged among themselves (converged, articulated) in such a way as to form a kind of network," and one can express

them in a table. For Barthes, we form what he calls a “table (as in the sequences ‘To enter,’ ‘Door,’ ‘Farewell,’ ‘To leave’)” (82). Barthes says that “the luck of this table. . . is the possibility of a . . . metasequence” (82). This metasequence, or series of interlocking sequences, is exactly what we find in Joyce’s story as soon as we apply the system of five codes suggested by Barthes in *S/Z*. I have created a table to what I take to be Barthes’ specifications. It is found in the Appendix to this article, and I recommend the reader refer to it as we proceed.

Scene Two then begins. Based on Barthes examples of “‘To enter,’ ‘Door,’ ‘Farewell,’ ‘To leave,’” we are justified in identifying a second scene as beginning with an action: the entrance of Mr. Hynes. His presence activates the *Enigma Code*. First of all, why is he here, since—as we quickly discover—he is not a canvasser for Tierney? A further enigma arises when he compares the Socialist candidate to the Nationalist: “one man [the Socialist candidate] is a plain honest man with no hunker-sliding about him. He goes in to represent the labour classes. This fellow you’re working for only wants to get some job or other” (121). The old man answers, “Of course, the working-classes should be represented” (121). Why, when Hynes speaks in favor of the Socialist Party candidate in the committee room of the Nationalist Party candidate does he encounter no opposition from Tierney’s canvassers? A second enigma is introduced: will Tierney pay the canvassers, today? Schutz and Luckmann, in an observation that dovetails neatly with Barthes’ enigma code, say, “If the appresented aspects of an object (that is, anticipated phases of my consciousness), when they come to self-presentedness, are incongruent with the previous experience, we can say that the taken-for-granted nature of my experience ‘explodes’” (11).

Action Code—Hynes advances into the light of the fire, but the light is deemed too weak and the characters light candlesticks (120).

Symbolic Code—Hynes asks, “What are you doing in the dark?” (120). We readers may assume that the characters do not have enough light and can’t get enough light symbolically as well as physically; this symbolic meaning may still not be apparent, and may emerge only in retrospect.

Scene Three begins with the entry of Mr. Henchy, the supervisor of Tierney’s canvassers.

Let us first consider the *Action Code*: “The old man returned with a few lumps of coal which he placed here and there on the fire” (123). Lumps of coal are being placed on the fire.

Symbolic Code: “For the love of God, Jack,” said Mr. Henchy, “bring us a bit of coal. There must be some left” (123). The repeated mentions of fire and the need for more light now begin to be clearly symbolic. One of the characters even says that somebody “saw the light,” employing the clichéd version of the symbol, but pointing to the symbolic potential of all the other images of not enough light and inadequate fire in the story (123).

Connotative Code: Statements in conversations of the characters imply issues of political corruption. “The working-man,” said Mr. Hynes, “is not looking for fat jobs for his sons and nephews and cousins. The working man is not going to drag the honour of Dublin in the mud” (121). A clear connotation of Hynes’s

statement is that some candidates will drag the honour of Dublin in the mud, if elected.

Enigma Code: We have the answer to one of the previously introduced enigmas. Tierney will not pay the canvassers. "No money, boys," said Mr. Henchy (121). Hynes, on planning to leave, said he would return when more of Tierney's canvassers have gathered.

There are no new *Reference Code* elements in the sequence.

Scene Four begins when Hynes exits after having asked when the remainder of the canvassers will be present.

This sequence shows no *Action Code* or *Symbolic Code* elements.

Reference Code: The Castle, British Headquarters is mentioned, making a reference to Irish history. O'Connor says many writers are in the pay of the Castle: "I believe half of them are in the pay of the Castle. . . I know it for a fact. They're Castle hacks" though not Hynes (125).

Connotative Code: The implication of political corruption continues. Also, the recently departed Hynes is revealed to be a poet. This provokes a short debate as to the value of writing/poetry and writers/poets.

Enigma Code: We can see another connection to Schutz and Luckmann's concept of the life-world, here. They say, "The core of my experience, which on the basis of my stock of knowledge I admit as self-evident 'until-further notice,' has become problematic to me (11). Proposed answers to the previously introduced enigma are mentioned. That was as follows: why is Hynes, a supporter of the Socialist candidate, visiting the committee room of the Nationalist candidate? Two answers are proposed. Perhaps he is a sponger, hoping to borrow money from the canvassers once they are paid. "Damn it, I can understand a fellow being hard up but what I cannot understand is a fellow sponging" (124). This does not fit with Hynes saying he will return despite having heard the news that Tierney will not pay the canvassers today. Perhaps he hopes be included if free drinks are provided to the canvassers. The second enigma element is that perhaps Hynes is a spy for the Socialist candidate. "I think he's a man from the other camp. He's a spy of Colgan's if you ask me," said Mr. Henchy (124).

Connotative Code: The connotation of political corruption continues as the candidate is referred to as "Tricky Dicky" Tierney. Perhaps every politician named Richard risks getting called Tricky Dicky by his opponents, but this is by his supporters.

Scene Five begins as Fr. Keon enters.

Enigma Code: Fr. Keon is addressed as Father, but he is dressed in a way that could be the garb of a priest but might not be: "it was impossible to say whether he wore a clergyman's collar or a layman's because the collar of his shabby frock-coat, the uncovered buttons of which reflected the candlelight, was turned up about his neck" (125). This costume introduces the enigma: Is Fr. Keon in good standing? Also, the question of Hynes's presence is still unsolved.

Action Code: Fr. Keon moves to leave, and one of the men in the room offers to light his way on the stairs. Fr. Keon declines the offer (126).

Symbolic Code: Fr. Keon needs more light but denies the need.

Scene Six begins when Fr. Keon exits.

The *Action*, *Symbolic*, and *Reference* codes go inactive here.

Connotative Code: Connotations of religious decay arise as the men remaining in the room discuss Fr. Keon. This leads to mention of the lack of ceremony at the Lord Mayor's Palace, the connotation being political decay. Connotations of political corruption continue and become extensive.

Enigma Code: The men discuss the earlier question of Fr. Keon's status and propose a solution. He is not defrocked but removed from parish service for unknown reasons. As to how Fr. Keon makes his living, "That's another mystery," says one of the men in the room (126). A new issue arises: will Tierney supply liquor to the men since he will not pay them? (127). Meanwhile, the reason for Hynes' presence is still unknown.

Scene Seven begins when a boy enters.

This short scene has no *Reference Code* features. The boy's depositing a basket of bottles fits the *Action Code*, but this time no connection to the *Symbolic Code* emerges.

Enigma Code: One minor enigma is now solved. The bottles are from Tierney. He is supplying the men with alcohol. However, the reason for Hynes's presence remains an enigma.

Scene Eight begins when the boy leaves to fetch a corkscrew. This short scene has no *Action*, *Symbolic*, or *Reference* coding. However, the men now speak well of Mr. Tierney, comically reversing the earlier negative *Connotative Code* implications.

Scene Nine begins when the boy returns with the corkscrew.

Action Code: opening bottles with the corkscrew.

Symbolic Code: none.

Connotative Code: offered a drink from one of the bottles as a tip, the boy drinks an entire bottle, connoting alcoholism, as does the boy's toast to Mr. Henchy who paid for the wine from Mr. Tierney's treasury.

Enigma Code: we still do not know why Hynes was present, or why he intends to return.

Scene Ten begins when the boy exits.

Connotative Code: alcoholism: One of the men says that's how it starts about the boy's drinking the entire bottle.

Enigma Code: The mystery of Hynes presence is now intensified as the men speak ill of Crofton, a canvasser for the Conservatives who is helping elect the Nationalist (129–130). The Conservative Party has withdrawn its candidate for fear that the Socialist Party will win. The men dislike a supporter of another party even when he is allied with them, so why do they not react more strongly to Hynes who supports the active opposing candidate?

Scene Eleven begins when Crofton enters with Lyons, one of Tierney's canvassers.

Action Code: The men put bottles on the stove to cause the corks to pop off, as a way to open the bottles. Each time a cork pops it makes a pop sound.

Symbolic Code: The hot gas of the bottles punctuates the political talk with repeated pops, symbolizing that the talk itself is so much hot gas, symbolically speaking.

Connotative Code: political corruption and alcoholism.

Reference Code: Irish politics consisted of three Parties. The Nationalists wanted independence from the British Empire and capitalism, the Socialists wanted independence and socialism, and the Conservatives wanted to remain within the British Empire and capitalism. A second Reference Code element is the comment that the conservative Irish people plan to honor the English King on his visit. The more conservative Irish turned against Parnell for sexual immorality, yet this same conservative sector of the political spectrum plans to honor the English King despite the fact that he is renowned for his many sexual affairs (131–132). They are at least guilty of hypocrisy.

In the *Enigma Code* realm, we are reminded that the reason for Hynes's visit is still unknown.

Scene Twelve opens when Hynes reenters.

Action Code: The men put a bottle on the stove to open for Hynes. Hynes recites a poem for the men, entitled "The Death of Parnell."

Reference Code: Irish History—the poem refers to the Parnell's dream of Liberty for Ireland and how he was brought down by "treachery" and saying that on the future joyous day when the dream of an independent Ireland arrives, there will be one sad note: "the memory of Parnell" (134–135).

Elements of the *Connotative Code* abound as the politico-religious debate becomes entwined with the accusations in the poem of betrayal and hypocrisy. Also connoted are the issue of the value of writing and especially poetry.

Enigma Code: A strongly probable solution to the mystery of Hynes' presence is now evident. He is a poet, looking for an audience for his poem. Also, since other men present know about Hynes' poem in praise of their party's idol, their non-hostility toward Hynes can be explained. This solution is not absolutely certain, because the men ask for the poem, and Hynes is not the one who brings its existence into the conversation. Also, "Mr. Hynes did not seem to remember at once the piece to which they were alluding" (133). However, Hynes is probably feigning this memory gap since he immediately stands up and recites the 44-line poem from memory.

Symbolic Code—there is a final hot-gas pok, commenting on the quality of the poem, more hot gas.

Thus, far from being an amorphous mass, the story has both an overall structure and an intricate detailed substructure. The Enigma Code with its early introduction of the question of Hynes's unexplained presence and the answer to the question suggested at the end gives the story an overall structure. Joyce stops introducing new enigmas about the middle of the story and answers the first enigma question only in the last scene, an effective structuring strategy. This is a strategy I noticed only after constructing the Five-Codes table at Barthes' suggestion. The Action Code, which enables us to construct the table of scenes provides a matrix for fine structure within which the other codes cohere. The small enigmas add internal structure, for example: if Tierney will pay the men/no; if Tierney will provide drink for the men/yes; Fr. Keon's status/he is probably not defrocked but is barred from functioning as a priest. This confirms the relentless implication of religious hypocrisy and political corruption conveyed by the Connotative code. In the Symbolic Code, we have an

issue. Since a symbol, by definition, provokes a communication that is not stated in the text, any claim of symbolic meaning must be accompanied by at least a modicum of doubt. However, once one notes, via the Action Code, how often the need for more fire and more light is repeated, the idea that these men need more light symbolically as well as physically becomes much stronger. This symbolic action, threaded through the whole story adds cohesion.

The importance of the Reference Code (mainly Irish history and politics) is enormous because, as Barthes says, “Although entirely derived from books, these codes. . . appear to establish reality, ‘Life’” (209). Thus, while showing the structure of the story, the application of Roland Barthes’ five codes provides intriguing suggestions as to how fiction manages to give the reader a sense of life.

Almost everyone who reads Barthes *S/Z* has the same reaction: Are not five codes somewhat of an arbitrary number? They also claim that the five-code approach is chaotic. As I have said in an article that appeared in *The American Journal of Semiotics* (Wilson, 2000):

Critics regarded *S/Z* almost as an original work of art which—however brilliant in itself—did not contribute to the ongoing flow of theoretical discourse. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, for example, speaks in *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* of how different readers would apply Barthes’ codes differently to a given text; Rimmon-Kenan says that “the problem of uniformity keeps cropping up” (1983: 14). She does not mean that Barthes’ system imposes unwarranted uniformity; rather she implies that Barthes’ system lacks the degree of commonality necessary among users of the system to permit them to communicate to each other. Calling Barthes’ principle in *S/Z* “anarchist”, Catherine Belsey says that “it would almost certainly not be possible (or useful) to attempt a wholesale imitation of its critical method(s)” (1980: 106). “*S/Z* is itself a polyphonic critical text”, says Belsey. “It is impossible to summarize adequately, to reduce to systematic accessibility” (1980: 105). Robert Scholes, who presents in *Structuralism in Literature* a “number of criticisms” of Barthes’ approach, may serve as a paradigm: “There is something too arbitrary, too personal and too idiosyncratic about this method” (1974: 155). (*Semiotics* pp. 267–268)

In some ways the objection about the arbitrariness of five codes is answered by clarifying Barthes’ position. First, Barthes is protected by his statement, quoted earlier in this article that “the five *major* codes” (my italics) predominate in the structuring of literature. He thus leaves open the possibility that other codes might be noticed that he does not detail in *S/Z*. Additional clarification also helps answer the criticism that the choice of five codes is arbitrary. For example, the suggestion that in addition to the five proposed by Barthes, there might be other codes such as a mythological code or a psychological code. These would be subsumed under Barthes’ Reference (or Cultural) Code which handles textual references to anything that might have a dictionary or standard text book, as Barthes says in *S/Z*, “physical, physiological, medical, psychological, literary, historical, etc.” (20). It is difficult to come up with candidate codes that would not be references to some kind of handbook, dictionary, or standard textbook, and thus would not be included in Barthes’ “etc.”

An added insight may be that the Reference Code traps the author. In activating the Reference Code, the author writes words that invoke the “as-everybody-knows” trope, with its, previously mentioned, cross-reference with the “until-further-notice” aspect of the life-world. The author may not be happy with the result. Suppose, for example, that the author refers to textbooks on “Female Psychology,” a frequently

used phrase in *S/Z*. What if these textbooks contain negative stereotypes about women to which the author does not subscribe? This is an instance of a broader problem of involuntary implications—implications not willed or intended by the author. Unintended implications present a serious problem because, as Barthes says, “Although entirely derived from books, these codes, by a swivel characteristic of bourgeois ideology, which turns culture into nature, appear to establish reality, ‘Life’” (206). In a striking metaphor, Barthes says that the author “vomits” the code. What can the author do when the Reference Code provokes unintended implications? The first answer, suggested by Barthes, is that the author can ironize that text to show that he or she does not agree with the implications provoked automatically by the workings of the Reference Code. “Perhaps that is what Flaubert did,” Barthes suggests, “particularly in *Bouvard and Pécuchet*” (206). However, ironizing is not a perfect solution. In fact, the only real solution is for the textbooks to be rewritten by a new generation of scholars. Thus, *S/Z*, by implication, suggests a worthy program for the direction of academic scholarship, indeed an enormous one.

What of Catherine Belsey’s complaint that Barthes’ system cannot be adequately summarized? I would venture to suggest that in its simplest nomenclature, the five-code system is easily and quickly described, as I did in the opening paragraph of this essay. Barthes’ further specification of the codes introduces puzzles, of course. For example, Barthes uses the term Action Code for explicating the significance of seemingly random action. This might be puzzling when we realize that the Enigma Code also involves actions. Undoubtedly, this potential overlap is the reason that Barthes also calls the Action Code the Proairetic Code. Giving the code two names, one self-evident and the other which must be learned, adds difficulty, but is an effort to clarify. It does not make the system “anarchic.” Similarly, Barthes also calls the Reference Code the Cultural Code, although all the codes are undoubtedly cultural in the broad sense. Again, however, Barthes giving the code two names is not a move to randomness but is an attempt to distinguish the Reference Code from the Connotative Code, and thus it is a move toward clarity. As I point out in my article in *The American Journal of Semiotics* (273), “The problem is not unsolvable, given a positive approach; even such a critic of *S/Z* as Robert Scholes admits that a difference exists ‘between a connotation and a cultural reference.’” Scholes ascribes the main difficulty not to an inherent incoherence in Barthes’ system, but because Barthes’ system involves us “precisely in distinguishing among things that we have been content to lump together before.” I quote this statement on page 273 of my article.

A final reason to stand by my position is the table itself, which appears in the Appendix of this article. Barthes suggests creating a table, and his advice guided its creation, using not just generally the Action Code, but specifically the idea of entrances and exits to create sequences, or scenes. It is also Barthes’ idea that the sequences will articulate with one another to form a metasequence. A study of the table reveals that its elements articulate both horizontally and vertically. Horizontally, a high degree of mutual articulation is apparent as one reads across each sequence. Frequently, the same textual element participates in the Action Code and the Symbolic Code, simultaneously. At times, the textual element participating in the Reference Code dovetails thematically with the Action/Symbolic Codes.

Vertically, as one looks down the table from top to bottom, one sees another kind of articulation, for example in the Enigma Code, where an enigma is introduced in one scene, discussed in one or more other scenes, and then solved in a further scene. This would appear to the opposite of anarchism, and clearly does not support a claim that Barthes' system cannot be reduced to systematic accessibility. I find it interesting that both Joyce in "Ivy Day in the Committee Room" and Barthes in *S/Z* have been accused of being random or anarchic, but when one applies Barthes' *S/Z* to "Ivy Day," an intricate and precise structure emerges in the story, represented by the table; and Barthes' system reveals its innate orderliness.

While the main benefit of this exercise is the revelation of a structure that careful readers of Joyce's story intuit, but which conventional analysis—such as plot analysis—cannot verify, the procedure also reveals thematic implications. The major Enigma Code's revelation that Hynes is a poet, reduced to a rather pathetic stratagem to find an audience dramatizes the sad position of the literary artist in early twentieth-century Ireland, at least in James Joyce's opinion. This implication articulates with elements in the Connotative Code, when the canvassers express doubt of the value of writing and writers or suggest that writers are in the service of the British colonial masters. It subtly foreshadows Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Joyce, 1916), who believes that he cannot become a great artist if he stays in Dublin: "Ireland is an old sow that eats its own farrow," he says (225). Stephen plans to go abroad in self-exile, claiming that "When the soul of a man is born in this country, there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets" (224). Speaking to his friend Cranly, Stephen says;

I will not serve that which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defense the only arms I allow myself to use—silence, exile, and cunning. (275)

We note the word "exile," as the one appropriate to the theme of "Ivy Day in the Committee Room." Hynes stayed and became a poor poet, despite talent and an impulse to write poetry. Cranly retorts to Stephen in *A Portrait* by an accusation: "You poor poet, you!" (275). And Stephen does not refute Cranly's claim. Readers of *A Portrait* have seen one of Stephen's poems, and they know that Stephen is a promising poet. These readers might then ask: why does Stephen not defend himself? Precisely, Stephen's point is that he must leave Dublin and Ireland if he is to become a great writer. If Stephen stays, he would be in the position of Hynes in "Ivy Day in the Committee Room," stunted as a poet by the desperation for an appropriate audience. As Stephen prepares for exile, he writes in his diary: "Welcome, O life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race" (281). That this is what Hynes, left behind in Dublin, could not do and could never do is an implication suggested by the analysis of Barthes' Enigma Code in "Ivy Day in the Committee Room," when seen in the light of Joyce's later *A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man*.

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APPENDIX

Scene	Symbolic code	Enigma code	Action code	Reference code	Connotative code
1	Lighting fire	None	Lighting fire	Irish history, Parnell and the Catholic Bishops	Royal Exchange Ward connotes low to moderate income
2	Light and fire	Q-1. Why is Hynes, a supporter of the Socialist candidate, present in the Committee Room of the Nationalist candidate? Q-2. Will Tierney pay the canvassers?	Advancing into light, light candlesticks	Ivy pin refers to Parnell	Political corruption: "Tricky Dicky" Tierney
3	Light and fire	A-2. Tierney will not pay the canvassers.	Placing lumps of coal on to the fire	None	Political corruption
4	None	Proposed A-1: Hynes may be a sponger or a spy.	None	Irish history, The Castle, British Hdqtrs.	Political corruption, value of writing/poetry
5	Need for light denied by Fr. Keon	Hynes' presence still unsolved. Q-3. What is Fr. Keon's status?	Holding light for Fr. Keon	None	Ambiguity in Fr. Keon's clothing.
6	None	Proposed A-3: Fr. Keon defrocked or just inactive in parish. Q-4. Will Tierney supply liquor? Hynes' presence unsolved.	None	None	Religious and political decay.

(continued)

Scene	Symbolic code	Enigma code	Action code	Reference code	Connotative code
7	None	A-4: Tierney supplies alcohol. Hynes' presence unsolved	Boy deposits basket of bottles	None	Alcoholism
8	None	Hynes' presence unresolved	None	None	Now speaking well of Tierney connotes hypocrisy
9	None	Hynes' presence still unsolved	Boy drinks entire bottle of stout	None	Alcoholism—Stout is a high alcohol content beer
10	None	Mystery of Hynes' presence intensified by Connotative Code	None	None	Alcoholism—"That's how it starts." Speaking ill of Crofton (Conservative)
11	Hot gas "pok" symbolizes the hot gas of political talk	Hynes' presence still unsolved	Opening bottles by the hot gas method	Irish politics— Three Parties: Nationalist, Socialist, and Conservative Irish history—Conservative Irish turned against Parnell while accepting English king who had numerous affairs.	Political corruption and hypocrisy. Alcoholism.
12	The final hot "pok" comments on the quality of Hynes' poem.	A-1. Hynes wants audience for his poem on Parnell, the hero of the Nationalist Party.	Opening a bottle by the hot gas method. Reciting a poem.	Irish history: The story of Parnell.	The value of writing/poetry. Betrayal (in poem). Debate on religion/politics.

NOTE

- ¹ Page numbers in text's parentheses refer to the most recent edition listed in "References".

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SECTION III
HISTORICITY AND LIFE

TEMPORALITY IN FITZGERALD'S *BABYLON*
REVISITED

ABSTRACT

Temporality in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Babylon Revisited* is germane to the understanding of the experience of Charlie Wales as he returns to Paris in search for his own honor, incorporated in his little daughter, Honoria. Nothing else matters to him now. However, Charlie cannot escape his past and in the end, he leaves the city, renamed Babylon by the author, alone. After his intense quest for Honoria, he is doomed to be alone. Fitzgerald aptly uses the word, alone, as the last word of this literature to name the doom which is the fate of Charlie. Augustine's concept of time necessarily engages participation. He suggests that we need a medium between things and ideas. The medium must possess the qualities of both the things and the ideas and must allow the ascent from one to the other. Describing time, Augustine writes "Time is never all present at once. The past is always driven on by the future, the future always follows on the heels of the past, and both the past and the future have their beginning and their end in the eternal present. If only men's minds could be seized and held still! They would see how eternity, in which there is neither past nor future, determines both past and future time" (*Confessions*, Book XI; 11261–11262) Charlie Wales participates in the time which incorporates his past, in his revisiting of Paris where he encounters two distinct phases of his identity,

1. His past, dissipated existence in this city of lights, where he lost his wife and child and his own moral center.
2. His present, allegedly responsible self, where he desperately tries to regain an innocence and a responsible control of his own experience.

Primary Texts for this examination will include

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. 1960. *Babylon revisited and other stories*. A scribner classic. New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Company.

Mensch, James Richard. 1996. *After modernity – Husserlian reflections*. New York, NY: State University of New York Press.

Temporality in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *BABYLON REVISITED* is germane to the understanding of the experience of Charlie Wales as he returns to Paris in search of his own honor, incorporated in his little daughter, Honoria. Nothing else matters to him now. However, Charlie cannot escape his past and in the end, he is doomed to be alone. Fitzgerald aptly uses the word alone, as the last word of this literature to name the doom which is the destiny of Charlie.

The quest of Charlie Wales in this narrative includes his participation in engaging the transformation of his identity. He has a dual identity, a past, in which he is a particularly irresponsible individual and a present in which he is a new man, a responsible person, a father, a widower, a working person, capable of caring for his child. Time has passed and Charlie has participated in the building of his identity in the last two years. His identity incorporates a centrality of his homeland and alienation, his wife, and his child and it incorporates the possibility of an ever changing journey. Time has been engaged in his persona in regard to these three essential qualities of his self. Moreover, time has a fourth dimension, the past, the present, the future, and the ever abiding timelessness, the eternal present that Augustine proposes.

Augustine's concept of time necessarily engages participation. He suggests that we need a medium between things and ideas. The medium must possess the qualities of both things and ideas, and must allow the ascent from one to the other.¹ Describing time, Augustine writes "Time is never all present at once. The past is always driven on by the future, and the future always follows on the heels of the past, and both the past and the future have their beginning and their end in the eternal present. If only men's minds could be seized and held still! They would see how eternity, in which there is no past nor future, determines both past and future time." (Confessions. Book XI. 11261–11262)

Although Charlie Wales does not ascribe to the eternal present, that Augustine claims is central to the meaning of time, his experience, like that of human experience, necessarily engages the presence of time as it exists in the eternal present. Charlie's life in Paris in the 1920s includes a few years which intercept his life. His life in time also intercepts the greater linear existence of humanity. And the temporality which is human life, even the very long existence of life, necessarily intercepts eternity, the eternal present.

F. Scott's tale, *BABYLON REVISITED*, engages the experience of a man remaking himself, renewing his identity, in a temporary existence far from home. The first scene of the story is the Ritz Hotel in Paris, actually the bar, where the American, Charlie Wales is talking to the barman about other expatriates in Paris. Certainly, the lone figure is reminiscent of the very title of the story, *BABYLON REVISITED*. For Fitzgerald knows about the exiled people of God who spent almost three hundred years away from their homeland. The Psalmist sings the sad song that is theirs.

By the streams of Babylon, we sat and wept
When we remembered our homeland.²

Charlie Wales is far from his homeland, certainly reminiscent of the author, Fitzgerald, an American figure of our historical "Lost Generation".³ Fitzgerald experienced living abroad for almost a decade, in a somewhat tumultuous life in Paris. Much like Charlie Wales, Fitzgerald knew the desperate life of alcohol and marital problems. Fitzgerald creates an alter-ego in the person of Charlie. Both men's identity is tied to alienation from their homeland, and of course to their marriages and their families.

Like the depressed exiles living in Babylon almost three thousand years ago, Charlie experiences a time of unspeakable loneliness. Babylon is the metaphor for Paris, and Fitzgerald includes a footnote for the title, calling it a place of "orgiastic decadence." Certainly, as an ancient city/state, Babylon exemplifies wealth and beauty, with its verdant river valleys and hanging gardens. The exiles, Israelites forced from their homeland three thousand years ago, loathe this place, and Charlie Wales now considers his past in Paris as a "nightmare." "How many weeks or months of dissipation to arrive at that condition of utter irresponsibility".⁴ Has time been standing still? Augustine and Husserl, and before them, Parmenades, indeed, recognize that essential medium to temporality, and it is that still moment, or the eternal present. Something is the same in our human affairs. The experience of the idea of Babylon is the same as the experience of the idea of Paris in the psyche of Charlie Wales.

Charlie's future life necessarily includes the presence of his daughter. He begs his sister in law Marian, for Honoria.

"I'm awfully anxious to have a home" he continued, "And I'm awfully anxious to have Honoria in it. I appreciate your taking in Honoria, for her mother's sake, but things have changed now" he hesitated and then continued more forcefully, "changed radically for me."⁵

The transformation of Charlie certainly is basic to his quest for his own honor, which Fitzgerald carefully crafts into the name of Charlie's daughter. In an episode where he takes Honoria to lunch, he watches his daughter and he reflects,

"She was already an individual with a code of her own, and Charlie was more and more absorbed by the desire of putting a little of himself into her before she crystallized utterly. It was hopeless to try to know her in so short a time."⁶

The author undoubtedly incorporates Charlie's identity with that of his daughter. He has this desire of putting a little of himself into her before she crystallized completely. Perhaps his honor is the best reflection of himself. Indeed he has no one else in the world as important as this child. And Charlie also thinks that time is too short for him to achieve his quest. When Augustine, in his *CONFESSIONS* claims that time is never all present at once, he also claims that the past is always driven by the future, and the future always follows upon the heels of the past. He also claims that the past and future have their end in the eternal present. Thus, timelessness is actually the fourth dimension of temporality.

What is happening in this little episode of father and daughter and one identity is the miracle of the still moment. Even if Charlie will not regain custody of Honoria, and she will not take the train with him to Prague where he now lives, there is still that timelessness existing, and this experience in the hotel restaurant is a meaningful moment in time in the experience of Charlie and Honoria.

T.S. Eliot also likes to examine temporality and especially the essential medium in which time exists, that being timelessness, eternity, the eternal present. In *The fifth canto of the Fourth Quartet*, he reflects on the timelessness of history,

What we call the beginning, is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.

The End is where we start from (l 216–219)

and

“A people without history
Is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern
Of timeless moments.” (l 235–237)⁷

For Eliot to say, “history is a pattern of timeless moments,” is actually a reverberation of Augustine, when he claims in his *CONFESSIONS*, “If only men’s minds could be seized and held still! They would see how eternity, in which there is neither past nor future, determines both past and future”.⁸ Although we measure time in a temporal world, days years, decades, centuries, there is the abiding eternal moment, a timelessness that is essential in our existence. Temporality in this Fitzgerald story is focused in measured time, in Charlie’s past and future. However, the story also holds the timeless medium, the eternal moment, that is present in the experience of Charlie as he is defined by his homelessness in a foreign country, by his child who represents his quest for himself, and by his dead wife, Helen, who truly defines his persona.

Charlie’s life with Helen is turbulent, for both individuals were alcoholic and reckless. Helen’s sister, Marian, who now has custody of Honoria, calls Helen’s life a martyrdom. Charlie remembers Helen

“Whom he had loved so until they had senselessly begun to abuse each other’s love, tear it to shreds. On that terrible February night that Marian remembered so vividly, a slow quarrel had gone on for hours. There was the scene at the Florida, and then he attempted to take her home, and then she kissed young Webb at a table, after that there was what she had hysterically said. When he arrived home alone he turned the key in the lock in wild anger. How could he know she would arrive an hour later alone, that there would be a snowstorm in which she wandered about in slippers, too confused to find a taxi?”⁹

This was the beginning of the end for the couple’s relationship. Charlie remembers the reckless party, the alcohol, Helen too drunk to get a taxi, he locking the door against her, the hysterical quarrel at the dinner. Although Helen did not die from the pneumonia from this night of drunkenness, within the year she was dead, and Charlie himself was in an asylum. Thus Marian promised to care for her sister’s child.

It can be noted here that this story, *BABYLON REVISITED* is autobiographical. Fitzgerald recreates himself and his wife Zelda in Charlie and Helen. Zelda, in real life, is confined to the asylum, where she dies. Charlie, like the author is an alcoholic. Actually Fitzgerald creates a “better man” in Charlie, for Charlie can drink one drink and stop. The author could never do that. Also in creating Helen, Fitzgerald creates a reconciled woman, somewhat “sweeter” and consoling than Zelda. Charlie’s dead wife comes back to him in dreams, wearing a white dress.

She said that he was perfectly right about Honoria and that she wanted Honoria to be with him. She said she was glad he was being good and doing better. She said a lot of things, very friendly things, but she was in a swing in a white dress, swinging faster and faster all the time, so that at the end he could not hear clearly all that she said.¹⁰

Now, when Charlie remembers Helen she is sweet and consoling. An angel now, she tells him many friendly things and she is glad to have Honoria with Charlie.

Helen in the past and Helen in the present becomes so important to Charlie, that Fitzgerald uses as the last sentence of the story, "He was absolutely sure Helen wouldn't have wanted him to be so alone."¹¹ Helen is not punishing him. However Charlie feels that Marian, in keeping his child, is punishing him.

The episode that highlights the past and present, the inability of Charles to escape his past, is set on the evening before Charlie will take Honoria home to Prague. He had given the Ritz bartender the address of Lincoln and Helen Peters, where Honoria lives. Charles old friends Duncan Schaefer and Loraine Quarles come to see Charles. They are drunk and create a foolish scene. Helen leaves the living room with Honoria, and that is the end of Charlie's quest.

The drunken companions of Charlie represent Charlie's past that he cannot escape. They appear like ghosts from the past and maintain a presence that highlights the identity of Charlie before his transformation into a different person. Is it possible that time has not passed, that a change has not taken place, that an individual is still the "same old Charlie?"

Here it is good to examine the importance of possibility when we speak of Temporality. Walker Percy likes to consider the possibility which accompanies the idea of catastrophe. Anything can happen, and human destiny is also associated with the central idea of possibility. Charlie Wales can return to his living quarters in Prague with or without his daughter, his honor. He can remember lovingly his dead wife, or he can forget her. Honoria can love her father or she can detest him. In the last paragraph, Charlie refuses a second drink. It is possible that the author could present Charlie as a true alcoholic who could not refuse that second drink. Possibility is infinite.

Fitzgerald created a story in which the past experience of an individual determines the present and the future. He also creates a story in which possibility affects the destiny for the major characters. The very identity of Charlie Wales in the past is different from the person he presently has become. The identity of Charlie is incorporated in the fact that he is not at home. He lives in a foreign country as a member of the "Lost Generation," a community of Americans, artists for the most part, living abroad.

Temporality in this story is intrinsically present in the meaning of the experience of the past and future of Babylon itself, and the characters who inhabit the fiction, *BABYLON REVISITED*. Moreover, the characters, Charley, Honoria, Marian, and the author, F.Scott Fitzgerald, all contribute to the experience of presence in the past and presence in the future, and in the identity that each acquires in living in time.

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NOTES

¹ Augustine, Saint. Confessions. Book XI. 11261–11262. Quoted from *After Modernity – Husserlian reflections*, ed. James Richard Mensch. New York, NY: State University of New York.

² Psalm 137. *The living bible*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

- ³ Tate, Mary Jo. *A critical companion to F. Scott Fitzgerald*. New York, NY. Facts on File. 130. Tate calls this age "The Lost Generation" when Esquire published Stories (December 1939) from the community living abroad.
- ⁴ Fitzgerald. *Babylon Revisited and Other Stories. A scribner classic*, 225. New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Company.
- ⁵ Fitzgerald., p. 219.
- ⁶ Fitzgerald., p. 218.
- ⁷ Eliot, T.S. Little gidding *The complete poems and plays*. New York, NY. Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc.
- ⁸ Augustine, Saint. Quoted in James R. Mensch. p. 27.
- ⁹ Fitzgerald., p. 223.
- ¹⁰ Fitzgerald., p. 224.
- ¹¹ Fitzgerald , p. 230.

ON THE METAPHYSICAL BRUTISHNESS OF LIFE IN
THE LIGHT OF ZOLA'S *THE HUMAN BEAST*

Human life is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.

Hobbes

ABSTRACT

The argumentative framework of this paper unfolds as follows: after an introduction wherein we shall set out the intellectual background of whatever critical approach to life, we shall analyse in the first section of the paper, through the novel mentioned in the title thereof, the idea of an absolute vital drive that we shall call “brutishness” because it gainsays the metaphysical tradition that identifies man, life and reason; according to the import of “brutishness”, a truly philosophical conception of life must be essentially pessimistic regarding the possibility of a would-be total realization of the individual in a world whose ontological and socio-historical complexity is irreducible to the individual’s aims. In the second section, we shall dwell on the bond of brutishness with crime beyond the moral and legal standards that are for punishing the violation of the law but that utterly indifferent to the emotional or psychological process that leads to it, which for a naturalistic conception of literature such as Zola’s is instead fundamental. In the third and final section, we shall figure out how the development of the technical framework of existence, whose universalization was perhaps the most striking cultural phenomenon of the nineteenth-century, strengthens brutishness and works so as the element that rounds off the pessimistic vision of life.

After the Kantian reduction of the reach of knowledge to experience¹ and the consequent impossibility of asserting a rational continuity of the immanency and a would-be *post-mortem* transcendence of life (which was the very kernel of whatever metaphysical conception of existence prior to Kant)² no other philosophical problem was more urgent for the nineteenth-century thought and culture than trying to attain a new foundation for the sense and unity of the vital development in accordance with the understanding of the dynamism of the natural strengths that rule it, which substituted the metaphysical tenet of a divine providence.³ Kant showed, indeed, that the only function for the transcendental subject was the determination of experience,⁴ that nature was not a self-subsistent whole but it hinged upon the rational determination,⁵ and that, consequently, no rational knowledge of an afterlife was possible based on the ontological framework thereof (although it was perfectible sustainable a rational faith in it).⁶ Therefore, the philosophical vision of

life changed dramatically from the end of the eighteenth-century onwards, for it was not only necessary to adequate the vital flow to the rational or subjective regulation of nature but also to the dynamics of culture and history, which together with the study of nature provided philosophy with an expedient to make comprehensible the ideal of a new, almost poetic conception of man,⁷ or, on a different version of this trend, to point out the contradictions of the social development that prevented man from attaining his utmost creative possibilities, as Marx shows doubtlessly better than any other thinker.⁸ At any rate, this optimistic vision in its double version (idealistic of materialistic) was contradicted by other trend of thought, embodied above all by Schopenhauer and somehow by Freud, that resorted to nature and culture too but to emphasise that beyond the subjective determination of scientific experience, man was inexorably under the sway of drives that asserted themselves over everyone independently of the individual intentions and that, to top it all, worked essentially against them.⁹ In accordance with this pessimistic approach, a new metaphysics was developed, not to sustain the link of immanency and transcendence but the narrow scope of reason before the unfathomable nature, which leads to the conclusion that nothing can be more dangerous than the postulation of a limitless felicity as the very aim of life. Thus, there were in the rough two utterly opposite ways for setting out the post-Kantian or rather critical visions of life during the nineteenth-century: either it was supposed that life expressed a dialectical harmony that somehow or other worked for the sake of man (although not precisely for the sake of the individual) even in the absence of a moral framework sustained by a divine intention, or it was on the contrary supposed that life stood for an innermost contradiction that carried away nature and culture and that compelled every living being to suffer under an all-embracing, unavoidable violence that can at best be appeased by means of a *sui generis* resignation or of a symbolical consolation that must be the very aim of art.¹⁰ The common ground of these two opposite solutions was a theory of drives, impulses, instincts and passions whose different formulations were upheld both by philosophers and artists of every kind, although it could be argued that the positive trend was upheld by whom focussed the question from a symbolical plane whereas the pessimistic trend emphasised the slant of the average individual that feels lost in the vortex of natural drives and social values whereof he cannot get out. In other words, the description of life such as it is experienced in the middle of a world that for most people denies whatever possibility of escaping the brutality either of nature or of society was the main aim of a nineteenth-century very critic trend, and Zola's works are an excellent instance thereof because all of them bring to light the stints of the would-be optimistic vision of life and, on the other hand, the hardness of a social world wherein everyone has to vie mercilessly with others and also with machines and artefacts that are for their part props of a system that tramples on the supremacy, if not of man, at least of the individual. Caught among a double-faced contradiction that is brutally universalized by the mechanical framework of production, life is doomed beforehand and independently of the personal circumstances to the worst suffering and aggressiveness, which we shall fathom through *The Human Beast*, a novel where this approach to life attains its roughest expression.¹¹

THE MYTHICAL BRUTISHNESS

Brutishness comes out through two elemental psychological mechanisms: the sudden outburst and the hellish obsession. Let us see the way they work.

The first scene of *The Human Beast* is one of the most striking that had ever been written, a genial literary exploit, for in the course of a few pages we pass from the utmost tenderness of love to the most brutal aggression without the verisimilitude weakening by that; on the contrary, the insanity takes the action by the hand. Roubaud, a forty years old man that works as an assistant station-master in the Le Havre train station, waits for Severine, his wife, to lunch. He adores her, but the fact that she is fifteen years younger than him tantalizes him; furthermore, Severine, despite her youth and curvaceous body, is not as passionate as he would like her to be. When she arrives, she presents him with a knife and they start to lunch. The scene flows as the perfect recreation of a moment of conjugal bliss that anyone would envy. However, a little later he realizes, due to a slip of the tongue of hers, that a snake-shaped ring that Severine always uses was not a present of her mother, as she had told him, but of Grandmorin, one of the presidents of the train company who was a former protector of hers and that also has helped Roubaud to ascend in his job. After a tense cross-examination, Roubaud guesses that Severine was the lover of Grandmorin before marrying him and without further ado he starts to beat her with a brutal rage so that she confesses with every possible detail how the president had sex with her; but what really infuriates him is that he also guesses that she married him just to obey the president's orders, not because she loved him. When Roubaud eventually gets tired of beating her, Severine, who is bleeding and all covered with bruises, remembers in the middle of her commotion that she had already perceived that lurid aspect of her husband beneath the would-be intensity of his love for her:

Without vice, the flesh hardly awoken, in her half-conscience of sweet girl, chaste despite everything, she stared her husband go and come, turn round furiously, as she would have stared a wolf, a being of another species [. . .] What frightened her was to feel the animal, which she had suspected for three years, with its dull growls, now unleashed, furious, and ready to bite.¹²

Unlike the violence of the robber that waylays his victim round the corner or the violence of misery or war that crushes the highest hope and that are one way or another an abstract drive for the very aggressor or for the victim (the robber, for instance, wants money and it is indifferent for him who he will flee, and the people that suffer the atrocities of misery or war attack whomsoever crosses their path without a personal reason), brutishness plays havoc with the sentimental kernel of one's life, as if the sole aim of the aggressor were to tear to pieces the people he is supposed to care for more; the bestial drive is indeed more potent insofar as the bond that is at stake is more important for the aggressor, which is the case of Roubaud, who, despite his loving his wife, punches her with a brutality a lot more repugnant than if he had killed her. For although Othello, for instance, kills Desdemona, he does not thrash her like a madman would thrash one of his kind; even more, he allows her to say her last pray: "I would not kill thy unprepared spirit".¹³ Everyone could at worst understand that a man killed his beloved one when rage blinds him,

but it would from whatever slant be unacceptable that he attacked her as if he were a beast.¹⁴ Thus, brutishness is not like the eruption of a violent grief or anger that cannot be checked anymore but that somehow or other makes the individual to keep a certain self-consciousness (as it occurs with Othello); far from that, brutishness bursts as a reminder of the mythical violence that reigned when everything was subjected to chaos and the most sullen natural potencies were incarnated in those beasts that, although were according to mythology defeated and shut into the deepest bosom of earth, seem to have survived in those predators that give the impression of being fully conscious of the cruelty wherewith they attack, above all when they attack man or when they harm him in any possible way, as if they oddly wanted to revenge themselves on him for his having overcome the horrors of an instinctive world that chains them instead to a territory or to the fatidic cycle of birth, growth, reproduction and death. In essence, the beast such as we make it out has nothing to do with the animal that just like man has to integrate into nature and that even attains a relative balance with its environment¹⁵; instead of that symbolic harmony that some animals, whether predators or not, embody (think of the lion as a symbol of royalty), the beast always exhibits an untameable aggressiveness that makes forcible to keep it captive, which is precisely what stands for the worst condition for man. Brutishness then evinces a disconcerting malignity that is independent of the size or natural conditions of the animal at issue: a rat, for instance, is certainly small but it seems to be seized by an inexhaustible want of harming, of proliferating in the most obnoxious way. Thus, the beast, in the most proper sense of the word, stands for *the risk of backsliding in that sullen tyranny of nature against which man always has fought for all he is worth* and that at any rate seems to harbour in everyone's bosom, since it springs when least expected. And the real effectiveness of the scene that Zola describes lies precisely in how he opposes the tenderness of a passionate love to the sheer destructiveness of brutishness that expresses itself through jealousy and disappointment and, above all, in how the narrator revels in depicting in full detail the *physical ferocity* of the attack: Roubaud punches and kicks Severine savagely and no feeling or moral respect is enough to stop him. But what is more startling in the scene is that the attitude of his is somehow the counterpart of Severine's, who without knowing why, stirs up eagerly the beastliness of her husband as if she wanted him to realize that he was a fool on thinking that she could have loved him. Both characters are so carried away by a drive that, as we have already pointed out, is neither comparable with the abstract violence that so frequently bursts among people nor with that anger that works in the light of reason and that allows to forget and to be reconciled once the outburst is over and that balance has been restored: there is a specific human kind of anger that leads to a better understanding of the situation (although there must be a scapegoat for that), whereas brutishness gainsays that flat and just tries to ride roughshod over whatever ideality that life could possess.¹⁶ It is essentially alien to time and space and has no link with reason, which is why it is imaginable solely through the mythical thralldom of man to nature, as we have already underlined. And the further psychological development of the characters as well as the dramatic unfolding of the plot confirm that the bestial drive asserts itself over everyone and leads the individual to his most grotesque degradation, which is

what occurs to Roubaud, who after having murdered the president Grandmorin with the perhaps plausible reason of taking revenge on him, degenerate more and more and ends up living like a beast:

He listened and, for a moment of lucidity, he was flabbergasted by his having ended up stealing. The phases of the slow demoralization were blurry, he could not recover what the murder had severed from him, he did not explain to himself how another existence, almost another being, had begun, with his marriage destroyed, his wife aloof and hostile. Straightaway, the irreparable seized him and he made a gesture as if to get rid of any importune reflection.¹⁷

Indeed, once love has been annihilated by an outburst of brutishness, grudge is the only possible link between the couple and, on a general plane, among all the characters of the novel, whose respective conflicts makes somehow or other evident a life that is an endless hell, which provides the narration with the causal continuity indispensable to weave all the varieties of brutishness into the plot, taking into account that the relations of the characters as well as the circumstances that make them recognize one another are either illusory or incidental and at any rate never deepen, as Roubaud and Severine show, for they solely share a sentiment really deep (their mutual hatred) after they have destroyed the ideal ground of their marriage. Thus, far from being the exception that probes the rule, they are the symbol of the horrible abstractedness wherein all the characters of the work live: Flore, for instance, hardly has any contact with Phasie, her mother, although they have never quarrelled, they always have lived together and the latter is hopelessly ill; due to the shallowness of their link, it is not surprising that she does not feel anything when Phasie dies, considering moreover that Flore has for her part her own innermost hell: "That was what, certainly, overwhelmed her heart: when there is a great grief, there is no place for another one; her mother had passed away, she saw her there, annihilated, so pale, without being able to feel sad despite his effort to".¹⁸ None can share something really personal because everyone is under a bestial grip that he cannot challenge, although there are evidently ways of handling it so as to make life more bearable and even desirable, as when one is in love with someone and there is a mutual understanding on the surface or a great passion that allows to pretend that one will be happy, as Jacques, the protagonist of the work, imagines on reflecting that he must kill Roubaud so as to be the sole lord and master of Severine:

Was not Roubaud the only hindrance to his happiness? If he were dead, Jacques could marry Severine to whom he loved, he would not hide and he would possess her forever, completely. Withal, he would have money, a fortune. He would abandon his hard work and would for his part become patron in that America whereof he listened how his colleagues speak as a country where the mechanics got a lot of money. His existence there unfolded in a dream: a wife that loved him passionately, millions to win straightaway, a long life, the limitless ambition, everything he wanted.¹⁹

It is not necessary to emphasise the absurdness of this daydream so as to grasp the lurid contradiction perceptible between the idyllic future of love and marital felicity and the want of killing Roubaud as soon as possible, which corroborates that life conceals beneath the utmost ideals a negativity that only someone that always had been subjected to it will find normal or logic. Without splitting hairs, a more conscious person would feel the want of at least considering the crime from a certain

moral slant, but since Jacques is not that kind of person, he passes easily over the moral problem that his daydream implies. Thus, his behaviour, which is the reflect of all the others', allows us to bring to light the utter opposition of the idealistic or rather illusory plane of a life led by a mutual affection and sultriness and the impossibility of accepting the real way of being of others: it would seem that the individuals solely coexist gaily or peacefully when their relationships are mediated by daydream, but that they become unyieldingly foes as soon as they transcend that plane and see one another without the masks that everyone wears in the social dealing, as the reaction of Roubaud after his discovery of Severine's past or the indifference of Flore towards her mother death have proved. And no wonder that things are so, since the danger of an outburst of brutishness grows proportionally to the intimacy that one establishes with someone else, and since even when the circumstances make impossible to attack the people one is with, one can be ready to take revenge on them at the first opportunity, which reminds us of the anecdote of the porcupines that Schopenhauer refers²⁰: when two persons come too close, they end up hurting each other one way or another. Brutishness is not solely then the reminder of a prehistoric thralldom to nature but an unavoidable conflict for beings that like the human ones have such an ephemeral emotional balance and that always make life more difficult than it is on demanding it a welfare that it cannot furnish. And as the novel shows throughout, this disheartening fact is far from being an incidental feature: man always aggresses his congeners when he can do it harmlessly, as it is so evident, on the other hand, in the case of marriage, above all in the case of the marriage that has been concerted on the basis of a love illusion as it happens more often than not in a society when people think that it is enough to sigh for someone so as to be happy with him. But when coexistence erodes the thin layer of illusion, there is no way to prevent the appearance of brutishness, as Zola shows in the second chapter of the work through the depiction of the awful marriage of Phasie and Misard. She is a forty five years old woman who after ten years of living with Misard has lost all her appeal and vigour and looks "embittered and yellowish, continuously quivering".²¹ She does not understand how she could marry "a skinny little man, with the hairs and the beard thin, bleached, with the figure hollow and mean",²² who has forced her to be bored to death in a post of switchman where there are none to speak to, bar the two daughters of hers, who grew up like beasts in the wilderness. Moreover, Phasie suspects that her husband is poisoning her little by little to seize one thousand francs that she inherited from her father a year before and that she has hidden in such a way that her husband never will find them. Due to her suspicions, Phasie lives in a hell and tries to eat and drink the least possible, which is why she is weak and cannot walk anymore, so that she spends her time on a chair, horror-stricken: "despite the stubbornness wherein she isolated herself so as not to share the inheritance, she was secretly in a growing fear of him, the fear of the colossus before the insect by which he is devoured".²³ And that is not all. Some months before, Phasie's younger daughter, Louissette, a young girl that worked as a chambermaid in the house of the sister of the president Grandmorin, had been bestially beaten on her way to her home and had just had time enough to drag herself to the house of a friend in whose arms she had died; some people blamed the

president for the crime but Phasie had no way to throw light on the subject and had to resign herself to bear alone that sorrow, for, as we have just remarked, her other daughter, Flore, a very stalwart, Amazon-like girl, always had been like a stranger to her and was not someone that could offer comfort whatever to her mother.

According to this description of a hellish existence that is on the other hand very common, brutishness is not only that irrational outburst that seizes someone all of a sudden; it is also and mainly the emotional framework of a never ending conflict that is reflected in the obsession and bodily degradation of the people that are, like Phasie, subjected to circumstances that they have no way to reject. For despite the shallow and loud-mouthed tenet of the limitless liberty of the individual and of the poetic consistency of life that have had so great fortune during the Enlightenment and whose contradictoriness was, as a matter of fact, the very locomotive of romanticism,²⁴ Zola's novel reminds us of the fact that most people know liberty or happiness just from hearsay or through those philosophical chimeras that sound very well but are inapplicable to fact, and are utterly convinced that they have no other option than the haplessness they endure. *The impossibility of living otherwise or even of imagining a better life is so the most unsettling outcome of brutishness*, for it leads inexorably to the acceptance of the worst suffering and degradation. Phasie is not precisely a fatalist person and, on the other hand, she is clever enough to know that she could live better away from Misard than beside him; nevertheless, she is caught in an inward, obsessive fight against him and is disposed to die before leaving him so as to show him that he will never find the money, which is for her a kind of revenge on him not so much for the years of poorness and loneliness but for his having made her feel scared stiff all the time. The loss of her self-assurance, which was the very kernel of her life, is for Phasie a lot more devastating than the loss of her beauty or the possible loss of her money, so that she is determined to defeat Misard on the only field where she can do it, which is why she is carried by an ilk of brutishness not so different from Roubaud's or Jacques's or perhaps even more awful, for at least Roubaud discharges his grudge on Severine and Jacques on a future victim, while Phasie discharges it on herself provided that she will defeat someone that to top it all she does not care in the slightest; thereat, when Flore asks her permission to call for a doctor when she is already agonizing, she refuses eagerly, as if she "[. . .] had put the sense of the fight on her not accepting anyone's help, being sure, at least, of the victory, for she would keep the money".²⁵ Phasie's obsession shows that brutishness is indifferent to the harm that the predator or the prey can suffer and that it is preferable to lose everything, life included, provided that one will carry on a drive that leads to the total annihilation, which reminds us of Schopenhauer's description of will as a drive "[. . .] without consciousness".²⁶ The relativeness or rather unimportance of the own person in the middle of a conflict that would otherwise be unimaginable corroborates that the all-embracing potency of brutishness is utterly alien to reason and to the very self-preservation instinct, which is why we have hereinabove opposed Othello's reaction to Roubaud's.

Now, *the double face of brutishness whereon we have so far remarked, the sudden outburst of rage and the lifelong obsession*, is perfectly embodied by the protagonist of the work, Jacques Lantier, a young man that "[. . .] had just turned twenty-six

years old, equally of a large height, very brown, handsome, with a resolute and regular face that the too strong jaws spoil".²⁷ This disproportion between the features and the strength that they manifest is meaningful because it points at the contradiction that tears the character's personality throughout: Jacques is tranquil and even kind on working or in the social intercourse, for he can hide there among the others and not to think of himself, which is what he always is after because of the brutal opposition between his yearnings for enjoying a fully amorous life and, on the other hand, the bestial want of cutting the throat of a woman that he experiments whenever he sees it through a low-necked dress. None would believe that beneath his labour efficiency and kindness, Jacques stands such a terrible conflict, but the sight of a feminine bare throat unsettles him on the spot, and he has solely been able to check himself by avoiding completely intimacy with women. He lives then miserably and that enrages him more, for he is perfectly aware that he could be happy if he were not haunted by such luridness and were compelled to always reject the object of his desire, as he has to do when Flore invites him to go for a stroll in the country. Despite her coarseness and apparent intractability, she is in love with Jacques who, instead, just sees her as the daughter of his godmother, almost a relative that he comes across from time to time. When they are alone, Flore, without suspecting the horrors that shake him inwardly, provokes him while she handles a scissors that she has with her by coincidence in that moment. For his part, Jacques is quivering of terror because he feels how the maddening desire of killing her bites him; Flore, mistaking his attitude for the violence of lust, provokes him more just because of the pleasure of measuring herself with him. When he throws her to the ground, she thinks that he is about to take her and she gives herself up after a momentary resistance. But in that moment Jacques by no means thinks of making love to anyone but of resisting the outburst of brutishness:

He, then, panting, stopped and stared her instead of possessing her. A rage seemed to seize him, a ferocity that made him look around for an arm or a stone, something in short to kill her. His sight found the scissors, shining among the edges of rope; and he took them with one bound and he would have sunken them in that bare throat, between the two white breasts, among the red flowers. But a great cold made him come round, he threw the scissors aside, he ran away, lost; while she, with the eyelids closed, thought that he for his part refused her because she had offered resistance.²⁸

In order to make out Jacques's reaction, it is worth comparing it with Roubaud's: *stricto sensu*, brutishness ravages conscience, so that neither character is any more master of himself before the outburst or the obsession that seizes him; now, the reason why Roubaud is carried away by rage whereas Jacques restrains it and flees lies in the temperament of the character at issue and also in the circumstances wherein he acts: Roubaud is a mature and dominant man whereas Jacques is young and kind; the former is shut up in a narrow room with his wife, whereas the latter is in the middle of the country with the daughter of his godmother, who would blame him for whatever happened to Flore. Thus, the reaction of Jacques is not a conscious choice although it seems so, it is simply the instinctive withdrawal of the predator that smells danger and opts for waiting a better occasion, which reinforces the criticism implicit in the novel and in the trend of thought that it stands for against whatever optimistic approach to life: just like Roubaud's marriage was beforehand

doomed to failure because he was incapable of teaching Severine to love because of his own vital experience and insensibility, Jacques's possibilities of being happy are so too due to the inexorable laws of genetic heredity, since his morbid passion is the outcome of the alcoholism of his forebears. Both characters show in their respective way the impotence of everyone before the irreducible determination of life, which only through the artistic representation allows the individual to get some intensity, although on the plane of real life, he just suffers all that as a curse that he cannot conjure. Neither Roubaud nor Jacques can attain a self-consciousness that gave them the elements indispensable to overcome their stints, so that they just can bear them and try to discharge the brutishness that they spark off on someone else.²⁹

This outright refusal of a material liberty of decision and of the idealization of sorrow is perfectly understandable in the light of the dramatic setting where someone as haunted as Jacques goes on in the hardest possible circumstances, which are no other than the overwhelming power of life that plays havoc with whatever theoretical or axiological determination of the individual; thereat, the better expedient for showing the stints of liberty lies in binding the whole existence to the terrifying tyranny of blood and history that ride roughshod over the conscious liberty of man. Whether he likes it or not, Jacques is fettered to the nefarious history of his stock; he feels all the time the contradiction of his want of living and of his murderous obsession, and he cannot overcome it because he has it in his own blood, so that he has either to suffer alone or to bear it through a substitute pleasure. And the only way that he has discovered to experience in broad daylight that "joy of living" that most people only know by hearsay is to change his train locomotive into a kind of symbol of the woman that he will never be happy with; for him, the locomotive is "an appeasing lover, whereof he only expected welfare".³⁰ But when he does not feel on it the mechanical beat of life or when he is not lost in the middle of the crowd, he has to look for a refuge in the loneliness of the country wherein there is no harm because there is neither company whereof to be afraid: "the great hush, however, the vast loneliness appeased him a little, made him dreaming of a quiet and desert life like this desolated country, where he would go on forever without coming across a soul".³¹ And in this absolute, impenetrable hush, brutishness annihilates the last resistance of the cultural values and the undifferentiated, chaotic mixture of the mythic nature returns.

THE CRIMINAL BRUTISHNESS

In the light of the foregoing, it is perfectly explainable why crime gained a philosophical and cultural relevance at the beginning of the nineteenth-century that would have been unthinkable for the metaphysical and moral tradition that bound substantially man with a transcendent good and that therefore considered by and large evil and concretely crime as contrary to the very human essence.³² It must be taken into account that even Kant considered that there was just a sound proof of the existence of God and that it was of a moral ilk.³³ But since the being of man was grounded on a nature that was no more the symbol of a rational Principle,³⁴ the question of a

criminal trend that despite education and social control demanded to be fulfilled at any cost shed a new light on the complexity of the individual psychology and of the social framework of existence that somehow or other require idealization or at least regulation to work efficaciously together.³⁵ This is the historical and cultural background of the momentous part that crime plays throughout *The Human Beast* and why the narrator dwells so much on the double plane of the question: the psychological motivations of the sundry murderers and the mechanisms of justice. It must be taken into account that in *Thérèse Raquin*, his first novel, Zola had set out minutely the process of the psychological degradation of the protagonists but had not related it to any ontological vision of existence. Such as they appear in that masterwork of youth, Thérèse and Laurent, the adulterous lovers that kill Camille, the husband of hers, so as to be free to love each other and that once the crime has been committed fall into the clutches of a morbid guilt that ends up leading them to the mutual hatred and eventually to the self-punishment of the crime, are two feeble-minded subjects that cannot stand what they have done because the love that was their justification solely was the ephemeral exaltation of lust, cupidity and boredom:

Hatred had to come perforce. They had loved each other like beasts, with a hot, fully bloody passion; later on, among the dejection of the crime, their love had become fear, and they had experienced a kind of physical terror for their kisses; now, before the sufferings that marriage and life in common imposed on them, they were rough on each other and revolted against themselves.³⁶

It is needless to say that although the hallucinations and mental unbalance of the lovers are comprehensible through the idea of the sullen power of blood over conscience and reason (which goes hand-in-hand with the idea of an inexhaustible brutishness), the hell that they share is exclusively psychological, not mythical, and stands for the guilt that crushes the murderers. From this slant, the novel describes a moral and mental unsettlement and nothing more, whereby it is not necessary to resort to a mythical or rather metaphysical conception of the vital drive such as the one that we have figured out in the precedent section and that is instead axial in the ideological and dramatic framework of *The Human Beast*, wherein the two elementary forms of brutishness, i.e., the uncontrollable outburst and the poisonous obsession, take turns with a maddening vertiginousness that carries all the characters to their respective wretchedness without suggesting in the least, nonetheless, the idea of a moral punishment such as the one that appears in *Thérèse Raquin*. The moral dimension of crime makes way so for the mythical configuration thereof, since (and this fact is doubtlessly decisive) no character exhibits in the work a psychological depth that is worth for the narrator to dwell on, which is perfectly explainable because the characters are with no exception average people that only have a very elementary emotional framework: Roubaud is a middle-aged man that has a shallow, illusory experience of love and that only can express the brutality of whom does not care for anyone else, Severine is a young woman that has been abused from her early years and has not had either opportunity to unfold her feelings, Flore is a girl whose drabness is interrupted by savages outbursts, etc.; even Jacques, by far the character with more psychological nuances of all, always moves on the same contradiction of desire of living and desire of killing, whereby there

is not too much to say of his psyche. Instead, the field wherein the work makes up for this lack of psychological diversity is the dramatic one, where the actions and the tensions of the characters are so vivid that the plot unfolds practically with no solution of continuity thanks to the extraordinary series of turns that it takes in order to display the lurid possibilities of brutishness, which gets an extraordinary concreteness because it acts through the individual temperament, as we have seen on remarking on Roubaud's and Jacques's so different way of reaction before the frenzy that seizes them. It is in a word the temperament of each character as a whole, not the subtleties of behaviour, what furnishes the reader with the general principle to understand how the characters act and how they are mercilessly carried away by life instead of leading it as everyone is normally supposed to do, subjectivist tenet that in the light of the work evinces its groundlessness.³⁷

The outwardness or rather unconsciousness of the vital dynamism is perceptible from the very configuration of the individual character as a mechanical outcome of the mixture of a universal mythic drive and some particular social circumstances. Let us take Severine as an instance. She marries Roubaud because he stands in her eyes for a possibility of escaping her sexual servitude to the president Grandmorin, and although she gets on with him from the onset and until the brutal hiding that he gives her, she never finds pleasure, let alone love with him, due above all to his being a coarse man that in spite of his good intentions does not know how to treat a young girl; after the crime of Grandmorin, wherein she is the accomplice of his without her understanding at bottom why, Severine experiences a growing loathing of him and feels somehow justified on starting to seek for a new sentimental life with someone else, concretely with Jacques; of course, she ignores that the latter is a lot more dangerous than her husband. Jacques, at any rate, stirs up in her a love passion that she had not experienced before:

She loved for the first time and she did not surrender precisely because that would have spoiled her want of being straightaway of him the same way that she had been of the other two. Her unconscious desire was to prolong forever and ever this so delicious sensation of becoming completely young as before her blemish, of having a good boyfriend, as when one is fifteen years old and one kisses behind the doors.³⁸

This return of her lost ingenuousness changes however very soon into sheer lust when in the middle of the darkness and a few steps from her own house, she takes the initiative and drags Jacques to her arms so that he possesses her on the floor of the train station. She surrenders with that urgency of whom has dreamt of pleasure for a long time and is afraid of losing it, whereas the satisfaction that Jacques expresses once the act is over is more due to his having enjoyed without having to smash her crane with a hammer that is nearby than to her caresses: "she was his without any fight, without the instinctive want of throwing her on her back, dead, like a prey that one wrests from others".³⁹ Thus, their first coupling shows that there will be not a real identification between them bar the very elementary one required for the intercourse itself, and the tremendous dramatism of the scene hinges entirely on the risk that Severine runs of being murdered at any moment, not on a mutual acknowledgement, which confirms the psychological outwardness that in accordance with our approach rules the narrative throughout, which is simultaneously grotesque and

touching because it stands for the narrow sensibility of two individuals that, contrary to what the shallow vital optimism states, have no opportunities to conjure the misery, mistreatments and (in the case of Jacques) madness that always have haunted them. Therefore, it is not so surprising that Severine, instead of getting rid of the horrors of her youth through the discovery of love, puts them into practice and searches for revenging on her husband, which shows that her love has nothing to do with the discovery of a new way of being, which is comprehensible since it was besmirched from the onset by the want of seducing Jacques lest he should denounce her for the crime of Grandmorin that he witnessed by a well-nigh unbelievable coincidence. Withal, more than the capacity of changing the vital framework, what she discovers with Jacques is the sheer sensuousness that neither Grandmorin nor Roubaud had been able to arouse in her: “the creature of love, simply mild in other times, loved at this hour and gave herself up with no reserve and had a burning experience of pleasure”.⁴⁰ That is why she links love or rather passion with the worst aspect of hers, the irrational grudge against Roubaud, whom she considers the sole hindrance to the happiness that she enjoys with Jacques, all the more after her having *motu proprio* told him how she helped her husband to kill Grandmorin. Thus, beyond the confession and the passion and the illusory future bliss, there is no real intimacy between them, and Jacques always feels that she is a stranger to him: “Jacques found her impenetrable now, groundless, from that black depth whereof she spoke. However much he embraced her, he did not come into her”.⁴¹ And the blackness wherein he perceives her and that is an unmistakable symbol of the all-embracing brutishness that reigns among all the characters, compels her to put forward to him that he kills her husband: just like she has been the accomplice of Roubaud in a murder, she can be the accomplice of Jacques in other, with all the more reason since his having kept silence during the inquiries about the death of Grandmorin makes him somehow an accomplice of the own Severine. Thereby, the sole essential bond between them is neither love nor passion but murder and madness.

I want to underline that this outwardness goes hand-in-hand with the objective misery of every kind that everyone suffers in the novel, which strengthens the part that brutishness plays as the sole ground for coexistence and explains why all the characters cling so obsessively to one another even when that is tantamount to bear all the time a lurid conflict or the very risk of death, which is what happens with Severine and Jacques and, on a plane not so different from theirs, with Phasie and Misard. As we have seen before, Phasie does not care at all to be killed and even seems to wish it wholeheartedly provided that she will punish her husband. And the worst is that she is right on suspecting Misard of poisoning her, which is the condition *sine qua non* for the revenge wherein Phasie delights beforehand, although that means that the chain of horrors will go on indefinitely, which is what Misard for his part feels and accepts willingly, for that represents for him the possibility of keeping his endless fight against his wife, whose beauty and strength he destroyed because they did not match the brutishness that crushed him. Thus, as soon as Phasie is dead and Flore goes to a near village to report the decease, he seizes the opportunity to search the house throughout after the money and reflects on how he killed Phasie like a parasite:

To begin with, he cut tranquilly a piece of bread, for he felt empty, since he had not dined [the night before] because of that unending agony. Some attacks of cough stopped him, bent down in two, he himself half-death, so skinny, so sickly, with his lifeless eyes and his bleaches hairs, and it did not seem that he were to enjoy his victory for a long time. It did not matter, he had devoured her, this charming, this large and beautiful woman, just like the insect devours the oak: she was lying on her back, death, reduced to nothing, whereas he still lasted.⁴²

We have already said that, from a psychological slant, brutishness pounces directly on conscience, which is why there is no way for reconsidering the own behaviour: the evildoer is indifferent to his crime, which sinks into oblivion as if it never had taken place. Unlike the usual psychological explanation of the emotional link of guilt and repentance, which presupposes the aprioristic continuity of conscience through time and the consequent possibility or rather obligation of facing up to what one has done (as it happens in *Thérèse Raquin*, just to restrain the reference to Zola's work),⁴³ the phenomenon that we are figuring out evinces that someone subjected to any kind of misery or unending mistreatment lives and acts unconsciously most of the time and that what is usually called "the sense of life" or rather "the moral sense of life" is an euphemism for a blurry image whose impossible fulfilment explains for its part the coldness wherewith some people can commit the worst crimes and go on as though it had not happened anything at all or, on the contrary, the bitterness that overwhelms them when their plans are thwarted and whereby they are so eagerly ready to take revenge on everyone.⁴⁴ The brutishness can be expressed then either through indifference or through bitterness but in either case it prevents the individual from understanding life, which is evident above all in the so obvious framework of obsession, since although the individual grasps clearly the way he behaves and knows that it will ruin him, he sustains it within the mythic temporality that obsession itself has previously traced. Hume said that "reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them",⁴⁵ but he forgot to emphasise that the most violent and regressive passions (whereof brutishness is the worst) overthrow conscience whether in an outburst or through a vital framework that bereaves the individual of the capacity of reacting to anything beyond his immediate or most elemental bodily wants (which is the case of Misard) or that encloses him in an endless inward fight (which is the case of Phasie). Whether it is because of misery or of obsession, the outcome is the same: the individual cannot overcome its conflict and consequently he never repents of anything he has done and falls more and more into the clutches of madness: for someone that is in the middle of emotional forces whose comprehension is beyond his reach, the sole option seems to be crushed by wretchedness, which implies that, contrary to the rationalistic tradition that goes back to Socrates and that upholds the supremacy and substantial continuity of conscience (tradition that oddly enough was firstly questioned by the thought of a great rationalist thinker, i.e., Spinoza),⁴⁶ the latter is, as we have just pointed out, for strengthening the conflict through an obsessive repentance.⁴⁷ And the cause thereof is alien to the individual, who repeats time and again the behaviour that will eventually destroy him and the others, which confirms that the real sense of this phenomenon lies in the annihilation of the very humanity of the individual, that is to

say, of his would-be capacity for making a choice on behalf of rational values. For what is here at stake is no other thing than the possibility of liberty that brutishness gainsays outright, and the sole way for understanding that is to resort to a mythic chaotic nature, to an unavoidable fate or to an original sin, which in the light of the outcome are one and the same.⁴⁸

Before such a gloomy panorama of the human impotence, the only remedy at hand seems to be the ideals and values that tradition upholds and that not only allow the individual to resist the powerful need of regression but that are at best supposed to help him to overcome it once and for all, which is what philosophy, religion and by and large culture have from their very onset been after. To tame the beast, that is to say, the tendency to a mythical cruelty that compels everyone to tyrannize and crush the others and himself is indeed the common aim of whatever kind of emotional or moral discipline, and philosophy has as much as religion emphasised the potency of the individual possesses to act according to his farsightedness. But in the light of the vital strengths as they show in *The Human Beast* throughout, all the remedies of philosophy and morals are rather meaningless words that are for increasing the contradictions wherein the individual goes on, not for making him more conscious. After all, Schopenhauer, the most out-and-out critic of the moral ideality, was right on affirming the impotence of everyone face to that all-embracing and blind drive that he so meaningfully called "will".⁴⁹ Thereat, when that drive is figured out not from a metaphysical standpoint such as Schopenhauer's treatise's but from a dramatic setting such as Zola's novel's, the violence wherewith will acts explains why it must expressed like that ominous brutishness that culture has tried to eradicate but that returns time and again among beings as limited as the ones that we have so far analysed, who, to top it all, are far from being the exception that proves the rule; on the contrary, all of them are average individuals that one can come across round the corner or, which is a lot worse, through the own image that is reflected on a mirror. Independently of crime and physical violence, what Zola describes must so be understood as a possibility close at hand even for the most normal people, and that the horror that Jacques experiences when he perceives his own want of murdering is similar to the horror that everyone experiences before his particular stints and evil tendencies, which are perhaps not as dramatic as the character's but keep with them some resemblance.⁵⁰ In other words, the difference among the sundry species of brutishness is just quantitative, not qualitative, so that the image of a boy tantalizing cruelly a bird is in essence the sheer reflect of a man doing the same with one of his fellowmen, which seems to be absurd just because we pay attention to the content of the image, not to its formal intentionality, which is nevertheless one and the same, no matter how much that is irrational and loathsome in the eyes of anyone. Moreover, this universal brutishness, which is the truly metaphysical feature of existence, runs parallel to the outwardness of the sentimental bonds that we have already mentioned: the individual that lacks the formative tools that despite their final ineffectiveness are for sublimating the bestial drive, reaches crime sooner than later even when he tries consciously to resist it, which is what occurs to Jacques, who always is on the brink of murdering Severine and escapes the risk by the skin of his teeth, so to speak, until the

fatidic moment when he is waiting together with her the arrival of Roubaud so as to murder him.

In order to grasp how Jacques finally yields to temptation, it is necessary to consider the dramatic setting wherein he is. On the one hand, the state of mind of the character: he is very troubled because he is convalescing of a terrible train accident that Flore brought about to take revenge on him for his having preferred Severine; withal, he has just heard of the death of Phasie, his godmother, and of the own Flore, who has tilted at a train like a madwoman. Jacques is then more aware than ever of how brutishness threatens everyone and concretely him. On the other hand, he has been recovering in the house where Grandmorin abused Severine for years and that bequeathed her as an ilk of compensation, which is then a sinister symbol of the crime that has been the thread of all the narrative⁵¹; withal, the house is a few steps away from the site of the accident, which was on the track whereon Jacques worked, and from the house of Phasie (where the corpse of hers and Flore's are still exposed while Misard seeks the house throughout uselessly after the money that Phasie concealed); which is more important, both Severine and Jacques have got to feel that their passion will not last as much as they had believed in the middle of their exaltation, and that is at bottom due to a simple fact: Jacques was not able to kill Roubaud the night when Severine and him had waylaid him in a nook of the train station, although Jacques had a knife with him and it would have been very easy to plunge it in the other's throat. Nonetheless, while he saw how Roubaud went directly up to them so that he well-nigh run into them, Jacques had oddly enough felt that the murder of him was senseless because "[...] he lacked the instinctive want of biting, of jumping over the prey, the hunger or the passion for tearing it to pieces",⁵² so that he had let Roubaud pass along without his noticing the danger that he had escaped. That night, Jacques had understood that what excited him was not murder as such but the murder of a woman, above all of one that were enjoying with him, just like Severine did all the time. He wanted to identify the utmost pleasure with an unpremeditated murder, whereas the crime that put his conscience at stake through a careful plan, with all the more reason in the case of Roubaud, who he did not care at all, scared him, which corroborates the absolute dissimilitude between the bestial outburst and the premeditated murder. As we have showed, although brutishness allows man to keep a minimum consciousness whereof he is doing, it changes the ideality of life into a symbol of a mythic conflict that should be solved at once, which would could be deemed tragic if it were not by the utter absence of the symbolic overcoming wherewith tragedy makes up instead for the sacrifice of the scapegoat. We have already seen that no character evolves psychologically through the novel, and although all of them experience passions and bales that should in principle have metamorphosed them one way or another, they remain impassive while everything around them crumbles. Not even Severine, who is supposed to have discovered a new sense of life with Jacques, is eventually able of changing inwardly, which, of course, does not mean that she should be better but that she should live better and forget the grudge that she bears her husband. At bottom, if she really had loved Jacques the way she says it, she would have elope with him to America and both of them would have be free from their past. But due to the

circular conception of time that rules whatever mythic vision of existence,⁵³ they are fettered to a cyclic strength that they cannot flee.

The scene of the murder corroborates the genius of Zola on narrating how everyone gropes most of the time under the overwhelming pressure of drives, wants and would-be ideas hardly understood, which from a phenomenological slant means that the consciousness remains in a haze that only in certain moments dissipates to show the meaninglessness of vital ideals. When Roubaud is just some minutes off and Severine and Jacques are imagining feverishly how he is going to meet them, she starts to fear that he will not be able to do murder her husband, which will compel them to separate, for their union would be absurd before the reiterated failure of Jacques. Thus, she leaps out of bed and stark naked lights a lamp so as to excite Jacques with her caresses, but instead of making him feel dauntless, the sight of her white throat shakes him up. She, mistaking his shivers with fear of the murder, presses herself against him more eagerly and tries to lead him downstairs in order to pounce on Roubaud as soon as he comes in the house. For his part, Jacques feels how it seizes him the mythic rage of men against women that has become darker and darker through history and that he cannot resist anymore because he has already grasped the knife wherewith he was supposedly going to kill Roubaud, and stabs Severine directly on the throat, while she gets to perceive the movement of his hand and only has time enough to cry wide-eyed: "why? Why?" But when Jacques sees how her blood gushes out and how her sight fixes forever the horror that has been her last impression of existence, he goes into ecstasy:

He listened a beast's pant, a wild boar's howl, a lion's roar; and he calmed down, for it was him who gasped. At last! At last! He was happy, he had murdered! Yes, he had done it. An unbridled joy, an enormous pleasure raised him, in the full satisfaction of the everlasting desire. He experienced a surprise of pride, an exaltation of his sovereignty of man. He had killed the woman; he had possessed her the way he wanted to possess her after so much time, completely, to annihilate her. She was no more; she would be no more of anyone else. And a sharp remembrance awaked him, the one of the other murdered one, the corpse of the president Grandmorin, which he had seen that terrible night, five meters off there.⁵⁴

The way brutishness rides roughshod over the feeble drive of love cannot be more outright, which shows that for average people such as the characters of the novel whatever sentimental identification is not much more than an illusion in the worst sense of the word or also a euphemism to dissimulate the bestial drive of lust. At any rate, these two senses coincide in the case of Severine and Jacques, who never overcame the elemental outwardness of coexistence and went on like people do when there is no other option within their reach, which by no means implies that Severine had not been important for Jacques or vice versa; but that importance was determined by the general abstraction of an existence that flows through the contradictions of drives and stimuli that never get a conscious shape. Thereat, it is not surprising the exaltation of Jacques before the corpse of the woman that he was supposed to be in love with and how he vindicates the memory of a prehistoric grudge that always has haunted him. Solely when a noise of the floorboards downstairs makes him come round and see what he has done, he feels horrified but that does not prevent him from searching the door to escape unnoticed in the middle of the night.

THE TECHNICAL BRUTISHNESS

A feature that singularizes *The Human Beast* among the host of nineteenth-century works wherein somehow or other evil plays havoc with the metaphysical idealization of existence (which could even be considered the main aim of the whole modern literature)⁵⁵ is the way it contests the progressive conception of history that the epoch upheld (which had attained its utmost intellectual expression at the onset of the century, in Hegel's thought)⁵⁶ through the presentation of an all-embracing drive that instead of being appeased by the socio-social development was, oddly enough, reinforced by it, since the manifold manifestations of progress dispensed with the metaphysical framework according to which the function that everyone had to carry out in society had until then been made out; unlike the natural determination that always had compelled man to accept whatever had fallen to his lot, the modern individual whose universalization took place during the nineteenth-century assumes that he is absolutely free by principle although he had been born destitute, and that consequently he can improve his status as much as he strives to do it and, which is a lot more worrisome, that he can do whatever he likes for there is no moral law above his will; this perverted vision of an absolute self-rule goes hand-in-hand with the idea of a material progress that will sprawl welfare all over the world, and the unity of theirs appears negatively in Zola's novel just to evince that the natural brutishness of man becomes extremely dangerous in a time when life evolves in those teeming cities that are connected one another by tracks, where the very idea of an inescapable guilt is absurd because the individual conscience is enfeebled by the dizzy rhythm of the everyday activities and the multiplicity of distractions that prevent everyone from having to face what he is doing, which is what occurs with Severine, with Jacques and with the rest of the characters of the novel, who move from Paris to Le Havre and vice versa in the hustle and bustle that never ends and that allow them to live so shallowly and fast that even the bloody murder of the beloved one can be considered an exciting experience with no other moral sense than the fulfilment of a longed-for wish. Thus, this terrible nonchalance of the average modern individual regarding the final sense of his own actions is the direct outcome of the creed of progress and universal freedom that unsettles more often than not the people that have neither critical tools nor historical framework to deal with the complexity of Modernity and that reproduce willy-nilly the mythic powerlessness of man before nature, which means that everyone lives subjected to the innermost violence whereas society disarticulates and life loses its sense; what is worse, the unsettledness of the dweller of the modern hectic cities is just the inverted image of the excruciating boredom that the people that live in the would-be idyllic realm of nature have to endure. Thus, whether in a vertiginous wagon or in the dusty atmosphere of the dwellings that shake when the train passes next to them, the so-called "progress" has not been for overcoming the sway that nature holds on existence but to make it uncontrollable through the rampant subjectivism, and the vindication of modern culture is just a daydream for whom has to live in the cyclic isolation that is the common lot, as Phasie thinks in a certain moment on opposing the harshness of her situation to the apparent freedom of the people that use the trains:

That seemed funny to her, to live lost at the end of this desert, without anyone to trust, when, by day or by night, continuously, so much men and women passed, in the thunderbolt of the trains that shake the house and ran by full tilt; the whole earth passed very surely there, not only French people, also the strangers, the people that have come from the most far-off countries, for nobody could nowadays be in his home and every people, as it was said, would very soon be just one and the same. That was the progress, all men brothers, running together, over there, towards a never-never land.⁵⁷

This image of a universal brotherhood whereto everyone would spontaneously aspire is brutally gainsaid by the circumstances that Phasie and all the characters experience, everyone obsessed by hatred or haunted by fear, whereby, as we have just remarked, it is not so different to be in the city or in the country if one has at any rate to endure the same chaotic aggressiveness or its inescapable counterpart, the drabness of a life whose greatest pleasure lies in being permanently narcotized, so as not to feel the insurmountable isolation. Man has doubtlessly attained an amazing degree of self-consciousness that agrees with the ground of the technical framework of modern culture through that inversion that Kant called the “Copernican revolution”,⁵⁸ but that does not mean that he had overcome in the least the natural violence that subdues every living being; still more, he has just interiorized that violence through the development of a thought that far from having broken with the mythic chaos, acts upon a socio-cultural reality that has loosened the tight control that the ancient society exerted over everyone and makes easier to give rein to the wildest tendencies, which is what all the characters of the novel do. All men can be brothers thanks to the system of communication and production, yes, but it must be taken into account that the worst grudges grow precisely among the brothers that on trying to get free from the tyranny of their father end up fighting one another more fiercely, as those prehistoric foes that come back in the nightmarish outbursts and obsessions that devastate in an instant the most solid bonds and that explain why Jacques can flee without the slightest remorse after having so brutally murdered Severine. He is of course tantalized by his obsession, but that has nothing to do with a real conscience, and that is why he can without further ado change the horror that one would have expected before such an atrocity into an ecstasy deeper than anyone he had experienced with Severine; at any rate, neither the obsession nor the crime make him realize what he has done or the possible transcendence that it could have for the rest of his life; he goes on after the crime as fresh as a daisy and he attends the trial of Cabuche, a simple peasant that had been the friend in whose arms Louissette had died after having raped and beaten by Grandmorin and who has been charged with the murder of Severine, as if that did not mean anything at all for him:

He was going to give evidence as a stranger, like a stranger or innocent person; he had not after the crime had the slightest quiver, he did not dream of those things, his memory was abolished, the organs in a state of balance, of perfect health; even there, in that bar, he had neither remorse nor scruples; he was in an absolute thoughtlessness.⁵⁹

This awful image matches the indifference wherewith Jacques interprets his own existence within the social and vital machinery that works more efficiently when the personal intentions are suppressed, justly because the aim thereof is not the integration of the individual consciousness but its submission to the mechanical abstractedness of production. Jacques revolted against an obsession that prevented

him from being like anyone else and the sole thing that he got was suffering and unbalance, although after his killing Severine, he felt better than never before, to the extent of taking a new lover, Philomena, a woman that did not lure him too much but with whom he discovered that he was completely cured of his murderous obsession: they have been able to be together without his experiencing the want of stabbing her to death, so that he did not must feign a tranquillity that he actually felt and that not even his knowing that Cabuche had unfairly been sentenced to hard labours for life would have trouble. He acts so like someone for whom conscience or moral responsibility were merely words with a conventional sense and coexistence were another aspect of the insurmountable isolation that compels everyone to go on as if he were lost in that desert next to the railways where Phasie lived and that was a lot more unbearable because of the ceaseless passage of the trains that stood apparently for the progress and happiness that there is no way to get despite the illusions. The world of possibilities that the technical improvements has put within reach of man is for covering the senselessness of life and the individual heartlessness that the ideals of every ilk had concealed for centuries, which the would-be modern liberation of individual consciousness compels oddly enough to see in broad daylight, although the average individual refuses to do it and tries to make up for that with a permanent movement and excitement that the modern technology allows him to experience and that was symbolized for the nineteenth-century by the train better than by any other machine. The train represented in itself an illusory freedom that dispensed with a real personal attitude and that on the other part agreed with the ideological functioning of a socio-political framework that was supposed to reinforce the individual consciousness but that contradicted it at bottom because it was ruled by the selfishness and the greediness that everyone could express after the fall of the metaphysical ideality of existence, since, for instance, the institutions that should have made sure that the laws were observed, worked instead in the service of the most vulgar interests, which is evident in the novel throughout by means of the representatives of power that, like Grandmorin, get honours and sinecures and that flaunt their respectability when the fact is that they are brigands disguised as respectable citizens. For instance, Camy-Lamotte, the civil servant that has in his hands the unchallengeable evidence of the culpability of Roubaud and Severine, the letter that she wrote to Grandmorin so that he joined her on the train to Le Havre, makes the decision of hiding it because he thinks that if the guilty couple were brought to trial for the murder of the former protector of hers, it would come to light the whole truth concerning the corruption of someone that had received the cross of the Legion of Honour and that was considered a badge of respectability, which would harm even more the image of the government in a moment when the political situation made forcible to keep it as clean as possible. Justice, then, must be set aside, and Camy-Lamotte makes the effort to convince Denizet, the examining magistrate that is in charge of the case, that Roubaud and Severine cannot be guilty and that the best for everyone is to shelve the issue. For his part, Denizet, who has all his life sighed for participating of the high spheres of the judiciary system and that, withal, thinks wrongly that the murderer is Cabuche, is ready to yield to the pressure of someone that, like Camy-Lamotte, enjoys the position that he himself desires so

much. Thus, the political corruption accrues to the basest conventionality, which is all the more absurd because it favours people whose culpability is perfectly manifest and because it punishes instead someone that is utterly innocent: although Cabuche escapes by the skin of his teeth the sentence that Denizet had already prepared, he is eventually sentenced by the murder of Severine, for Roubaud and Misard discover him with the bloody corpse of hers that he had uselessly tried to revive, whereas Jacques, the actual murderer, is remorseless and gets rid of his anxiousness as if by magic. The judiciary system is then not only subjected to corruption but to the most extreme foolishness of the judges that are incapable of administering justice because they did not care it at all and only want to make secure their position within the promotion list, which is why Denizet yields to Camy-Lamotte:

And he, who had not believed himself to be corrupt, brought up in the tradition of this honest and mediocre magistracy, yielded straightaway to a simple hope, to a vague engagement that the administration seemed to promise him. The judiciary function was nothing more than a job like any other, and he dragged the ball of the advancement, as a hungry solicitor, always ready to yield beneath the orders of power.⁶⁰

The transcendental nexus of conscience and existence vanishes so among the dullness of the average individual, which can be expressed through cynicism or through conventionalism and that at any rate rides roughshod over the false unity of life and ideal fulfilment that the tradition so eagerly upheld and that Modernity somehow or other vindicated on considering the possibility of identifying a critical consciousness with a socio-cultural determination, which is nevertheless a vacuous tenet in the light of the preposterous dramatism that has not contributed at all to the moral improvement of man, let alone to a rational vision of existence.⁶¹ Thereby, the fact that Cabuche is unfairly sentenced for a crime that he did not commit whereas Jacques does not arouse suspicion whatever although everyone knows that he was the lover of Severine and that could therefore be more logical that he killed her for he could have a sounder reason for that, is just another sample of the absurdness of the modern optimism regarding the natural goodness of man that furnish the ground both of democracy and personal self-rule but that at the end solely works within an abstract conception of justice and responsibility. What is worse, since Jacques is not really wicked and is simply carried away with a drive that he himself hardly understands, none can blame his crime on him and although he gets his deserts at the end (as we shall see straightaway), that does not stand for justice but for an accidental complication that would have been averted if he had been a little more sensible.⁶²

Thus, before the lack of a culturally ideal sense of life and before, above all, the concomitant possibility of murdering with no consequence in a socio-political system as rarefied as the one that the novel shows, the true metaphysical feature of existence seems to lie in the sinister productiveness and efficiency of the own system that is articulated through machines that make everything easier (including murder in the first place) and convey everyone all the world over, giving so the illusion that everyone can flee even the worst crime since he can reconfigure his route at will. The train changes into the inverted image of the ancient fate that against whatever verisimilitude or probability comes to meet everyone in the middle of the most tedious routine and that seizes everyone when least expected, which is what occurs

to the characters of the novel that are mean people that keep a dull existence but that all of a sudden have to face the violence of a progress that goes beyond the limited capacity of understanding of them. From this slant, the dynamism of the whole process appears like a manifestation of the mythical brutishness, and not because it supplants a would-be naturalness but because it makes feasible to act senselessly or unconsciously. The technical framework of modern existence, together with the ineluctable biological determination that is expressed through phobias or obsessions, explains why, for instance, Jacques is a murderer by nature whose extremely atrophied conscience allows him to pass over his having murdered the woman he cared for or, on the other hand, why he embodies symbolically his narrow sentimentality in the locomotive that he drives and wherewith he gets the only intimacy that he manages to experience. Ironically, he does not feel anything that is worth living with Severine despite the ardour of their passion and the crime itself, whereas he feels at his ease with his locomotive, which he calls Lison as if it were that lover that he has uselessly tried to find in a woman:

And it was true, he loved his locomotive amorously after four years of driving it [. . .] Some people said that it started with so much easiness due to the excellent brake of the wheels and above all to the perfect assembly of the slide valve [. . .] But he knew that there was something else, for other locomotives, equally made, set up with the same care, did not show any of its qualities. There was the soul, the mystery of the fabrication, this something that the chance of the hammering adds to the metal, that the dexterity of the assembler communicates to the pieces: the personality of the machine, the life.⁶³

This preposterous life that Jacques perceives in his locomotive confirms that the true metaphysical feature of modern culture for someone caught in the abstractedness of a technical world such like the character lies in the complex functioning of the machines that make everyone feel wishes and nourish hopes that would have been unimaginable in a vision of life grounded on the sole sway of nature. The technical complexity does not belie so the all-embracing potency of brutishness, on the contrary, it is for universalizing it on dispensing with the metaphysical unity of conscious action and practical consequence⁶⁴: one can murder his beloved one and accept as though it were nothing at all that someone else is blamed for that, provided that the functioning of the whole mechanism goes on, for it represents the sole kind of life that one can experience. Thus, the moral groundlessness matches the shallowness of the average individual, who ends up behaving as if he for his part were nothing more than a piece of the machine that must work efficiently, which, of course, does not mean either that the machine had bereft him of his real creativeness or personal depth since, on the contrary, the machine serves as the medium to express all the brutishness that should otherwise be aimed against oneself, which shows that oddly enough the machine works in a way very similar to the ancient ideals that were for checking the essential brutishness of nature: as a matter of fact, ideals such as the moral ones gave sense to a vital strength that always threatened to overflow, which is not so different from the functioning of the machines that give also a sense to a life that would be very violent or very boring without the former. The risk, of course, in this case is that the expedient ends up seizing the control of the process, which is moreover well-nigh inevitable if the operator himself is immersed in the passional dynamism of existence and has no critical consciousness, which is

the case of Jacques and of most people, who never are able to see life at a distance and crumble before the onslaught thereof. Thereat, the machine, which is in principle for coping with the brutishness of existence, makes harder or rather impossible to overcome it, just like the ancient ideals did on demanding a spirituality that the average individual was utterly incapable of experiencing.

This regulated unsettlement that the machine universalizes, takes place through two processes that seem to contradict each other but that are at bottom complementary: the machine is more above all for dealing with brutishness efficiently, which in the circumstances of the novel means that it must bring about as much harm and pain as possible, as it occurs when Flore, after her having realized that Jacques will never love her because he has an affair with Severine, and mistaking that for the real sentiment that she also would like to experience, makes the decision of taking revenge on both of them: since she cannot be happy, none will be. She has observed that Severine always travels in the first wagon of the train that Jacques drives from Le Havre to Paris so as to spend the night there with him; she then thinks of causing an accident devastating enough to make sure that Severine will be dead on the spot, and although she is aware that that implicates the death of a lot of innocent people, she does not care about it: "in the selfishness of her vengeance, she never saw but the two mutilated corpses without worrying about the people, the crowd of the world that had passed unknown before her, during years and years".⁶⁵ Thus, in the most intensely dramatic passage of the novel, a masterpiece of narrative, Flore puts the cart of Cabuche, which is loaded with two enormous blocks of stone, on the track immediately after a bend and compels the five horses to stand while she listens how the train approaches, revelling in her hatred, and in the last moment before the crash she sees that Jacques's sight is fixed on hers and that he has understood everything while he tries desperately to stop the Lison, whose first seven wagons pile up because of the frightening impact. But what Flore does not know is that Severine had not got a ticket for the first wagon and that she travelled on the end of the train, whereby she does not suffer harm whatever, so that she gets off the train and starts to seek Jacques among the smoke, the cries of pain and anguish, the mutilated corpses and the wounded persons that are scattered all over the spot, who are nevertheless meaningless for Flore, who remains astounded until all of a sudden she comes round and sees the magnitude of her crime:

That was done, that was right, and there was nothing in her but the relief of a want, without pity whatever for the harm of the others, which she did not even see. But when she recognized Severine, her eyes opened disproportionately, and a shadow of horrible suffering darkened her pale face: she was alive, this woman, whereas he was certainly dead! In this piercing sorrow of her murdered love, this stab that she has plunged in her own heart, she was brusquely aware of the abomination of her crime. She had done that, she had murdered him, she had murdered everyone! A great cry tore her throat; she twisted her arms and ran crazily.⁶⁶

The machine allows so to multiply the reach of the evil drive, to make it diabolically efficacious, to change what is an individual conflict into a brutal slaughter, which is why the technical framework does not only stand for a mythic potency that after all required man to deploy but for a possibility that at worst can dispense with the very existence of the operator, for the system can do everything for itself.

In other words, the machine reveals the unheard-of meaninglessness of existence that makes conceivable to do without man and that furthermore endows whomever with a lurid potency to harm, which is why “the human beast”, stops being the symbol of a particular degeneration and changes ominously into the figure of the human as such in a time when, as we have just said, everyone can dispense with the moral or rather rational justification of his own behaviour, as Jacques and Flore evince better than any other character: he murders and sees how an innocent is sentenced for that, whereas Flore slaughters the passengers as though it were nothing at all, which is frightening because Jacques and Flore stand for that common people that pullulate in whatever modern city and that, contrary to what the shallow social romanticism supposes, are cruel and vindictive, a condition that the host of machines and apparatuses reinforces instead of attenuating: Jacques solely experiences an odd kind of intimacy and relative welfare on the Lison, the locomotive that also helps Flore to carry out her hatred in a way that implicates the devastation of the whole world at scale: she is ready to sacrifice the life of everyone provided that she will take revenge on Severine for something that to top it all the latter did not even committed; the utter senselessness of murdering someone for the sheer fact of existing is not however a hindrance for Flore, since she has at hand the tool to hit, the machine that accrues so to a new experience of brutishness that goes beyond the limited mythical framework that is manifested through the outburst or the obsession and that rather aims at a way of being that assimilates man to a gearing that works with no other end than working the most possible time: it is true that Flore is as obsessed with Jacques as her mother with Misard, but what differentiates her attitude from Phasie’s is that she implicates the whole world in her vengeance and that she resorts to a technical expedient instead of a merely psychological one. This is then something quite different from the personal involvement of someone with a foe that he wants to crush whether with reason or without it, and the worst is that the ominous drive multiplies its destructive potency thanks to the machine. Unlike the outburst of Roubaud (wherewith the chain of horrors that the work unfolds begins and that is explainable to a some extent because of the link of his with Severine), the outburst of Flore has an abstract import that appals because it is very similar to the indifference of Jacques regarding the murder of Severine; at bottom, the two crimes are the outcome of a bestial or amoral conception of existence that goes hand-in-hand with the nihilist functioning of the judiciary system and of the whole ideality of the cultural values that are stark ineffective for living. As a matter of fact, unlike what happened in the ancient society, wherein it was necessary to be a powerful person so as to harm on a great scale, in a social world wherein the machines and artefacts are within reach for everyone even the most deprived person can bring about a terrible devastation through one of those technical devices that are supposed to be for making life more comfortable but that arouse in everyone a *sui generis* brutishness simply because the operator of the machine or the people that can in a moment use it are carried away by a maddening dynamism that they do not understand. The distance between potency and effectiveness has practically disappeared and that is why the process of devastation can go on unconsciously, as by itself, for the machine has seized the very consciousness of everyone.

This automatic, never-ending functioning stands for the second process through which the machine brings about and regulates a new kind of brutishness that does not even require the participation of man because it has a life of its own that man cannot destroy for, contrary to his, does not unfold through consciousness but through technical efficaciousness. The death of the machine is at bottom the death of an individual link with it, which is why it does not affect the machine itself but the individual that without it is not able to share anything with others, which is what Jacques realizes when after his having come round and in the middle of terrible pains he solely has eyes for the Lison that lies some metres off, whereas he does not recognize either Severine or Flore, who lean over him and cry desperately. But he does not care that, for he knows that the real ground of his life is not Severine's love but the Lison's mechanical easiness:

She, the Lison, he knew her well, and she reminded him of everything, the two stones laid across the track, the abominable jolt, that crushing that he had felt both in her and in him, from which he would resuscitate whereas she [. . .] was dead. And the heap of iron, of steel and of copper, that she left there, this wound colossus, with her cloven trunk, her scattered limbs, her crushed organs, set in broad daylight, had the horrible sadness of a human corpse, enormous, of a whole world that had been living and wherefrom life had just been torn away in the middle of suffering.⁶⁷

The feeling that this passage expresses is quite meaningful: despite its lifelessness, the locomotive keeps a mysterious intimacy with Jacques, so that he can feel the commotion that she experiences before the crash, and that is not a metaphorical expression, at least not for him. Phenomenologically, then, the consciousness is one and the same for both of them, since Jacques is together with the locomotive and vice versa, whereby he, who does not experience the least remorse on murdering Severine or on seeing how Cabuche pays for the crime, feels instead the overwhelming sorrow of losing a being that is not an individual among others, let alone a tool that one could set aside or substitute for a better one, but the image of the world itself, wherefore it is understandable that he heeds more the locomotive than Severine herself, for after all she is just a woman among others, whereas the Lison is unique, which is not a wild idea of the character but the token of a new technical integration of the human existence that culminates in the total self-rule of the machine and that for the individual stands for the loss of the possibility of communicating with others and above all with himself, whereof the best proof is the reaction of Jacques, who at the end of his recovery murders Severine as if the so-called "death" of the Lison had bereft him of the relative emotional balance that allowed him to check his murderous obsession. Without the machine that carries everyone to and fro ceaselessly, which is the sole link among people that would otherwise be utter alien one another and that in a deeper sense is the sole link of everyone with himself (as Jacques evinces), life becomes unbearable and it is useless to go on pretending a normality that is on the other hand absurd in the light of the unsettlement that everyone somehow or other reveals. The machine is so the medium to uncover the falseness of the ideals that are supposed to rule the individual and the social life, to realize who one really is behind the feeble mesh of consciousness that so easily brutishness tears. Thereat, just like Jacques eventually carries out what he always had wanted to carry out, Flore, before her impotence to

destroy the would-be happiness of Jacques and Severine, decides to run away and to kill herself, which stands for the consummation of the brutishness that has haunted her all her life and that despite her love illusions has crushed her. And the expedient for that cannot be other than the train that independently of the individual perception is always one and the same, a drive that carries away everyone whether one wants it or not and that arouses in everyone the uncheckable desire of exerting that terrible potency that it exerts:

[...] She perceived in the distance the lantern of the express, similar to a little star, twinkling alone on the depth of the sky of ink [...] And the train had just entered the tunnel, the frightening howling approaching, shaking the earth with the rush of a storm, while the star changed into an enormous eye, always growing larger, springing as from the orbit of darkness [...] And in the awful crash, in the embrace, she even straightened up as if carried away by a last rebelliousness of fighter, for she has wanted to stop the colossus and to beat it. Her head had directly hit the lantern, which went off.⁶⁸

With her death, Flore makes evident the powerlessness of individual before the all-embracing strength of the machine that tramples on the very instinct of survival and with all the more reason on reason, whereof the lantern whose light goes off can be considered a symbol; after violence and crime, the only thing that matters in a time when mythical brutishness goes hand-in-hand with selfishness and a mechanical vision of existence lies in exerting as much strength as the machine exerts independently of the unbalance that it brings about or of the human cost that it implies, which confirms that although the machine can by no means be considered the direct cause of the whole process of unsettlement and that it on the contrary contributes to the doubtless understanding of reality and to the comfort of man, the fact is that in view of the permanent stress that the would-be progress sparks off in the average individual, it stands in the end for an abstract conception of the own existence for it works stark unconsciously, at least on an elementary level that is enough to slaughter.⁶⁹ Thereat, it is not surprising that when Flore's corpse is carried to the house where Phasie's also lays and where Misard strives to find the money of his victim, it has been re-established the traffic of the trains that convey to and fro anonymous passengers whose life is as absurd as Flore's: "the trains passed inexorably, with their absolute mechanic potency, indifferent and unaware of these dramas and of these crimes".⁷⁰ Instead of overcoming the brutishness of a socio-personal framework that compels everyone to act with the least possible consciousness and that reduces the diversity of vital aims to an operative level that despite its sophistication is the reverse of the suffocating instinctive conditioning that nature imposes on every living being, so that everyone lives in the middle of the incontestable material progress as if he were in a prehistoric jungle perpetually sunken in a semidarkness.⁷¹ On the level of the individual, historical progress and technical improvement sounds like those empty metaphysical ideals that Modernity has left behind but that try time and again to recuperate their preponderance on culture. Therefore, Flore's and Jacques's crimes are the outcome of a naturalistic conception of existence that works unconsciously and ravages the weak mental and emotional defences of the individual, which is why she commits suicide the way she does it and he decides to have an affair with the Philomena, the lover of his fireman and partner Pecqueux, wherewith he destroys by someone that he did not even

like a job collaboration that had until then been excellent and that is moreover axial for him since he works directly with Pecqueux. But carried away by the fatidic, brutish indifference that is his main drive, he does not care that, whereby the tension between the two men grows harsher and harsher until it eventually explodes: one night, when they are driving a train full of soldiers that go to the war against Germany, Pecqueux, who is very drunken, starts to quarrel with Jacques and in a certain moment thrusts him so as to hurtle him out from the train, but Jacques gets to seize him by the neck and both of them fall; the wheels of the train tear them into pieces and even so their mutilated corpses, headless and limbless, remain closed embraced as if they wanted to pursue their fight after death.

This last frightening image agrees with the final description of the train that keeps running in the middle of the night without driver while the soldiers that it carries to the front and to their death sing and get drunk in a maddening excitation that reveals how the machines end up reproducing *ad infinitum* that diabolic frenzy that seeks at all costs the annihilation of the rationality that has released man from the darkest, subterranean forces of nature, which thanks to the technical developments recover their sway over everyone and ride roughshod over the ideals and values that make life worth living despite the horrors of all kind that everyone must strive to overcome in a socio-historical world that belies, however, the sense of that effort:

What did they matter the victims that the machine ran over on its way! Did it not go towards future, unconcerned to the blood shed? With no driver, in the middle of darkness, like a blind and deaf beast that someone had hurled among death, it ran, it ran, loaded with this cannon fodder, with these soldiers, already brutalized by weariness, and drunken, who sang.⁷²

Vale.

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NOTES

¹ de Gruyter, Walter. 1968. Prolegomena to any future metaphysics. In ed. Kants Werke, vol. IV, 316–317. Berlin: Sciences Academy.

² In fact, it is very meaningful that the platonic *republic* (614b and ff.) ends with the exposition of a myth of the supernatural destiny of soul after death, as if the socio-political order of life must be grounded on the metaphysical conception of the individual existence. Regarding Plato's theory of the relevance of immortality for kenning the total sense of life, cfr. my article "Los Dos Paradigmas de la Identidad Entre Filosofía y Muerte a la Luz de la Interpretación Platónica de la Muerte de Sócrates" [The Two Paradigms of the Identity of Philosophy and Death in the Light of the Platonic Interpretation of Socrates's Death] in *Miradas Sobre la Muerte. Aproximaciones desde la Literatura, la Filosofía y el Psicoanálisis*, eds. Alberto Constante, and Leticia Flores Farfán. Mexico City: UNAM/Itaca, 2008, pp. 237–257.

³ Concerning this, vide my article "A life beyond Go(o)d: A criticism of wisdom and the foundation of a poetic conception of life based in Goethe's Faust" in Tymieniecka, Anna-Teresa, ed. 2005. *The enigma of good and evil: The moral sentiment in literature. Analecta Husserliana LXXXV*, 749–785. Dordrecht: Springer.

⁴ *Critique of pure reason* (A 380), passim.

⁵ *Ibid.*, A 505.

⁶ *Critique of practical reason*, A266.

⁷ Regarding this, vide my article “Enlightenment, Humanization and Beauty in the Light of Schiller’s *Letters on the aesthetic education of man*” in Tymieniecka, Anna-Teresa. ed. 2008. *Virtues and passions in literature. excellence, courage, engagements, wisdom, fulfilment*, 171–198. Dordrecht: Springer.

⁸ Vide above all “Human Requirements and Division of Labour under the Rule of Private Property” in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* that are published on line in <http://www.marxists.org/archives/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/needs.htm>.

⁹ As far as I know, the most striking expositions of this trend of thought are respectively the fourth book of Schopenhauer’s *The world as will and representation* and Freud’s *civilization and its discontents*. It is true, by the by, that Freud’s major works were produced during the twentieth-century, but the seminal problems that he faced belong to the nineteenth-century thought or episteme.

¹⁰ Throughout *The birth of tragedy out of the spirit of music*, Nietzsche reminds us of this feature on speaking of the need of “conciliate” the Dionysian and the Apollonian drives, although his positive conception of both of them (despite the horrors that Greek tragedy depicts throughout) keeps his posture away from the essential negativity of brutishness such as we try to delineate here, which are more akin to Schopenhauer’s conception of will.

¹¹ The edition of the work that I shall handle is: *La Bête Humaine*, Paris: Pocket, 1991, Eds. Marie Thérèse Ligot and Gérard Gengembre (Classiques, 6062). There is an excellent new English translation by Roger Pearson, with an introduction that provides the socio-cultural setting of Zola’s work and a very sensible analysis thereof. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

¹² *Ibid.*, I, pp. 49–50.

¹³ *Othello, the Moor of Venice*, Act V, Scene II, v. 31.

¹⁴ Let us remember that although don José stabs Carmen at the end of the opera because she has confessed that she does not love him anymore, he appears like a poor scrub that even deserves an odd pity, which would be unthinkable in the case that we now try to describe.

¹⁵ For a philosophical exposition of the concept of “animal”, cfr. Tymieniecka, Anna-Teresa. 2009. *The fullness of the logos in the key of life, Book I: The case of god in the new enlightenment, Analecta Husserliana*, vol. C, **Chapter 7**, p. 83 and ff. Dordrecht: Springer.

¹⁶ This explains why the phenomenon at issue cannot be considered tragic in the most proper sense of the word, namely, as the possibility of overcoming the darkest sides of nature. Vide Steiner, George. 1984. *Antigones.*, 60. New York, NY: Rorchardt.

¹⁷ *The human beast*, IX, p. 284.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, X, p. 316.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, IX, p. 301.

²⁰ *Parerga and paralipomena*, II, paragraph 396.

²¹ *The human beast*, II, p. 61.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 62.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

²⁴ Vide Berlin, Isaiah. 1965. *The roots of romanticism*. Washington, DC: NGA, cc. II and III.

²⁵ *The human beast*, X, p. 316.

²⁶ Payne, E.F.J. Trans. 1966. *The world as will and representation*, vol. 2, 201. New York, NY: Dover.

²⁷ *The human beast*, II, p. 59.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 76–77.

²⁹ This is why Terry Eagleton, among some other authors, rejects eagerly whatever “metaphysical” or “aesthetic” theory of existence or history and demands a critical approach to the contradictoriness thereof beyond the falsification of a symbolic grief. Vide his book *Sweet violence. The idea of the tragic*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003, p. 23 and ff.

³⁰ *The human beast*, II, p. 80.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

³² On this, vide my article “On the Fourfold Ontology of Evil Throughout Western Tradition and its Final Disappearance in the Present Time”, which was published in the book mentioned in the footnote 3, pp. 317–363.

³³ *Critique of practic reason*, A223 y ss.

³⁴ According to Nietzsche, this identification of the human being with a transcendent moral principle, which can be considered the very kernel of metaphysics, was an upshot of the criticisable influence of

Socrates, who reduced the plethora of vital drives to the unsound pretension of a substantial conception of the individual (*The Birth of Tragedy*, section 12 and “The Problem of Socrates” in *Twilight of the Idols*).

³⁵ I deal with this subject in my article “An Enquiry Concerning the Dialectics of Personality and its Practical Consequences” in Tymieniecka, Anna-Teresa. ed. 2006. *Logos of phenomenology and phenomenology of the logos. Book two. The human condition in-the-unity-of-everything-there-is-Alive. Individuation, Self, Person, Self-Determination, Freedom, Necessity*, 61–89. Dordrecht: Springer.

³⁶ *Thérèse Raquin*, ed. Robert Abirached, Folio Classiques 1116. Paris: Gallimard, 1979, c. XXVIII, p. 251.

³⁷ It is very meaningful that this so-called tenet has been so decidedly criticised by thinkers of the most variegated ilk such as Spinoza (above all in the fourth book of the *Ethics*) and Schopenhauer (in the already mentioned second and fourth books of *The world as will and representation*). The common ground for these criticisms is a non substantial theory of the human individuality, which Spinoza interprets as a simple mode of reality and Schopenhauer as a sheer appearance.

³⁸ *The human beast*, VI, p. 198.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, VIII, p. 253.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

⁴² *Ibid.*, X, p. 312.

⁴³ Concerning this, the obvious reference always be Dostoevsky, whose *Brothers Karamasov* and *Crime and Punishment* are indisputably the masterpieces of the psychological analysis of guilt and of the dramatic possibility of moral redemption through the acknowledgement of the own crimes.

⁴⁴ Perhaps the best philosophical analysis of how the terrible potency of grudge acts upon life beneath the disguise of moral ideals appears in Nietzsche’s work, concretely in the third treatise of *The Genealogy of Morals*, where the author unmasks the so-called sanctity of the asceticism and, withal, discovers its influence in the modern world that has apparently broken with Christianity.

⁴⁵ Norton, David Fate, and Norton Mary J. ed. 2000. *A treatise on human nature*, book 2, part 3, paragraph 4, 266. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁴⁶ Spinoza criticises consistently throughout the *Ethics* the idea of a substantial conception of individuality, and although he admit the possibility for the wise men of attaining a certain “eternal” way of being, that by no means would agree with the individuality but with the being of God. Vide the scholium of the proposition XXXIV, book V.

⁴⁷ Idea that Nietzsche criticises in *Daybreak*, where he sets out the want of having not only new morals ideals but a new, unheard-of vision of life.

⁴⁸ Concerning this, vide my article “Sobre la Invención Agustiniana de la Interioridad y la Reducción de lo Constante, Alberto, and Farfán, Leticia Flores. eds. 2006. *Ético a lo Psicológico y Moral. In Imprescindibles de la Ética y la Política (Siglo V A.C.—Siglo XIX D.C.)*, 83–106. Mexico City: UNAM.

⁴⁹ For the intellectual process that led to the meaning of this concept, vide the [chapter 11](#) of the fascinating book by Rudolf Safranski entitled *Schopenhauer and the wild years of philosophy*, Trad. Ewald Osers. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991, p. 205 and ff.

⁵⁰ As a matter of fact, it was Kant who considered that the very notion of evil was simply the heteronomy of the will, the incapacity of ruling the personal behaviour by the sheer force of reason. Vide the first treatise of *Religion within the limits of reason alone*.

⁵¹ In her remarks on the work, the editor Marie Thérèse Ligot says that the name of the place where the house is, la Croix-de-Maufras, means Croix-de-Maux feras (The Cross-of-the-Evil-that-you-will-do) (*The human beast*, preface, 7). Independently of the soundness of such interpretation, it is doubtless Zola’s intention of charging the place with a symbolic evil influence on the characters.

⁵² *Ibid.*, IX, p. 308.

⁵³ Vide Eliade, Mircea. 1969. *Le Mythe de l’Éternel Retour*, Folio Essais, 120. Paris: Gallimard, c. I. It is needless to say that Nietzsche’s interpretation of the issue would assert precisely the contrary regarding the ineluctable reiteration of a behaviour [vide Arthur C. Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher* (New York: Columbia University Press), c. 7], but for making comprehensible that it would be necessary a ontology of time quite other than the one that rules *The human beast*.

⁵⁴ *The human beast*, XI, pp. 373–374.

⁵⁵ I refer again to the article of mine mentioned in the note 32, concretely to the pages 337 and ff.

⁵⁶ The most brilliant and deep philosophical exposition of this appears in the chapter I of Hegel's 1975. *Lectures on the philosophy of the world history*, ed. Duncan Forbes, trans. H. B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁵⁷ *The human beast*, II, pp. 65–66.

⁵⁸ *Critique of pure reason*, BXVI.

⁵⁹ *The human beast*, XII, p. 401.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, V, p. 165.

⁶¹ Which is precisely what Nietzsche denounces his work throughout, above all in his critic of the moral conscience such as Christianity conceives it. Vide the “Third Section: The Religious Being” of *Beyond good and evil*.

⁶² With this I contradict the interpretation of the character as someone that suffers the opposition of culture and nature such as Roger Pearson says in his already quoted introduction to the novel (p. xxii–xxiii).

⁶³ *The human beast*, V, p. 177.

⁶⁴ This is perhaps what Heidegger considered an inescapable historical fate in texts like “The Question Concerning Technology” or “The Turn” and why he thought that the problem that technology implies for the understanding of human being goes beyond the so-called isolation of the individual. Concerning this, vide my article “De la Dimensión Sociocultural de la Técnica” in Xolocotzi, Ángel, and Gomina, Célida. eds. 2009. *La Técnica, ¿Orden o Desmesura?* 225–235. Puebla: BUAP/VR.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, X, p. 325.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 331–332.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 337–338.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 344–345.

⁶⁹ As much as I know, no other work has unfathomed this issue better than Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, for the author shows there that the imposition of a never-ending productivity breaks with the rather discontinuous rhythm of the pre-modern society.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 346.

⁷¹ This image of an inward mythic jungle that resists all the efforts of the individual to change it into an habitable dwelling has been used by Henry James in what can be considered his finest short story, which I have analysed in my essay “On the Distinction of Tragedy and Bathos Through the Perusal of Henry James's *The Beast in the Jungle*” in Tymieniecka, Anna-Teresa. ed. 2007. *Temporality in life as seen through literature. contributions to phenomenology of life. Analecta Husserliana LXXXVI*, 187–207. Dordrecht: Springer.

⁷² *The human beast*, XII, p. 412.

“MAIS PERSONNE NE PARAÎSSAIT COMPRENDRE”
 (“BUT NO ONE SEEMED TO UNDERSTAND”):
 ATHEISM, NIHILISM, AND HERMENEUTICS
 IN ALBERT CAMUS’ *L’ÉTRANGER*/THE STRANGER

ABSTRACT

Meursault, the protagonist in Albert Camus’ *The Stranger*, is a peculiar man with provocative views that invite intense philosophical debate. On the one hand, he believes that the reflective life is not worth pursuing, he rejects the sacrifice of Jesus, he denies the existence of God, and he asserts that life is not worth the trouble of living it. On the other hand, as a condemned murderer awaiting execution, he seems to find the inner peace to accept the alleged indifference of things. In doing so, Meursault becomes for some readers not only a literary protagonist but also an existentialist hero, that is, someone whose thoughts and actions are deemed worthy of admiration and emulation: a modern Sisyphus, a rebel with a cause, a courageous man who lives a meaningless life and dies a happy death. With Meursault, thus the reading, Camus has created a figure whose firm view that ‘life is absurd’ gets established as philosophically defensible and even as intellectually respectable. In this paper, I challenge this interpretation by suggesting that there is a sustainable reading of *The Stranger* according to which, far from endorsing Meursault’s absurdist worldview, Camus inspires the readers to rise to a level of reflection higher than that of Meursault, from which his views can be critically regarded, judiciously examined, and ultimately rejected as philosophically inadequate. More precisely, I suggest that there is a tenable explication of *The Stranger* according to which Camus is not defending Meursault’s absurdist worldview but reducing it to the absurd. Yet, in proposing that it is possible to understand Meursault differently from how he does himself, I am not speculating that understanding *The Stranger* depends on understanding Camus better than he did himself, for example, by retrieving his original intent in creating his chief character. To the contrary, my focus is on the possible hermeneutical effect of the text on the readers and on their potential hermeneutical responses to it. Yet I do concede that my reading also amounts to an attempt to understand Meursault differently from the way in which Camus apparently did.

INTRODUCTION: UNDERSTANDING “THE DEVIL’S DILEMMA”
 OF CAMUS’ *THE STRANGER*

To begin with,¹ I address “the devil’s dilemma” of Albert Camus’ *The Stranger*.² It is this: *either* God exists, I believe in God, and my life has meaning, *or* God does not exist, I do not believe in God, and my life has no meaning. The Jewish-Christian

variation on the same theme is this: *either* I accept Jesus Christ's self-sacrifice as the solution to the problem of my guilt and my salvation is assured, *or* I do not accept Jesus Christ's self-sacrifice as the solution to the problem of my guilt and my damnation is certain. This is "the devil's dilemma" because, although it is often advanced by believers to get non-believers to believe, it is "the work of the devil" in the sense that it misses a crucial possibility in the debate about the relationship between theism and nihilism. This oversight plays into the hands of those who equate atheism with nihilism, that is, those who would argue that not to believe in God is to believe in nothing.

There is clear evidence in Camus' *The Stranger* that the examining magistrate (2.1.10–12), the prosecutor (2.3.19, 2.4.5), and the prison chaplain (2.5.11–24) all believe that, because Meursault is an atheist—or, thus the magistrate, "monsieur l'Antéchrist" (2.1.13)—he must also be a nihilist. The idea, then, is that atheism entails nihilism. Yet Meursault too conveys the impression that "the devil's dilemma" is a given and that the readers have no other alternatives. For example, he says that he does not like Sundays (the Christian day of worship) (1.2.4), that he does not accept Christ (2.1.10–13), and that he does not believe in God (2.5.13–26). These statements are foundational to his assertion that life cannot be understood as "rational" (2.5.3–4, 2.5.8) but must be accepted as "absurd" (2.5.25). So Meursault is also complicit in narrowing down the reflective possibilities by suggesting that atheism entails absurdism.

The problem is that, as soon as one critically examines the traditional divine command theories of ethics that have been embraced by such authoritative thinkers as Augustine and Aquinas ('what is right, is right because God wills it, and what is wrong, is wrong because God wills it not': this view is ubiquitous in *Civitas Dei* and *Summa theologica*),³ it becomes seriously questionable whether morality does indeed rest on religion.⁴ So Meursault can disagree with 'the authorities' about whether to believe in God or Christ, but he may agree with them that the only alternative is the absurdist option, for he appears to acquiesce in the part of their narrative according to which one who does not accept Christ or does not believe in God cannot live a meaningful life (2.1.11). Yet why should the readers follow Meursault by assuming that human life is absurd because God does not exist or because Jesus died in vain? Meursault may think that he rejects Christian theism, and he does believe that he is the victim of a grave miscarriage of justice, but his whole worldview is deeply mired in the unreflective acceptance of a primordial "guilt" that is not based on the fact that a human being has done anything wrong but for which all human beings have been "condemned" (1.1.5, 1.2.2, 1.3.11, 1.4.5, 2.1.10–11, 2.3.15, 2.4.1, 2.4.4–5, 2.4.10, 2.5.8, 2.5.15, 2.5.18, 2.5.25).

Yet there is a third possibility here. It is just that Meursault does not seem to see it, and the other characters do not seem to enable him to see it. Now it would be a fallacy to assume that, because the characters in the novel did not see it, neither did the author of the novel, nor should its readers. There is no necessity in such an inference, and there is a lot of gratuity. Therefore the only charitable interpretation, that is, the only reading that does not unnecessarily posit irrationality where there may be none, is to assume that, in not letting Meursault or 'the authorities' recognize the possibility of a meaningful human life without God or Christ, Camus was—if

not by intent, then in effect—issuing a challenge to the readers to grasp what the protagonist and his persecutors did not. Thus this aspect of the novel has nothing to do with the author's intent but everything to do with the readers' responses. It is a matter of the effect of the novel on the readers, regardless of what the author had in mind in writing it.

In fact, the Hobson's choice presented above is not exhaustive because there is a third way that is viable. As atheistic existentialists long before Camus, and, first and foremost, Nietzsche, recognized, the notion that it is the existence of God that makes human existence meaningful is an insidious form of nihilism.⁵ From this perspective, it is precisely because "God is dead" that human beings can and must take the question about the meaning of human existence into their own hands.⁶ In this sense, "existentialism" is the position that human life does not make sense due to some God-given content (as in theistic essentialism), but rather that human beings must make human lives make sense by performing meaning-bestowing human activities. Thus a meaningful life is not a divine gift but a human achievement.⁷ Hence it is a religious form of nihilism to suggest that, if God does not exist, then human existence is rendered meaningless. In no case is the divine demise a blank check for moral permissiveness. Even Nietzsche's Zarathustra does not think that, "if God is dead, then all is permitted" (Ivan Karamazov), but rather that, because God is dead, human beings must take responsibility, especially moral responsibility, for human existence.⁸ In addition, within the horizon of phenomenological existentialism, human existents *constitute* the meanings of human existences, since existence is, in each and every case, the existence of an existent, so that being, conscience, and death, for example, are always and everywhere the being, the conscience, and the death of a concrete particular instance of *Dasein*.⁹ Christian existentialism, for example, that of Kierkegaard, is another matter for another essay.¹⁰ The same holds for Camus' own vexed connection to existentialism.¹¹

On the present reading, then, the strength of Camus' *The Stranger* is not at all that it exhorts the readers to embrace Meursault's celebration of the alleged absurdity of life, but rather that it challenges them to dig to a far deeper level of reflection than that of which Meursault is capable. Thus the readers should ask themselves: Is that all there is? And, above all, skeptically bracketing judgment on the apathetic approach adamantly adopted by Meursault: How can anyone possibly make a difference in an allegedly indifferent world by responding to that indifference with a studious and stubborn indifference? It is self-evident that the idiotic Meursault is not comparable to the heroic Sisyphus, since for Meursault it does not and cannot matter whether the stone is up the hill or down.¹² Still, although Monsieur Meursault cannot have found it, there may indeed be a "way out" (1.1.27, 2.2.17).

HERMENEUTICS I: TRYING TO UNDERSTAND MEURSAULT AS HE DOES HIMSELF

The basic plot of *The Stranger* is easily sketched: Meursault's mother ("Maman") has died and he attends her wake and funeral in a somnambulant state of emotional indifference and taciturn recalcitrance. The next day, Meursault spontaneously

decides to go swimming in the sea, where he bumps into Marie, a former secretary from his office, with whom he then enjoys an intimate encounter. The next week, Meursault runs into Raymond, a neighbor who is rumored to be a pimp and whom he helps by writing a letter intended to entice his allegedly unfaithful mistress, an unnamed Arab, into a situation in which Raymond schemes to punish her severely. A few days later, Raymond beats the woman badly, the police detain him, and Meursault testifies on his behalf. A few days after that, Marie asks Meursault to marry her, but he responds apathetically. The next weekend, while Meursault, Marie, and Raymond are visiting friends of Raymond at the beach, the Arab woman's brother and another Arab man follow them, three altercations between European and Arab males ensue, and Meursault ends up killing "the Arab" ("l'Arabe": 1.6.24–25) by first shooting him once and then pumping four more bullets into him as he lies on the beach.

In court custody, Meursault faces an examining magistrate who urges him to acknowledge Christ's sacrifice and to beg God's forgiveness for his crime, as well as a defense lawyer who is more interested in his insensitivity at his mother's funeral than in his actions at the scene of the crime. Marie visits Meursault in prison; he misses her badly, and reflects nostalgically on the painful loss of his intimate life. At the trial, the prosecutor aggressively examines witnesses to argue implausibly but convincingly that the defendant is guilty of premeditated murder because 'he buried his mother with a criminal heart'. The vacillating defense lawyer is helpless against the determined prosecutor, who harshly characterizes the hapless Meursault as 'a moral monster devoid of a human soul', so that the jury quickly finds him guilty of premeditated murder and the judge swiftly sentences him to death by public decapitation. Waiting in his cell for an unlikely appeal and a likely execution, Meursault shouts at the prison chaplain that 'nothing matters' because 'life is absurd', but then calms down and opens up to "the gentle indifference of the world" ("la tendre indifférence du monde": 2.5.26).

Thus Meursault's way of life is both simple and complicated. Before his crime, he leads a life of immediacy-cum-sensuosity (1.2.1–11), "insensitivity" ("insensibilité": 2.1.4, 2.4.2, 2.4.5), and "indifference": he works, swims, loves, eats, drinks, smokes, sleeps (often when awake), all of which activities he experiences without any interest in any higher or deeper or wider questions (the formula "cela ne signifiait rien" varies but is ubiquitous: 1.1.1–2, 1.1.13, 1.1.17, 1.2.2, 1.2.11, 1.4.3, 1.4.5, 1.5.3–4, 1.6.20, 2.3.3, 2.5.10, 2.5.23, 2.5.25–26). He is "a taciturn and withdrawn character" ("un caractère taciturne et renfermé": 1.1.4, 1.4.3, 1.5.4, 2.1.4, 2.1.8, 2.3.14, 2.3.16–17), and has difficulty understanding those who talk a lot or get emotional (1.5.4–5, 2.1.10–11, 2.4.5, 2.5.23). He says that he has "a nature such that [his] physical needs often get in the way of [his] feelings" ("une nature telle que mes besoins physiques dérangent souvent mes sentiments": 2.1.4), which is a fact that is evident both at the funeral of his mother (1.1.26) and at his killing of the Arab (1.6.25). It is as if Camus designed Meursault as a negation of Socrates, who states that "the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being"¹³: ". . . my purpose . . . was to describe a man with no apparent awareness of his existence."¹⁴ Meursault emphatically eschews the Delphic Imperative (1.2.5, 1.5.3, 2.1.4, 2.2.17).¹⁵ After

his crime, Meursault, forced by the situation into which he has put himself to display a certain low level of interest (2.1.1–13, 2.3.2, 2.3.4, 2.4.1, 2.5.1, 2.5.3, 2.5.6, 2.5.10, 2.5.13–14), if not a very high level of reflection (2.2.17 [1.2.5]), first tries to be “reasonable” (2.5.4, 2.5.8), then concludes that ‘life is absurd’ (2.5.25), and finally tries to be “happy” about it (2.5.7, 2.5.26). In the end, his insensitivity at his mother’s funeral has had dire consequences (2.1.4–5, 2.3.11, 2.3.14–17, 2.3.20, 2.4.2, 2.4.5, 2.4.7, 2.5.25). Throughout, Meursault feels that others do not understand him.¹⁶

In what follows, I focus on *The Stranger* within a hermeneutical horizon.¹⁷ I take this approach because I hold it to be self-evident that what makes an interpretation specifically hermeneutical is the concentration on understanding and lack of understanding. Indeed, I suggest that the defining attribute of Meursault’s character is a *hermeneutical* weakness.¹⁸ By this I mean that, if he had spent a fraction of the time trying to understand himself that he wasted bemoaning the supposed fact that others did not understand him (to say nothing of his not trying to understand them either—he fails to recognize that it is only by understanding others that we understand ourselves and vice versa), then he would not have gotten trapped in the absurdist failure of communication depicted by the novel. Above all, I seek to explicate the text in such a way as to clarify its defining hermeneutical moments, which, again, involve understanding and misunderstanding.

AN EXPLICATION OF THE TEXT: UNDERSTANDING AND MISUNDERSTANDING IN *THE STRANGER*

The focus on understanding and misunderstanding in *The Stranger* is justified by the fact that Camus’ text is utterly replete with hermeneutically relevant references to “understanding” and “misunderstanding”. Those who have a firm grip on the loci in *The Stranger* where the verb “comprendre” (to understand) occurs may feel free to skip this section. For those who do not, the following explications can prove helpful¹⁹:

PT. I: MEURSAULT THE FREE MAN—WHAT HE DOES AND DOES NOT UNDERSTAND

Ch. 1: Meursault tries to understand his mother’s death. When he tells the caretaker at the home that he does not want to see his dead mother, the caretaker says (1.1.9): “Je comprends” (“I understand”). Yet the caretaker does not seem to understand him, and Meursault does not seem to understand the nurse (ibid.): “. . . je ne comprenais pas . . .” (“. . . I didn’t understand . . .”). The director also asks Meursault to understand the funeral arrangements (1.1.21): “Vous comprenez . . .” (“You understand . . .”). Again it is Meursault who does not seem to understand (1.1.23): “Je n’ai pas entendu . . . j’ai compris seulement . . .” (“I didn’t understand . . . I only understood . . .”). Despite the lack of understanding, Meursault thinks that he is able to understand his mother (1.1.24): “. . . je comprenais maman” (“. . . I understood Maman”).

Ch. 2: Returning to work, Meursault understands why his boss seemed annoyed when he requested two days off for his mother's funeral (1.2.1): "... j'ai compris pourquoi ..." ("... I understood why ..."). Meursault can give reasons why he should have gotten two days off, but he understands why his boss thinks otherwise (ibid.): "Bien entendu, cela ne m'empêche pas de comprendre tout de même mon patron" ("Properly understood, that still doesn't keep me from understanding my boss's point of view"). This chapter narrates an intimate encounter between Meursault and Marie on the day after his mother's burial, but there is no mention of any "understanding" between them.

Ch. 3: Meursault agrees to help his neighbor Raymond, who claims to be a "warehouse guard" but is known to be a pimp, "punish" his "unfaithful" mistress. Raymond pleads for Meursault's understanding (1.3.7): "Vous comprenez ... c'est pas que je suis méchant, mais je suis vif" ("You understand ... it's not that I'm a bad guy, but I have a short fuse"). Raymond gets Meursault to understand him (1.3.9): "... vous comprenez ..." ("... you understand ..."). Meursault shows Raymond that he understands him (1.3.11): "... je comprenais qu'il veuille la punir ..." ("... I understood that he wanted to punish her ..."). Meursault writes a letter to the woman for Raymond, and Raymond expresses sympathy for the death of Meursault's mother (1.3.12): "D'abord, je n'ai pas compris. Il m'a expliqué alors qu'il avait appris la mort de maman ..." ("At first I didn't understand. Then he explained that he'd heard about Maman's death ..."). Raymond gives Meursault a very firm handshake and assures him (1.3.13): "... entre hommes on se comprenait toujours ..." ("... men always understand each other ..."). Meursault has become an accomplice in Raymond's plan to entice his mistress into a sexual situation where, "right at the moment of climax" ("juste au moment de finir"), he will abuse her mercilessly.

Ch. 4: The plan works. Meursault ignores the screams of the woman, whom Raymond is beating, but registers the tears of Salamano, whose dog is missing. He draws an analogy between how Salamano mourns the loss of his pet and how he marked the death of his mother (1.4.8): "... j'ai compris qu'il pleurait. Je ne sais pas pourquoi j'ai pensé à maman" ("... I understood that he was crying. I don't know why I thought of Maman").

Ch. 5: His boss offers to send him to Paris, but Meursault displays no interest in a change in life (1.5.3): "... quand j'ai dû abandonner mes études, j'ai très vite compris que tout cela était sans importance réelle" ("... when I had to give up my studies, I understood very quickly that all that was without real importance"). Marie asks Meursault whether he wants to marry her. He answers that, although he does not think that he loves her, he will marry her if that is what she wants. During a walk through town he asks her whether she has noticed the beautiful women (1.5.5): "Elle m'a dit que oui et qu'elle me comprenait" ("She said 'yes' and that 'she understood me'").

Ch. 6: As Meursault, Marie, and Raymond leave for a trip to the beach house of a couple whom Raymond knows, they notice that they are being "stared at" by some Arabs, including the brother of the woman whom Raymond has beaten. Marie does not understand what is happening (1.6.3): "Marie ne comprenait pas très bien et nous

a demandé ce qu'il y avait" ("Marie did not understand very well and asked us what was going on"). At the beach, Raymond is cut in a fight with the woman's brother and goes to a doctor. At the house, Meursault is supposed "to explain to the women what has happened" ("pour expliquer aux femmes ce qui était arrivé"), but he "did not like having to explain to them" ("Moi, cela m'ennuyait de leur expliquer"), so he keeps quiet (1.6.15). Soon Meursault returns to the beach alone and kills the Arab.

*PT. II: MEURSAULT THE PRISONER—WHAT HE DOES
AND DOES NOT UNDERSTAND*

Ch. 1: Meursault's lawyer informs him that investigators have learned that he showed "insensitivity" ("insensibilité") at his mother's funeral (2.1.4): "Vous comprenez . . . cela me gêne un peu de vous demander cela. Mais c'est très important" ("You understand . . . it's a little embarrassing for me to have to ask you this. But it's very important"). After making his lawyer feel uncomfortable with his responses, Meursault concludes that his lawyer has failed to understand him (2.1.6): "Il ne me comprenait pas et il m'en voulait un peu" ("He didn't understand me, and he was holding it against me a bit"). When the examining magistrate tells Meursault that he is 'interested in him', Meursault is unresponsive (2.1.8): "Je n'ai pas bien compris ce qu'il entendait par là et je n'ai rien répondu" ("I didn't really understand what he meant by that, so I didn't respond"). Yet the magistrate insists that Meursault help him understand certain aspects of his crime (ibid.): "Je suis sûr que vous allez m'aider à les comprendre" ("I'm sure that you'll help me understand them"). Meursault cannot understand why the magistrate does not understand why he hesitated between firing the first shot and the other four (2.1.10): "J'ai à peu près compris [que] . . . il ne le comprenait pas" ("I vaguely understood [that] . . . he couldn't understand this"). When the magistrate asks him whether he is "sorry" for what he did, Meursault says that he is "annoyed" (2.1.12): "J'ai eu l'impression qu'il ne me comprenait pas" ("I got the impression that he didn't understand me").

Ch. 2: Struggling with sexual desire in prison, Meursault understands what it means to be punished (2.2.11): "Oui, vous comprenez les choses, vous" ("Yes, you understand these things, you do"). He comes to feel the same way about not being able to smoke (2.2.12): "Je ne comprenais pas pourquoi on me privait de cela qui ne faisait de mal à personne. Plus tard, j'ai compris que cela faisait partie aussi de la punition" ("I couldn't understand why they had taken away that which didn't hurt anybody. Later I understood that that too was part of the punishment"). What Meursault does not understand is "prison time" (2.2.16): "Je n'avais pas compris à quel point les jours pouvaient être à la fois longs et courts" ("I hadn't understood how days could be both long and short at the same time"). He cannot comprehend it when the guard tells him that he has been incarcerated for five months (2.2.17): ". . . je l'ai cru, mais je ne l'ai pas compris" (" . . . I believed it, but I did not understand it").

Ch. 3: In court Meursault gradually understands that he is on trial (2.3.3): "Tous me regardaient: j'ai compris que c'étaient les jurés" ("They were all looking at me:

I understood that they were the jury”). He has a hard time comprehending being the focus of attention (2.3.4): “Il m’a fallu un effort pour comprendre que j’étais la cause de toute cette agitation” (“It took an effort on my part to understand that I was the cause of all the excitement”). Meursault does not understand everything (2.3.7): “. . . je n’ai pas très bien compris tout ce qui s’est passé ensuite . . .” (“. . . I didn’t quite understand everything that happened next . . .”). He does understand when the presiding judge mentions ‘questions that seem irrelevant but are significant’ (2.3.11): “J’ai compris qu’il allait encore parler de maman et j’ai senti en même temps combien cela m’ennuyait” (“I understood that he was going to talk about Maman again, and at the same time I could feel how much it irritated me”). After the director and the caretaker of the home have testified, Meursault senses that things have changed (2.3.15): “. . . pour la première fois, j’ai compris que j’étais coupable” (“. . . for the first time, I understood that I was guilty”). Of the witnesses who were not present at Maman’s funeral, Salamano is the one who pleads most eloquently with the court to understand Meursault (2.3.18): “Il faut comprendre . . . il faut comprendre” (“You must understand . . . you must understand”). Yet Meursault sees that the damage has been done (ibid.): “Mais personne ne paraissait comprendre” (“But no one seemed to understand”). When the prosecutor accuses him of “burying his mother with the heart of a criminal”, Meursault senses the acute danger (2.3.20): “. . . j’ai compris que les choses n’allaient pas bien pour moi” (“. . . I understood that things weren’t going well for me”).

Ch. 4: In the continuation, Meursault has difficulty understanding the prosecutor’s argument that his crime was premeditated (2.4.2): “. . . si j’ai bien compris . . .” (“. . . if I understood him correctly . . .”). Hearing that he is being judged “intelligent”, Meursault cannot comprehend how an innocent man’s virtue can become a guilty man’s vice (2.4.4): “Mais je ne comprenais pas bien comment . . .” (“But I couldn’t quite understand how . . .”). He cannot understand why the prosecutor attacks him for not expressing remorse for his offense (ibid.): “. . . sans qu’en réalité je comprenne bien pourquoi” (“. . . without my ever really understanding why”). Found guilty and sentenced to death, Meursault cannot understand how all this has “happened” to him.

Ch. 5: Imagining clemency but anticipating severity, Meursault begins by attempting to understand why his father went to watch a murderer be executed (2.5.3): “Maintenant, je comprenais, c’était si naturel” (“Now I understand, it was perfectly natural”). He ends by trying to understand why his aged mother took a fiancé (2.5.26): “Il m’a semblé que je comprenais pourquoi . . .” (“It seemed to me that I understood why . . .”). In between, Meursault remembers that Marie will forget him when he is dead (2.5.10): “. . . comme je comprenais très bien que . . .” (“. . . since I understood very well that . . .”). Although Meursault listens to the chaplain’s pleas for him to seek consolation in God, he has difficulty following him (2.5.17): “J’ai compris qu’il était ému et je l’ai mieux écouté” (“I understood that he was emotional and I listened more closely to him”). Above all, Meursault struggles to understand why the prison chaplain cannot understand that life is not rational but absurd (2.5.25): “Comprenait-il, comprenait-il donc?” (“Couldn’t he understand, couldn’t he understand this?”). Assaulting the chaplain physically and

verbally, Meursault repeats the question as an answer (ibid.): “Comprenait-il donc . . .” (“Couldn’t he understand this . . .”). In consolation, Meursault feels as if he understands his mother at the end of her life (2.5.26): “Il m’a semblé que je comprenais pourquoi à la fin d’une vie . . . elle avait joué à recommencer” (“I felt as if I understood why at the end of her life . . . she had played at beginning again”).

It is only fitting that a novel about the absurd contain at least as much misunderstanding as understanding. Indeed, a leitmotif of *The Stranger* is the strangeness of the stranger, which manifests itself as the bizarre, the odd, the peculiar. For example, before he commits his crime, Marie says that Meursault is “peculiar” (“bizarre”: 1.5.4). For his part, Meursault thinks of ‘the little robotic woman’ in Céleste’s restaurant as “peculiar” (“bizarre”: 1.5.6). After committing his crime, Meursault thinks that his lawyer is looking at him “in a peculiar fashion” (“d’une façon bizarre”: 2.1.5). At the trial, he has “the strange impression” (“la bizarre impression”: 2.3.4) of being “a little like an intruder” (“un peu comme un intrus”: ibid.). He also has “the odd impression of being watched by [himself]” (“l’impression bizarre d’être regardé par moi-même”: 2.3.7). Adducing his idiosyncratic behavior at his mother’s wake and funeral as aggravating circumstances, the prosecutor portrays Meursault as “a stranger” (“un étranger”: 2.3.15) to society.²⁰ All the things that pertain to his mother seem to Meursault to be “irrelevant to [his] case” (“questions étrangères à mon affaire”: 2.3.11). Yet he does not understand the law (2.1.1). At first “it all seemed like a game to [him]” (“tout cela m’a paru un jeu”: 2.1.2), but then he realized that “one should never play games” (“il ne faut jamais jouer”: 2.2.15). Even ‘the peculiar little robot woman’ (“la petite automate”: 2.3.8, 2.3.10, 2.3.13, 2.4.9) who stared at him in Céleste’s restaurant is at the trial to stare at him again. Finally, he hears the judge tell him “in bizarre language” (“dans une forme bizarre”: 2.4.11) that he will be guillotined. Meursault can explain things on the screen to Emmanuel, the office dispatcher who does not understand films (1.4.1), but he cannot explain things in real life (1.6.15, 2.1.6, 2.1.8, 2.4.6). He is especially weak on answers to questions that begin with “why” (1.1.9, 2.1.9–10, 2.3.11–12, 2.3.18). Camus’ challenge to hermeneutically trained readers, then, is to understand the strangest thing in *The Stranger*, that is, what his characters, especially “the stranger”, cannot understand, namely, *why* Meursault killed the Arab (1.6.22, 2.1.8, 2.4.6). Alternatively, if all there is to understand here is that this act cannot be understood in rational terms but rather only in terms of the absurd, then so be it, too.

HERMENEUTICS II: TRYING TO UNDERSTAND MEURSAULT BETTER THAN HE DOES HIMSELF

Thus Camus succeeds brilliantly in depicting Meursault as “a man with no apparent awareness of his existence”,²¹ for the unique combination of the author’s minimalist style and the protagonist’s laconic narrative—“the degree zero of writing” à la Barthes’ memorable title²²—yields a classic work that, by saying as little as necessary and displaying as much as possible, demands and rewards repeated reading and rereading. Ironically, never has such a poster-boy for the unexamined life inspired

so many people to examine their own lives. Then again, this effect may have been Camus' intent.²³

Now the key to a critical reading of *The Stranger* is not to take Meursault at his word. After all, Meursault and Raymond may testify for one another (1.4.5, 1.6.3, 2.3.19) because they are "pals" (1.3.7, 1.3.12, 2.3.19, 2.5.25), but even those readers who tend to like Meursault for such sentimental reasons must have more warrant than affection to believe his narrative. As a matter of fact, the readers have no reason at all to accept without further ado anything that Meursault says about himself. With his lawyer, for example, Meursault thinks (2.1.6): "J'avais le désir de lui affirmer que j'étais comme tout le monde, absolument comme tout le monde" ("I felt the urge to reassure him that I was like everybody else, absolutely like everybody else"). Yet is this true with respect to content? And should the readers simply take Meursault's word for it? Or must they not rather test his claim against the evidence? For, if this one leading thought is questionable, then so is virtually everything else that Meursault thinks and says about himself and others. Hence a hermeneutically sound reading of *The Stranger* must test Meursault's acts and attitudes against the evidence of his own narrative.

To achieve this task, the readers cannot reflexively and unreflectively adopt Meursault's level of reflection. Nor is there any compelling reason to see him so as he sees himself, at least not without a philosophical argument of some sort. To object that to hold Meursault to any standards of rational argumentation is to beg the question, is itself to beg the genuine question, given that he regards himself as torn between rationality and absurdity (2.5.8, 2.5.25). It is, after all, Meursault who, in his most insightful moments, insists that, although "one cannot always be reasonable" ("... on ne peut pas être toujours raisonnable": 2.5.4), he has always been right about himself because he has always had reasons for what he has done (2.5.25): "J'avais eu raison, j'avais encore raison, j'avais toujours raison" ("I had been right, I was still right, I was always right"). Meursault cannot be the only judge in his own case.

The only stable basis for understanding the whole "affaire" is discerning a judicious—but not necessarily 'judicial' (2.3.8)—level of reflection. Meursault lives in an apartment in which the mirror, a metaphor for reflection and achievement of self-knowledge, has gone yellow long ago (1.2.5). He tells his lawyer (2.1.4): "... que j'avais un peu perdu l'habitude de m'interroger ..." ("... that I had pretty much lost the habit of questioning myself ..."). He seems to have given up self-study with his studies (1.5.3). He does not even understand why the examining magistrate is interested in understanding him or his deed (2.1.7–13). In fact, the magistrate is much more interested in understanding Meursault than he himself is. By the time Meursault has been forced to reflection against his will, it is too late (2.2.17). The point is that the prosecutor may be wrong that Meursault is 'a moral monster' (for example, Meursault does judge that Raymond should not shoot the defenseless Arab on the beach: 1.6.18), but he is right that Meursault's killing of the Arab on the beach was 'a reflective act' ("d'une façon réfléchiée en quelque sorte ... pas ... d'un acte irréfléchi ...": 2.4.2–3).

This is not a construction arbitrarily and violently imposed by others on Meursault's act (2.4.7). To the contrary, the evidence of Meursault's own narrative

confirms this reading beyond a reasonable doubt. By his own admission, he shot the Arab once, and then again and again and again and again (1.6.25, 2.1.8–10, 2.4.2). By shooting unnecessarily, Meursault did what he had warned Raymond not to do (1.6.18). For Meursault recognized that Raymond had a choice (1.6.19): “J’ai pensé à ce moment qu’on pouvait tirer ou ne pas tirer” (“I realized, at that moment, that you could either shoot or not shoot”). And Meursault realized that he did not have to return to the beach alone, but he did (1.6.20): “Rester ici ou partir, cela revenait au même. Au bout d’un moment, je suis retourné vers la plage et je me suis mis à marcher” (“To stay or to go, it amounted to the same thing. A minute later I turned back toward the beach and started walking”). Yet Meursault acted knowingly and willingly (1.6.25): “J’ai pensé que je n’avais qu’un demi-tour à faire et ce serait fini” (“It occurred to me that all I had to do was turn around and that would be the end of it”). Since the Arab was not nearly close enough to use his knife on him, Meursault knew that he was making a stupid move that ‘plunged himself into unhappiness’ (ibid.): “Je savais que c’était stupide . . .” (“I knew that it was stupid . . .”). According to Meursault’s own narrative, then, these are not afterthoughts but the thoughts that he was thinking while he was acting. Thus the prosecutor also argues (2.4.3): “‘Et l’on ne peut pas dire qu’il [Meursault] a agi sans se rendre compte de ce qu’il faisait’” (“‘And no one can say that he [Meursault] acted without realizing what he was doing’”). Meursault’s act of killing the Arab is voluntary in the Aristotelian sense: he is responsible for it and it is blameworthy.²⁴

Even Meursault must admit that what the prosecutor was saying made some sense (2.4.2): “J’ai trouvé que sa façon de voir les événements ne manquait pas de clarté. Ce qu’il disait était plausible” (“I found that his way of viewing the events did not lack clarity. What he was saying was plausible”). Hence, when Meursault cannot understand the prosecutor’s argument that his crime was “premeditated” (“prémédité”: 2.4.2, 2.4.10) and testifies that “it was because of the sun” (“c’était à cause du soleil”: 2.4.6), this is not evidence of lack of guilt or of diminished guilt on his part. Rather, it shows that, even after he has realized that he is guilty (2.3.15), the callous, ‘remorseless’ perpetrator (2.1.12, 2.4.4, 2.4.8) is still unable to distinguish between a cause and a condition, an intention and a motive. Indeed, his inability in this respect is then most evident when he testifies that ‘the sun made him kill the Arab’ (see again 2.4.6), leaving the *explanans* more in need of an explanation than the *explanandum* and inviting the ridicule of the court (1.6.22–23, 2.1.8–9).²⁵ Idle talk about “chance” (“le résultat d’un hasard”: 1.3.12, 2.3.12, 2.3.19, 2.4.6) and “bad luck” (“c’est un malheur”: 2.3.17) also proves unhelpful.²⁶ In the end, of course, Meursault insists that he has been convicted of murder and sentenced to death ‘because he did not weep at his mother’s funeral’ (“pour n’avoir pas pleuré à l’enterrement de sa mère”: 2.5.25 [2.3.15, 2.3.20]). And, in fact, he is convicted more because of his lack of emotion at his mother’s funeral than because of his state of mind at his victim’s death (2.1.4, 2.3.11, 2.3.20, 2.4.5). In the event, however, Meursault decided not to decide, and, in effect, his depraved indifference to the preservation of the life of another human being cost him his own happiness and perhaps his own life. How can one fault the prosecutor for having tried his best to make rational sense of the defendant’s absurd action?

Thus Camus has created for the readers both an existentialist paradox and a hermeneutical challenge. He provokes the readers to reflect on how they would judge Meursault's case. Yet he also invites them to find their own level of reflection in analyzing Meursault, his act, and his attitude. So the readers are being asked not so much how they "feel" about Meursault, but much rather what they *think* of his act. They can only decide by taking up a standpoint that is other than Meursault's own, which is irretrievable. No one can read Meursault "like an open book" ("à livre ouvert": 2.4.7). Nor is he "a vacuum" or "an abyss" ("le vide . . . un gouffre": 2.4.5).

The big mistake that the readers must absolutely avoid, then, is the reflective fallacy (a variation of the mimetic fallacy), namely, the error of uncritically adopting Meursault's inchoate state of reflection as their own instead of adapting a nuanced approach to an analysis of their own. After all, what could be a more "inauthentic" way of reading the novel than the *modus legendi* on which the readers were not free to understand its main action other than in the way that is predetermined by its chief character, but were forced to "understand" it in that way alone? Hermeneutically speaking, if the readers do not achieve "a fusion of horizons" (*Horizontverschmelzung*) with the author, then they will have no common context within which to examine Meursault's text.²⁷ Yet this does not require them to see everything from his perspective and to approve completely of his interpretation of his situation merely because it is his narrative. It is not a valid objection to this procedure to point out that Meursault would feel uncomfortable with or oppressed by it, for he reacts apathetically, even allergically, to any and all attempts by others to understand him. Rhetorically speaking, if Meursault alone is allowed to determine in full the level of reflection that the readers must unconditionally apply in reflecting on his situation, then it is incomprehensible why anyone would undertake to understand his narrative in the first place.

As a result, it is necessary to try to understand an author better than, and this means, differently from how, he (in this case) understood himself, for the simple reason that no *author* is the *authority* on the text that she (in another case) has generated. The pertinent principle is one of the oldest and most revered in hermeneutics, and it is possible to trace the entire history of the discipline by examining the many different and not always consistent ways in which it has been applied.²⁸ In Camus' *The Stranger*, Meursault is the *author* of his narrative, but not the *authority* on its interpretation. It is not the case that he and he alone gets to determine what it means. This may strike him as absurd. Those who hold that the uninterpreted text is not worth reading can find it reasonable. It is possible to understand Meursault better than he did himself.

CONCLUSION: TRYING TO UNDERSTAND MEURSAULT DIFFERENTLY FROM HOW CAMUS DOES

The aim of this analysis is not to condemn Meursault (again), but to comprehend him. If this way of reading *The Stranger* has any merit, then it lies in the modest proposal that it makes sense to understand Camus' narrative as a *reductio ad*

absurdum argument against Meursault's position that 'life is absurd'. Certainly it makes at least as much sense to read the novel in this way as it does to interpret it as a defense of Meursault by Camus, and arguably it makes much more sense to read it in the former way than in the latter. Yet one can also try to read the work as if Camus were neutrally regarding Meursault from the perspective of a non-participant observer. For the character who understands Meursault best is without doubt the young journalist at his trial who is sympathetic to his plight (2.3.7, 2.3.10, 2.3.13, 2.4.9, 2.4.11). In fact, the author used this character to write himself into the novel (2.3.7)²⁹: "Et j'ai eu l'impression bizarre d'être regardé par moi-même" ("And I had the odd impression of being watched by myself").

Thus, if one is tempted to think that Camus uses Meursault to express his 'own' view that 'life is absurd' (external evidence indicates that he does not: Camus starts with the absurd, whereas Meursault ends with it),³⁰ then one should recall what Meursault, waiting in his cell to be guillotined (or, less likely, pardoned), resolves, not ironically but bitterly (2.5.1, 2.5.26), to do if he is freed, namely, 'to attend all the executions' (2.5.3): "Si jamais je sortais de cette prison, j'irais voir toutes les exécutions capitales" ("If I ever got out of this prison, I would go and watch every execution I could"). In other words, if he is spared the death penalty, then Meursault will not work to abolish capital punishment. Yet Camus was a vehement opponent of the death penalty.³¹ So Meursault's resolution does not reflect Camus' position, and Camus seems to suggest that the readers recognize Meursault's plan not as reasonable but as absurd. Hence one cannot say that Camus uses *Meursault* as his "mouthpiece".³²

To the contrary, the author virtually exhorts the readers to overcome the narrow limits of Meursault's horizon (1.3.2, 1.6.24, 2.2.2, 2.5.1) in order to take the analysis to a higher level. The level of reflection on which Meursault does operate in examining himself is thus not necessarily the plane of analysis on which the readers must work in analyzing him. The requirement that the readers adhere to Meursault's level of reflection protects his narrative from the scrutiny that might otherwise expose the inadequacy of his worldview. Meursault is, of course, as much the author of his narrative as is Camus. The difference, however, is that Meursault is vested in it in a way in which Camus is not. As much as he protests that others do not understand him, Meursault cannot understand why others do not understand him in the same way in which he understands himself. Being understood can be threatening.

In fact, it is difficult not to conclude that Meursault's celebrated "indifference" is a mask for his unwillingness to understand and to be understood by others. It is not a strength but a weakness of his character. The prosecutor recognizes this (2.4.3), and the defendant acknowledges it (2.4.4). Meursault would rather be a "man" ("un homme": 1.3.7, 2.3.17) to his "pal" ("copain": 1.3.7, 1.3.12, 2.3.19, 2.5.25) than a human being to society. He is, and he is judged, "intelligent" ("intelligent": 2.4.3 – 4), but he prefers to project misunderstanding onto others rather than to look for understanding in himself.

Accordingly, Meursault can shout as loudly as he wants that 'he is always right' (2.5.25), but that does not make it true. For example, he is wrong that "people never change their lives" ("... on ne changeait jamais de vie ...": 1.5.3) and that "one

life was as good as another" ("... toutes se valaient ...": *ibid.*), for he certainly did change his own life (1.6.25), and decidedly not for the better but for the worse (2.3.21), going not to Paris (1.5.3–4) but to prison (2.2.1–17). It is not an interpretation but a fact that Meursault was happy before his crime, that he is unhappy after it, and that he wants to be happy again (1.6.25, 2.3.21, 2.5.26). Also, Meursault's argument that, "since we're all going to die, it's obvious that when and how don't matter" ("Du moment qu'on meurt, comment et quand, cela n'importe pas, c'était évident": 2.5.8), is self-serving. The argument is not cogent because twenty or thirty or forty years of life more or less do matter, if not for him then for virtually everyone else. After all, if one cannot live forever, then one must live for as long as one can and for as much good as one can. Indeed, Meursault's unsound argument oddly echoes Kierkegaard's implausible statement that, if a human life is not eternal, then it is empty.³³ Yet Meursault thinks that he is "like everybody else, absolutely like everybody else" ("... comme tout le monde, absolument comme tout le monde ...": 2.1.6). Does anyone else seriously think that "the stranger" is 'like them, just like them' in this and similar respects? To the extent that Meursault only speaks of himself, he does not also speak for others.

Augustine, too, did not weep at his mother's funeral,³⁴ but he did ask why one man kills another.³⁵ In his search for an answer he speculates in vain about criminal motives only in order to posit that, as the result of an "original sinfulness" ("peccatum originale"),³⁶ human nature is corrupt, depraved, fallen.³⁷ Etiologically challenged, Meursault states that he killed the Arab "because of the sun" (see again 2.4.6 and compare 2.1.8–9). So he does something "stupid" and gives a "ridiculous" explanation for it. Not exculpating but exacerbating, his account of his crime is not rational but absurd. By thus understating a weak case, Meursault enables the court to overstate a strong one. As a result, he is found guilty of premeditated murder (2.4.11), whereas some other, lesser form of murder, or even some kind of homicide, may have been more appropriate (2.4.10).³⁸ In addition, with his clumsy narrative that stumbles over the relation between intent and effect, Meursault adds injury to injustice. In the two crucial scenes of the novel, that is, at the funeral of his mother in the country (1.1.24–27) and in the encounter with the Arab on the beach (1.6.11–25), the sun, the natural source of warmth and light and the metaphorical source of being and truth in the Western metaphysical tradition, does not enlighten Meursault. To the contrary, it blinds him. And it drives him into situations in which he neglects good and effects evil (1.6.22). It is as if Meursault were a recently escaped prisoner from Plato's cave who could not wait to rest his weary eyes in the comforting darkness again.³⁹

Meursault's position on the biggest issue of all is also questionable (2.5.25): "Rien, rien n'avait d'importance et je savais bien pourquoi" ("Nothing, nothing mattered, and I well knew why"). Even if it is true—"as Maman used to say"—that "after a while you could get used to anything" ("... on finissait par s'habituer à tout": 2.2.10), and that "you can always find something to be happy about" ("... on n'est jamais tout à fait malheureux": 2.5.7), surely some things are more worth getting used to and more worth being happy about than others. Sour grapes aside, one can both appreciate the absurdity of life and reasonably prefer the freedom of the sun, the beach, and the sea to the punishment of incarceration, prosecution, and

decapitation. That is also why Meursault acknowledges that he was happy before he killed the Arab, that he was unhappy after he did, and that he wanted to be happy again (1.6.25, 2.3.21, 2.5.26).⁴⁰

Subsequently Camus summarized *The Stranger* with a paradoxical remark: "In our society any man who does not weep at his mother's funeral runs the risk of being sentenced to death."⁴¹ The plot of the novel seems to confirm the truth of this observation, since Meursault is convicted more on the basis of his insensitivity at his mother's funeral, to which there are several witnesses, than on the basis of his state of mind at his victim's death, to which there are no witnesses other than himself (2.1.4, 2.3.11, 2.3.20, 2.4.5).⁴² Camus also attacks those who regard Meursault as "a piece of social wreckage",⁴³ defends him as "a foreigner to the society in which he lives",⁴⁴ and describes him as someone who "does not play the game"⁴⁵: "... he refuses to lie. To lie is not only to say what isn't true. It is also, and above all, to say *more* than is true, and, as far as the human heart is concerned, to express more than one feels."⁴⁶ For Camus, Meursault is "animated by the passion for the absolute and for the truth".⁴⁷ He describes *The Stranger* as "the story of a man who ... agrees to die for the truth",⁴⁸ and characterizes Meursault as "the only Christ we deserve".⁴⁹

Yet must the readers accept the author's understanding of a character without further ado? And, if the artist has "the right to feel a slightly ironic affection for the characters that he has created",⁵⁰ then do the readers also not have the duty to try to understand those characters, if not better than, then differently from how, the author does? Indeed, Meursault may die for *his* truth, but he does not die for *the* truth. His narrative may not be a lie, but it is demonstrably false in certain crucial respects. For example, when Meursault writes the letter that enables Raymond to assault his mistress, does he not then say more than he knows to be true (1.3.12, 2.3.19)? And, when Meursault testifies for Raymond to the police, does he not also then say more than he knows to be true (1.4.5, 1.6.3, 2.3.19)? The evidence indicates that, in writing the letter that set off the whole affair, Meursault was merely doing what Raymond wanted him to do 'because [he] had no reason not to please him' ("... je me suis appliqué à contenter Raymond parce que je n'avais pas de raison de ne pas le contenter": 1.3.12). How is that *not* a case of 'saying *more* than is true', of 'expressing *more* than one feels', and of 'doing *more* than is justified'? Meursault insists that he cannot admit to feelings ("sentiments") that he does not have (2.1.5): "Non, parce que c'est faux" ("No, because it's false"). Yet what about the feelings of his victim, and all the ones that Meursault has deprived him of? This is a case in which the victim had a reason to hate the perpetrator, not vice versa (2.3.19). So it is not the case, as his defender desperately observes, that "everything is true and nothing is true" at Meursault's trial (2.3.16): "Tout est vrai et rien n'est vrai!" Nor is it unreasonable to infer that Meursault's own inattentive actions and attitudes add to the absurdity that already exists in the world.⁵¹

Who, then, is the real "stranger", the true "outsider", the genuine "other", in *The Stranger*? Is it, in fact, Meursault? Or is it not rather the nameless, faceless, and forgotten Arab killed on the beach for no sufficient reason? This question revives the issue of Meursault's complicity in his fate. His involvement in the case does not begin on the beach with Raymond and the Arab. It originates with the letter that he wrote for Raymond in order to entice the Arab's sister to Raymond's apartment so

that he could punish her for her alleged infidelity (1.3.11–12, 1.4.1, 2.3.19, 2.4.2). Would Meursault have written the letter for Raymond if he had not known that the woman was an Arab? It is uncertain but unlikely. Having at first demurred, Meursault only then writes the letter when he realizes, as Raymond reveals her name, that the woman is an Arab (1.3.12). One can only speculate that Meursault would not have killed a European as he did the Arab (1.6.3). Did Meursault not harbor feelings of resentment against Arabs that he could not admit to but acted on? Why does Camus allow no Arab witnesses at Meursault's trial? How does *he* feel about *them*? At a press conference in Stockholm on the occasion of his reception of the Nobel Prize for Literature (1957), Camus, a *pied-noir* or *petit colon* from Algiers, was asked about the vicious violence of the French army against the indigenous insurgents during the Algerian War of Independence (1954–62). He answered with, among other memorable remarks, this extremely controversial one: “Je crois à la justice, mais je défendrai ma mère avant la justice” (“I believe in justice, but I will defend my mother before justice”).⁵² What exactly did he mean by this? Does Camus do justice to “the other” in *The Stranger*?⁵³

In the end, all human beings die. Why? According to the Jewish-Christian narrative, it is because they are guilty. So they must be punished not only because they sin, but also because the first human beings sinned.⁵⁴ Meursault claims that he does not know what “sin” is (“péché”: 2.5.18), but he accepts the premiss that all human beings are “guilty” and “condemned” (“coupable” and “condamné”: 1.1.5, 1.2.2, 1.3.11, 1.4.5, 2.1.10–11, 2.3.15, 2.4.1, 2.4.4–5, 2.4.10, 2.5.8, 2.5.15, 2.5.18, 2.5.25). Hence he has also internalized the bleak Jewish-Christian anthropology that places human beings between a punishment that they do not deserve and a reward that they cannot earn.⁵⁵ Yet this grim tale, which is barely coherent, is hardly cogent, and from the fact that human beings must die it does not follow that death is punishment for guilt due to sin.⁵⁶ Why must death be penal? Why can it not be natural? From the fact that life cannot make sense of death it does not follow that death renders life meaningless. Understood with discrimination, Camus' *The Stranger* enables readers to recognize that, despite Meursault's rejection of reflection, atheism need not yield nihilism.⁵⁷ Nor is the character's atheistic existence, absurd or rational, evidence of nihilism on the author's part.⁵⁸ Finally, for good measure, Camus also eschewed existentialism as he understood it.⁵⁹ Indeed, he even went so far as to suggest, well after *The Stranger* and not without a trace of self-effacement, that “perhaps [he] should decide to study existentialism”.⁶⁰

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NOTES

¹ What follows is the revised version of a paper that I presented at the 8th Annual Hawaii International Conference on Arts and Humanities, Honolulu, Hawaii, January 14, 2010.

² The French text of *L'Étranger* is in: *Albert Camus*, vol. I: *Théâtre, Récits, Nouvelles*, ed. Roger Quilliot (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1962), pp. 1127–1212. I refer to the text in parts (1 or 2),

chapters (6 in 1 and 5 in 2), and paragraphs (from 1 to 27), which is a much more precise way of citing and quoting it than by mere pages. Readers should be aware of the fact that the English translations may contain a few paragraph changes vis-à-vis the French original. A relatively accurate English translation of *L'Étranger* is *The Stranger*, tr. Matthew Ward (New York: Vintage, 1989). Yet I find a number of significant things to alter in Ward's version. For example, in a mistranslation with serious hermeneutical consequences, Ward has Meursault say: "But everybody knows life isn't worth living" (*The Stranger*, p. 114). But what Meursault really says is rather this: "Mais tout le monde sait que la vie ne vaut pas la peine d'être vécue" (2.5.9). Thus a more accurate English translation is: "But everyone knows that life is not worth the trouble of having lived." The one statement is categorical, but the other is hypothetical. The question is, then, what, if anything, one can do about the "trouble" (or "effort" or "grief" or "sorrow") of life to make it worth living.

³ In fact, Augustine's best statement of the divine command theory of ethics may be in *Confessions*, 3.7.13–3.10.18. Aquinas' systematic statement of it is in *Summa theologiae*, pt. I/II, qq. 90–97.

⁴ Neither Augustine nor Aquinas gives serious consideration to Socrates' probing arguments against divine command ethics in Plato's *Euthyphro*. Such concerns are perennial. Cf., e.g., Greg Epstein, *Good Without God: What a Billion Nonreligious People Do Believe* (New York: William Morrow, 2009).

⁵ Cf. Camus, *L'Homme révolté* (1951), in: *Albert Camus*, vol. 2: *Essais*, ed. Roger Quilliot and Louis Faucon (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1965), pp. 407–709, thereof pp. 475–89 ("Nietzsche et le nihilisme"). The English translation is *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, tr. Anthony Bower (New York: Vintage/Random House, 1956, and London: Penguin, 1971/2000).

⁶ As Nietzsche argues in numerous works, the claim that "Gott ist tot" does not entail that God once existed and then died or was killed. Rather, it is a meta-statement about the existential importance of an overcoming of trust in God by human beings. Cf., e.g., *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, bk. 3, aph. 1 ff.

⁷ On this point, the simple comparison of and stark contrast between Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, and Augustine, *De beata vita/On the Happy Life*, is extraordinarily instructive.

⁸ Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra: Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), pp. 253, 340.

⁹ Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1977 [Fourteenth Edition]), pp. 41, 240, 278.

¹⁰ Cf. Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (1843), tr. Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844), tr. Reidar Thomte (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); *The Sickness Unto Death* (1849), tr. Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983). Kierkegaard struggles mightily to explain the philosophical implications of a Jewish-Christian version of the divine command theory of ethics, the Categorical Imperative of which is (Mt. 6:10): "Thy will be done." Who knows the will of God, and how, is another question.

¹¹ Although Camus is commonly thought of as an existentialist, he is critical of Kierkegaard and other existentialists, arguing, for example, that their notion of a "leap of faith" misses the point of the ineluctability of the absurd. Cf. the section on "Philosophical Suicide" in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*. The French text is in the Pléiade Edition of Camus' works, vol. 2: *Essais*, pp. 119–35. A good English translation of the *Mythe* is in *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, tr. Justin O'Brien (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1955).

¹² Camus finished *The Myth of Sisyphus* in 1941 but published it in 1943, after having published *The Stranger* in 1942. The temporal proximity of the works suggests that Meursault is supposed to represent a token of the type Sisyphus. On closer scrutiny, however, the suggestion proves misleading.

¹³ Cf. Plato, *Apology of Socrates* 38a.

¹⁴ Cf. Camus, *Essais*, p. 1426 ("Interview", *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, Nov. 15, 1945): "... mon propos ... était de décrire un homme sans conscience apparente." On the English translation cf. *Albert Camus: Lyrical and Critical Essays*, ed. Philip Thody and tr. Ellen Kennedy (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1969), p. 348.

¹⁵ In Nietzsche's sense, Meursault is not a "superhuman being" (*Übermensch*) but a "last human being" (*der letzte Mensch*), who contemns examination of life in favor of work, love, and "happiness" (*Zarathustra*, Prologue, ch. 5). He also bears a striking resemblance to the Pale Criminal (*ibid.*, pt. 1, ch. 6).

¹⁶ Meursault's insensitivity toward others and hypersensitivity toward himself evoke the personal qualities of Dostoevsky's existentialist par excellence, "the underground man". Cf. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground* (1864), tr. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1993), passim, and Jean Grenier, *L'Existence malheureuse* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1957), p. 176.

¹⁷ This is a new approach. Cf. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Explication de *L'Étranger*" (1943), in: *Situations I* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1947), pp. 92–112; Roland Barthes, "*L'Étranger*, roman solaire", *Bulletin du Club du Meilleur Livre*, vol. 12 (1954), pp. 6–7; Germaine Brée, *Camus* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1961); René Girard, "Camus' Stranger Retried", *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association*, vol. 79 (1964), pp. 519–33; Conor Cruise O'Brien, *Albert Camus: Of Europe and Africa* (New York: Viking Press, 1970); Brian Fitch, *The Narcissistic Text: A Reading of Camus's Fiction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982); Patrick McCarthy, *Albert Camus: "The Stranger"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988/2005); English Showalter, "*The Stranger*": *Humanity and the Absurd* (Boston: Twayne Publishing, 1989); Harold Bloom, *Albert Camus's "The Stranger"* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2001); Robert Solomon, *Dark Feelings, Grim Thoughts: Experience and Reflection in Camus and Sartre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); David Carroll, *Albert Camus the Algerian: Colonialism, Terrorism, Justice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Edward Hughes, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Camus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), especially pp. 147–64 (Peter Dunwoodie, "From *Noces* to *L'Étranger*"); David Sherman, *Camus* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

¹⁸ My interpretation was inspired by Roger Shattuck, *Forbidden Knowledge: From Prometheus to Pornography* (New York: Houghton, Mifflin, Harcourt, 1997), pp. 137–64 (on Camus' *The Stranger*).

¹⁹ The parts and paragraphs of the synopsis correspond to the parts and chapters of the novel: The first part contains six chapters and the second part contains five chapters.

²⁰ This instance represents the only occurrence of the French expression "étranger" in the text.

²¹ Cf. again Camus, *Essais*, p. 1426 (*Lyrical and Critical Essays*, p. 348).

²² Cf. Roland Barthes, *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1953). The book is available in English as *Writing Degree Zero*, tr. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968).

²³ According to the publisher's sales figures, *The Stranger* is probably the most widely read philosophical novel of the twentieth century. Gallimard has sold more than six million copies of the French original, and the novel has been translated into more than forty languages.

²⁴ Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, bk. 3, ch. 1.

²⁵ To be fair, one must note that on his fateful, solitary trip to the beach Meursault, whose 'nature was such that his *physical* needs often got in the way of his (moral) sentiments' (2.1.4), was seeking refuge from the fierce heat of the sun in the cool spring behind the rock (1.6.22), and the Arab was blocking the way to it (1.6.23). This version of the encounter is confirmed by Meursault's statements to the examining magistrate (2.1.8–2.1.9). To what extent the circumstances of his crime are extenuating or aggravating, is another question (2.4.10).

²⁶ Meursault's actions are characterized not by "authenticity" but by "bad faith" in Sartre's existentialist-humanist sense (cf. *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme/Existentialism is a Humanism* [1945]), in that his entire narrative is predicated upon positing chance instead of positioning choice.

²⁷ Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1960), pp. 284–90.

²⁸ Cf. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, pp. 180–81, 280–81.

²⁹ Cf. Olivier Todd, *Albert Camus: une vie* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1996), p. 187.

³⁰ Cf. Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe/The Myth of Sisyphus*, pt. 1, in: Camus, *Essais*, pp. 99–146. Cf. also *Essais*, pp. 1424–27 ("Interview with Jeanine Delpech", *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, Nov. 15, 1945), 1337–43 ("Interview with Gabriel d'Aubarède", *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, May 10, 1951), and 1919–24 ("Replies to Jean-Claude Brisville", *La Bibliothèque idéale*, 1959). For English translations of these interviews cf. *Camus: Lyrical and Critical Essays*, pp. 345–48, 349–57, and 357–65, respectively.

³¹ Cf. Camus, *Réflexions sur la guillotine/Reflections on the Guillotine* (1957), in: Camus, *Essais*, pp. 1019–64. In his *Notebooks* Camus writes "that it is impossible to say [*dire*] that someone is absolutely guilty [absolument coupable] and as a consequence impossible to pronounce [prononcer] total punishment [châtiment total]". Cf. Camus, *Carnets II: janvier 1942–mars 1951* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1965), p. 200. The entry is dated to June 1947 and reprinted in Camus, *Essais*, p. 1888.

³² Cf. Camus, *Essais*, p. 448: “Un personnage n’est jamais le romancier qui l’a créé. Il y a des chances, cependant, pour que le romancier soit tous ses personnages à la fois.” Cf. also the laconic remark from the *Notebooks (Carnets)* that is reprinted in Camus, *Théâtre, Récits, Nouvelles*, p. 1934: “Trois personnages sont entrés dans la composition de *l’Étranger*: deux hommes (dont moi) et une femme.”

³³ Cf. the opening lines of the section on “A Tribute to Abraham” in *Fear and Trembling*.

³⁴ Cf. *Confessions* 9.11.27–9.12.32, 9.12.33–9.13.34.

³⁵ Cf. *Confessions* 2.5.11: “Homicidium fecit. Cur fecit? . . . Num homicidium sine causa faceret ipso homicidio delectatus? Quis crediderit? . . . Quare id quoque? Cur ita?”

³⁶ Cf. *Ad Simplicianum*, passim. This work immediately precedes (396) the *Confessions* (397–401).

³⁷ Cf. *Confessions* 2.4.9: “. . . essem gratis malus et malitiae meae causa nulla esset nisi malitia. Foeda erat, et amavi eam; amavi perire, amavi defectum meum, non illud, ad quod deficiebam, sed defectum meum ipsum amavi . . .”

³⁸ Given that the defendant is a *pied-noir* or *petit colon* (an ethnically French “blackfoot” or settler) and the victim an indigenous Arab, as well as that Meursault is the only eyewitness against himself, one is tempted to regard the charge of murder, especially premeditated murder, as implausible. On the other hand, Meursault would have been tried under the *Code napoléonien*, that is, he would not have been presumed innocent until proven guilty—to the contrary. In any case, the press needed a sensational story to relieve the summer boredom of the reading public in Paris (2.3.4, 2.3.7, 2.3.10, 2.3.13, 2.4.11).

³⁹ Cf. Plato, *Republic*, 514a ff., and Camus, *Entre Plotin et Saint Augustin or Métaphysique chrétienne et Néoplatonisme* (1936), in: Camus, *Essais*, pp. 1224–1313. This work was Camus’ thesis for his *Diplôme d’Études supérieures* in philosophy at the University of Algiers under the direction of René Poirier.

⁴⁰ Although Camus’ *A Happy Death*, with its protagonist Patrice Mersault, is often advertised as “a preamble to *The Stranger*”, it is important to recognize that these are actually two entirely different works. Cf. Camus, *La Mort heureuse* (1936–1938), in: *Cahiers Albert Camus I*, ed. Jean Sarocchi (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1971), and *A Happy Death*, tr. Richard Howard (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1972).

⁴¹ Cf. Camus, “Préface à l’Édition universitaire américaine (Preface to *The Stranger*)” (1955/56), in: Camus, *Théâtre, Récits, Nouvelles*, p. 1928 (*Lyrical and Critical Essays*, p. 335): “Dans notre société tout homme qui ne pleure pas à l’enterrement de sa mère risque d’être condamné à mort.” Cf. also Camus, *Carnets II*, pp. 32–34 (1942).

⁴² Cf. Camus, *Carnets II*, pp. 29–30: “The meaning of the book [Le sens du livre: *The Stranger*] is found exactly in the parallelism of the two parts. Conclusion: Society needs people who weep at their mother’s funeral; or else, one is never condemned for the crime that one believes. Besides, I see ten more possible conclusions.” This text is reprinted in Camus, *Théâtre, Récits, Nouvelles*, p. 1932.

⁴³ Cf. Camus, *Théâtre, Récits, Nouvelles*, p. 1928 (*Essays*, p. 336): “. . . une épave . . .”.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*: “. . . il est étranger à la société où il vit . . .”.

⁴⁵ Cf. Camus, *Théâtre, Récits, Nouvelles*, p. 1928 (*Essays*, pp. 335–36): “Je voulais dire seulement que le héros du livre est condamné parce qu’il ne joue pas le jeu.”

⁴⁶ Cf. Camus, *Théâtre, Récits, Nouvelles*, p. 1928 (*Essays*, p. 336): “. . . il refuse de mentir. Mentir ce n’est pas seulement dire ce qui n’est pas. C’est aussi, c’est surtout dire plus que ce qui est et, en ce qui concerne le cœur humain, dire plus qu’on ne sent.”

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*: “. . . une passion profonde . . . l’anime, la passion de l’absolu et de la vérité . . .”.

⁴⁸ Cf. Camus, *Théâtre, Récits, Nouvelles*, p. 1928 (*Essays*, p. 337): “. . . l’histoire d’un homme qui . . . accepte de mourir pour la vérité . . .”.

⁴⁹ Cf. Camus, *Théâtre, Récits, Nouvelles*, p. 1929 (*Essays*, p. 337): “. . . le seul christ que nous méritions . . .”.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*: “On comprendra, après mes explications, que je l’aie dit . . . seulement avec l’affection un peu ironique qu’un artiste a le droit d’éprouver à l’égard des personnages de sa création.”

⁵¹ I do not apologize for being rather rigorous with Meursault, since my sense is that for his own reasons Camus is too gentle with him (see again his remark about ‘his affection for the character that he has created’ in the “Preface to *The Stranger*”), and that therefore there is still a great deal to discuss here.

⁵² Cf. Camus, *Essais*, p. 1882.

⁵³ The best treatment of these issues is found in David Carroll, *Albert Camus the Algerian: Colonialism, Terrorism, Justice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

⁵⁴ Cf. Gen. 2–3.

⁵⁵ Cf. the Classic Jewish-Christian account of human beings as trapped between primordial sin and eternal life in Augustine, *Civitas Dei/City of God*, bks. 13–14 and 20–22. Augustine’s interest in the factuality of his narrative is self-evident, for, if the narrative is not true, then there is no compelling reason for human beings to embrace Jesus Christ as their personal lord and savior. It is precisely this that Meursault refuses to do, albeit for his own peculiar reasons.

⁵⁶ Cf. Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, pt. 2, ch. 20. This section, “On Redemption”, is about the necessity of “redeeming” human beings from their need for “redemption” by “redeemers”.

⁵⁷ Camus was famous for having said that ‘he did not believe in God but that he was not an atheist’. Cf. his “Interview with *Le Monde*”, August 31, 1956 (quoted by Jean Grenier in his “Préface” to Camus, *Essais*, p. xi): “Je ne crois pas en Dieu, mais je ne suis pas athée pour autant—et . . . je trouve à l’irréligion quelque chose de vulgaire et d’usé.”

⁵⁸ Cf. Camus, “Preface” (to the American Edition of *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays* [1955]), p. v: “. . . this book declares that even within the limits of nihilism it is possible to find the means to proceed beyond nihilism. In all the books that I have written since, I have attempted to pursue this direction.” Although Camus finished *The Stranger* (in May 1940) before *The Myth of Sisyphus* (in February 1941), it is evident that his position on nihilism applies not only to the latter but also to the former.

⁵⁹ Cf. Robert Spector, “Albert Camus 1913–1960: A Final Interview [December 20, 1959]”, *Venture*, vols. 3/4 (Spring/Summer 1960), pp. 26–40. Cf. also Camus, “Interview [with Jeanine Delpech]”, *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, November 15, 1945: “Non, je ne suis pas existentialiste . . . Sartre est existentialiste, et le seul livre d’idées que j’ai publié: *le Mythe de Sisyphe*, était dirigé contre les philosophes dits existentialistes . . .” (Condensed versions of the interviews are reprinted in Camus, *Essais*, pp. 1424–27 and 1925–28, respectively.) Camus’ denial that he was an existentialist had little to do with his break with Sartre. Cf. Ronald Aronson, *Camus and Sartre: The Story of a Friendship and the Quarrel that Ended It* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), esp. p. 60.

⁶⁰ Cf. Camus, *Essais*, p. 1427 (“Interview [with Jeanine Delpech]”, *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, November 15, 1945): “Peut-être faudrait-il aussi que je me décide à étudier l’existentialisme . . .” Cf. also Camus, *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, p. 348.

MORAL SHAPES OF TIME IN HENRY JAMES

ABSTRACT

Moral philosophers often turn to the works of Henry James as a resource. Martha Nussbaum, for instance, reads James's texts for moral examples of the quest for the good. Robert Pippin's neo-Hegelian approach, on the other hand, reads James's texts as capturing the moral ambiguities of living through a major shift in social structure of the Western society. For Nussbaum, James's language is about the subtle perceptions of the characters and narrators. For Pippin, the novel's complex syntax and obscure diction capture the uncertainties of social transition. Neither one examines the ontological dimension of James's approach to language and morality. This paper looks at James's as a moral philosopher in the line of Charles Taylor and Richard Rorty, for whom questions of morality emerge in the context of the linguistically articulated identities of the individual and community. Through this lens, James is a philosopher of language whose novels display the rupture and repair of semantic packages of moral beliefs. Unlike Nussbaum and Pippin, I maintain that James's late style needs to be considered as something more than an aesthetic vehicle for ethical content. Instead, it presents a phenomenological and ontological drama that gives moral meaning temporal as well as semantic shapes.

"You can't skip a word if you are to get the effect, and 19 out of 20 worthy readers grow intolerant. The method seems perverse: 'Say it out, for God's sake,' they cry, 'and have done with it.' And so I say now, give us one thing in your older director manner. . .for gleams and innuendoes and felicitous verbal insinuations you are unapproachable, but the core of literature is solid."¹ Letter of William James to Henry James after reading *The Golden Bowl*

Williams's famous complaint about his brother's style is largely ignored by contemporary moral philosophers, from Martha Nussbaum in the Aristotelian tradition to Robert Pippin in the Hegelian one. For Nussbaum, Henry James's texts are works of moral philosophy that present us with moral exemplars of the quest for the good. In Pippin's neo-Hegelian approach, James's texts capture the moral ambiguities of living through a major shift in social structure of Western society without falling into relativism.² For Nussbaum, James's language is about the subtle perceptions of the characters and narrators. For Pippin, the novel's complex syntax and obscure diction capture the uncertainties of social transition. Neither one examines the ontological dimension of James's approach to language and morality. The approach in this paper looks at James's as a moral philosopher in the line of Charles Taylor and Richard Rorty, for whom questions of morality emerge in the context of the linguistically articulated identities of the individual and community.

Through this lens, James is a philosopher of language whose novels display the rupture and repair of semantic packages of moral beliefs. Unlike Nussbaum and Pippin, I maintain that James's late style needs to be considered as something more than an aesthetic vehicle for ethical content. Instead, it presents a phenomenological and ontological drama that gives moral meaning temporal as well as semantic shapes.

In the first section of the paper, I will set up my reading of James by outlining a hermeneutics of moral reasoning. This will give us an orientation to appreciate his texts.

HOW TO PHILOSOPHIZE THE MORALS OF MODERNITY

James rejects moral constructivism, such as we find in the work of John Rawls, Ronald Dworkin, Jürgen Habermas, and Christine Korsgaard, an approach that separates the right from the hermeneutics of the good by deriving the right from procedural constructions, such as Kant's universalizability test or Habermas's "universal presuppositions" of communicative action. James, like Taylor and Rorty, wants to break down the division between the right and the good. Our concepts of right or justice require no separate antihermeneutical method. Moreover, James shares with these philosophers a desire to break the dualism between morality and truth so that both questions emerge from within the interpretive space of historically specific languages and practices.

While Taylor and Rorty both offer transcendental arguments for an understanding of our relationship to language and social practices, for the sake of this paper, I will focus on the opening section of *Sources of the Self* since this portrait of the subject's relationship to moral languages fits James's practice better than the pragmatist approach does. Here Taylor offers a sweeping critique of modernity's various misguided assumptions, from moral constructivism to atomism and naturalism. What all these philosophies share is a disengaged conception of epistemology and practical reason, a desire to step outside of evaluative frameworks, and this error produces reductive misdescription of how we act and talk.³

For Taylor, we should abandon the search for universalized moral rules that can swing free of life forms, that can stand "outside the perspective in the dispute. . . , [for] there cannot be such considerations" (Taylor, 1989, 73). Instead, we reason by seeking "to articulate a framework . . . , to try to spell out what is it that we presuppose when we make judgment that a certain form of life is truly worthwhile, or place our dignity in a certain achievement" (1989, 26). In his view, Habermas, like Rawls, is surreptitiously appealing to the good and hence misdescribes claims: "We have to draw on the sense of the good that we have in order to decide what are adequate principles of justice" since the good "gives the point of the rules which define the right" (89). It is "the background understanding surrounding any conviction that we ought not to act in this or that way that the procedural theory cannot articulate" (87). Thus, principles do not rule over practices, which we see in the Kantian tradition.⁴

Taylor brings this idea of evaluative frameworks to language through his conception of strong evaluations, that is, of second-order desires that evaluate our first-order wishes: “Whereas for the simple weigher what is at stake is the desirability of different consummations, those defined by *de facto* desires, for the strong evaluator reflection also examines the possibility of different modes of being of the agent” (Taylor, 1985a, 25). Strong evaluations “aren’t just more desirable; they command our awe, respect, admiration” (Taylor, 1989, 19–20). Because we are inescapably embedded in these languages of strong evaluation, they partially constitute our experience rather than merely describing it. The languages of such interpretations cannot be disarticulated from who we are: “Our self-interpretations are partly constitutive of our experience [. . .], [which is] not to say that we alter our description and then as a result our experience of our predicament alters” (1985a, 37). Rather, it is that “certain modes of experience are not possible without certain self-descriptions” (1985a, 37). That is, what is at stake here is not the phenomenology of an individual subject, but an argumentative space in the inherited discourse of a culture that is inhabited and affirmed by the speaker: “The meanings and norms implicit in [. . .] practices are not just in the minds of the actors but are out there in the practices themselves [. . .]. These must be the common property of the society before there can be any question of anyone entering a negotiation or not” (Taylor, 1985b, 36).

In lieu of Kantian procedures or Archimedean points that are outside the terms of debates in question, we reason through comparison and contrast so that we argue for the relative superiority of certain understandings *vis à vis* others: “The nerve of rational proof consists in showing that [a certain] transition is an error-reducing one. The argument turns on interpretations of possible transitions from A to B or B to A. This form of argument has its source in autobiographical narrative [. . .]. [For instance,] I see that I was confused about the relation of resentment and love [. . .]. Arguing here is contesting between interpretations of what I have been living” (Taylor, 1989, 72). The idea of reasoning through comparison applies to historical, cross-cultural, and biographical examples – e.g., a society that lives through a transition from hierarchical to egalitarian relationships, an anthropologist who enriches her understanding of the concept of family through living in another culture, or an individual who moves from a shallow to a deeper understanding of love and hate. In each case, the individual or collective subject makes an interpretive, comparative assessment of the transition in terms of gains and losses. In articulating such transitions, narrative and other forms of discourse take on both a temporal and argumentative burden. This involves characterizing and narrating an understanding of configurations of meaning prior to the change in light of the new understanding provided by the present.⁵

Such transitional interpretive accounts cannot be understood only on the model of autobiography. Transitions can come about, for example, in the face of new statistical information about the period, problem or person under study. They can also come about from new explanatory hypotheses, say, about how global capitalism works, or from large scale readings of the historical connections, such as the relationship of religion and democracy. Transitional arguments are not necessarily

historically accurate or without considerable ideological baggage, such as we find in the creative misremembering of nationalist histories.⁶ My point is that moral reasoning does not work through the isolation of moral concepts into principles that are then applied to situations. Rather, reasoning works through revisions of packages of belief.

To take a simple literary example of Rorty's, we can say that Huck Finn "fears that he may not be able to live with himself if he does not help return Jim to slavery. But he winds up giving it a try. He would not be willing, presumably, if he were completely unable to imagine a new practical identity – the identity of one who takes loyalty to friends as releasing one from legal and constitutional obligations" (Rorty, 197–198). Thus, the question 'why should I be moral?' is better understood, as 'Should I retain the practical identity I presently have, or rather develop and cherish the new identity I shall have to assume if I do what my present practical identity forbids?' (Rorty, 198). This moment in *Huckleberry Finn* depends on a moral perception that is not part of Huck's inferential network of meanings and yet solicits his attention. These kinds of perceptions are important in James since they often signal the inadequacy of a character's network of reasoning about himself/herself and the world, but we find them in many places, such as Catherine MacKinnon's critique of moral and legal principles. She is not asking us to apply the principle of equality to our shared world. She is asking us to change who we are so that the world of women's domination, which we currently trivialize or ignore in our moral and referential judgments, can come into view.⁷ Semantic transitions of a very different sort are the key to the Jamesian articulation of moral shapes of time.

MORAL REASONING AS TRANSITION IN JAMES

The first step in understanding James's philosophy is to examine the way he thematizes the relationship of common sense, the language and concepts of the everyday, to the semantic explorations of his protagonists. James's texts do not simply charge off into uncharted linguistic and normative territory. Instead, they set up a domain of received wisdom for the reader and the community in the novels through secondary characters, such as the Assinghams, Fanny and the Colonel, in *The Golden Bowl*. These characters serve as a kind of chorus who test the adequacy of received languages in their attempts to read the actions of the main characters.

Early in the novel, the narrator stakes out the tension between blunt, realistic Colonel and his speculative, emotional wife, "He could deal with things perfectly, for all his needs, without getting near them. This was the way he dealt with his wife, a large proportion of whose meanings he could neglect. He edited for their general economy the play of her mind, just as he edited, savingly, with the stump of a pencil, her telegrams" (James, 1909, I, 67). For her part, "Mrs. Assingham denied, as we know, that her husband had a play of mind; so that she could on her side, treat these remarks only as if they had been senseless physical gestures or nervous facial movements" (I, 68). Thus, the Assinghams maintain a functional level of intersubjectivity only by ignoring the linguistic peculiarities of the other.

This intersubjectivity starts to break down once the main action begins. Here is Fanny Assingham's attempt to articulate her first inkling that there has been a change the relationships among the protagonists: "I *see* the boat they're in, but I'm not, thank God, in it myself. To-day, however,' Mrs Assingham added, 'today in Eaton Square I did see'" (I, 370). But the Colonel refuses to put an object after "see" and asks a simple but devastating question: "Well, then what?" (I, 370). This question sends Fanny scrambling after a slippery referent: "Oh many things. More somehow than ever before it was as if, God help me, I was seeing *for* them – I mean for the others. It was as if something had happened – I don't know what, except some effect of these days with them at that place – that I had with them at that place – that had either made things come out or had cleared my own eyes" (I, 370). When Fanny starts to cry, the Colonel seeks to comfort her by agreeing; however, before he can agree he must still find out what "it" is: "She must reassure him, he was made to feel, absolutely in her own way. He'd adopt it and conform to it as soon as he should be able to make it out. The only thing was that it took such incalculable twists and turns" (I, 371).

The "it" in James has an unusual semantic status that is characteristic of his late style. "It" does not have an antecedent and it functions like a proper name rather than a common noun. John Searle gives helpful clarification on how proper nouns function: "But the uniqueness and immense pragmatic convenience of proper names in our language lies precisely in the fact that they enable us to refer publicly to objects without being forced to raise issues and come to an agreement as to which descriptive characteristics exactly constitute the identity of the object. They function not as descriptions, but as pegs on which to hang descriptions. Thus the looseness of the criteria for proper names is a necessary condition for isolating the referring function from the describing function of language" (Searle, 172).

In this dialogue – as in many others – "it" is a place holder for a gap in moral common sense for individual characters, particular couples or for a community. When Fanny tries to provide an identifying description for the "it," she starts spinning, saying first "many things" and then speaking of diffuse effect bounded by time on "these days" and space, "that place."

By consenting to talking about these things, the literal-minded Colonel gets caught in the metaphoric process and comes to accept the existence of "things" and even events that he cannot fathom. In the following passage, the Assinghams negotiate the existence of events; however, the Colonel can assent to Fanny's statement only by the repetition of her words, for he cannot translate them into another statement. He can no longer ignore or edit "the play of her mind":

"*Nothing* – in spite of everything – will happen. *Nothing* has happened. *Nothing* is happening."

He looked a trifle disappointed. "I see. For us."

"For us. For whom else?" And he was to feel indeed how she wished him to understand it. "We know nothing on earth--!" It was an undertaking he must sign.

So he wrote, as it were, his name. "We know nothing on earth." It was like the soldiers' watchword at night. (I, 400).

The Colonel can agree only through a word for word repetition of words that he does not understand. The text insists on the consequences of this agreement for his

identity by calling it a “signature,” and we will see how agreeing to speak in a new language means a change of identity. Moral concepts are bound to identities.

However, characters are not simply at the mercy of the moral perceptions that ask them to revise their self-understandings. They can also initiate this process. The most spectacular example in *The Golden Bowl* is Charlotte Stant’s “demonstration” to her ex-lover, the Prince, on the eve of his wedding. After asking him to go out to look for wedding present together, she makes the following speech, which the narrator calls a “demonstration” (I, 98), and its use of the demonstrative pronoun “this” is extraordinary. Once again, we see a pronoun function as a semantic place holder, like Fanny’s “it.” I will cite only a part of the speech: “This is different. This is what I wanted. This is what I’ve got. This is what I shall always have. This is what I should have missed. . . .” (I, 97). The referential force is directed toward an unnamed, intangible feature of the situation. When Charlotte turns from the representation of her feelings to statement of what she wants the Prince to know and to her commentary on her previous speech, she refers only to the meaning of words that she has just uttered, the meaning that she names “it”: “I wanted you to understand. I wanted you, that is, to hear. I don’t care, I think whether you understand or not. . . . What I want is that it shall always be with you – so that you’ll never be able quite to get rid of it – that I did. I won’t say that you did – you may make as little of that as you like. But that I was with you where we are and as we are – I just saying this. Giving myself, in other words, away – and perfectly willing to do it for nothing. That’s all” (I, 97–98).

Charlotte creates a referential hook for their moments together, a common reference point that exercises an influence on how they talk together. Charlotte enhances this power by getting the Prince to agree to keep the excursion a secret from Maggie and by speaking of Maggie and her father as quite different from the two of them (I, 102). Charlotte’s struggle for control of reference reemerges later in the shop when the Prince offers a gift, a “ricordo” of “this little hunt” (I, 108). But Charlotte resists the offer saying that it runs against her “logic”: “But logic’s everything. That at least is how I feel it. A ricordo from you – from you to me – is a ricordo of nothing. It has no reference! (I, 108).⁸ When the Prince hesitates, she insists, “You don’t refer,’ she went on to her companion, ‘I refer” (I, 109).

Later in the novel, Charlotte comes around to visit the prince when he is alone and makes another “demonstration” (I, 300–301). (“The whole demonstration, none the less, presented itself as taking place at a very high level of debate – in the cool upper air of the finer discrimination, the deeper sincerity, the larger philosophy. No matter what the facts invoked and arrayed, it was only a question as yet of their seeing their way together” (I, 300–301). This process culminates: when they agree to “say the same thing” (I, 308). The scene closes when they repeat, “it’s too wonderful,” “too beautiful,” “too sacred” (I, 312). The “it” becomes part of a chant that inaugurates a new narrative and temporal space for them. Once they agree to a common way of talking, they establish an intimacy that separates them from the Maggie Verver, the Prince’s fiancée, and her father.

A similar process linguistic process takes place in the mind of the characters in which an abstract “something” marks a challenging moral perception. Although we can find examples in *The Golden Bowl*, I would rather focus on Lambert Strether,

the protagonist of *The Ambassadors* since this text will permit us to develop other ways James's connects time and the moral shapes of identity.

In this novel, Strether is sent to Paris by Mrs. Newsome, his patron and lover, to retrieve Mrs. Newsome's son, Chad. Mrs. Newsome is concerned that Chad has become too ensconced in Paris and is about to be "lost." It is time for Chad to come home and run the family business and become part of New England culture. In this novel, our intersubjective guide is Maria Gostrey, an American who fluent in the traditions of American and Parisian society.

The plot of the novel does not advance according to a line of action; instead, it moves in abrupt changes in systems of meaning whose relationship to what has come before is differential, not casual: "Nothing could be odder than Strether's sense of himself as at that moment launched into something of which the sense would be quite disconnected from the sense of his past and which was literally beginning there and then" (James, 1964, 20). "What carried him hither and yon was an admirable theory" (James, 1964, 57). In these sentences, as is often the case, Strether is an object, not an actor, and the cause is not named. Neither the character nor the narrator is interested in causal explanation; rather, we see ontological rupture that explodes subject and object. These grammatical constructions, which many have noticed, are often reduced to Strether's psychological nature – his passivity. But what is most important about them is that it is one of James's ways of foregrounding the changes in the medium of meaning rather than actions of the subject. Characters and narrator often express this rupture of semantic space by saying that they do not "know where they are."⁹

One of the ways that James subordinates the linear temporality of events to the characters' interpretive engagement with the moral significance of events is through his narrative technique of past perfect retrospection. With this device, he leaps over the incident and then has the character reflect on it, trying to find a language and an identity that can make proper sense of it. What matters about the external event is whether and how Strether can fit it into his "system" of meaning. James focuses on the moral event of interpretation, an ontological linguistic event rather than epistemology question of Strether's point of view.

Early in the novel, Strether goes to the theater with Maria and he comically struggles to interpret her "ribbon":

It would have been absurd of him to trace the ramifications of the effect of the ribbon from which Miss Gostrey's trinket depended, had he not for the hour, at the best, been so given over to uncontrolled perceptions. What was it but an uncontrolled perception that his friend's velvet band somehow added, in her appearance, to the value of every other item – to that of her smile and of the way she carried her head. . . . He had in addition taken it as a starting point for fresh backward, fresh forward, fresh lateral flights. The manner in which Mrs Newsome's throat was encircled suddenly represented for him, in an alien order, almost as man things as the manner in which Miss Gostrey's was."¹⁰ (42).

In this passage, an impression challenges Strether's system of meaning. The simplicity of the object makes it a source of embarrassment: "What, certainly, had a man conscious of a man's work in the world to do with red velvet bands" (42). In order to develop an adequate language, Strether takes "flights." This conceptual gap is not trivial but a gap in his identity.¹¹ The band is part of an alien system of moral meaning, a system that challenges the system of Woollett. When he tries to

locate the same 'image' in the language of Woollett, he finds that "it" no longer has the same meaning. His first stop in his flight is the way in which Mrs. Newsome's throat is encircled; however, when he gets "there," he finds that the known on which 'he' wants to ground his understanding has become "alien: "The manner in which Mrs Newsome's throat was encircled suddenly represented. . .almost as many things as the manner in which Miss Gostrey's was (42). Strether then extends Mrs. Newsome's resonance by recalling that he once compared her to Queen Elizabeth. This simile unleashes a swarm of "things": "All sorts of things in fact now seemed to come over him, comparatively few of which his chronicler can hope for space to mention. It came over him for instance that Miss Gostrey perhaps looked like Mary Stuart: Lambert Strether had a candour of fancy that could rest gratified for an instance in such an antithesis" (43). Strether contains the threat by indulging in a kind of aestheticism that defuses the interpretive crisis. He is able to entertain meanings without considering the world disclosed by these meanings.

This aestheticizing will prove both productive and deceptive during his stay in Paris. At the end of the novel, Strether aestheticizes a couple and their surrounding landscape, only to be floored by the recognition that the couple is Chad and his lover, and they are in a position that leaves no doubt as to the sexual nature of their affair, something that he has hidden from himself for most of the novel. However, at this point early in the novel, Strether recognizes that he must abandon "his odious suspicion of any form of beauty. . . [H]e shouldn't reach the truth of anything till he had at least got rid of that" (118). Strether recognizes that making the proper judgment will require a kind of apprenticeship of which James speaks in his Prefaces: "If you haven't for a fiction, the root of the matter in you, haven't the sense of life and the penetrating imagination, you are a fool in the very presence of the revealed and assured; but. . .if you are so armed you are not really helpless, not without your resource, even before mysteries abysmal" (James, 1984, 78). The Americans, such as Chad's family, who make simple moral judgments without making themselves vulnerable to "appreciation," miss this morality reality. ("Appreciate" is one of the words James uses to distinguish Strether's horizon of moral truth from that of the other Americans.¹²) He is as committed to the truth just as he is to his obligation to Mrs. Newsome: "He mustn't dispossess himself of the faculty of seeing thing as they were" (79). Strether moral and linguistic changes during his stay in Paris make it difficult to find a language for his ongoing progress reports to Mrs. Newsome: "A personal relation was relation so long as people perfectly understood or better still didn't care if they didn't. From the moment they cared if they didn't, it was living by the sweat of one's brow" (92). These dramas of moral meaning do not fit well within the moral model of self-legislation or within the Aristotelian model, but comport well with the hermeneutics of "strong evaluations" that Taylor develops.¹³

In sum, an understanding of the dynamics of Jamesian moral reasoning must begin with his hermeneutic conception of meaning, which creates the space for his original linguistic articulation of time and identity. Such understanding must be attuned to the dynamics of style for capturing the receptivity, obtuseness and creativity of the moral subject. James's contextualization of truth and morality around the identity of characters and their communities is no a facile pluralism,

but a perspicuous display of how imaginative practical reason comes to terms with shifting circumstances and interpretive frameworks. Indeed, the Jamesian text is not organized around the time of action but around the temporality of interpretive frameworks. His texts alternate between periods of stability and challenge. This kind of writing foregrounds his characters' struggles to find the proper place for himself/herself in an uncertain moral space. James's obscurities are not, as brother William would have it, about avoiding the "core of literature" for the "gleams and innuendoes." James's style articulates the interpretive and therefore linguistic crises of moral identity that could not be presented in a more straightforward manner. In his essay, "The New Novel," Henry offers the following rejoinder to both William and his sympathetic critics: "The value of the offered thing, its whole relation to us, is created by the breath of language, that on such terms exclusively, for appropriation and enjoyment, we know it" (*Literary Criticism*, 159).

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NOTES

- ¹ Henry James. ed. 1928. *The letters of William James*, II, 278. Boston, MA: Atlantic Monthly Press.
- ² Nussbaum, *Love's knowledge* and Pippin Henry James and modern moral life
- ³ Taylor says that the disengaged theory's misdescription means that "we are far more Aristotelian than we allow, and hence our practice is in some significant way based less on pure disengaged freedom and atomism than we realize" (Taylor, 1993, p. 344). In Taylor's work there are many examples, from Hobbes to Sartre. Rorty and Taylor differ over the question of naturalism. I discuss this difference in *Hiding from History*.
- ⁴ In the pragmatist view of Brandom and Stout, we should think of moral and epistemological reasoning in terms of the inferential networks of the community in question. "There is no such thing either as the mere application of previously determinate conceptual content nor as the institution of a wholly novel conceptual content, [for] every application of a concept develops its content" (Brandom, p. 157).
- ⁵ Thus, Taylor's understanding of the "constitutive" view of language does not leave us with the narrow unmasking conclusion – i.e., what researchers took for an object of investigation is, in fact, constituted by language – such as, Said's unmasking of "orientalism," – a view is still caught in the disengaged perspective.
- ⁶ Taylor notes the "creative misremembering" of the taking of the Bastille, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 127–129.
- ⁷ MacKinnon asks us to see that forms of domination in practices that we currently advocate or at least tolerate – e.g., pornography – are bound up with our moral vocabularies. See *Feminism Unmodified* or her more recent collection, *Women's Lives, Men's Laws*.
- ⁸ Part II of *The Golden Bowl* opens with Maggie starting to question her own moral system and logic: "Maggie's actual reluctance to ask herself with proportionate sharpness why she had ceased to take comfort in the sight of it [the arrangement of the lives of the four protagonists] represented accordingly a lapse from the ideal consistency on which her moral comfort almost at any time depended. To remain consistent she had always been capable of cutting down more or less her prior term" (II, p. 6). At the end of *The Ambassadors*, Strether speaks of his moral "logic" in deciding to leave Maria. (344). He also theorizes about the background conditions of perception: "It was the proportions that were changed, and the proportions were at all times, he philosophized, the very conditions of perception, the terms of thought" (*The Ambassadors*, p. 196).

⁹ The expression appears twice in the following exchange between Maria and Strether:

“She’s [Mme de Vionnet] coming round to see me – that for you. . .but I don’t require to know where I am.”

The waste of wonder might be proscribed; but Strether, characteristically, was even by this time in the immensity of space.

“By which you mean that you know where *she* is?” (James, 1964, p. 136).

William Veeder notes forty-one different appearances of this expression and its variants in “Strether and the Transcendence of Language.”

¹⁰ We see other examples of it in the novel over the meaning of “Paris,” pp. 64–65, “Chad,” pp. 89–94.

¹¹ Jeffrey Stout says of such noninferential observations, “Observation involves conceptual skills that one can acquire only through initiation into a discursive practice. While some of these skills are inferential, others are not. The noninferential skills are as much the result of training as the inferential ones. We are trained to respond noninferentially to cats with ‘cat’ . . . to instances of cruelty by using the term ‘cruelty’ Our social practices also prescribe actions. –e.g. parents read sounds of newborn and other behavior. . . . Some of these noninferential judgments are normative. A referee can see whether a slide tackle is fair or foul” (Stout, p. 220).

¹² For examples of “appreciate” or “appreciation,” see pp. 45, 61, 92, 245, 322, 327.

¹³ Terry Pinkard, Pippin’s colleague in the analytic Hegelian revival, criticizes “Taylor’s insistence on ‘strong evaluations’ as making claims on us – and therefore having an authority over us that cannot be rationally explicated in terms of our giving them that authority” because this “authority is not self-legislated” (Pinkard, p. 207). I think Pinkard mischaracterizes the subtlety of the hermeneutic position, which recognizes the moral subject’s vulnerability to claims without erecting these claims into “authorities” in a premodern sense. For instance, Strether is unseated from any imaginative play when he sees the artist Gloriani: “Was what it told or what it asked him the greater of the mysteries? . . . [I]t was for all the world to Strether then as if in the matter of his accepted duty he had been positively on trial” (121). He comes to terms with this threat, not by submitting to its authority, but by revising his self-understanding.

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SECTION IV
THE LIMITS OF ORDINARY EXPERIENCE

“THE LIMITS OF ORDINARY EXPERIENCE”: A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL READING OF “RAPACCINI’S
DAUGHTER”

ABSTRACT

The author identifies the fundamental interpretive problem in “Rappaccini’s Daughter” as being associated with the desire of Baglioni and Giovanni to bring Beatrice back within “the limits of ordinary experience.” Based on Hawthorne’s most prevalent themes, this desire seems to be both right and wrong, and the story seems disunified. A phenomenological perspective on this problem examines how Hawthorne views ordinary human experience, and demonstrates that despite the harm Rappaccini has done to Beatrice by isolating her, her poisonous condition represents Hawthorne’s view of fallen but mature human nature, corresponding in some way to having experienced an *epochè* that Baglioni and Giovanni never achieve. The limits of ordinary experience can be seen as analogous to Husserl’s natural attitude of unreflective daily life, never fully examining what Gerhard Funke calls “the subjective origins of all objectivities.” Hawthorne advocates passing beyond this unreflective attitude, which never fully recognizes that mature human nature is a mixture of good and evil that accepts this good and evil in self and others.

Wolfgang Iser, in his influential phenomenological work *The Act of Reading*, says “It is generally recognized that literary texts take on their reality by being read, and this in turn means that texts must already contain certain conditions of actualization that will allow their meaning to be assembled in the responsive mind of the recipient.”¹ It is of course these “conditions of actualization” in “Rappaccini’s Daughter” that create the interpretive problems we struggle with. Stories such as “The Birthmark” or “Roger Malvin’s Burial” may produce different responses in different readers, but the elements that make up these stories fit together well, and the stories seem unified in form and in the meanings they produce. With “Rappaccini’s Daughter” all the pieces do not seem to fit, yet the human attitudes and behaviors that Hawthorne consistently explores are clearly present. The story is so fascinating despite its apparent flaws that we continue to try to explain what makes it “work” as a literary work of art.

Decades of modern academic criticism of “Rappaccini’s Daughter” discussed the story primarily in terms of Hawthorne’s most prevalent moral themes and aesthetic concerns but failed to produce a widely accepted reading of “Rappaccini’s Daughter” that resolved the interpretive problems. More recent criticism has turned to an exploration of the story’s sources or discussion of the story as evidence of Hawthorne’s attitude toward a variety of trends and people of his era. My concern

about much of this recent criticism of "Rappaccini's Daughter" is that the interpretations are too narrow: some interpret the story as showing Hawthorne's view of miscegenation or his attitude toward homeopathic medicine or venereal disease; others say it offers a reading of the Gospel of John or reveals some aspect of his personal or family life. Even if one or more of these interpretations can be said to eliminate the difficulties and apparent contradictions in the story, they leave it rather far removed from the rest of Hawthorne's work and his most prevalent themes. To paraphrase Ben Franklin, these recent interpretations, though they may be true, are not very useful in the kind of survey course where most students encounter Hawthorne and where the stories are often used as a path to *The Scarlet Letter* or another novel.

Phenomenology offers a perspective on "ordinary experience" and its "limits" that suggests the story is indeed a unified expression of some of Hawthorne's most central themes. But before outlining my methodology, which I believe is original in its application to the story, let me offer a framework for the interpretive problem and its solution which connects to previous discussions of the story in ways that most readers will recognize. I believe a key to the story lies in the value of Giovanni and Baglioni's desire to bring Beatrice back to what they conceive as a state of normal human experience and fellowship. Isolation is always an undesirable condition in Hawthorne's work, whether self-imposed, like Ethan Brand, or imposed from without, like the isolation the Puritan community forces on Hester. So on the one hand, it may seem appropriate for Baglioni, regardless of his motive, to try to bring Beatrice out of the isolation her father has imposed upon her and enable her to reconnect to the "magnetic chain of humanity." But since mature human nature in virtually all of Hawthorne's work contains a mixture of good and evil, of moral "purity" and "poison," and perhaps the chief virtue in his world view is for humans to accept that mixture in themselves and others, then Giovanni and Baglioni should sympathize with and accept Beatrice. From this perspective, Baglioni's effort to "fix" Beatrice looks inappropriate, even immoral. So the reader is faced with a dilemma: viewed in the context of several of Hawthorne's major moral themes, Baglioni's, and by extension Giovanni's, effort appears to be both proper and improper, not in the sense of a moral dilemma but as an action that must either be right or wrong, and the story seems confusing and disunified.

A phenomenological approach to the story will support the following solution to this problem. Rappaccini, despite what may be misguided but good intentions, was wrong to isolate his daughter from the rest of humanity. But once the damage is done, once she is "fallen" from her "normal" state, those who care for her should leave well enough alone and should love and accept her. Even though Beatrice has the poison of her father's plants in her system, Giovanni also has the poison of a shallow, suspicious, and sexually inadequate nature, and he should accept and love her in spite of her flaw, as she loves him. Baglioni can at least explore the idea of curing Beatrice of the "awful doom" her father brought upon her, but as a scientist he should recognize the danger, and as a human being he should sympathize with and accept Beatrice as she is, a mixture of purity and poison, good and evil. After all, he has the poison of professional jealousy in his system, yet despite this

flaw might have been a tolerably good mentor to Giovanni in his university studies. For Beatrice, to return to “the limits of ordinary experience” and “ordinary nature,” or even to have remained in that state to begin with, is a limiting and unsatisfactory way to experience life. The three male characters fail in their relationship with her because they have remained in the “normal” state, having never become fully conscious of their own flaws or able to accept the flaws in others.

Phenomenology offers a perspective on what Hawthorne sees as the “normal” and the “fallen” or mature states of human consciousness and experience. Edmund Husserl says human beings have a “natural attitude” toward our experience of the world that assumes it can be known by the objective methods of empirical observation. This attitude undervalues or even overlooks the subjectivity of human consciousness. Given that we cannot separate perceived objects from our consciousness of them, Husserl advocates “an absolute universal criticism, which, for its part, by abstention from all positions that already give anything existent, must first create for itself a universe of absolute freedom from prejudice. The universality of transcendental experience and description does this by inhibiting the universal ‘prejudice’ of world-experience, which hiddenly pervades all naturalness.”² This prejudice is uncovered and gradually eliminated by “bracketing” existing attitudes and continually examining our assumptions that can improperly influence our interpretation of experience. Gerhard Funke describes Husserl’s view this way: all knowledge is authentic and relevant “when the ‘subjective’ origins of all ‘objectivities’ have been successively disclosed through a radical reflection.”³ This radical reflection or *epochè* is the process of moving beyond the natural attitude, via the bracketing spoken of above, to arrive at a life-world of true consciousness, the transcendental-phenomenological perspective.⁴

While Hawthorne was not primarily concerned with the structures of consciousness that were Husserl’s subject, a broad, perhaps metaphorical, application of these principles provides a valuable perspective. The “natural attitude” or prejudice toward experience takes a variety of forms in Hawthorne’s work, though most of the characters thus prejudiced have a similar naiveté in their view of the world. The innocence of Pearl differs from that of Phoebe and Hilda, and all three differ from Giovanni, but in their “unfallen” state none of these characters recognize that both good and evil can be intermixed in the world and that both personal sorrow and joy, and sympathy for the sorrow and joy of others, are needed for an individual to experience full humanity. Their view of the world, their prejudiced state of mind, blinds them either to their own failings, to the evil around them, or to both. The contrast between Phoebe and Pearl is particularly enlightening. For Phoebe, “The path which would best have suited her was the well-worn track of ordinary life.”⁵ Pearl’s nature, however, “lacked reference and adaptation to the world into which she was born” (I: 91). But for both Phoebe and Pearl, the innocence could be described as an unreflective natural attitude, lacking a true transcendental-phenomenological perspective, and for both, it is a deep grief that humanizes their soul and raises them to that perspective.

The idea that perception and reality influence each other is critical though not original to phenomenology, and the reader will recognize similarities between

phenomenology and other ideas discussed in Hawthorne criticism, such as Romantic notions of the workings of the senses, “all the mighty world/Of eye, and ear—both what they half create,/And what perceive.”⁶ But Husserl laid out the principles of this interaction in a way that has influenced much twentieth century thinking. Husserl says that “descriptions of the intentional [perceived] object as such, with regard to the determinations attributed to it in the modes of consciousness concerned” constitute the noematic component of consciousness. “Its counterpart is noetic description, which concerns the modes of the cogito itself, the modes of consciousness (for example: perception, recollection, retention).”⁷ These two sides of an “inquiry into consciousness. . . can be characterized as *belonging together inseparably*.”⁸ Quentin Lauer phrases Husserl’s view as follows: “If the experience is fully grasped, its object (the ‘noematic’ aspect of the act) is fully grasped, which is to say, it is ‘known.’” According to Lauer, for Husserl “The question to be asked is not ‘what do I experience’ but rather ‘what is my experience?’”⁹ Millicent Bell suggests that Hawthorne was aware of such principles: “Somehow he foresaw a ‘postmodern’ way of thinking that ‘reality’ is a word always to be set in quotation marks as a part of the mind’s figuration. It is remarkable—though not generally remarked upon—how Hawthorne expresses the suspicion that the ‘real’ cannot be confidently distinguished from the imaginary because all we can claim to know in either case is the problematic world of our ideas.”¹⁰ As Giovanni and Baglioni interpret their experience, they must continually examine themselves and rid themselves of any prejudice that will hinder their seeing Beatrice as she is. And we as readers must do the same in our attention to the story.

To summarize, Husserl’s phenomenology “consciously seeks to reduce all being to phenomenality, since only phenomenally can being be absolute. The key to a knowledge of being in its essentiality is an analysis of the intentional structures of consciousness, wherein being appears. The groundwork is laid for a philosophy that will find the essence of whatever can be said to be in an analysis of intentional conscious acts, with their noetic and noematic structures.”¹¹ It is in this sense, in the sense of experience as consciousness, that the phrase “limits of ordinary experience” becomes a key to viewing “Rappaccini’s Daughter” as a unified expression of Hawthorne’s major themes. For all three of the men in the story, “ordinary experience” means remaining in a prejudiced, unreflective attitude toward life. Neither Giovanni nor Baglioni, despite saying that they want to restore Beatrice to what they consider a normal life, really sees through to her essence as a being who is both dangerous and loveable, and neither examines the reason for his attitude toward her. Dr. Rappaccini neglects Beatrice’s spirit in his effort to make her physical nature impervious to harm. Baglioni lacks the scientific knowledge or the human wisdom to see that, once changed, Beatrice cannot, and indeed should not, be returned to a former state of being.

My phenomenological reading of the story—and this would be true of a first or a successive reading—begins by once again examining my current attitude toward the story, based on the experience I have had with it via study and teaching. This examination must then “bracket” or place in methodological suspension my existing assumptions about matters of interpretation. Carol Marie Bensick takes this

approach, calling it “an initial ‘unreading’” of taken-for-granted assumptions about the story, a way to “set aside the moral-allegorical constraints we have believed inevitable.”¹² I must try once again, via the hermeneutic circle, to see what the story seems to say in view of the most widely held interpretations of Hawthorne’s best works. How do the characters in “Rappaccini’s Daughter” behave in light of Hester, Arthur, Roger and Pearl, or any set of Hawthorne’s characters, and how does this story influence our interpretation of them?¹³

In particular, I must again bracket my interpretation of the garden allegory suggested by the lines “Was this garden, then, the Eden of the present world?—and this man, . . . was he the Adam?” (X: 96) For years I clung to the following standard view of the supposed allegory: Beatrice, as the only female, has to be Eve, and Giovanni, as her mate, Adam. Rappaccini, as creator of the garden, which is “his world,” is the figure corresponding to God, and Baglioni, as spoiler of Rappaccini’s plan, is the serpent or Satan. This approach to the allegory, like any other—whether Beatrice be thought of as Adam, God, or serpent—creates about as many problems as it solves, and the reader doesn’t need to hear them again. So I must begin by avoiding the temptation of trying to work out the story according to this or any allegorical scheme—in fact, I must abandon any absolute insistence that all elements of the story can be made to cohere, since few works have anything resembling formal perfection—and simply look first for the presence of Hawthorne’s most typical themes, which are perhaps expressed most concisely by the qualities Ethan Brand possessed before his monomania took control of him: the need for “love and sympathy for mankind,” “pity for human guilt and woe,” and the ability to avoid any frame of mind that would disturb “the counterpoise between his mind and heart” (XI: 98).

Leaving the story’s preface aside for now, the phrase “limits of ordinary experience” occurs first in relation to Giovanni’s perception of the garden. On day two of the story, Giovanni wakes after having dreamt of a “Flower and maiden. . . fraught with some strange peril in either shape.” As he looks out his window into the garden, he finds that the morning sunshine has “brought everything within the limits of ordinary experience,” and the garden seems a “real and matter-of-fact affair” after all (X: 98). Here we see Giovanni at least trying to bracket his previous impressions about the garden and its inhabitants, both vegetable and human, though it may be more accurate to say that mere circumstances alter the impressions of his dream. He is also aware of the noematic and noetic poles of his experience; concerning his observation of Dr. Rappaccini and Beatrice, he “could not determine how much of the singularity which he attributed to both, was due to their own qualities, and how much to his wonder-working fancy” (X: 98). So in this initial use of the phrase that concerns us, Giovanni seems vaguely aware of the phenomenological principles at work—the only things that can be real to him are the phenomena of the garden, doctor, and maiden as they appear to his consciousness, as they happen in his experience. But he must constantly review his interpretation of them based on his assumptions in order to arrive at a true understanding of their essence, and having a shallow heart—one that does not look beyond the impressions of the moment—he is unable to do this.

The contrast between Giovanni's moonlight and daylight views of Beatrice has elicited many comments, some of which suggest that Hawthorne preferred one view to the other. Thomas R. Mitchell in "Rappaccini's Garden and Emerson's Concord" discusses Margaret Fuller's influence on Hawthorne and observes that in Fuller's system, flower and moon are feminine symbols, whereas the sun is masculine and rational. So when Giovanni awakens and the daylight brings "everything within the limits of ordinary experience," "Giovanni finds that he can no longer recognize, much less embrace or repel, the 'mysteries' of flower and maiden that had been present during the "less wholesome glow of moonshine,"¹⁴ suggesting that Hawthorne knew the value of appropriating the more subjective feminine perspective. Samuel Chase Coale focuses on "the open-ended ambiguities that Hawthorne, rooted in his own darker distrust of human perception and interpretation, has himself been wrestling with" in many of his stories.¹⁵ After Giovanni has dreamed of flower and maiden the first night, "after the first glimpse 'in the light of morning' of the next day, unable to deal with ambiguity and contradictory complexities—the very nature of Hawthorne's icons—Giovanni decides that the garden 'would serve, he said to himself, as a symbolic language, to keep him in communion with nature,' a transcendently conventional interpretation that allows him 'to take a most rational view of the whole matter.'"¹⁶ Coale quickly acknowledges that Hawthorne sees this as an unsatisfactory perspective, and though Coale suggests that the story never quite resolves the tension between the rational certainty and the darker distrust, his argument shows Giovanni's need to recognize and accept Beatrice's "dark" nature.

The second appearance of the phrase "limits of ordinary experience" also focuses on Giovanni's perception of Beatrice, the noetic component of his consciousness. Giovanni's first encounters with Beatrice are from afar. He first sees her attend the purple-blossomed plant that her father avoided; he next sees the insects die from her breath and the lizard die from the nectar dropping from the sister plant. During this second observation of Beatrice he speaks to her and gives her the "pure and healthful flowers" (X: 103), a comment that surely reflects his suspicions, and thinks he sees them begin to wither in her hand before she even gets into the house. All three events raise his suspicions about her physical nature; Baglioni had also dropped hints of this in their first interview. Yet he is personally, physically attracted to her. Giovanni is painfully aware that Beatrice has "instilled a fierce and subtle poison into his system" that was neither love nor horror but a "lurid intermixture of the two" (X: 105), which, ironically, is not far from the love and pity he should feel for her. But he doesn't recognize the value of the mixed view, so he believes he must either leave Padua or else accustom himself "to the familiar and day-light view of Beatrice; thus bringing her rigidly and systematically within the limits of ordinary experience" (X:105) in a misguided effort to rid himself of this intermixture. He chooses the latter when Lisabetta shows him the passageway to the garden.

Once Giovanni has been admitted to the garden, Beatrice cautions him to "Believe nothing of me save what you see with your own eyes" and adds that even what he sees, "If true to the outward senses, still it may be false in its essence" (X: 112). She seems to know that he may associate her poisonous body with a corresponding evil of spirit, so she begs him to bracket his assumptions about what she might be

like and see her as she truly is. But with the shallow-hearted Giovanni, there is no chance of this; in her presence, he still sees only part of her. Now he sees only her pure spirit; he finds her innocent, “human and maiden-like,” not at all “the being who had so wrought upon his imagination—whom he had idealized in such hues of terror”(X: 113). Bensick speaks of Giovanni’s “hope and dread” as an example of his “hermeneutic approach to all phenomena” but seems to acknowledge that his approach isn’t successful in leading him closer to the truth. “Giovanni is evidently convinced that things have particular meanings; moreover, these meanings are inherent, intrinsically determined by their material substance, not simply conferred by an observing mind. Finally, Giovanni’s mind seems not to admit the concept of alternating or multiple identities. Beatrice is either all angel or all demon. . . .”¹⁷ Whether observing her poisonous body from afar, or under the influence of her personality and spirit, which craves love and companionship, he still maintains his prejudiced perspective and doesn’t rise to a higher consciousness of her being and her needs. Edward Wagenknecht says “it is clear that Giovanni is only the ‘natural man,’ devoid of spiritual insight. He is ‘the man from Missouri,’ and he ‘believes what he sees.’ Therefore he fails the hero’s test to which he is subjected and loses the girl he thinks he loves because he misses everything of real significance about her.”¹⁸ Giovanni knows neither her nor himself, having failed to recognize his own shallow heart and her full humanity. He of course experiences times when he feels “that his spirit knew [her] with a certainty beyond all other knowledge” (X: 116), but this is more shallow-hearted reaction of the moment, not a conviction based on a growing consciousness of his real feeling for her and her real nature.

Critics of the story have characterized the contrast between what is true to the “outward senses” and what is true in “essence” as a contrast between faith and reason, where Hawthorne shows a preference for faith over empiricism, but this may be a false distinction. Giovanni responds to Beatrice partly by faith and partly on the basis of sensory evidence; his problem is that he never combines the two. He, and in fact all of the male characters in the story, overlook what Funke, in the passage quoted above, refers to as the “‘subjective’ origins of all ‘objectivities.’” Reason must be tempered by faith, and vice versa. John N. Miller also rejects the faith/reason contrast, but he finds another kind of distinction that, from the phenomenological perspective, is also false. Miller argues that “this opposition between faith and reason sinks into a morass of inconsistency within the tale itself. First, we find its author or narrator not condemning but actually recommending a sagacious empiricism to Giovanni,” at which point Miller quotes the lines above about “the familiar and daylight view of Beatrice” that will bring her within “the limits of ordinary experience.” Miller finds the story inconsistent because what Giovanni sees when thus examining Beatrice he dismisses as fantasy.¹⁹ Can this recommendation to the empirical view not be tongue-in-cheek? Giovanni needs to see her as she is, and as Coale suggests above, to see her as she is goes beyond either the moonlight (intuitive/faith-based) or daylight (rational/empirical) view to arrive at a perspective that combines these.

These first two uses of the key phrase “limits of ordinary experience” refer mainly to the process of perception and consciousness as Giovanni observes Beatrice,

Husserl's noetic component of the human process of perceiving the world. The phrase changes for its next two uses, with "experience" being replaced by "nature," a word which focuses less on the mind and more on the object and its place in the world, the noematic component. Since phenomenology cautions us, however, against making a stark distinction between what we "experience" by our sensory perception and the "nature" of the things we perceive, the meaning has changed very little. After Baglioni has told Giovanni that Beatrice has been made poisonous by her father, he tells Giovanni to "be of good cheer, son of my friend! It is not yet too late for the rescue. Possibly, we may even succeed in bringing back this miserable child within the limits of ordinary nature, from which her father's madness has estranged her" (X: 119). This is an issue of reality, not perception, and seems to be an admirable action, even if she were Baglioni's main concern, which she of course is not. "We will thwart Rappaccini yet!" is his motto, not "We will save Beatrice yet!" as it should be. Then the phrase in its new form, "limits of ordinary nature," is used one last time in the story. After Beatrice acknowledges the "awful doom" that her father brought upon her and sees that her father has united them "in this fearful sympathy," Giovanni remembers the vial given him by Baglioni: "might there not still be a hope of his returning within the limits of ordinary nature, and leading Beatrice—the redeemed Beatrice—by the hand" (X: 125–126) into that supposed redemption? The answer to this is, of course, "no." Beatrice's nature already *is* that of an ordinary mature human being. She cannot and should not return to her previous state. And once human beings have "fallen," once they have been introduced to the evil that is an inescapable part of completed human nature, the valuable qualities others should show them—that they should show to themselves—are the qualities of the young Ethan Brand (XI: 98) previously identified.²⁰

At this point certain elements of the Garden of Eden story have reasserted themselves. Since we have bracketed the allegory thus far and tried to examine the story with as few preconceptions as possible, we should be prepared to reexamine it now. William H. Shurr argues that Rappaccini represents both Satan and "the Calvinistic deity, [who] gives his creatures no choice,"²¹ since he creates Beatrice and is also the agent of the change in her physical nature and Giovanni's. Theologically this is akin to the idea that God created Adam and Eve with the potential to sin and hence can be seen as the Author of evil when they do sin, a view which Hawthorne may or may not have subscribed to. Nevertheless, in the literal sense of "ordinary nature," Beatrice and Giovanni have been removed from it. Like Adam and Eve after the Fall, they stand apart from all other beings, an "insulated pair." Is it not right for Baglioni to want to restore them to "ordinary nature"? Can he not be seen as some sort of misguided redeemer?

Throughout his work, Hawthorne consistently suggests that the answer is "no." Hawthorne seems to have little use for the Christian theology which says that God created humans with the capacity for evil and then, when they turned to that evil, turned His omniscient, all-loving back upon them and judged and condemned them. If Gayle Brown is right in asserting that Hawthorne was more religious than he is generally credited with being,²² then he might acknowledge that God provided a way back to Himself through the redemptive suffering of Christ. But Hawthorne

values forgiveness and tolerance of sin so highly, that even though it was wrong in the first place for Rappaccini to isolate his daughter—even as some argue that it was wrong for God to allow mankind to fall—that once the damage is done, the proper thing is not to judge and condemn but to accept and even love the fallen. In this way the fall could become fortunate for both Giovanni and Beatrice, for if they accept themselves and each other, their redemption will work itself out during a lifetime of devotion to each other in spite of their peculiarities.

The perceptive reader will have noticed long before now that I have overlooked the first expression in “Rappaccini’s Daughter” of the idea that concerns us in this essay, which appears in the playful and puzzling introduction. The idea of being within or apart from the limits of ordinary experience and ordinary human nature takes a variety of forms—sometimes artistic, other times epistemological, theological, psychological or sociological—in Hawthorne’s work, and so far we have examined only the moral rather than artistic uses in “Rappaccini’s Daughter.” In the introduction, Hawthorne, as presumed editor of the works of M. de l’Aubépine, tells us that, despite the author’s general tendency to content himself with “the faintest possible counterfeit of real life” in his writings, there are occasional instances where his stories make us feel “as if, after all, we were yet within the limits of our native earth.” He adds that “M. de l’Aubépine’s productions, if the reader chance to take them in precisely the proper point of view, may amuse a leisure hour as well as those of a brighter man. . .” (X: 92). At one level the suggestion that Aubépine “occasionally” makes us feel that we were still within the limits of earth pokes fun at readers who don’t understand Hawthorne’s work; the remark is surely tongue-in-cheek, since in several other introductory statements Hawthorne seems to advocate breaking out of those limits. In the “Preface” to *The House of the Seven Gables* Hawthorne speaks of the novel as a form “presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man’s experience” (II: 1), speaking of the absence of those symbolic devices—serpents in the bosom, scarlet letters in the sky—that characterize romance. But there is no apology for departing from that fidelity and sending the reader aesthetically beyond “the limits of our native earth.” The “Preface” to *The Marble Faun* is even more specific: Hawthorne speaks of Italy as “a sort of poetic or fairy precinct, where actualities would not be so terribly insisted upon, as they are, and must needs be, in America,” a dull place where there is nothing “but a common-place prosperity, in broad and simple daylight” (IV: 3). Here “daylight” seems to represent an aesthetic “natural attitude” present in the unimaginative simplicity of Hawthorne’s native America. Italy is the moonlight and fire glow, the artist’s “indefinable something added, or taken away, which makes all the difference between sordid life and an earthly paradise” (IV: 45). “Rappaccini’s Daughter” certainly has this “indefinable something” and takes us far beyond “the limits of our native earth.”

Some critics, of course, do not agree that these “Preface” remarks are to be taken at face value. Thomas R. Moore discusses the sometimes humorous tone of the prefaces and says that with *The Marble Faun*, Hawthorne “outtricks himself in this preface. Overly ironic, he cannot have us believe that the ‘common-place prosperity’ of his ‘dear native land’ makes romances impossible. Nor can he have us believe

that 'the annals of our stalwart Republic' hold no theme for romance writers. He has already proved otherwise. If, on the other hand, his intention parallels the strategy of the prefaces to *The House of the Seven Gables* and *The Blithedale Romance*, we must read him here as consciously duplicitous, and see America as the very center of such romantic possibilities."²³ As long as "native earth" is limited to America, Moore may be correct, but seen in its widest sense, the "actualities" spoken of in this "Preface" can easily be interpreted as referring to the unimaginative, prejudiced attitude toward experience. Mitchell sees the Aubépine remarks about being "within the limits of our native earth" as a response to Margaret Fuller's comments in an 1842 review of *Twice-Told Tales*. Fuller had found in many of the stories a "frigid-ity and thinness of design [that] usually bespeaks a want of deeper experiences," accusing Hawthorne of needing to understand more fully what it really means to be "within the limits of our native earth." "Rappaccini's Daughter," Mitchell suggests, shows that Hawthorne was taking Fuller's advice and both living and writing with more passion.²⁴ Again, this may be too "limited" a view of "the limits of our native earth."

Nevertheless, at another level Hawthorne's remarks about Aubépine plead seriously with the reader, saying that the story he is introducing, if viewed in the spirit that he views Aubépine, "with personal affection and sympathy"—in the spirit that the characters should view each other, not only recognizing but valuing human imperfections—this story can take us beyond ordinary understanding to the depths of human experience. The essence of our mortal lives in this world can be known, is worth knowing, and can be woven "of the self-same texture with the celestial" (X: 56) if we understand the limits of that experience, since unlimited understanding and fulfillment can be obtained only in eternity. "From the point of view of the soul," says Husserl, "humanity has never been a finished product, nor will it be, nor can it ever repeat itself. The spiritual telos of European [i.e., Western] Man, in which is included the particular telos of separate nations and of individual human beings, lies in infinity; it is an infinite idea, toward which in secret the collective spiritual becoming, so to speak, strives."²⁵ Husserl expressed his understanding of these limitations in human experience throughout his work. In *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* he says "if we could equate this subjectivity with the *psyche* of Heraclitus, his saying would doubtless be true of it: 'You will never find the boundaries of the soul, even if you follow every road; so deep is its ground.' Indeed, every 'ground' that is reached points to further ground, every horizon opened up awakens new horizons, and yet the endless whole, in its infinity of flowing movement, is oriented toward the unity of one meaning; not, of course in such a way that we could ever simply grasp and understand the whole. . . ."²⁶ Beatrice in her poisonous state was actually within the limits of ordinary fallen human nature and, if understood by her father and accepted by Giovanni, could have had a full life. But in the absence of this understanding and acceptance, she ends her life with the hope that her pain will "pass away like a dream" as she enters eternity.

In this sense, the idea of "the limits of ordinary experience" or "ordinary nature," which usually refers primarily to an unreflective view of objective experience, also

hints at the full but limited knowledge and experience of life as it should be. Richard Harter Fogle anticipates this distinction, though I believe the failure that Fogle attributes partly to Hawthorne is merely the failure of the characters to rise above the unreflective attitude: “Hawthorne fails by his symbolism to distinguish between the ordinary light of reason and common sense, ‘the familiar and daylight view of Beatrice,’ and the pure light which would lay bare her true goodness. For presumably the outward signs of evil, the deaths of the lizard and the butterfly, would have occurred in any light whatever; they are real and external events. The truest perception could not ignore them but would relegate them to their proper place in its final judgment. The unfortunate Giovanni is incapable of this highest insight and swings helplessly between a too-simple common sense, which sees only the beauty of Beatrice, and a morbid fear. The combination is disastrous.”²⁷ As mentioned above in the contrast between Pearl and Phoebe, this prejudiced view of experience in Hawthorne takes many forms, but it is usually defined by an absence of some of the moral qualities that Hawthorne advocated throughout his work. And change alone does not always represent the *epochè*, the movement toward a more transcendental-phenomenological perspective. Goodman Brown is an example of this, since his initiation into sorrow and evil does not produce a balanced view. The true “fall”—such as that experienced by Robin, Phoebe, Donatello, Pearl, or Arthur—always results in this balanced perspective and, to some degree, an awareness that “the breach which guilt” or any deeply humanizing grief “has once made into the human soul is never, in this mortal state, repaired” (I: 200-1).

The true “limits of ordinary experience” in Hawthorne’s work always contain this balanced knowledge and acceptance of good and evil, joy and sorrow. Hepzibah’s decision to open the shop is spoken of several times as a return to real life and ordinary experience, in this case clearly a desirable change, since her life for many decades had been one of isolation and sorrow only, and the return to ordinary life would perhaps offer some human companionship and joy to balance her sorrow. In *The Blithedale Romance*, the storm in [Chapter 3](#) serves as “a symbol of the cold, desolate, distrustful phantoms that invariably haunt the mind, on the eve of adventurous enterprises, to warn us back within the boundaries of ordinary life” (IV: 18). These boundaries are the human imperfections that will prevent the achievement of a utopian society, so remaining within the “limits of ordinary experience” again seems like the proper course. But if we look deeper, the phrase may again remind us that remaining within these limits can be a utopia of sorts as long as we do not expect utopia but understand that the highest virtue is to bear with our own and each other’s imperfections. Hawthorne seems to understand that the frame of mind achieved in the *epochè*, that repeated movement toward the transcendental-phenomenological perspective, moves us progressively toward that understanding.

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NOTES

- ¹ Iser, Wolfgang. 1978. *The act of reading: A theory of aesthetic response*, 34. Baltimore, AL: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- ² Husserl, Edmund. 1995. *Cartesian meditations: An introduction to phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns, 35. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- ³ Funke, Gerhard. 1973. Phenomenology and history. In *Phenomenology and the social sciences*, ed. Maurice Natanson, vol. 2, 36. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- ⁴ This study does not assert that all efforts to look at a subject afresh involve phenomenological method. The bulk of Husserl's writing explains *how* to understand and bracket the natural attitude in such a way that we can identify and build upon our subjectivity, and such explanations go far beyond the scope of this study. Hawthorne himself, however, understood the advantage of freeing the mind of prejudicial knowledge in order to truly experience the Guido portrait of Beatrice Cenci: "I wish, however, it were possible for some spectator, of deep sensibility, to see the picture without knowing anything of its subject or history; for no doubt we bring all our knowledge of the Cenci tragedy to the interpretation of the picture" (*Centenary Edition XIV*: 93).
- ⁵ Hawthorne, Nathaniel. 1962–1997. *The centenary edition of the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, 23 volumes, vol. II: 142, eds. William Charvat et al. Columbus: Ohio State University Press (hereafter cited in text by volume number).
- ⁶ Easton, Alison. 1996. *The making of the Hawthorne subject*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, uses many principles common to Husserlian phenomenology, though she makes no reference to phenomenology or any of its principle figures. Rather, she discusses the tales and *The Scarlet Letter* in terms of "two theories of the human subject that were [Hawthorne's] cultural inheritance: Scottish Common Sense psychology and the Romantic ideas of the individual" (ix). According to Easton, "The poison in Beatrice, therefore, is symbolic evidence of the split between inner and outer identities. The tale is also attacking the simplicities and certainties of certain modes of apprehending reality where appearance and meaning are supposedly neatly matched. The division is not simply between appearance and reality, since both are real. . . . Beatrice's external condition and her subjective sense of herself are inextricably mixed; Giovanni oversimplifies the situation in trying to see her in binary terms of either wholly 'good' or 'bad'" (163). Colacurcio, Michael J. 1984. *The province of piety: Moral history in Hawthorne's early tales*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, is primarily concerned with the relationship between evidence and faith; however, his discussion of spectral evidence corresponds in many ways to the issues of perception and reality discussed in this study. "Giving the epistemology of Berkeley or Kant a distinctive moral twist, . . . Hawthorne means to suggest that all moral knowledge of others exists in us as phenomenon, or idea, or appearance merely; the moral essence . . . remains an *ignotum x*." His analysis of "Young Goodman Brown" speaks of "the epistemological uncertainties inherent in the historical problem of specter evidence or the psychological problem of Brown's bad faith" (299), factors corresponding closely to Husserl's noesis and noema. See the chapter entitled "Visible Sanctity and Spectre Evidence" (283–313).
- ⁷ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 36.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 39, emphasis in original.
- ⁹ Husserl, Edmund. 1965. *Phenomenology and the crisis of philosophy*, trans. Quentin Lauer, 29. New York, NY: Harper and Row.
- ¹⁰ Bell, Millicent. 2005. Hawthorne and the real. In *Hawthorne and the real: Bicentennial essays*, ed. Millicent Bell, 19. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.
- ¹¹ Husserl, *Phenomenology*, 52.
- ¹² Bensick, Carol Marie. 1985. *La Nouvelle Beatrice: Renaissance and romance in "Rappaccini's Daughte"*, xi–xii. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- ¹³ Judith Butler speaks of "Husserl's claim that a phenomenologist is a perpetual beginner" in her Foreword to *The Erotic Bird: Phenomenology in Literature*, by Maurice Natanson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1998), x, but this exaggerates Husserl's view of the process of bracketing existing knowledge. Each successive *epochè* potentially moves toward a more complete understanding of the intended object, building reflectively upon related experience. Giovanni and Baglioni must interpret Beatrice in

view of their previous experience with her and with other human beings, just as the reader of the story interprets it in light of previous readings of this story and Hawthorne's other works.

¹⁴ Mitchell, Thomas R. 1999. Rappaccini's garden and emerson's concord: Translating the voice of margaret fuller. In *Hawthorne and women: Engendering and expanding the Hawthorne tradition*, eds. John L. Idol Jr, and Melinda M. Ponder, 82. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press.

¹⁵ Coale, Samuel Chase. 1998. *Mesmerism and Hawthorne: Mediums of American romance*, 57. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁷ Bensick, *La Nouvelle Beatrice*, 19.

¹⁸ Wagenknecht, Edward. 1989. *Nathaniel Hawthorne: The man, his tales and romances*, 53–54. New York, NY: Continuum.

¹⁹ Miller, John N. 1991. Fideism vs. allegory in 'Rappaccini's Daughter.' *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 46: 230.

²⁰ Martin, Terence. (1984). *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, revised ed. Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, does see Beatrice as needing "a special redemption," but argues that Giovanni could provide this redemption not by curing her of her poisonous condition but by giving her his love and acceptance. Martin sees Giovanni's failure to provide such love as a failure of the heart: Giovanni "vacillates between faith and doubt, between the promptings of the heart and those of the fancy — and his alternating moods comprise the essential dramatic movement of the tale. He is not so much tricked or deluded as limited by his fancy, which blurs any profounder vision . . ." (89).

²¹ Shurr, William H. 1981. Eve's Bower: Hawthorne's transition from public doctrines to private truths. In *Ruined Eden of the present: Hawthorne, Melville, and Poe*, eds. G.R. Thompson, and Virgil L. Lokke, 151. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press.

²² Brown, Gaye. 1996. Hawthorne's 'Rappaccini's daughter': The distaff christ. *Nathaniel Hawthorne Review* 22: 22.

²³ Moore, Thomas R. 1994. *A thick and Darksome Veil: The Rhetoric of Hawthorne's Sketches, prefaces, and essays*, 85. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press.

²⁴ Mitchell, "Rappaccini's Garden," 77–78.

²⁵ Husserl, *Phenomenology*, 158.

²⁶ Husserl, Edmund. 1970. *The crisis of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology*, trans. David Carr, 170. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

²⁷ Fogle, Richard Harter. 1964. *Hawthorne's fiction: The light and the dark*, revised ed., 97. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.

THE KINDNESS OF STRANGERS: EPIPHANY
AND SOCIAL COMMUNION IN PAUL THEROUX'S
TRAVEL WRITING

I had no names, no contacts, just the idle wanderer's distinct confidence that having arrived here I was available for some sort of enlightenment; that I would meet the right people, that I would be fine.

Paul Theroux, *Dark Star Safari*¹

Being happy was like being home.

Paul Theroux, *The Happy Isles of Oceania*²

ABSTRACT

This paper examines a central vacillation between epiphanies in natural landscapes and meaningful social encounters in the travel writing of Paul Theroux. The poetics of travel writing in general will be explored while focusing on the philosophic issues of consciousness and of self and others. Theroux's travel writing serves well to exhibit the implications behind these issues. This paper will concentrate on four of his works: *The Old Patagonian Express* (1979); *The Happy Isles of Oceania* (1992); *Dark Star Safari* (2003); and *Ghost Train to the Eastern Star* (2008). The last work repeats a travel journey taken three decades before through Eastern Europe, Central Asia, India, Southeast Asia, Japan, and Russia. The dialectic of solitary epiphany and heightened friendship is complicated by the unavoidable natural and social failures he finds in the contemporary world. Yet the complaint by a Japanese man that the seasons are no longer orderly is balanced by the account of a man living a traditional Jain life of devotional wandering.

I've opened shop this time
On the banks of the Kamo.
Customers, sitting idly,
Forget host and guest.
They drink a cup of tea,
Their long sleep is over;
Awake they realize
They're the same as before.
Baisao

Like Odysseus encountering numerous adventures before returning home to Penelope, Paul Theroux, in many of his solitary wanderings, had time to consider the essential nature of home where in various parts of his life his spouse was waiting. Another modern travel writer, David Yeadon, covered the same global

territory as Theroux and had the same arrangement with his spouse. But whereas Yeadon, the artist and travel writer, simply engaged the places he found himself, with straightforward descriptions, drawings, and appreciative thoughts, referring to Theroux's early travel writing as sometimes "a little cranky" and to Theroux's later travel writing as sometimes "downright depressing,"³ those very characteristics may reflect Theroux's honest misgivings about the social failures he finds in the contemporary world that often border on philosophic consideration of consciousness itself and the nature of other minds. For the one he verges on being a witness to the "postmodern condition." For the other he seems to be testing a hoped for Abraham-like compassion from strangers. Thus he expresses the metaphysical context for his travel writing as "a solitary enterprise: to see, to examine, to assess . . . to be alone and unencumbered"⁴ and, poetically, to declare: "I knew I was merely skimming south, a bird of passage generalizing on the immediate."⁵ Yet, a central dialectic of epiphanies in natural landscapes and meaningful social encounters is complicated by experiences of the "postmodern condition." While kayaking in American Samoa, he accordingly ruminates: "I was both uplifted by the mountains and the glorious vistas along the south coast, and also depressed by the seedy modernity of this seemingly spoiled society."⁶ Most often, the "postmodern condition," for Theroux, is incompetency, surface modernization, loss of tradition, and outright criminality found worldwide in his travels.

Theroux designates himself as a traveler rather than a tourist, almost suggesting that mindless, packaged tourism is part of the "postmodern condition": "Tourists don't know where they've been . . . Travelers don't know where they're going."⁷ Traditionally, through the centuries, travel was directed, aimed at practical acts of trade or harvesting or spiritual acts such as visiting a sacred site, aims not associated with the contemporary tourist Theroux had in mind. His travelling is illustrated by his search for the vast outlands of Australia where the Aborigines live: "Most people I had met in Australia regarded Cooktown as the limit, the real bush, the Land of Wait, the Never-Never—few had actually been there. Now I was going beyond it, and going north of the Never-Never was like going off the limit of the known world."⁸ He states the point explicitly, "The traveler's conceit is that he is heading into the unknown. The best travel is a leap in the dark. If the destination were familiar and friendly, what would be the point of going there?"⁹ The Australian Aboriginal walkabout which interests Theroux is, contrarily, directed, though it would not seem so to a Westerner. The director of the Institute of Aboriginal Development explains its directedness to him: "It is when a person leaves to go to the outback on ceremonial business or family business, to visit sacred sites, to be with people of his own nation."¹⁰ Theroux in fact directs small segments of his travels, scheduling talks and visits with friends, and often, there is an overriding general emotional purpose to a specific trip. The specific experience, from moment to moment and day to day, however, is open-ended and bound to a counterbalance between the present unknown and the past of home and Penelope, not unlike the Thai travel poetry form *nirat* in which a narrative of a journey is interspersed with memories of home, the beloved, or early periods of the poet's life. Musing on his trekking in a wilderness area of New Zealand, Theroux speculates:

Travel, which is nearly always seen as an attempt to escape from the ego, is in my opinion the opposite. Nothing induces concentration or inspires memory like an alien landscape or a foreign culture. It is simply not possible (as romantics think) to lose yourself in an exotic place. Much more likely is an experience of intense nostalgia, a harking back to an earlier stage of your life, or seeing clearly a serious mistake. But this does not happen to the exclusion of the exotic present. What makes the whole experience vivid, and sometimes thrilling, is the juxtaposition of the present and the past—London seen from the heights of Harris Saddle.¹¹

Minimizing his task as a writer with this psychological process of relating feeling “recollected in tranquility” to an unfamiliar landscape, he notes: “All you do as a note-taking traveler is nail down your own vagrant mood on a particular trip. The traveling writer can do no more than approximate a country.”¹² So, the continuity of the self and its storehouse of memory are decidedly present as a featured aspect of such a travel poetics.

On a short visit with the novelist Nadine Gordimer in Johannesburg, Theroux humorously underscores the dynamic of alienation that underscores his poetics: “It is all right to be Steppenwolf, or the Lone Ranger, or Rimbaud, or even me. You visit a place and peer at it closely and then move on, making a virtue of disconnection.”¹³ He elaborates while waiting in Egypt for a Sudan visa to come through, “Travel at its best is accidental . . .”¹⁴ Theroux has mastered the seasoned traveler’s patience. In the throes of fear in being the lone Westerner in an ecstatic crowd of Sufi in unstable Sudan, he can maintain a “willing suspension of disbelief” to experience the exotic:

As an unbeliever, the only one among these thousands, I had reason to be alarmed. “They are not political,” Khalifa assured me. “They are Sufis. Thy bother no one. They dance. They are mystical. They are good people.”

Perhaps so, but in any case, this was the lovely and weird essence I looked for in travel—both baffling and familiar, in the sunset and the rising dust beaten in the air by all those feet, dervishes and spectators alike. Everyone was part of it.¹⁵

Here Theroux is experiencing one of his typical epiphanies. Nor really induced by his fear, the Sufi trance dancing at sunset becomes for him an experience of ecstasy and unnamed insight that he often records as heightened responses to natural landscapes.

Theroux’s travel writing aspires to a kind of higher literature with frequent comments on his illustrious predecessors in the genre. He also arranged meetings with contemporary writers, some Nobel laureates, such as Jorge Luis Borges in Argentina, Nadine Gordimer in South Africa, Orhan Pamuk in Turkey, the late Arthur C. Clarke in Sri Lanka, and Haruki Murakami in Japan. The ensuing intelligent, idiosyncratic, and often touching encounters reflect the seriousness of Theroux’s travelling endeavors. That he is also down to earth about these endeavors is reflected in his often amusing encounters with travelers reading one of his books. The general purpose of the four travel books at hand vary from a simple idea to cathartic recovery: *The Old Patagonian Express* was conceived as an attempt to travel by train from South Station, Boston to the last stop in Patagonia, Argentina; *The Happy Isles of Oceania* was an attempt at recovery from a divorce; *Dark Star Safari* was an attempt to travel overland from Egypt to South Africa but centered

on a visit to an area where he had served in the Peace Corps; and *Ghost Train to the Eastern Star* was an attempt to update a journey taken three decades ago from Europe through Central Europe, Central Asia, India, Southeast Asia, Japan, and Russia. He concludes his serendipitous trip to Patagonia on a philosophic note when his long journey simply ends in a deserted place: "Only the Patagonian paradox: the vast space, the very tiny blossoms of the sagebrush's cousin. The nothingness itself, a beginning for some intrepid traveler, was an ending for me."¹⁶ Espousing a familiar Taoist-like idea, for him, the travelling as opposed to the traditional travel destination was the point. On his Patagonian adventure he summarizes: "But I had known all along that I had no intention of writing about being in a place—that took the skill of a miniaturist. I was more interested in the going and the getting there, in the poetry of departures . . . The travel had been the satisfaction . . ."¹⁷ He concisely states this at the end of this journey: "My arrival did not matter. It was the journey that counted."¹⁸ On that journey, as he crosses the border from the United States to Mexico, he offers one of his frequent intellectual asides. After citing the economist David Ricardo, Theroux speculates on the economic and social distinctions between Laredo, Texas and Nuevo Laredo, Mexico: ". . . the puritanical efficiency north of the border and the bumbling and passionate disorder—the anarchy of sex and hunger—south of it."¹⁹ This vacillation between the personal journeying as such and the intellectual rumination offer the basic structure of his travel books. In his *Patagonian Express*, *Dark Star Safari*, and *Ghost Train* trips he was married. In his *Happy Isles* kayaking trip he was ostensibly following the migration routes of early islanders throughout Oceania, but also desperately trying to forget his divorce. Everywhere he travelled in Oceania he was asked about his wife. This precipitated his thoughts about existential as opposed to social aloneness in an area where people were "never alone and could not understand solitude."²⁰ He sums up: "All this made my position awkward. Being solitary made me seem enigmatic, paddling alone made me seem a true *palangi* [white man] 'sky-buster,' reading and writing made me look like a crank, and my being wifeless was a riddle."²¹ Yet, he goes on to recount his loneliness when he had seen a happy family at dinner in a New Zealand restaurant window. There are two Theroux kinds of loneliness: the emotional one that is familiar to most people and the existential-philosophic one that speculates on experience and consciousness. At the beginning of his African adventure, he offers an insight into his emotional state as a traveler: ". . . hoping for the picturesque, expecting misery, braced for the appalling. Happiness was unthinkable, for although happiness is desirable, it is a banal subject for travel."²² This seems to justify the epigraph in which he equates happiness with being home. Although the *Happy Isles* escape from divorce in Oceania may be seen as, in a general sense, the opposite of such a travel philosophy where another kind of happiness may occur in the traveler's encounter with unfamiliar natural settings or engagements with strangers, mitigated by the expected residues of the "postmodern condition" and a rereading of the epigraph finds happiness away from home, such instances occur in all his travel writing. Through nostalgia, and perhaps to test the effects of time, Theroux retraces in his *Ghost Train to the Eastern Star* his decades old *The Great Railway Bazaar*. He finds that not much had changed in the sacred monkey-god

temple at Galta Gorge near Jaipur, India, including the troupe of wild monkeys. Out of respect, Theroux leaves his pen and notebook outside when he enters the mountaintop shrine. A monkey steals the pen and notebook, but drops them in exchange for peanuts. His guide notes that his act would bring Theroux good karma. Looking around he realizes that the temple grounds had actually grown into a complex of temples. Such an experience as this is an example of an epiphany, a heightened emotional opening to a new understanding, which are frequently found in Theroux's travel books.

The experience of such an opening is in fact a major purpose for travelling. Theroux puts this in context: "Some days traveling in an odd place there is nowhere else I would rather be."²³ At the beginning of the Oceania trip he accordingly notes that "a journey can be either your death or transformation . . ."²⁴ Theroux asserts that the transformative epiphany is an indelible experience at the center of travel: "You go away for a long time and return a different person—you never come all the way back."²⁵ Sounding like an eighteenth-century aesthetician, he describes the emotional context for epiphany: "What is required is the lucidity of loneliness to capture that vision which, however banal, seems in my private mood to be special and worthy of interest. There is something in feeling abject that quickens my mind and makes it intensely receptive to fugitive impressions."²⁶ His existential loneliness is coordinated, if not precipitated by, his physical loneliness. Alone at night in a vacant train stop in the wilds of Patagonia he notes that ". . . it was near enough to the end of the earth to give me the impression that I was a solitary explorer in a strange land. That illusion . . . was enough of a satisfaction to me to make me want to go forward."²⁷ Alluding to the classic philosophic tale of philosophic loneliness, *Robinson Crusoe*, Theroux wakes on an isolated island and is frightened by the presence of many footprints. He experiences a sudden chill when he realizes the footprints are his own.²⁸ An opposite effect is found in tropical paradise in the Trobriands:

I came to a white sandy beach, protected by a pair of jutting cliffs. There were green parrots in the trees, a big eagle overhead, and terns strafing the lagoon. There were no human footprints, only lizard tracks, and it looked like a perfect camping place, but while I was sizing it up a dugout canoe went past, two bare breasted women paddling it, and they called out, sort of yodeling at me. So my presence was known.²⁹

Within a state of loneliness, he senses that the negative emotional aspect of this state could impose itself on a foreign setting or experience. While listening to opera on his headphones he paddled near an island in the Solomons and admired the natural setting but felt it and the simple island people would be undermined by any commercialized tourism or bureaucratic venturing and blamed his occasional sadness upon what he had brought with him, his divorce.³⁰ Likewise, he realizes that his attempt to spear two sharks in order to boast of his prowess was a kind of perversion: "The sharks had not menaced me nor even bothered me. They were apparently enjoying themselves. But in trying to kill them—so impulsively, from a sense of power and domination—I was behaving with the sort of malicious wickedness that we always attributed to sharks."³¹ These ethical realizations align him

with contemporary ecological currents and justify his Henry David Thoreau-like observation in New Zealand's South Island: "As long as there is wilderness there is hope."³² His fears about cultural destruction are observed in an epiphany of the Australian Aboriginal connection with nature when he observed non-Aboriginal Australians swimming in a sacred natural pool: "This water hole was known as Yapalpe, the home of the Giant Watersnake of Aboriginal myth, and over there where Estelle Digby was putting sun block on her nose (and there was something about the gummy white sun block that looked like Aboriginal body paint) the first shapeless Dreamtime beings emerged."³³ This shift of perspective was also experienced in Argentina while viewing autumn fields, a seemingly unthreatening army camp, and a quiet suburb, when even a recognizably comfortable arrangement of humanity lacked something like the Aboriginal connection to nature: "The suburb did not look stifling, nor was the factory a blot on the landscape. It was easy to be fooled by appearances, but after what I had seen, I needed the reassurance of this order, the lightness of this air, the glimpse of this hawk steadying itself in the sky."³⁴ Theroux needs a sense of a primal connection to open landscape and unmediated nature that is obviated by even the most ordinary human activities. His free floating feeling poeticizes such landscapes and wild nature. In regard to the desert of Patagonia he thus notes: "There was not enough substance in it for it to have a mood. A desert is an empty canvas; it is you who give it features and a mood, who work at creating the mirage and making it live. But I was incurious; the desert was deserted, as empty as I felt."³⁵ What may have really been missing to augment the experience of natural epiphany was the social communion and consequent emotional coloring that propagates its own epiphany. Stranded momentarily in a seemingly dangerous area of Africa with other passengers from a broken-down vehicle and overcoming the others' fear, Theroux convinces a village woman to cook a meal for the group. Talking with her as they prepared the meal he experiences social communion:

Feeling fortunate, I laughed, drank another Tusker, and thought: I love this place, I love sitting in the pink afterglow of sunset, peeling spuds and talking about salvation. The heat of the day had gone, the air was mild, and there were children everywhere, fooling, fussing, teasing each other among the flaring fires and the aromatic steam of chicken and potatoes.³⁶

The poem by Baisao that serves as one epigraph and is really a Zen metaphor of the nature of spiritual awakening puts the value of encounters with strangers in question. After their idle the customers in his tea shop are no more awakened than before, though they had thought so. Theroux's travel writing can be seen as a series of awakenings in the higher sense. Yet, the problematic of other minds or, mundanely, strangers, is also a part of his experience. He acknowledges the problematic: "A traveler was conspicuous for being a stranger, and consequently was vulnerable. But, traveling, I whistled in the dark and assumed all would be well. I depended on people being civil and observing a few basic rules."³⁷ In one of the epigraphs he repeats this trust in other people and experience itself to the aim that he would be, in his words, "available for some sort of enlightenment."³⁸ In one way or another, like talking with the village woman preparing dinner, he gained something of note

from his spontaneous, or even planned, encounters with others. At the beginning of his Patagonian train trip an American student named Wendy asked him to put his cigarette out. When asked what she studied she replied: "Eastern philosophy? I'm into Zen."³⁹ With a distaste reserved for lapses of humanity, he mocked her justifications for such explorations, not unlike Yeadon who similarly mocked the young New Age spiritual seekers in Kathmandu.⁴⁰ Perhaps the issue was generational in both cases. Theroux kept up his conversation with Wendy for several pages of his book, though. Toward the end of this journey, he also talked with a young Argentine soldier on his way to his mandatory 1 year at a military camp:

"It could be worse," I said. "You don't have a war."

"Not a war, but a problem—with Chile, over the Beagle Channel. It had to be this year! This is an ugly year to be in the service. I might have to fight."

"I see. You don't want to fight the Chileans?"

"I don't want to fight anyone. I want to be in Buenos Aires. What do you think of it? Beautiful, eh? Pretty girls, eh?"⁴¹

Theroux obviously enjoys what might arise from such conversations, here the consideration of duty and conflict in general. After a conversation with an old native fisherman on Easter Island he thus notes: "In the pleasantest circumstances, like this, I tended to procrastinate. I planned an expedition for the day, but then I would fall into conversation with someone, and find it interesting, and say to myself: *I'll go on my expedition tomorrow.*"⁴² Paramecia are said to meet and exchange genetic material. Sufis recognize each other with a look as believers. Martin Buber suggests that the spiritual in humanity is encountered in person-to-person exchanges. Some pre-Socratic philosophers thought of friendship as a primary aspect of life. So did the Guugu Yimidirrh who Captain Cook met in coastal northern Australia as did Theroux.⁴³ In the same region he met a beachcomber named Tony. After long conversations with him, Theroux was struck by Tony's discipline in his structured life while not keeping track of time and considered if he was like Tony in this way.⁴⁴ Later, in the Trobriands, he talks with John, a missionary, and finds there are no watches in the local village. Theroux reflects: "As he looked at mine and seemed to be on the verge of breaking the Eighth Commandment, I thought how wonderful it was to have so little idea of the right time."⁴⁵ Perhaps Buber would have considered that a state of timelessness is an aspect of human exchanges.

Some exchanges are unpleasant, such as Trobriand islanders laughing at Theroux and his kayak drenched in the pouring rain, calling him a *dim-dim* or white man.⁴⁶ Others offer a new perspective of one's own culture, as in an encounter with a Turkmen who had been an exchange student in the United States. He told Theroux what he liked and what he didn't like about the United States: "'Good people. Clean conditions. No bribes.' and 'The way that children treat their elders. Not good.'"⁴⁷ He illustrated the latter with how the daughter of his host family mocked her mother. In Khartoum a former prime minister tells Theroux: "The criterion is how you treat the weak . . . The measure of civilized behavior is compassion."⁴⁸ Theroux is moved to act on such thought in Mandalay when he meets an old bicycle rickshaw driver named Oo Nawng whose rented rickshaw was his only livelihood: "Oo Nawng preyed on my mind. Thinking about him, I could not sleep . . . The little skinny

man with his rusted bike and his rented rickshaw and his notebook. Like me, he too was a ghost—invisible, aging, just looking on, a kind of helpless haunter.”⁴⁹ Before moving on, Theroux gave Oo Nawng enough money to purchase a rickshaw, overcome by a sense of shared vulnerability, one as a traveler and one as a victim of poverty. In travel, in this one instance, Theroux had discovered the commonality of humanity he had assumed and the necessity of compassion. In Sapporo, Japan on a hiking trail he met another old man, Mr. Miyamoto. Through a translator he asks if Sapporo was still a good city despite its population increase. Miyamoto’s response was: “No, it’s worse now by far. We had more trees then, more birds, more space. Now Sapporo is big and busy—and for what? Just more shopping. We’ve lost a lot.”⁵⁰ He continues, in a modern-sounding global critique whose subtext is the long connection of Japanese culture to the passage of the seasons: “It’s like this. We used to have four distinct seasons, but now they’re confused. We have warm winters and cold summers. Sometimes just a little snow in the winter and a lot in the spring. It’s really strange.”⁵¹

This pessimistic consideration of overpopulation and consumerism and an unintentional example of global warming is counterbalanced by a man Theroux met on the night train to Jaipur, India. Mr. Kapoorchand describes how his father became a “saint” after entrusting him with his mother’s care:

He then renounced all worldly things. He gave up shoes, going barefoot only. Sleeping on the floor. Owning nothing. He became a sadhu, a holy man. He went about by walking in bare feet. Simple clothes, living in ashrams, going from place to place, sometimes walking fifteen kilometers a day. He could not visit me, but I could visit him, if he allowed it.⁵²

Theroux asked his litmus test question for living, whether his father was happy. The response: “Very happy.”⁵³ Mr. Kapoorchand, who meditates three hours a day and plans to become a sadhu, left Theroux a requested example of one of the Jain scriptures. One of its four lines is “I have friendship to all.”⁵⁴

Theroux’s identification with the old rickshaw driver as a fellow ghost reflects on the idea of abject invisibility while traveling. In Africa Theroux declares: “I had remained unobtainable. No one knew I was in Mozambique. This sort of disappearance made me feel wraithlike and insubstantial, as though I had become a ghost, without the inconvenience of dying in order to achieve it.”⁵⁵ In his serious side Theroux has taken William Butler Yeats’ advice to “cast a cold eye” on the world. The ghost becomes an icon of that state, as at the beginning of his Patagonian adventure when he passes at night through the part of Massachusetts he grew up in: “It was an average evening for this time of year in this place; and I knew all the ghosts here. It was the darkness of home.”⁵⁶ The complexity of being such a ghost almost undermines the desire for travel. On a train through Costa Rica, responding to a fellow passenger’s observation that Americans travel alone, Theroux replies: “I hate to travel alone. It is depressing. I miss my wife and children. But if I am alone I see more clearly.”⁵⁷ So the poetics of his travelling is a Yeatsian clarity, the detached persona of a ghost, punctuated by epiphanies. Almost at the end of his Patagonian trip he reflects correspondingly: “In the best travel books the word *alone* is implied on every exciting page, as subtle and ineradicable as a watermark. The conceit of

this, the idea of being able to report it . . . made up for the discomfort. Alone, alone: it was the proof of my success.”⁵⁸

Yet this very objectivity leads to some unsettling thoughts. His stay in the Trobriands undermined his romanticism: “An island of traditional culture cannot be idyllic. It is, instead, complexity itself: riddled with magic, superstition, myths, dangers, rivalries, and old routines. You had to take it as you found it. . . I could now see the utter impossibility of my ever understanding the place.”⁵⁹ This objectivity, even cynicism, leads to a distaste for the impersonality and sprawl of large cities: “Cities look like monstrous cemeteries to me, the buildings like brooding tombstones. I feel lonely and lost in the lit-up necropolis, nauseated by traffic fumes, disgusted by food smells, puzzled by the faces and the banal frenzy.”⁶⁰ *Ghost Train to the Eastern Star* concludes with a compilation of the failures of the contemporary world. He asserts therefore: “Most people are poor. Most places are blighted and nothing will stop the blight getting worse. . . Only the old can really see how gracelessly the world is aging and all that we have lost.”⁶¹ Yet his final words are based on the hope he finds in the people met in his travels: “Most people I’d met, in chance encounters, were strangers who helped me on my way.”⁶² Moreover, the epiphanies felt in wild nature mollify his cynicism. He notes, accordingly: “The smaller one feels on the earth, dwarfed by mountains and assailed by weather, the more respectful one has to be—and unless we are very arrogant, the less likely we are to poison or destroy it.”⁶³ Likewise, he cites Gustave Flaubert: “‘Travelling makes one modest—you see what a tiny place you occupy in the world.’”⁶⁴ Theroux further sums up his poetics at the conclusion of his most recent travel book *Ghost Train to the Eastern Star*:

The best travel was not a simple train trip or even a whole collection of them, but something lengthier and more complex: an experience of the fourth dimension, with stops and starts and longueurs, spells of illness and recovery, dawdling and hurrying and having to wait, with the sudden phenomenon of happiness as an episodic reward.⁶⁵

His “fourth dimension” or “episodic happiness” is not a purple passage like this one that seems surprisingly like most people’s lives. It is the encounter with a kind stranger, a realization of compassion, an almost mystical epiphany in nature, like his encounter with a group of perhaps seventy dolphins while kayaking off the coast of Kaua’i, Hawaii. The dolphins were so close that Theroux and his guide could hear them breathing:

Even the experienced guide was amazed. He had been down this coast hundreds of times and he had never seen anything like it, he said. For the next hour and a half we played with them, paddling among them, and they performed for us. We made no sound, we posed no threat, we merely watched appreciatively—and they seemed to realize that.⁶⁶

Like a benevolent Wandering Jew searching for Emmanuel Levinas’ Infinite Other, Theroux had found an incidence, or at least an emotional metaphor, of his happiness.

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NOTES

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- 12 Theroux, *Dark Star Safari*, op. cit., p. 473.
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- 16 Theroux, *Old Patagonian Express*, op. cit., p. 404.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 383.
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- 23 Theroux, *The Happy Isles*, op. cit., p. 460.
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FAULKNER'S *THE SOUND AND THE FURY* AS
ANTI-ENTROPIC NOVEL

...an examined life, in the sense of the word as we have borrowed it from Socrates, is a life recounted.
(Paul Ricoeur, "Life in Quest of Narrative," p. 31)

ABSTRACT

This paper examines Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* to show how the narrative performs a dynamic synthesis of various times—especially subjective (personal) and objective (cosmic, historical)—focusing particularly on the levels of intentionality of the final section's narrator and of the whole novel's implied author. Time in the world of the fourth section is "public," a seamless continuum, everywhere the same, and "objective," or at least transcending the idiosyncratic temporalities of individual characters, while serving as their ground, but contributing little to subjective meaning. On the level of the novel as a whole, however, which encompasses all four sections of the novel, temporal configurations are considerably more complex, and grow more complex, but also more meaningful and more "readable," as the novel progresses. This movement is anti-entropic. Also, the wealth of cues to read this story as a repetition of a variety of earlier stories (for example, of the failure and decline of the South, or of death, burial, and resurrection) suggests a freedom that runs deeper than fate. In reading such a text, readers practice a dynamic synthesis of temporal configurations that they can then enact in their own lives.

"Life," says Macbeth, as Malcolm's army is closing in and he has just learned of his wife's suicide, "is a tale/Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury/Signifying nothing" (*Macbeth* V,v, 24–28). In choosing a phrase from this passage for the title of his novel, William Faulkner is apparently prompting us to infer that the theme of his novel will be that life is "meaningless," provoking *anomie* and despair. Although this inference receives some support from the analysis of the subjective temporalities of the three Compson brothers Benjy, Quentin, and Jason, an analysis of the temporal configuration-effects on the level of the non-character narrator of the fourth section and on the level of the novel as a whole, discloses that the novel embodies more meaning and more hope than the reader might at first expect.

The Cartesian-inspired split between subjective and objective time leads to pressure to assign human time to one or the other. At the risk of oversimplifying, we might say that while the sciences tend to privilege objective or cosmic time, the humanities tend to privilege the subjective or psychological experience of time.¹ Further, objective time is often considered "meaningless" from the humanistic perspective. Thus, Macbeth's cry can be seen as a recognition that the time of his

life is being configured by patterns not of his choosing, not flowing from his own configurative intentionality. Indeed, as Paul Ricoeur has pointed out, once the “inner” experience of time is made the privileged register of human temporality, it becomes very difficult to regain the “outer” experience of cosmic time as a human time as well. “The aporia of temporality,” says Ricoeur, “lies precisely in the difficulty in holding on to both ends of this chain, the time of the soul and that of the world” (*Time and Narrative*, Vol. 3, p. 14). If, as Ricoeur argues in *Time and Narrative* and elsewhere, it is in the crucible of narrative that a synthesis between the two is performed, it behooves us to examine carefully how narratives create or deploy temporal experience.

Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* is a fertile field for such an examination. Each of the four sections or chapters of the novel ostensibly covers one day. The first section presents the mimesis of the intensely subjective experience of the idiot man-child, Benjy Compson. The two following sections mime the subjective experience of Benjy’s brothers, Quentin and Jason, using the methods of stream of consciousness and interior monologue, respectively. Finally, in the fourth section, we have an “objective” narrative voice presenting the experiences of the Compson family, but especially of Jason and of the faithful family servant, Dilsey. Focusing as the book does for three quarters of its time on the subjective and quite idiosyncratic experience of three different characters, the novel seems to privilege the subjective aspect of human temporality. However, already in these sections but especially in the fourth section, we see an opening out to a larger, more communal temporality. Gradually, the novel comes to show these characters as being in a world of shared or common temporal experience.

While the mimeses of the characters’ subjective experiences of time, which are perhaps the most striking features of the novel, offer some support for the theme of defeat-despair-meaninglessness, it is particularly those aspects of the novel that are not part of the characters’ experience of time that open the novel to a sense of hope, freedom, and plenitude of meaning.² It is in these elements, I suggest, that we find our best clues as to how a narrative dynamically “bridges the gap” between inner time and outer time, between the personal experience of subjective time and the impersonal, public experience of historical and cosmic time.³

TEMPORALITY OF THE WORLD OF THE NOVEL’S FOURTH SECTION

Let us begin by investigating how the narrator of the fourth section (sometimes misleadingly called the “Dilsey” section) handles the deployment and presentation of actions as the day progresses. We learn from the narrative that this is an Easter Sunday (p. 342), and one of the central actions of this section is Dilsey’s taking Benjy to the Easter service at her church and listening to a remarkable and heterodox sermon preached by the Reverend Shegog.⁴ This section is the final stage of Faulkner’s progression from the intensely “subjective” experience of time as presented in the Benjy section, where Benjy is completely “unhinged” from public

time, to a world in which the subjective times of the characters are thoroughly embedded in a common, public time, a time that even the narrator is subject to.

One characteristic of this presentation is a frequent noting of clock and calendar time. Several times in the section the narrator mentions, or records characters mentioning, the placement of the day in calendar time: Sunday, Easter, April. For example, the narrator describes the church toward which Dilsey and her family are walking as set "against the windy sunlight of space and April" (p. 364).

As the day progresses, the narrator records a character's noting the time (as when Dilsey hears the clock striking and says "Eight o'clock"—p. 342) or himself notes the time of an action (as when Dilsey and her family walk back from church "through the bright noon"—p. 371).⁵ The pealing of church bells is frequently mentioned, placing the concurrent action on the half hour or the hour. Even when the time of an action is not specifically mentioned, it can often be "plotted" from what is mentioned.⁶

The result of all these actual and implicit specifications of clock and calendar time is a strong sense that the "now" of the currently narrated action occupies a specific "place" on the linear continuum of cosmic time.

Besides the references to clock-time, another way this section helps bridge the gap between subjective and objective time is that the movement of actions through the day is presented as continuous and consecutive, a "flow" without gaps. Using Seymour Chatman's five-point continuum of ellipsis, summary, scene, stretch, and pause, we can say that the narrator's presentation of action is very strongly scenic (*Story and Discourse*, pp. 68–74), that is, a moment-by-moment tracking of the action. Summary is resorted to infrequently, and the forms of summary that are used tend to border on scene rather than on ellipsis.

Almost always, summaries are brief, are put in terms of specific actions—"Dilsey ate her dinner and cleared up the kitchen" (p. 392)—and are embedded within a scene or scenic sequence. A summary condenses rather than supplants a scene. Sometimes condensation is accomplished through the specification of a continuing action—Jason "started the engine and drove slowly up the street until he found a drugstore" (p. 390)—or specification of continuous action—"Dilsey stroked Ben's head, rocking back and forth" (p. 396). Usually the condensation opens back up into a continuation of the same scene.

Descriptions are presented not as pauses in Chatman's sense, in which story-time is zero while discourse-time continues, but are given as if the narrator is taking advantage of pauses in the action of the story, while continuing a scenic "equivalence" between story-time and discourse-time. For instance, at the beginning of the scene in which Jason and his mother, seated at the breakfast table, begin to realize that the teen-age girl Quentin has fled, Jason sends Dilsey upstairs to get the girl, and they listen to Dilsey approach Quentin's door and call her. ("When she called the first time Jason laid his knife and fork down and he and his mother appeared to wait across the table from one another, in identical attitudes" (p. 348). As the characters themselves pause, waiting for Quentin to answer Dilsey, the narrator "uses" that time to describe them: "the one cold and shrewd, with close-thatched brown hair curled into two stubborn hooks, one on either side of his forehead like a bartender

in caricature, and hazel eyes with black-ringed irises like marbles, the other cold and querulous, with perfectly white hair and eyes pouched and baffled and so dark as to appear to be all pupil or all iris" (p. 348). This is the first description of either character, though Mrs. Compson has already appeared several times and Jason has been in this scene for more than three pages. But this is the first pause in the story's action.

Even when an ellipsis or gap is recorded, it is presented within rather than between scenes or scenic sequences, as, for example, when Jason is waiting in Mottson to hire someone to drive him home, because his headache makes it difficult for him to drive. While he sat in the car "for sometime [sic]," he "heard a clock strike the half hour, then people began to pass, in Sunday and Easter clothes" (p. 391). The narrator notes the waiting period in a short summary statement which includes a striking image that passes judgment on Jason's life: "Some looked at him as they passed, at the man sitting quietly behind the wheel of a small car, with his invisible life ravelled out about him like a wornout sock. After a while a negro in overalls came up" (p. 391). Immediately before this passage is a recorded dialogue in which Jason bargains for a driver to drive him home, and immediately after is another such dialogue, with the negro who has just approached. The effect of noting the striking of the half hour and of phrases like "for sometime" and "After a while," embedded as they are in such a context, is to imply the continuous registering of passing time rather than a "jumping over" from one time to the next.

The sense of continuous time is reinforced by the handling of point of view. The narrator's time is almost "Homeric" in the sense that in moving his focus from one character to another, he continues in an uninterrupted temporal sequence.⁷ For example, early in the day the narrator is following Dilsey as she begins to prepare breakfast. She goes to the door to call Luster, who comes into the back yard to answer her. When she closes the kitchen door, the narrator stays with Luster, who gathers an armful of firewood, takes it into the kitchen, and is asked by Dilsey to go dress Benjy. When he leaves the kitchen to do so, the narrator stays with Dilsey and continues to describe her actions (pp. 334–336).

For any particular scene of interaction or conversation among characters, the narrator will usually track one character into the scene, record the scene, and track one character, either the same or a different one, back out of the scene and into the next. Moreover, within a multi-character scene, the narrator generally does not present the thoughts or feelings of a character, so that he conveys the sense of presenting what "any observer" could have observed: the scene is the scene of public action and interaction, and the time of the scene is public time.

The net effect of the predominantly scenic presentation and this way of handling point of view is to convey very strongly the impression that the narrator is "embedded in" or subject to the time of the narrated world, which is a public and chronological time. The narrator "goes this way but once," and the time of his passage can be measured by clocks and bells.

There is one major exception to this rule of single passage, and this is the "Jason sequence," the sequence of scenes in which Jason talks to the sheriff about the girl Quentin's theft of his money, drives to Mottson in search of her, encounters an old

man and is humiliated (the old man attacks Jason with a knife when Jason accuses him of lying, and Jason has to be rescued by others), and arranges to be driven home (pp. 376–392). In fact, the impression created by the narrative technique that the narrator is subject to the chronological time of the narrated world is so strong that many first-time readers are disoriented when they begin the Jason sequence. They do not expect the world of this section to allow a backward jump in time.

Within the Jason sequence time is continuous (as usual), but this sequence overlaps Dilsey's churchgoing sequence, which has already been run through. The Jason sequence is presented as an interruption in the Dilsey-Luster-Ben sequence or the "domestic sequence," which at the end of the Jason sequence is taken up again at the exact point of interruption, so that the domestic sequence is continuous from the beginning to the end of the section.⁸

To sum up, we see that the narrated world of the novel's fourth section is characterized by a marked preference for scene over summary, and by seamless passage from scene to scene via a moving point of view, which together build a strong impression that time is continuous and that the narrating-time coincides with the time of what is narrated. The frequent marking of chronological time by characters or narrator binds this common time of action and its narration to cosmic time. The near absence of flashbacks or anticipations implies that the narrative point of view is "embedded" in the non-repeatable chronological time of the narrated world. The one flashback or analepsis that creates problems for this embeddedness is very explicitly coordinated with the "continuous" time of the domestic sequence. The two spatially distinct sequences of scenes are presented as clearly taking place "during the same time."

Time in the world of this fourth section is "public," a seamless continuum, everywhere the same, and "objective," or at least transcending the idiosyncratic temporalities of individual characters, while supporting or "carrying" these temporalities and serving as their ground. This is the time "within which" characters shape their lives, but it is not shaped or configured by them; even "the narrator" is not quite free to reshape this time as he will. Time is not meaningless in the sense that it is without configuration, but configurations of personal time (except on the mundane level) hardly touch public time. So it seems that although the gap between subjective and objective time is being bridged, the problem remains that public time does not contribute to the meaningfulness of personal time. Any personal configuration is always a configuration of the personal dimension of a time that also has an impersonal dimension: on-going, continuous, and irreversible, a time that can be "kept track of" by clock and calendar, a public time of works and days.

TEMPORALITY OF THE WORLD OF THE TEXT

When we shift our focus to the novel as a whole, we will see how even "objective" time becomes a locus of meaning. It is on the level of the novel as a whole that we have a narrative composed of four "sub-narratives," in a particular sequence, whose section or "chapter" titles are calendar dates. We are now at the level of intentionality

that attends to a title that is a quotation from Shakespeare; to a major character's having a name that means "Southerner" (Benjy—see *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 1, p. 671); to action being set on Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter Sunday, and the day before Jefferson Davis's birthday; to the movement from a mimesis of fragmentation and dispersal (in the first section) toward a mimesis of coherence and continuity (in the last); etc.

If we spoke of the "narrator" of the fourth section, let us speak here of the "implied author," as a way of focusing our attention on "the world of the text," which now is not Benjy's world, or Quentin's, or the world unfolded by the narrator of section four.⁹ This is no longer the world of Jefferson, Mississippi and environs, but the world that produced the world of Jefferson, that produced the temporalities of Benjy, Quentin, and Jason; the world in which these can be considered precisely as productions. For our purposes, then, the fictional world of Jefferson, Mississippi where the Compson family lives is the world *in* the novel; the world that produces Jefferson and the Compsons is the world *of* the novel.

One of the particular merits of *The Sound and the Fury* for a study of temporality is the strong separation of levels produced by distinct narrative voices in the sections and the absence of a distinctive "narrative voice" that crosses from section to section. This enables us to perceive more clearly that the production of temporality in the text, the mimesis of time, is due not merely to the operations of "voice" or "point of view," and to the interplay between "narrator's time" and "character's time," which I analyzed in the last section, but also to operations on a level distinct from these, the level of the implied author.¹⁰

Chatman's formulation of this level of intentionality is useful; he describes the category of the implied author in the following way:

He is "implied," that is, reconstructed by the reader from the narrative. He is not the narrator, but rather the principle that invented the narrator, along with everything else in the narrative, that stacked the cards in this particular way, had these things happen to these characters, in these words or images. Unlike the narrator, the implied author can *tell* us nothing. He, or better, *it* has no voice, no direct means of communicating. It instructs us silently, through the design of the whole, with all the voices, by all the means it has chosen to let us learn. (*Story and Discourse*, p. 148)

In the case of our text, if characters and narrator call a character "Ben" or "Benjy," it is because the implied author has "decided" that this character's name is "Benjamin" and that these are his nicknames. If Benjy remembers that a girl named Caddy climbed a tree and saw the dead body of their grandmother, it is because the implied author "decided" that it was a girl and not a boy, a tree and not a ladder, and that Benjy would have the kind of memory he has.

Since the implied author is constructed by the reader as the one capable of authoring this particular text, it is not surprising that the reader constructs an author who intends these effects. To the extent that "implied author" and "authored world" (or "world of the text") are strictly correlational, my use of the language of authorial intention is meant as an economical way of describing the text itself.¹¹

It is the temporally-configuring effects on the level of the novel as a whole that move us finally to transfigure meaningless impersonal time into meaningful personal time. To see how this works, we need to examine what the implied author's time is

like, or what the temporality of the world of the novel is like. This examination opens a series of five reflections.

First Reflection. The first thing we must note is that the time of the novel is discontinuous as well as continuous. Each section or "chapter" represents a specific day, with no attempt to bridge the gap between them with summaries or transitions (other than the title-dates themselves). Furthermore, the days are not presented in chronological order. The second section is dated eighteen years before the first, and the first section's date inserts that section between the third and fourth sections. Also, the shift of narrators and narrative techniques for the three contiguous days minimizes the sense of continuity among them.

Clearly the implied author does not have the same relationship to time that the narrator of the fourth section does (or that the character-narrators of the first three sections do). The implied author's point of view is not "embedded" in the chronological time of the narrated world, nor is the implied author trying to mime a chronological continuity. This suggests that the implied author is free of the constraints of time that restrict the various narrators.

Second Reflection. The temporal-chronological discontinuity between sections and within the first few sections is reduced, even overcome, in a number of ways. For example, the personal traits and qualities of the characters remain remarkably stable from one section to the next, over a span of eighteen years—and memory extends this stability back another twelve years. In fact, the most important means of overcoming discontinuity is the device of a reliable memory of a shared, "objective" past.

It is particularly significant that the various memories of the various characters are consistent from section to section. For example, not only does Quentin remember some of the same incidents Benjy does, but his memories agree very closely with Benjy's. He may add or subtract details, but he does not contradict Benjy.

There are two consequences of this agreement among memories. First, in this world, memory does give access to the past, in the sense of "what has actually happened in the past." What a character remembers and how he remembers it (calmly, feverishly, in fragments, repeatedly, etc.) may be personal and idiosyncratic, but if a character remembers something, it "really happened," and it happened as the character remembers it did.

The agreement of memories becomes so much a norm in this novel that if on occasion Jason's or his mother's reported or stated memories differ from those of the other characters or from their own memories reported or stated elsewhere, the reader recognizes that what is being represented is not a variable past or the "normal" workings of memory, but a *distortion* of the past. Further, the reader recognizes this distortion of the past as a fault or moral flaw in Jason's or Mrs. Compson's character.

Second, the past that each character remembers is a *public* past, a common past. Regardless of the intense subjectivity of each character in his own present, his memories are "objective." The past preserved in memory—anybody's memory—is the same for everyone.

This reliability of memory has the same effect that the narrator's careful coordination of the Jason sequence with the domestic sequence had, in building the sense

that the time of the novel's action is a public time, stable, transpersonal, "objective." In addition, the past of this public time is accessible in the present (via memory, both personal and public). Moreover, this past is *important to* the present; it is the past *of* the present. This present has, and can have, no other past than this past.

In fact, the contrast between the "stable past" on the one hand and on the other the dispersal of the textual present over eighteen years and the "arbitrary" 2-1-3 ordering of the three most "recent" days suggests that the past is *more important than* the present. From whatever present one chooses, one looks back into the same generative past. And this is a past that retains a "thickness" and "density" that make it almost as present as the present—and often *more* present. As a character says in Faulkner's *Requiem for a Nun*, "The past is never dead. In fact, it's not even past" (p. 92). Indeed in the Benjy section past perceptions displace present ones in Benjy's experience. The past is not merely a past of calendar time; it is the past of a time of human action and passion, of intentions/attentions that have formed or deformed the future, extending seamlessly up to and into the present.

In the world of the novel, the past endlessly reverberates in the present, and the present constantly verges on dissolving into repetitions of the past. This particular interrelationship of past and present is strongly established in the Benjy section, and is sustained in the movement from section to section. The hand of the implied author is revealed as the repetitions become less and less literal and more and more metaphorical as the novel progresses. If as the novel progresses the past becomes more clearly distinct from the present, the present in turn becomes more clearly *related to* the past in a variety of ways.

Third Reflection. A considerable sense of temporal coherence is generated by the frequent notation of temporal placement, by the dispersal of context-setting throughout the text, and by motif-repetition (repetition of particular images or phrases).

One of the ways the time of this world is established as public is through the frequent notation of "time and date" of actions. Each section is dated, and within sections and in memory-fragments characters (or the narrator) frequently note the time or the date ("Christmas is the day after tomorrow. Santy Claus, Benjy. Santy Claus"—p. 6) or their age; or they "place" their present with respect to a specific past event or future event.

The effect of this dating and placing, together with the devices discussed in the previous reflection, is to build not merely coherence but "context." An action, scene, or group of scenes becomes a context that helps make sense of another action or scene or fragment of a scene. This operation works backwards and forwards; each new segment of text can become context or be contexted—or both. The overt refusal to "set the context" at the beginning of a section or scene and the switching to a different narratorial point of view for each section have the effect of dispersing the contexting operation throughout the text, and of foregrounding its operation.

In addition to dating and contextualizing, motif-repetition assists in the assembly of fragments into scenes. Sometimes, also, motif-repetition helps establish explanatory context, as the repeated detail of the book-satchel strengthens *for Benjy* the association between Caddy and the other school-girls, who carry book-satchels

similar to Caddy's. In this case, the other characters, not having access to this motif, mis-interpret Benjy's action in accosting the schoolgirls, which they interpret as a sexual assault, and so Benjy gets castrated. The reader, on the other hand, because of the book-satchel motif, recognizes that Benjy is trying to recover a lost experience of Caddy coming home from school, and can interpret his behavior accurately.

More frequently, however, motifs are non-explanatory and serve simply to set up echo-effects in the text. Examples of such motifs are Jason with his hands in his pockets, the references to Quentin as student in several different time-strata (pp. 20, 76, etc.), Jason as tattletale, phrases such as "she smelled like trees," "I'll run away," etc. These motif-repetitions often cross from section to section. One of the ways the narrator of the fourth section establishes himself as an "independent" voice is by avoiding already-established motifs for the first few pages of his section.

The result of the combination of temporal placing, contexting, and motif-repetition is a more or less continuous generation of temporal configurations, some "causal," some not. In addition, the world of this novel is remarkably coherent and self-contained. Practically every detail ends up being taken up into the network of significances generated by the operations of contexting and motif-repetition. For example, George Stewart and Joseph Backus claim that in the entire Benjy section only three lines of text cannot be "tied into" the set of specific scenes or scene-sequences constructed from the fragments (which themselves constellate around a few key experiences of loss).¹² In this world, everything resonates.

Fourth Reflection. But besides this inward reverberation there is an "expansion outward" of configurational impulses through historical, literary, and mythic allusions and references.

The time of the world of the text is "realistic," in the sense that the public time of this world is constructed as if it were identical to the public time of the "real" world, marked by the same clocks and calendars, with the same mix of linear unidirectionality and cyclic repetition. It opens out onto the same historical and cultural past as our own. And the historical past is treated as if it were "public" and "objective," like cosmic time.

The time of the world of the text is characterized by "repetition," in that some of the context-building occurs through elements of the text that refer *ad extra* to history, literature, and myth. These allusions explicitly call into the attention/intention of this world, patterns of actions and interpretive symbols that prompt the configuration of this story as "a story of . . . , " —in other words, a repetition of a pattern that has appeared before.

For example, the Shakespearean allusion of the novel's title, especially when it becomes apparent that the first section is being "narrated" by an idiot, prompts an expectation that what Benjy is doing is "telling a tale" or story, that this story can be taken as a story of life, and further that the meaning of this story (on the level of the implied author) is that life is meaningless. (This initial expectation will of course be modified as the novel progresses.)

Again, when Quentin chooses to die on or just before Jefferson Davis's birthday, this says something about how Quentin is reading or wants to read his life. Through calendrical association, he asserts that his story is like that of Jefferson

Davis, perhaps as a “story of” the inevitable defeat of gallant aspirations or of too much responsibility, or as a “story of” the uselessness of struggle against destiny or fate.

The implied author is ultimately responsible for this date-association, and also for Mr. Compson’s burial occurring on Confederate Memorial Day, April 26 (Stewart and Backus, p. 453). And if Quentin displaces his suicide by one day from Jefferson Davis’s birthday, the implied author displaces the day of Jason’s defeat at the hands of Caddy’s daughter Quentin by one day from the anniversary of Lee’s surrender to Grant at Appomattox on April 9. Besides linking the action of the time of the novel to Southern memorializations of the Civil War, the implied author is also responsible for naming the idiot whose memories constellate around loss, Benjamin, which means “Son of the South” or “Southerner.”

These allusions suggest a reading of the story as a “story of” the South, in particular a (figurative or metaphorical) repetition of the Southern Civil War experience of assertion, defeat, and consequent sense of meaninglessness—not unlike the experience of Macbeth. However, in Shakespeare’s play Macbeth’s sense of the meaninglessness of life is contradicted by the “moral” of the play, that overreaching ambition is destructive. So too in Faulkner’s novel the characters’ sense of the meaninglessness of temporal experience may not coincide with the implied author’s position. If Quentin, through the timing of his suicide, equates the South’s defeat with death, the implied author contradicts this equation or at least makes it ironic it by setting the last section of the novel, narrating Jason’s own defeat, on Easter Sunday.

While for a Southerner the Civil War is a story of defeat and death, for a Christian Holy Week is a story of death defeated by Christ’s resurrection. And it is the implied author who is responsible for placing the most recent “present action” in Holy Week; for making Benjy thirty-three years old (conventionally, the age of Jesus at the time of his crucifixion), for having Benjy’s birthday fall on Holy Saturday, which commemorates Jesus in the tomb, and for making that day the one Benjy “narrates”; for having the girl Quentin locked in her room at nightfall on Good Friday; for having the day of Quentin’s flight coincide with the memorial day of Jesus’ resurrection so that the discovery of her empty room is resonant of the discovery of the empty tomb; etc.

The many linkages to Holy Week and to the crucifixion-death-entombment-resurrection sequence establish a context suggesting a reading of this story as a “story of” crucifixion and resurrection, with the role of Christ played alternately by Benjy and by the girl Quentin. Reading the story of the Compsons as the story of Christ must strike the reader as ironic, not the least because the hopefulness inherent in the resurrection contrasts with the novel’s apparent theme of defeat.¹³

As it has come to be told, the orthodox Easter story presents the resurrection as a redemption of the fall from grace in Eden. The novel presents its own version of the Eden story.

In the scene which according to Faulkner was the ur-scene or generative cell for the whole novel, the scene of the child Caddy with her muddy underpants climbing

the tree to see her dead grandmother, we see many elements which allude to or resonate to the Genesis story of the original sin: a girl/woman, her curiosity, a tree associated with knowledge and that knowledge associated with death, a paternal interdict regarding the tree, the woman's defiance of the interdict, etc., ending with loss of innocence (an innocence associated with ignorance of time and of sex) and forced entry into the mortal and finite time of change, suffering, and death. The allusions to the loss-of-Eden story in the first section prompt a reading of this novel as a "story of" passage from innocence to guilt, ignorance to knowledge, plenitude to impoverishment, timelessness to mortality, happiness to suffering, childhood to adulthood. Thus in the last section when the girl Quentin, the fruit of Caddy's "sin," escapes her room and her family with money from her mother that Jason had withheld from her, ironically she repeats the sequence of fall redeemed by resurrection. (The irony is on the level of the implied author.)

These and other allusions and resonances "outward" insistently put the time of the implied author on the level of repetition. Because this "casting outward" contributes to the contexting operation instead of disrupting it, the casting outward opens out the configuration of the "connectedness of life" (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 425) in the text to a larger world, with a larger and more diverse past. And this opening out is not in the direction of a single context or a single Ur-narrative, but toward multiple contexts and many stories. We could say that this story, the story of the Compson family and their faithful servant, *presents itself as* a repetition of other stories, or as a variety of figurative repetitions (including the figure of ironic reversal). These other stories are brought to us and we to them, with all their configurative possibilities and limitations, by our cultural, religious, and political past—which is both public and plural.

Fifth Reflection. Finally, then, the movement of time on the level of the implied author is anti-entropic. According to the theory of entropy, the universe is moving toward randomness. However, in this novel the movement is in the opposite direction. Within a section, the narratorial way of experiencing time may not change. But this is in striking contrast to the changes on the level of the novel as a whole, as the narratorial present moves from section to section.

In the novel as a whole, on the level of narrative technique, the chaos and confusion of the Benjy section is gradually, step by step or section by section, replaced with coherence and comprehension. The narrative of the fourth section is extremely coherent and comprehensible, a "greatest possible contrast" from the voice of the Benjy section. From fragments of scenes, arbitrarily interrupted and arbitrarily sequenced, we move to a flowing montage of scenes with no ellipses and in almost-strictly chronological order. We move from a narrator who, temporally speaking, never knows where he is to one who knows exactly where he (and everybody else) is every minute of the day. We move from a narrator ignorant of time to one who knows that this is a story "about" time and makes some pronouncements of his own about the significance of time.¹⁴ And we move from a sensed lack of temporal configuration to a sense of the continuous realization of multiple configurative possibilities.

This text, considered from the implied author's level of intentionality, is miming, in its technique and devices, the reader's temporal experience as she moves through the "world of the novel".¹⁵

The Benjy section's presentation of fragments of scenes in apparently random sequence is strongly disorienting and frustrating, but as the reader moves through this section (or as it moves through her) she begins to connect or associate fragments together to form an approximate reconstruction of the *fabula* (or story) behind the *syuzhet* (or order of presentation of events in the text).¹⁶ Scenes and the whole *fabula* begin to "take shape." And as they take shape, individual scenes begin to "make sense," and they begin to make sense of one another. In addition, a shaping on the *syuzhet*-level begins to emerge, not only in terms of a mimesis of a particular kind of consciousness but also in terms of the question of how Benjy's day will end, a question answered at the end of the section.

When the reader begins the Quentin section, her disorientation prompted by the stream of consciousness technique is moderated by the fabular understanding of "where Quentin is coming from" which the reader brings from the first section. This initial understanding must later be considerably revised, but it serves as an anxiety-reducing starting point. In addition, the reader expects a repetition of the experience of the first section, that things will get less obscure as she reads on. And indeed, the on-going presentation, after posing the puzzle about the purpose organizing Quentin's actions, brings the solution to the puzzle, gradually clarifying Quentin's situation and his resolve; moreover, in doing so it also adds more information helping to fill in and clarify the family *fabula*.

By the time the reader gets to the Jason section, the further enlargement of the family *fabula* is fairly easily accommodated, and the posing of the puzzle about what Jason is up to is a recognizable repetition of the posing of the puzzle about what Quentin was up to. The narrative strategy of initial disorientation followed by gradual building of coherence and comprehension has become a noticeable "shape" to the passing time of this world (the world of the implied author, not the world of Jefferson, Mississippi).

This strategy of puzzle and solution or disorientation and restoration of order hardly appears within the fourth section. However, its shaping effect of the level of the novel as a whole is becoming more obvious. Just as by the end of the Benjy section the fragments have become completed scenes, so too by the end of the novel many of the various actions have become "completed actions." And the book closes with a final figure of disorientation yielding to refamiliarization, of loss yielding to restoration.

In the novel's last scene, the teen-age servant Luster, unacquainted with Benjy's accustomed routine, attempts to drive him in the family horse-and-buggy the "wrong way" around the city square. Benjy's response is immediate and extreme: "Bellow on bellow, his voice mounted, with scarce interval for breath. There was more than astonishment in it, it was horror; shock; agony eyeless, tongueless; just sound. . . ." (p. 400). It is only when Jason, newly returned from Mottson, jumps on the buggy and turns it around so that it is circling the town square the "right" way, that Benjy quiets down: "his eyes were . . . serene again as cornice and façade flowed smoothly

once more from left to right; post and tree, window and doorway, and signboard, each in its ordered place" (p. 401). Thus ends the novel.

The temporality of the world of the novel is considerably more complex by the end of the novel than it was during the first section. The "times" of characters, narrator, and implied author have become more and more distinct, and more distinctly configurative. On the character level alone, there are mimeses or representations of temporal experiences ranging from Benjy's thrownness into the sheer present (in which memories are experienced so strongly they displace present sensations and "become" Benjy's present) to Jason's taking of life as a whole in recollection and resoluteness.¹⁷ However, offsetting the increasing complexity of the novel's temporality is the decreasing difficulty of the narrative technique. Despite its growing complexity, the world of the text becomes more "readable" as the novel progresses, as it "moves through" its own time; it makes more and more sense, or more and more kinds of sense, and makes them more easily.

This is the opposite of time as entropy. In the construct of entropic information theory, as time goes on more and more energy is needed to communicate less and less information. At the level of the implied author and reader, the opposite is occurring during the time of *The Sound and the Fury*. The text moves beyond configuring a temporal experience in order to ward off the *anomie* of temporal chaos, beyond taking its own good time to get to the end, beyond the pleasure principle,¹⁸ to energize an excess of configuring intentions/attentions. The novel cannot be reduced to a single meaning.

Beyond the pleasure principle lies Eros, which does not reduce tension; or if it does, it does so by catalyzing the energy (or "vital differences," to use Freud's phrase—*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 49) needed to manage the tension. Eros seeks not discharge but surcharge, and delights not in the simplicity of one but in the complexity of more than one. On the level of the novel as a whole, the time of *The Sound and the Fury* is an erotic time. Perhaps we can say the same of narrative time generally.

CONCLUSION

In *The Company We Keep*, Wayne Booth argues that in the reading process the reader identifies, for the duration of the reading at least, with the values of the implied author.¹⁹ Thus reading is for Booth an essentially ethical act. We might expand Booth's observation: the reader (or implied reader) resonates not just to the implied author's values but also to the implied author's temporality, to that aspect of the intentionality of the implied author that configures the time of the text in ways that, as we have seen, can be quite complex, covering the entire Heideggerian range of mundane, radical, and historical temporality. As the text enacts a dynamic synthesis of subjective and objective time, so do we. For the duration of the reading we endeavor to make the configurative temporality of the implied author "our own," as we *become* the reader of the text. In this way and on the imaginative level—in the "ethical laboratory" of literature, as Ricoeur puts it (*Time and Narrative* Vol. 1,

p. 59)—we enact a temporality that we may choose (consciously or unconsciously) to make our own, or perhaps better, to use as a metaphor for our own temporality, after we stop reading. In this way we learn to escape the dominion of the pleasure principle and the wind-down of entropy. In the emergent multiplicity of temporal configurations, we move from fate to freedom. Through narratives we learn to make our own time an erotic time.

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NOTES

¹ Both the sciences and the humanities claim as their own historical time, which occupies an ambiguous middle ground between subjective and objective time. I argue in my paper that in a narrative such as *The Sound and the Fury* the temporal configuration-effects on the level of the narrator and the implied author make historical time meaningful and appropriate it as a “human” time.

² Even in the intense subjectivity of the characters’ temporal experience we see a meaning-generating synthesis of “the time of the soul and that of the world” (Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 3, p. 14). I have examined the mimeses of the characters’ temporality in two previous papers, “Achieving a Human Time: What We Can Learn from Faulkner’s Benjy” and “Time After Time: The Temporality of Human Existence in Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*.” In these papers I used a phenomenological model of time drawn from Heidegger but influenced also by Augustine, Husserl, and Ricoeur. According to this model, human temporality has three levels or poles:

- (1) mundane temporality, the time of ordinary “everyday” activity, configured by Care in the form of concerns or preoccupations;
- (2) radical temporality, the finite time of life in the face of death, configured by Care in the form of resoluteness (Heidegger’s “authentic time”); and
- (3) historicity (Geschichtlichkeit—Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 437–438), the time that mediates between the two, configured by Care in the form of repetition or fusion of horizons (see Ricoeur, “Human Experience,” pp. 19–20).

My project in these earlier papers was to show that the characters’ time is shaped by a complex web of configurative intentionalities energized from all three levels. A surprise for me in these papers was the importance of the historical level of intentionality. In the present paper, the historical, the level of “repetition,” will be quite important as well.

³ I wish to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of my friend and colleague Raymond J. Wilson, whose many stimulating conversations and timely editorial advice have helped in the shaping of this paper.

⁴ For an intriguing analysis of this sermon see Thomas Merton’s “Time and Unburdening and the Recollection of the Lamb: The Easter Service in Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*.”

⁵ Though I agree with Wayne Booth and others that the narrator should not be conflated with the author, who in this case happens to be male, for simplicity’s sake I will refer to the narrator or more properly the “narrative voice” using the masculine pronoun. But the narrator is not “Faulkner,” either the real one or the implied one, as I hope will become clear as the paper progresses.

⁶ For example, the final episode of the book (pp. 398–401), focusing on Benjy in the family’s horse-drawn carriage, occurs before 4:00 p.m., because the reason Luster (Dilsey’s grandson) is driving is that P. T. (One of Dilsey’s sons and the usual driver) will not be back until four; but it must be close to 4:00, because Jason has had time to be driven back to Jefferson from Mottson, which he left a little after 1:30, and that morning it had taken him perhaps three hours to drive over to Mottson (but he drove slowly part of the way because of a throbbing headache). He had gone to Mottson to search for the runaway teenage

girl, Quentin, his sister Caddy's daughter, whom Caddy had named after her brother Quentin and then left for Jason and his mother to raise.

⁷ In the first chapter of his *Mimesis*, Erich Auerbach sees the continuous flow of time with neither true flashbacks nor overlapping of incidents as characteristic of the mimesis of temporal succession in Homer's *Odyssey*.

⁸ The Jason sequence is placed quite precisely with regard to the time of the domestic sequence. When Jason leaves the Compson house the kitchen clock strikes six times, which means it is nine o'clock (p. 355). The domestic sequence continues, through the Easter church service and the return in "bright noon," through Dilsey preparing lunch as the clock strikes ten times to signal one o'clock, through the group waiting for Jason to return, to Luster and Ben sitting down to eat their cold lunch. Dilsey tells them, "Y'all kin g'awn en eat. . . Jason aint comin home" (p. 376).

Then comes the transition to the Jason sequence, which begins, "He was twenty miles away at that time. When he left the house he drove rapidly to town . . ." (p. 376). The first sentence records the shift in terms of a "present" concurrence of Jason's time and the time of the domestic sequence. As with all the narrator's other shifts, he moves from character to character while preserving continuity of time. The second sentence presents the only shift of its kind in this section, moving from one time to an earlier time while preserving continuity of character. The sentence returns us to nine o'clock, with the narrator now tracking Jason, from whence the sequence rolls "continuously" to its conclusion.

The final scene of the Jason sequence is marked by bells chiming the half hour—one-thirty—and by a very explicit transition back to the domestic sequence. As the hired driver drives him out of Mottson, Jason closes his eyes:

He wasn't thinking of home, where Ben and Luster were eating cold dinner at the kitchen table. . . .

When Ben and Luster were done Dilsey sent them outdoors. "And see kin you keep let him alone twell fo oclock. T. P. be here den." (p. 392)

Besides the transitions at the beginning and end, there are some temporal signals within the Jason sequence, too, to coordinate or at least suggest the coordination of the runnings-through of the two sequences. For example, Jason thinks about where he will be at noon, and the early part of his sequence is punctuated by church bells, whose ringing is mentioned in the domestic sequence as Dilsey dresses for church and then walks to the church with her family and Ben.

⁹ The "implied author" is a category developed by Wayne Booth in his *Rhetoric of Fiction* to denote all that we can infer about the author from the text itself. Booth sees the implied author as a subset of the characteristics of the real author, that set of knowledges, skills, and values (and imagination) needed to generate the actual literary text. A correlative of the implied author is the implied reader, that combination of background knowledge, interpretive skills, and values needed to read the text and "get" it. When we apply this last category to our present project, we can say that the implied reader is one who will fully comprehend, resonate to, and value the configurations of temporality figured by the narrative. Wolfgang Iser's model of the implied reader as presented in his *The Act of Reading* is more complex than the Boothian model I am using here. In Booth's perspective, further developed in *The Company We Keep*, when we actual readers read a narrative, we strive to become the implied reader. It is in the dialectical interplay between the implied reader and the real reader that we may find the final "bridging of the gap" between the narrative construction of time and the human experience of time, the final step in the refiguration of time discussed by Ricoeur in *Time and Narrative*. But further development of this point belongs to another study. In this paper I am trying to keep the focus on the text.

¹⁰ In using the category of implied author I intend neither to enter into nor to decide silently any of the arguments over the relationships between implied author and real author, between implied author and narrator, or between implied author and originating consciousness. The difference between the narrator and the implied author is the difference between the operation that renders an action either in scene or in summary and the operation that specifies the action to be rendered, that names the actors, etc. It is the level specific to this latter kind of operation that I now want to focus on, in order to tease out the temporality and the temporally-structuring effects specific to this level of attention/intention.

¹¹ From Roman Ingarden on, the literary work has been recognized as an "intentional object." Since Augustine, human temporality has been investigated in terms of intention/attention (Latin *intentio*). In

using here the language of intentionality, I am agreeing that in investigating narrative temporality, it is fruitful to speak of a narrative in terms of a structure or structuring of *intentio*. I distinguish between narrator and implied author not to multiply agencies responsible for the text but merely to separate different orders or levels of *intentio*.

¹² For a detailed discussion of temporal configuring in the Benjy section, see my "Achieving a Human Time: What We Can Learn from Faulkner's Benjy."

¹³ Even the Reverend Shegog's sermon, though it focuses mostly on images of loss and bereavement ("I can see the widowed God shet His do"—p. 370), reinforcing these themes of the novel, ends with a mention of the resurrection and with Shegog's vision of "de arisen dead whut got de blood en de ricklickshun [recollection] of de Lamb!" (p. 370). The final pattern that Shegog affirms is the orthodox one of triumph over defeat and death, and of the personal appropriation of that triumph through "recollection"—arguably a kind of "repetition."

¹⁴ For a development and analysis of this point, see my "Time After Time: The Temporality of Human Existence in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*."

¹⁵ Intentional entities are, like God, conventionally sexless, but since for ease of reading I have been using the masculine personal pronoun to refer to the implied author, I will use the feminine personal pronoun to refer to "the reader." In my analysis of the process of reading *The Sound and the Fury* which follows, I am indebted to Wolfgang Iser's *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, though I do not use Iser's vocabulary.

¹⁶ The *fabula*, according to Victor Shklovsky in "Art as Technique," is the sequence of events that the narrative is about, in the order in which they "happened." The *syuzhet* is the sequence of events in the order of presentation in the actual narrative. E. M. Forster makes the same distinction, using the terms "story" and "plot." Chatman uses "story" similarly, but uses "discourse" for what Shklovsky calls *syuzhet*. Since "story" and "plot" and "discourse" are used in a variety of senses, and since the first two are even sometimes used interchangeably, I prefer to use Shklovsky's terminology here.

¹⁷ For a development and defense of this interpretation of Jason's experience, see my "Time After Time: The Temporality of Human Existence in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*."

¹⁸ "The dominating tendency of mental life, and perhaps of nervous life in general, is the effort to reduce, to keep constant or to remove internal tension due to stimuli. . . . (a tendency which finds expression in the pleasure principle," concludes Freud near the end of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, and he adds, "our recognition of that fact is one of our strongest reasons for believing in the existence of death instincts" (pp. 49–50). Ten years later, in the generally pessimistic *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud acknowledges the force of another "dominating tendency," speaking several times of "the eternal struggle between the trends of love and death" (p. 96) or between "Eros and the instinct of destruction or death" (p. 95).

¹⁹ Booth acknowledges that it is the "implied reader," not the flesh-and-blood reader, who identifies with the values of the implied author, the values emergent in the world of the text. Nevertheless, Booth tends to collapse implied reader and real reader, warning repeatedly of the danger of reading books whose values are corrosive of the values of the generally humane Western literary tradition. Rather than arguing for new reading strategies that would help us guide the dialectic between implied reader and real reader, Booth recommends we abstain from reading books that might seduce us into adopting false values. On the other hand, Booth is one of the few major critics who recognizes problems with some of the literary classics, for example Huck's racism in Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and how painful it is for many African-Americans to read this book.

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SECTION V
DESTINY, EXPERIENCE AND TIME

W. B. YEATS, UNITY OF CULTURE, AND
THE SPIRITUAL *TELOS* OF IRELAND

ABSTRACT

In “Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man,” Husserl speaks of the need for “a theory of the essence of spirit as spirit, a theory that pursues what is unconditionally universal in the spiritual order with its own elements and its own laws.” Husserl’s contemporary W. B. Yeats (1865–1939) also had a life-long concern for identifying and nurturing in Irish culture and art those spiritual elements that were universal but, in his opinion, most noticeably present in Ireland. In this paper the author examines Yeats’s pursuit of a Unity of Being that would lead to Unity of Culture, focusing on poems and prose of the 1890s and 1920s. Critics disagree on the degree to which his later work still reflects the idealism and optimism of his work in the 1890s, when he began creating and promoting an art that would launch Ireland into an era of cultural excellence and political independence. The author argues that when examined from a phenomenological perspective, Yeats’s work from about 1917 on shows that neither his ideas nor his technique changed substantially, and that he continued to practice and advocate the openness to experience that would be required to advance toward personal, cultural, and political strength, toward an Irish *telos* that would emerge as generations passed.

In Book III of *The Trembling of the Veil* (1922), Yeats (1999) at age 57 tells of his early vision for his life’s work, which was “to set before Irishmen for special manual an Irish literature which, though made by many minds, would seem the work of a single mind, and turn our places of beauty or legendary association into holy symbols,” symbols that would help to launch Ireland into political independence and cultural excellence (*Autobiographies*, pp. 204–205). Part of his plan was to discover within himself and within Irish folk traditions a Unity of Being that would serve as an example for other citizens of Ireland and ultimately lead to a Unity of Culture; both would be inspired by a Unity of Image that he and other imaginative—not political—Irish writers and artists would discover (pp. 200, 214–215). This Unity of Being would be achieved at least partly through discovering a “unity of spirit,” a term Yeats may never have actually used, that he nevertheless believed to exist in Irish legends and in the commonalities that could be found between Ireland’s Christian and pagan religious traditions.

Yeats’s success at promoting this Unity of Culture through an Irish literary revival, and even the wisdom of such an effort, has been met with various responses. Some critics suggest that the project was doomed to failure and that Yeats ultimately realized this and abandoned it. Michael North (1991), for example, argues

that “all of Yeats’s attempts to connect the Irish folk tales and habits to a world-wide mystical tradition serve only to *lessen* the national character of Irish folklore” and that “the very attempts to conceive of a unified Irish culture exacerbated the divisions that made such a culture impossible” (31). Terry Eagleton (1995) also questions the value of what Yeats sought: “To discover that the myths of ancient Ireland find their echo elsewhere in the world is at once to confirm and undercut their centrality. If myth encodes universal structures of the mind, can there really be a national mythology?” Speaking of an address on this subject Yeats gave to the Trinity College (Dublin) Historical Society in 1899, Eagleton remarks that “by the end of his address he is speaking of the task of expressing the Irish intellect as one ‘not for Ireland only, but for the world.’ So it is that Yeats can speak elsewhere, oxymoronically, of creating a national theatre ‘after the Continental pattern’” (260–261).

But Yeats never says that only in Irish legends and literature can the universal values be found; he merely asserts that they can be found in ways that can establish and promote Irish political stability. And despite expressing doubts and bitterness during the last decades of his life, he never abandoned his belief in the ability of art and religion to produce the Unity of Being that could potentially radiate out into larger cultural and political benefits. Terence Brown (1999) feels that even in the late 1920s when he was past age 60, Yeats still had “his eye set on the dream of unity of culture in the new order of things” brought about by political changes that had been inspired, at least in part, by the Irish literary revival of the past three or four decades (291).

Yeats (1937) makes apparently contradictory statements about Unity of Culture during the 1920s, the period of *The Tower* (1928) and the first version of *A Vision* (1925), some of which suggest that he had given up on it, and others suggesting that he had not. In “The Stirring of the Bones,” Book V of *The Trembling of the Veil* (1922), Yeats takes us through the development of his ideas about how an individual like himself could awaken the cultural unity of the Irish nation. He contrasts a false approach to personal wholeness characterized by intellectual and critical pursuits with “true Unity of Being, where all the nature murmurs in response if but a single note be touched,” a state which “is found emotionally, instinctively, by the rejection of all experience not of the right quality, and by the limitation of its quantity. Of all this I knew nothing” as a young man, he says. “Nor did I understand as yet how little that Unity, however wisely sought, is possible without a Unity of Culture in class or people that is no longer possible at all” (*Autobiographies*, p. 268). It is this aspect of Yeats’s thought that Rob Doggett (2006), in perhaps the most thorough study of Yeats’s pursuit of cultural nationalism, emphasizes: “Yeats often stressed, in later years, a clear division between his youthful attachment to cultural nationalism and his rejection, in the aftermath of *Cathleen ni Houlihan* and the controversies surrounding Synge’s plays, of a nationalist mindset ‘full of abstractions created not for their own sake but for the sake of party’” (15).

Nevertheless, there are other statements from the 1920s and later which show he never gave up on the idea of pursuing some sort of unity that would lead to a strong nation of spiritual people. Yeats continued to believe in the commonality of

many spiritual experiences and the unity of much religious truth. During the writing of *A Vision* Yeats (1992) told his wife Georgie that “When people have unity of culture the transference of thought & image goes through the whole people. In the past pure races have been made by blood, but bloods are now so mixed that in the future they will have to be made by culture” (*Vision Papers*, p. 63). This and similar assertions raise numerous questions: what changed in his underlying attitude toward culture, spirituality, and nationhood, and what remained the same? Did he expect the aristocracy to believe in the Sidhe and leprechauns just as the peasants did, or in instructors who dictated automatic writing? What, after all, would Irish “Unity of Culture” look like?

Phenomenology is particularly suited to examine Yeats’s thinking on this topic, given the opposites and antinomies that governed his thought and that can be observed in his art and actions. When one brackets any assumptions about the bitterness or pride, the despair or hope that is to be concluded from any given statement about his life’s work, one is in proper position to examine the essence of Yeats’s attitude toward that work. My thesis is that to whatever degree Yeats changed his approach to poetry and to cultural nationalism, it was not an abandonment of his initial goal of placing Ireland on a course toward excellence. When examined from a phenomenological perspective, Yeats’s later work shows that he continued to embrace and advocate the openness to experience that would be required to advance toward cultural, spiritual, and political strength, toward an Irish *telos* that would emerge as generations passed. To whatever degree Yeats’s later work was indeed bitter, or did achieve some degree of contentment with his life efforts to provide political progress through cultural revival, neither extreme should be seen as an end but rather as a natural state in the open-ended journey toward spirituality.

Husserl (1965) speaks of this in “Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man”: “Clearly the title Europe designates the unity of a spiritual life and a creative activity—with all its aims, interests, cares, and troubles, with its plans, its establishments, its institutions” (155). “[T]he spiritual *telos* of European Man, in which is included the particular *telos* of separate nations and of individual human beings, lies in infinity; it is an infinite idea, toward which in secret the collective spiritual becoming, so to speak, strives” (158). Yeats’s vacillations are merely the tacks of Emerson’s ship in his personal journey toward that *telos*. Richard Kearney (2001) in *The God Who May Be* describes Husserl’s teleology as “a radical openness to the ongoing perfecting . . . of meaning” (84), the kind of openness that Yeats maintained throughout most of his life.

Another Husserlian principle that can be of assistance in understanding Yeats’s life and work is the idea of the vocational epochē from *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (pp. 136–137), where Husserl argues that it is not trivial to observe that as we focus on one of our tasks, we bracket other tasks that are also part of our responsibility in the life-world. For Yeats, his approach to political *science* (my emphasis) usually brackets any absolute Fenian or Ascendancy perspective, though he leaned both ways at different times. Richard Ellmann (1948) is certainly correct when he says “Whenever Yeats swings strongly in one direction we must be wary of him” (148). Perhaps it is too convenient to say

that most of his life was a bracketing of one aspect of his thought as he focused on another; nevertheless, it is one way of explaining his vacillations and contradictions. And sometimes these extremes or inconsistencies in Yeats's work were exaggerated. R.F. Foster (2003) points out the irony of Georgie and others being concerned that he was neglecting his poetry by engaging in Senate work in the early 1920s, whereas in reality he was producing the poems of *The Tower*, some of his best works of art (pp. 335–339).

Husserlian phenomenology also supports Yeats's notion of the connection between individual unity of being and a broader unity of culture. "It should be noted that what is true of the individual life of consciousness is also true of the community life of a culture" (Jalbert 1981, p. 263). Husserl insists upon an a priori science of the essence of human spirituality because it alone can make manifest the norms or essential laws that make it possible to give a rational accounting or justification of the life of the individual and the community. . . . It has become manifest that only an essential science of man can help in the renewal of culture and can secure for it the consciousness of the infinite task of becoming 'genuine' culture" (265). Ken Monteith (2008) makes the following observation about the connection between individual spirituality and broader cultural benefit in *The Celtic Twilight* and other early works: "Through his use of folklore, as it is informed by theosophy, Yeats (1902) establishes a distinct racial Celtic identity, which in turn, Yeats incorporates into his own identity (becoming one of the 'people of Ireland' he faithfully records), and then uses that identity to promote a politicized, global, Irish nation" (161). Though there are statements to the contrary, there is also ample evidence that he never abandoned this promotion.

Yeats may have made contradictory statements like "Unity of Culture . . . is no longer possible at all" and "in the future [pure races] will have to be made by culture" because he understood the difficulty of constructing a "pure race" from an Irish population whose blood was no longer pure. Cultural histories of Ireland, however, acknowledge the heterogeneous character of Ireland throughout the past two millennia of its history but do not necessarily see this as a cultural drawback. Katharine Scherman (1981) speaks of the "happy congruence of cultures" (239) that existed in Ireland in the seventh to the twelfth centuries as a result of various invasions and argues that learning in a wide variety of areas was valued. Learning was "part practical, part mystical"; it paid attention to symbols and was a mixture of pagan and Christian elements, with even St. Patrick having respect for some of the meaning in the pagan stories. So while Yeats himself acknowledged that "the dream of my early manhood, that a modern nation can return to Unity of Culture, is false" (*Autobiographies*, p. 229), this is to miss the point somewhat. Almost any culture is the result of a mixing of elements that occurred at some early point in its history, with a new and somehow meaningfully unified culture continually re-emerging from the mixture. Yeats shows himself to be aware of this as he had frequently to argue against the idea that those of English stock could not be truly Irish.

Yeats's early thinking on the kind of spirituality that leads to cultural and political excellence was closely bound to Irish folk tales and beliefs. In the episode entitled "A Visionary" from the 1902 version of *The Celtic Twilight*, Yeats speaks of a young

man whose poems seemed “the very inmost voice of Celtic sadness, and of Celtic longing for infinite things the world has never seen” (37). This young man had spent time with an old peasant, and Yeats reported that both were sad, the young man “because he had then first decided that art and poetry were not for him, and the old peasant because his life was ebbing out with no achievement remaining and no hope left [to] him.” Yeats then responds ecstatically, “Both how Celtic! how full of striving after a something never to be completely expressed in word or deed.” Yeats continues:

Both seek—one in wandering sentences, the other in symbolic pictures and subtle allegoric poetry—to express a something that lies beyond the range of expression; . . . [both] have within them the vast and vague extravagance that lies at the bottom of the Celtic heart. The peasant visionaries that are, the landlord duelists that were, and the whole hurly-burly of legends—Cuchulain fighting the sea for two days until the waves pass over him and he dies, Caolte storming the palace of the gods, Oisín seeking in vain for three hundred years to appease his insatiable heart with all the pleasures of faeryland, these two mystics walking up and down upon the mountains uttering the central dreams of their souls in no less dream-laden sentences, and this mind that finds them so interesting—all are a portion of that great Celtic phantasmagorias whose meaning no man has discovered, nor any angel revealed” (39).

The hunger for the ideal, for things of the spirit, that is expressed here is of course typical of Yeats’s early poetry with its longing for ideal beauty and reflects Husserl’s statement above about the *telos* of individuals and nations lying in infinity. Again, writing in 1922, Yeats speaks of an event in 1897 or 1898 where he experienced a powerful emotion for the first time, which made him think “That is what the devout Christian feels, that is how he surrenders his will to the will of God.” Yet at the time his “whole imagination was preoccupied with the pagan mythology of ancient Ireland” (*Autobiographies*, p. 284). Throughout his work one can find statements showing his belief in the universality of much spiritual experience, which is expressed in Irish literature and legend as well or better than it is expressed anywhere.

Monteith speaks of Yeats’s thinking in the 1890s on the specific Irish connection to universal spirituality:

Yeats uses theosophy’s methods of investigation and argument to ‘discover’ a metaphysical literary tradition which incorporates all of Yeats’s own literary heroes into an Irish cultural tradition of Yeats’s own design. . . . Because of theosophy, Yeats can argue that the Irish people are a distinct race with a culture more sincere and natural than that of England. In this manner, Yeats displaces an imagined English literary nationalism with an Irish literary tradition that defines ‘Irishness’ to be distinct while validating this Irishness through a metaphysical connection to the whole of humanity. (2–3)

By the time he was in his late 1950s and on, Yeats (1994) seems to have felt that he achieved some of this kind of spirituality. In the essay “If I were Four-and-Twenty” (1919) he speaks of his three youthful interests—“a form of literature, a form of philosophy, and a belief in nationality”—and says that “Now all three are, I think, one, or rather all three are a discrete expression of a single conviction” (*Later Essays*, p. 34). This assertion suggests that at least during some periods of his later life he felt he had achieved a degree of Unity of Being that could be passed on to future generations of Irish artists and to the nation as a whole. And because in

moments of bitterness he expressed doubts about his success, we see his awareness that further progress must be made.

Husserl (1970), in *Crisis of European Sciences*, comments on this very issue:

This manner of clarifying history by inquiring back into the primal establishment of the goals which bind together the chain of future generations, insofar as these goals live on in sedimented forms yet can be reawakened again and again and, in their new vitality, be criticized; this manner of inquiring back into the ways in which surviving goals repeatedly bring with them ever new attempts to reach new goals, whose unsatisfactory character again and again necessitates their clarification, their improvement, their more or less radical reshaping—this, I say, is nothing other than the philosopher's genuine self-reflection on what he is *truly seeking*, on what is in him as a will coming *from* the will and *as* the will of his spiritual forefathers" (71) (emphasis in original)

While it is true that Husserl's psychical and philosophical notions of spirituality may differ from Yeats's more occult and religious ideas, the principle of "surviving goals repeatedly [bringing] with them ever new attempts to reach new goals" seems to be reflected in Yeats's now hopeful, now doubtful attitude toward the future of Ireland.

The revitalization in the 1920s of Yeats's hope about the unities he sought as a young man surely occurred at least in part because of his marriage. Terence Brown feels that Yeats "inhabited the institution of a marriage that generated the kind of collaborative centre of occult power that he had sought as a basis for authoritative action for much of his life . . ." (289). "The poet who began in 1923 to play a public part on the Irish stage once again was therefore invigorated by a marital relationship that had brought him sexual fulfillment, occult knowledge, and sense of destiny and the written materials in which he might cast his thoughts into an empowering unity" (290). According to Brown, Yeats felt that *A Vision* was developing into "a work which could be a sacred book for an age that, even in Ireland, had at best a deficient sense of the sacred." Again, this appears to contradict his statement from *Autobiographies* (268) about "not possible at all," suggesting that he had not given up on his early dreams of unity.

Ultimately Yeats seems to have concluded that "Nationality was like religion, few could be saved," and came to believe that Unity of Culture could be cultivated among an elite, aristocratic group that could direct the spiritual and imaginative life of the nation. This "Ireland of men's affections must be, as it were, self-moving, self-creating" (*Autobiographies*, p. 272) even if it consisted of only a few. Jonathan Allison (2001) says this is observable in "The process of change in Yeats's identifications, from love of landscape to love of houses (f, Lissadell, Ballylee) . . . [which] does reflect that shift in identification from a large space to a small retreat. In a sense, Yeats's big houses are his new sacred spaces: not a national homeland exactly, but a residence for the waning Anglo-Irish and indirectly a hub from which cultural and intellectual power could be transmitted by an elite leadership" (62). It is worth noting that the passage quoted above about the young poet and old peasant was omitted from the story when Yeats (1959) reworked *The Celtic Twilight* for *Mythologies*, first published in 1925, suggesting that he had indeed lost some of his emphasis on the value of the spiritual longings of the common folk and had turned his hopes towards some sort of new Ascendancy that would emerge as the

new nation matured. In 1922 Yeats asserted, “this much at any rate is certain—the dream of my early manhood, that a modern nation can return to Unity of Culture, is false; though it may be we can achieve it for some small circle of men and women” (*Autobiographies*, p. 229) who would continue the work, via art and appropriate political action, of moving Ireland towards its *telos*.

One way of judging whether Yeats abandoned or maintained his youthful hope for some kind of Unity of Culture is to examine aspects of his poetry that can reveal such an attitude. Yeats himself explains how, as he matured as a poet, he strove to rid his poems of abstraction and to find a more “hard” and concrete manner of expression. Yet romantic language similar to the early “Rose” poems sometimes appears in his later poetry. Compare these two passages from poems written roughly 30 years apart, first from “The Secret Rose” (1897) and next from “The Tower” (1927):

Thy great leaves enfold
The ancient beards, the helms of ruby and gold
Of the crowned Magi; and the king whose eyes
Saw the Pierced Hands and Rood of elder rise
In Druid vapour and make the torches dim;
Till vain frenzy awoke and he died; and him
Who met Fand walking among flaming dew
By a grey shore where the wind never blew,
And lost the world and Emer for a kiss. . . .

(*The Poems*, p. 66)

I declare
They shall inherit my pride,
The pride of people that were
Bound neither to Cause nor to State,
Neither to slaves that were spat on,
Nor to the tyrants that spat,
The people of Burke and of Grattan
That gave, though free to refuse—
Pride, like that of the morn,
When the headlong light is loose,
Or that of the fabulous horn,
Or that of the sudden shower
When all streams are dry,
Or that of the hour
When the swan must fix his eye
Upon a fading gleam,
Float out upon a long
Last reach of glittering stream
And there sing his last song.

(*The Poems*, p. 202)

The first passage makes use of a more metaphoric structure as the leaves of the rose “enfold” those people in the following examples, whereas in the second passage the idea of passing on his pride to his artistic heirs is more concrete. But I cannot agree that the lines about “Pride, like that of the morn” or those about the swan are less dreamy and romantic than those lines about Fand and Emer from “The Secret

Rose,” lines—and here I lapse into the realm of purely personal taste—lines as eerily beautiful as any I have ever encountered.

The themes of Eternal Beauty, hatred and desire, and his goal to raise up a younger generation of Irish literary artists that appear in the early poems and prose still appear in the later. In “All Souls Night” (1921) the souls he thinks of—Horton, Emery, MacGregor—seem to have pursued eternal beauty in their own way, like Fergus, the Magi, and the other legendary figures in the collection *The Rose* (1892) or the poem “The Secret Rose” (1897). Lines 33–48 in “The Tower” also show the pursuit of beauty as the men go to see Mary Haynes and one is drowned in the bog. Phrases like “thy great wind of love and hate” from “The Secret Rose” (*The Poems*, p. 67) echo his insistence throughout his career that he is motivated by “hatred and desire,” “lust and hate” for Maude Gonne and Ireland. Ellmann makes much of Yeats’s bitterness at the time of the publication of *The Tower* (1928). Brown on the other hand quotes a letter to Olivia Shakespear in 1929 where WBK writes “I am writing more easily than I ever wrote and I am happy” (325). It is of course possible to be happy and hopeful 1 week and bitter the next, but his bitterness was about getting old and losing his health, about the Civil War and slow progress toward national unity, not about thinking that his youthful hope for unity was a mistake.

Yeats’s belief in the power of symbols to inspire rational thought and spiritual experience is also a lifelong theme. Graham Hough (1984) points out the obvious fact that “It had been an article of Yeats’s belief from his earliest days that the Great Memory, ‘the mind of Nature herself,’ the *Anima Mundi* could be evoked by symbols” (94). Here is how Yeats describes the power of his fictional story-teller, Paddy Flynn from *The Celtic Twilight*:

Perhaps the Gaelic people shall by his like bring back again the ancient simplicity and amplitude of imagination. What is literature but the expression of moods by the vehicle of symbol and incident? And are there not moods which need heaven, hell, purgatory, and faeryland for their expression, no less than this dilapidated earth? Nay, are there not moods which shall find no expression unless there be men who dare to mix heaven, hell, purgatory, and faeryland together, or even to set the heads of beasts to the bodies of men, or to thrust the souls of men into the heart of rocks? (pp. 33–34)

The communicators of *A Vision* told him they had not come to give him a religious or philosophical system but to give him “metaphors for poetry” (*A Vision*, p. 8). And near the end of his life Yeats was still claiming success in finding images that could produce Unity of Being by connecting with unity of spirit:

I have now described many symbols which seem mechanical because united in a single structure, and of which the greater number, precisely because they tell always the same story, may seem unnecessary. Yet every symbol, except where it lies in vast periods of time and so beyond our experience, has evoked for me some form of human destiny, and that form, once evoked, has appeared everywhere, as if there were but one destiny, as my own form might appear in a room full of mirrors. When one discovers, as will be seen presently, at a certain moment between life and death, what ancient legends have called the Shape-Changers, one illustrates a moment of European history, of every mind that passes from premise to judgment, of every love that runs its whole course. (*A Vision*, pp. 213–214)

Hough points out that “His metaphors are formed into a system, though not into a chain of reasoning. He has a great deal of the Keatsian Negative Capability—‘when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without an

irritable reaching after fact and reason.” Of course, Yeats’s “reaching after fact and reason” did make him irritable and bitter at times, but Hough’s remarks shows Yeats’s openness to experience and the phenomenological foundation of much of his thinking.

One last topic that shows a continuity between Yeats’s (1997) work of the 1890s and the poems and prose of the 1920s and beyond is his life-long theme of the value to be had in the interaction of opposite qualities. One doesn’t have to read far in any genre of Yeats’s work—poetry, drama, or prose—to encounter one of his repeated assertions to the effect that “all realization is through opposites” (*Later Essays*, p. 45). Such interaction could represent several ideas; one could argue that the relation between some of Yeats’s opposites parallels Husserl’s view of the interaction of consciousness and the givenness of the life-world. Hough points out that this interplay of opposites was an important early theme, especially in his work on Blake, and is also present in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* (1917) (99). The following passage is often quoted in relation to Yeats’s hope for a peaceful separation from England: “Seeing that only the individual soul can attain to its spiritual opposite, a nation in tumult must needs pass to and fro between mechanical opposites, but one hopes always that those opposites may acquire sex and engender” (*Autobiographies*, p. 272). And sometimes in the interaction of opposite qualities, there are direct contrasts and contradictions in poems written not many years apart. For example, in “Byzantium” and “The Tower,” the soul seems to be more valued than the “self,” whereas in “Dialog of Self and Soul” the self clearly predominates. The reconciliation of opposites was a central theme in poems such as “The Double Vision of Michael Robartes” (1919), “Among School Children” (1927), and “Vacillation” (1932). The examination of such opposites, and the balance and progress toward a *telos* and unity that resulted from this examination, continued throughout his life to “suffice the aging man as once the growing boy” (*The Poems*, p. 210).

Perhaps the greatest historical antinomy or contradiction in Yeats’s work is the side-by-side hope for the future of Ireland and the expectation that a 2000 year cycle of history was coming to an end and a period of anarchy was about to be ushered in by something represented by a “rough beast, his time come round at last/ [that] Slouches toward Bethlehem to be born.” But once examined, this contradiction reveals the belief spoken of by Husserl that the spiritual fulfillment of Europe lies in eternity. Individual unity of being would not necessarily be destroyed by a collapse of society, and the stories, poems, and plays that embodied that spirituality, so wonderfully embodied in the Irish literature and mythology that Yeats dedicated his life to, would continue on through the next cycle and beyond, as it had continued on through past cycles.

So while it is true that Yeats reacted variously and in contradictory fashion to events in his life and the life of his country, his attitude could be described as a continual assessment and reassessment of his experiences. Robert S. Ryf (1975) declares that by the late 1920s “Yeats after all had been writing steadily for some 40 years, during which time he had been extraordinarily open to experience, and intent upon improvement. No single path through such a labyrinthine imagination as his, therefore, can be mapped with any degree of certainty, nor can any moment of time

be identified as that within which occurs an aesthetic explosion of sufficient energy to enable a poet to write those poems toward which he may have been tending all along” (611). Those poems are the manifestation of a deeper tendency, the hope of progress toward an Irish *telos*, that remained with him throughout his life.

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DOOM, DESTINY, AND GRACE: THE PRODIGAL SON
IN MARILYNNE ROBINSON'S *HOME*

ABSTRACT

Both Robinson's novel *Home* (2008) and *Gilead* (2005) invigorate longstanding theological debate on the doctrine of predestination, creating perhaps the most indelible Prodigal Son figure in modern literature. *Home* offers readers a more intimate characterization of Jack, told from the perspective of his younger sister Glory, a figure not characterized in the Biblical parable, but whose importance in this novel replaces that of the all-embracing father in the Biblical tale. Unlike their siblings, Jack and Glory struggle with a deep self perception of being doomed: Jack by alcoholism, a history of transgression, inability to believe in God, and his father's unwillingness to forgive him; Glory by a too-trusting, deferential nature that has deprived her of a husband, children, and a true calling. Jack's troubles with belief mark him as representative of modern self consciousness. His sad return to a home where he cannot stay exposes nuances and pitfalls of the human tendency to pass judgment on oneself and others, especially to perceive some individual destinies as overshadowed by doom. This paper identifies a supposedly obsolete definition of doom: the faculty of judgment itself, which can be personal and private. Applying this definition of doom to the development of Robinson's novel, it argues that the interior quest to fulfill a sense of destiny remains unfinished as our attention changes and refocuses on what constitutes meaning in our lives.

Though written by an observant Protestant in the Calvinist tradition, Marilynne Robinson's two recent novels show no trace of dogmatism, even as they bring to life the problematic theological doctrine of predestination in the form of perhaps the most indelible prodigal son figure in modern literature. John Ames (Jack) Boughton may come from a family headed by a Presbyterian minister, but his personal obsession with predestination or personal doom cannot be framed in a strictly religious context. As the critic Joan Frank remarks,

Many of us have known a Jack Boughton, or been him. It is a mark of Robinson's extreme skill and imaginative empathy that we're given this lost, lovely man in marvelous, complex dimension. Perhaps anticipating the argument that any son of a near-saintly pastor and his "slightly self-enamored and distinctly clerical family" might well opt for a misfit's life, Robinson has also entrapped Jack in a somewhat more contemporary predicament. . .that compounds his "inaccessible strangeness" in an upright culture of "endless probity." One may wonder. . .whether a man like Jack might have fared better, say, as the son of cheerful atheists living in New York or San Francisco in the twenty-first century [rather than in a small prairie town in Iowa in the early 1950s]. Yet we recognize the brilliant, embattled self-saboteur in any era or circumstance.¹

*Home*² is the companion novel to Robinson's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Gilead*, taking place in the same time span and telling almost the same story, with a revealing narrative difference. Told from the perspective of Jack's younger sister, it gives readers a more intimate characterization of one of contemporary literature's most compelling ne'er-do-well figures, through the eyes and heart of one of literature's most devout but no-nonsense fellow sufferers. If Jack is the prodigal, then Glory Boughton is a modern Ruth, a character not present in the biblical parable whose importance in this novel replaces that of the all-embracing father in the original tale.

Robinson's portrayal of Jack Boughton, the black sheep of his ostensibly virtuous and God-fearing family—his father's favorite—is darkened by a sense of personal doom. Returning home to the small prairie town of Gilead, Iowa, after 20 years of self-imposed exile, Jack's whimsical childhood misdeeds, the inherited curse of alcoholism, and an adolescent sexual transgression seem to have marked him for life. The question of whether he has been predestined to perdition looms large in his own mind, but not in isolation. Readers, along with Jack, are presented with evidence that, despite what they have preached, his Presbyterian father and Congregationalist godfather—Rev. John Ames, main character and narrator of *Gilead*—have not been able to forgive him, and indeed harbor un-Christian rancor.

This prodigal's story is told from two very distinct perspectives. *Gilead* takes the form of a long letter by Rev. Ames, a 76-year-old Congregationalist minister dying of heart disease who wants to leave something for the adult son his child will become. Ames is Rev. Boughton's best friend, and the warm, contemplative letter intended for his boy to read when he is older diverts into moral drama when Ames learns that his namesake and nemesis is returning. Most of *Gilead* traces the progression from Ames's harsh judgment and suspicion of Jack to the mercy and grace of his final understanding and blessing of his godson. *Home*, tellingly, is seen through the eyes of Jack's youngest sister Glory, the only one of the eight children left at home when Jack embarked on his long exile, and the only sibling there to greet him when he returns to find his father dying. Because of Jack's delicately developing rapport with his sister—perhaps the narrative's most masterful feature—several of his deepest thoughts and what he cares to divulge about his troubled life are lucidly expressed, not filtered through an elderly clergyman's mindset. Glory's perceptions, too, are *sui generis*, a study of loyalty and shrewd, compassionate insight that gives metaphysical heft to overlooked—and predominantly female—caregivers everywhere.

Jack's troubles with religious belief mark him as a special representative of modern self-consciousness. They also expose many nuances and pitfalls of the human tendency to pass judgment on oneself and others. In part, Jack represents the human tendency to perceive of our individual destiny as overshadowed by doom. We grow to love him as we struggle to hope he might be spared a doom imposed by the injustices he bears as a mature man. The narrative is set in the 1950s, marked by the taint of legalized racism, yet it is also made tragic because Jack is rejected by the religious family of the African American woman he loves. Not because he is of a different race, but because, at the devastating cost of losing her, he remains honest about his inability to believe in God. Poignantly, this prodigal tries to come home

but cannot remain there—reversing the Biblical parable in which an all-forgiving father celebrates his wayward son's return unconditionally.

Importantly, *Home* is narrated through the perspective of a nearly selfless believer who has herself come home in misery and humiliation. Unattached and able to care for the dying paterfamilias, Glory has her own linkage with personal doom. She has learned, after an engagement of several years, that the fiancé she'd been waiting for, given all her savings and most of her income, is married. Though she has been played for a fool and cast on the shoals of spinsterhood at 38, Glory is more than foolishly loyal and self-sacrificing. Because of her presence, Robinson throws an ingenious twist in the trope of the prodigal son, wherein a remarkable sister steps into the role that might have been filled by the father, adding a female lens lacking in the biblical parable. Glory's perspective ultimately draws our attention to the nature of forgiveness and grace, and is perhaps the crowning achievement in Robinson's variation on the proverb.

Through the siblings' intertwining stories of perceived destiny, Robinson peels back layers of sensibility in the phenomenology of doom.

The Oxford English Dictionary informs us that *doom* is derived from the Old English, Scandinavian and Teutonic root *dom*, that which is set up or put in place, such as a statute or ordinance. Anglo-Saxon laws, for example, were listed in books of dooms for a given city or region. A century or two later a second meaning arose, as a sentence or judgment, usually adverse, which was soon linked with the idea of fate and final judgment. Shakespeare refers to the Doom of Destiny in *Richard the Third*; later Dryden names Age, Death's inexorable Doom. Now obsolete, but telling, another meaning at this time was the faculty of judgment itself, which could be personal and private. Dryden, e.g., wrote of one who, with unerring Doom, sees what is, and was, and is to come. The dominant definition, of course, emerged in the Middle Ages: the Last Judgment at the end of the world, or Doomsday, when souls are judged by their Creator, cast into eternal perdition or sent heavenwards to a glorious reward.³ Nevertheless, doom as the rendering of personal judgment lingers in colloquial use, wherein persons are said to doom themselves or others to lives of suffering by ill-wrought decisions.

We cannot be sure of supernatural forces, but the phenomenology of human experience calls us to look closely at how the dead weight of doom can be, and is, felt by some with a force that can draw them toward self-destruction. A few decades ago existentialist writers like Sartre and Camus opined that death was so nauseatingly inevitable that the sole serious choice in life was whether or not to commit suicide. Fortunately, this extreme offshoot of Stoicism was pruned by a more sensible modern Epicureanism—the general sentiment that yes, we're all going to die, but let's enjoy what we can and avoid killing ourselves at the thought of being mortal. Nowadays the certainty of death does not in itself carry the water for doom. It seems to hover moreso around our fear of not achieving our personal destiny; that whatever we are destined to be or become is lost, failed, or damaged so that we cannot attain what we feel might be the state of personal fulfillment or the satisfaction of meaningful accomplishment. And although religious belief may factor in its determination, personal judgment—that not entirely obsolete definition of doom—seems

to set the parameters of destiny and makes the quest for individual fulfillment such an interior enterprise.

Home begins with Glory's arrival back in Gilead to take care of her dying father. When he greets her at the door, saying "Home to stay, Glory! Yes!" her hearts sinks. She sees that he is trying to get his eyes to twinkle with joy, but they are more likely "damp with commiseration."⁴ She has let him believe that she has been briefly married and abandoned, unable to tell him the ignominious truth. Her dutiful, abject return makes the memories of her happy childhood "portentous," because they have overrun their bounds and occupied the present and possibly the future, something she knows her seven siblings would perceive as regrettable.⁵ She earned a master's degree and taught high school English in Des Moines for 13 years before returning to Gilead, but thinks to herself, "I was a good teacher. What have I done with my life? . . . It is as if I had a dream of adult life and woke up from it, still here in my parents' house."⁶ Glory assumes a mantle of doom in perceiving herself as returning home without making a significant mark elsewhere, despite having been an effective educator for a substantial time.

What strikes us about Glory's doom-ish reflections is the note of misdirected destiny, a thwarted interior quest to pursue a calling. She admits to herself that she did not entirely love teaching. "If she'd been a man she might have chosen the ministry. . . . She seemed always to have known that, to their father's mind, the world's great work was the business of men, . . . ordained in some reasonably respectable denomination. Women were creatures of a second rank, however pious, however beloved, however honored." Her father would never have expressed this to her, but she did not have to be told. Now, the narrator who speaks for Glory explains, "it was part of the loneliness she felt, as if the sense that everything could have been otherwise were a palpable darkness. Darkness visible. That was Milton."⁷ It is as though Glory's father-- backed by a widespread socio-cultural assumption of the time-- managed to obstruct her quest without her real calling ever rising to the surface. Doom in this case takes the form of a perceived restrictive judgment of an authoritative Other. But the perception of that judgment belongs to the individual putting it in place. To return to the etymology of doom, Glory's was a privately formulated ordinance.

Suitability for predestined reward can also be privately formulated. Glory thinks of her brothers and sisters, who, except for Jack, were "good in fact, but also to be seen as good. There was something disturbingly like hypocrisy about it all, though it was meant only to compensate for Jack, who was so conspicuously not good as to cast a shadow over their household."⁸ Again our attention is drawn to Glory's judgment of her own predicament, in her uneasy awareness that the commendable behavior of the Boughton children was largely to make up to their father for what the whole family had determined was the lack of goodness in their one bad seed. Glory recalls how she and her siblings would run to Rev. Ames, their father's alter ego, and tell on their "poor scoundrel brother, who knew it, and was irritated and darkly amused, and who kept them informed or misinformed and inspired urgent suspicions among them which they felt they had to pass, whatever their misgivings, to spare their father having to deal with the sheriff again."⁹ This tattling, when they

were not the type to do so normally, took its toll, and Jack's alienation made them all feel less than comfortable in their childhood home.

It does not take long to gather that Jack was the most gifted of the Boughton children, bored with school and committing whimsical acts of theft that look conspicuously to readers like plays for attention, since the objects, except for alcohol, are eventually returned. Jack is also more discerning about being unfairly prejudged, and remarkably tolerant of his family's lack of genuine understanding and compassion.

Glory looks back at herself, the youngest of the children at 15 when Jack, 19, got a poor neighborhood girl pregnant and returned to college, refusing to take responsibility. Glory was about the same age as the mother of Jack's unacknowledged child. Her other siblings having left for careers and marriages, she was alone with her parents when Jack's disgrace became known. She could not understand, "imbecile as she was with loneliness and youth. . . why her father should feel that arrogance had a part in it all, or cruelty. Or why he whispered those words with such bitter emphasis."¹⁰ Readers, however, might figure that by then Jack had been an alcoholic since his first childhood taste of liquor. The Boughton family, like most of American society until very recently, viewed alcoholism as a flaw in character rather than a genetically inherited disease of the brain, in which the afflicted person's ability to act upon their knowledge of right conduct can be impaired.¹¹ Rev. Boughton's whispered bitterness about his troubled son betrayed a judgment rendered without compassion or forgiveness.

Yet, as Glory recalls, Jack was the son for whom their father would wait to appear in the pews before beginning his sermon, his head dropping when Jack did not appear, and perking up whenever the boy did, his sermon at once focusing on joy and God's goodness no matter what the reading from Scripture had been. How to decipher this contradiction? Hints can be found in other parts of the narrative, regarding Rev. Boughton's insistence on the finest quality shirts, ordered from Chicago and worn with elegant cufflinks, and his family's greater disgust at errors in taste than with sins tied to breaking any of the Ten Commandments.

Gradually the irony emerges in Glory's recollection of her father's insistence that one must forgive in order to understand. His sermons proclaimed: "Until you forgive, you defend yourself against the possibility of understanding," but Glory knew that "the real text was Jack, and those to whom he spoke were himself and the row of Boughtons in the front pew, which usually did not include Jack." Despite the profundity of the Reverend's words, "If you forgive, you may indeed still not understand, but you will be ready to understand, and that is the posture of grace,"¹² the crux of the novel seems to settle on the old cleric's deep-seated unwillingness to forgive his son. This contrasts starkly with Jack's quiet readiness to forgive his father for, in his terms, a severity harsh enough to break bones.

To James Wood, what makes the novel so powerful is precisely that Rev. Boughton is not the soft-spoken sage that Rev. Ames personifies in *Gilead*. "He is a fierce, stern, vain old man, who wants to forgive his son and cannot. He preaches sweetness and light, and is gentle with Jack, like a chastened Lear ('Let me look at you for a minute,' he says), only to turn on him angrily. There are scenes of the

most tender pain.” As Woods notes, “The novel quietly mobilizes the major Biblical stories of father and son: Esau, denied his birthright, begging for a blessing from his father; Joseph, reunited, finally, with his father, Jacob; the Prodigal Son, most loved because most errant.”¹³ Perhaps the denial of Esau’s birthright most resembles Jack’s version of doom, if we consider as a birthright the right to an unclouded view of one’s character, the chance to be released from lingering resentment. One example should suffice, an excruciating dialogue between Jack and his father:

The old man said, “Come here, Jack. . . .There’s something I need to say to you. You’re probably going to have to forgive me for this.”

“I’ll do my best.”

. . . “I feel I didn’t do right by you. I wasn’t a good father to you. . . .It’s a feeling I have had since you were a baby. As though there was something you needed from me and I never figured out what it was.”

Jack cleared his throat. “I really don’t know what to say. I’ve always thought you were a very good father. Much better than I deserved.”

. . . [Taking Jack’s hand]. . . .so he could study the face Jack would have hidden from him. . . .[h]e laid the hand against his chest. “You feel that heart in there? My life became your life, like lighting one candle from another. Isn’t that a mystery? . . .And yet you always did the opposite of what I hoped for, the exact opposite. So I tried not to hope for anything at all, except that we wouldn’t lose you. So of course we did. That was the one hope I couldn’t put aside.”

Jack withdrew his hand. . . .and put it to his face again. “This is very difficult,” he said. “What can I do—I mean, is there something I can do now?”

“That’s true,” his father said. “Not a thing to be done. I’m sorry I brought it up. . . .All that old grief coming back on me. I’m tired now, though. It seems like I’m always tired.” And he settled into his pillows and turned onto his right side, away from Jack, toward the wall.¹⁴

Rev. Boughton, in the view of Simon Baker, aligns himself with the doctrine of forgiveness “to appear worthier than he actually is,” and his outbursts against Jack “accumulate into an assassination of character which his son scarcely deserves.”¹⁵ The old man does say that he regrets speaking in such a way to his son. But even this apology is belied by his pitiless parting words, to be discussed shortly.

Jack, we come to understand along with Glory, has returned to Gilead—Iowa then being one of three states without anti-miscegenation laws—to inquire whether Rev. Ames would be willing to legally marry him and his beloved Della, an African-American schoolteacher who has borne him a son whom he has named Robert, after his father. He met Della in St. Louis on the day he got out of prison, having used the money his father had sent him to attend his mother’s funeral to buy a second-hand suit of clothes. He was so depressed that he had not opened the black-bordered envelope announcing his mother’s death, but in any case would not have wanted to upset his family by appearing at her funeral looking thin and haggard and having to explain where he’d been. He tells Glory that Della has done nothing but good for him, that being with her has been, and would be, worth any form of suffering he has had to endure. Jack’s trip back to Gilead was his last, desperate hope to save his 8-year common law marriage. Meantime, Della’s family—spearheaded by her own clergyman father—has been trying to persuade her to marry a churchgoing black man willing to adopt Jack’s child. Jack is finally able to tell Rev. Ames about Della and their son, and the few good years he has been able to spend with her. Against her wishes, he sent her and the boy back to her family in Memphis because he was

no longer able to support them, having been fired after his boss saw them together in a public park. Doom drips from this dreadful sequence of events. Jack's eventual understanding with Ames, who would have married them had he not been worried about its effect on his old friend, is made moot by Jack's receipt of a letter from Della, which he tells Glory is nevertheless kind. Given his reaction—disappearing for 2 days and while drunk unsuccessfully trying to kill himself—we gather that Della has broken off with him.

It is Glory who discovers him in the garage at this nadir of his life. Her kindness and capacity to forgive and restore her brother to dignity would merit a separate treatise. Rev. Ames's blessing of Jack, in which he realizes and acknowledges that the man he has always perceived as the bane of his best friend's and his own existence, is actually a loving husband and father and a good man, is the miraculous high point of Robinson's previous novel. But Jack knows—and Rev. Ames now wholeheartedly understands—that he cannot handle being in the midst of the rest of the Boughton family, the happily married siblings and their carefree children, while he is in deep mourning for the loss of those he loves and needs most. Jack tells Glory not to ask him to stay “while all this is happening,” that he can't trust himself not to “do something—unsightly. I could make everything much worse.” He adds, softly, “I really can't deal with the thought that he will die.” Still, he arranges that Glory will not be left alone, by calling the brother closest to him and asking him to arrive as Jack is leaving. When Glory asks Jack who will take care of him, he shrugs and says, “You really shouldn't worry so much. I have an impressive history of failure. . . . And people can be surprisingly decent about it. Cops. Nuns. The Salvation Army. Vulnerable women.” Glory tells him not to dare joke with him, and he smiles, saying he was pretty well telling her the truth. She replies that he has worried them almost to death, but leaving now is really his masterpiece. When he looks at her with “his face pale and regretful,” she realizes that she should not have said that, because “the grief he always carried with him was as much as he could bear.”¹⁶ Later she reflects that Jack, “God bless him,” had understood the depths of her hopes for children and her own sunlit house and home, “that she had been diligent at discerning virtues and suppressing doubts, ready to give up mere money if it could put aside the obstacles to her happiness. “Jack had understood it all and laughed, a painful but companionable laugh, as if they'd been whiling away perdition together telling tales of what got them there, to forestall tedium and the dread of what might come next.”¹⁷

For Glory, perdition is not the final judgment that determines what she will face in the afterlife. It is the loss of her dreams of happiness in this life, the realization that her fate is not to achieve her imagined destiny. A very particular form of doom, one that can be laughed at in sad companionship with another soul similarly shoved off his path of personal fulfillment, but it is doom humanly judged nonetheless. What redeems Glory's misery is her hope, not for her own happiness, but for the possibility that she will one day provide a home, if not for Jack, then for his son, and if not to stay, at least to visit and be able to call it home. We learn that Glory is willing to remain in the dark Boughton homestead, whose claw-footed furniture and tacky bric-a-brac she finds repellant, solely because she intuits that Jack values the place

enough to try to repair and restore its yard and garden to the condition of his youth. Her unsought destiny is now to live for others, to teach high school again though it is not her felt vocation, to occupy a big house and yard that will be filled rarely with visiting relatives. As Jack prepares to leave she sees “a peacefulness about him that came with resignation, with the extinction of that last hope, like a perfect humility undistracted by the possible, the unrealized, the yet to be determined.” He worked on the car he would leave in running order for her use, he went for a stroll “just to look at the place, he said, and came back in an hour, stone sober. It may have been the saddest day of her life, one of the saddest of his. And yet, all in all, it wasn’t a bad day.”¹⁸ When the time comes for him to leave, she assures him that she will be there if he ever wants to come home. He nods and thanks her, and says she has really helped him. Her achievement, not insignificant in the calibration of destiny, is that she knows this to be true.

How shocking, then, is the blow dealt by their father when Jack tries to say goodbye, holding out his hand. Rev. Boughton is unaware of the extent of Jack’s sorrow and the fact that the father of the woman he loves has rejected him primarily because he is a nonbeliever. Old Boughton seems incapable of understanding, unlike his friend Ames—who had spent a decades as a widower after the death of his young first wife in childbirth—how it feels to shun the company of happy, unlonely folks who provoke alienation simply being themselves. Rev. Boughton, who enjoyed a much longer marriage and many children, cannot forgive the one son who has not lived up to his expectations, even when Jack has bathed, carried, and otherwise cared for him tenderly in his last days. When Jack comes to say goodbye, hat in hand, his father looks at him, “stern with the effort of attention, or with wordless anger.” Jack extends his hand, and the old man draws his own hand into his lap and turns away. “Tired of it!” he says. These are the last words Jack will hear from his father, an echo of merciless doom that will resonate the rest of his life.

It is therefore an exquisite act of forgiveness that Jack responds with a nod. “Me, too,” he says. “Bone tired.” He stands and looks at his father for a minute, then bends to kiss his brow. This reader is grateful that Jack can go from this wrenching scene to the kitchen where Glory, who has heard everything, is weeping for him. He wipes a tear from her cheek with his thumb, and says “So long, kiddo.” One hopes that Glory’s love for him, her tears, her words—“You have to take care of yourself. You have to.”¹⁹—will buffer the impact of his father’s rejection.

At least in this reader’s mind, it may well be Jack who demonstrates the most compelling example of grace in this story—matched only by Glory’s compassion and loyalty to him. Ultimately, it seems this kind of grace is the only hope for those suffering from this type of doom. Why? Because it is the product of personal judgment, that supposedly obsolete meaning of doom that has not disappeared from human experience.

Earlier, Glory contemplates our “odd capacity for destitution,” which we might consider as the emotional or circumstantial condition that might induce one to set up, or posit, the existential judgment that one is somehow doomed, not by God or

fate, but by one's own standards of failed destiny. Glory ponders our capacity for destitution,

...as if by nature we ought to have so much more than nature gives us. As if we are shockingly unclothed when we lack the complacencies of ordinary life. In destitution, even of feeling or purpose, a human being is more hauntingly human and vulnerable to kindnesses because there is the sense that things should be otherwise, and then the thought of what is wanting and what alleviation would be, and how the soul could be put at ease, restored. At home. But the soul finds its own home if it ever has a home at all.²⁰

Jack's hopeless venturing forth to the remainder of his life, without the wife of his heart and their beloved son, is moving on without the thought of destitution because he accepts it so completely. He takes little money because more than forty dollars might tempt him to spend it on drink, and he plans to earn what he needs by his old standbys: washing dishes and peeling potatoes. One could say by some degree that he is doomed by alcoholism. He is at least as doomed by the judgment of others for his absence of religious faith, and by the prejudice of a society that would deny him the right to marry a woman of color in the city where she works and where they could make a life together. Granted, this was the 1950s, but aspects of Jack's predicament throw shadows over much of contemporary culture. Personal judgment, of oneself and others, does not require an end-of-the-world scenario to bring about the sensation of doom. But who knows? It might be the most damning eventuality we ever experience.

During one of Glory and Jack's franker conversations, he opines ironically, based on his "vast learning and experience," that the soul is "what you can't get rid of. Insult, deprivation, outright violence—'If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, thou art there,' and so on. 'If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea.'"²¹ Glory notes the interesting choice of texts, and says his idea of the soul sounds fine to her. She hasn't been able to come up with something better despite a life of religious devotion. It is worth noting here that in both *Gilead* and *Home*, the same conversation occurs about predestination. In it Jack asks his father and godfather whether they believe that a person can be born destined to live an unworthy life and be sent into perdition. After much theological backing and filling by the two clergymen, it is Lila, Ames's wife, who settles the matter decisively, asserting with surprising firmness that a person can change, everything can change. She is clearly speaking from deep personal experience, having arrived in Gilead with no family, little formal education, and no inclination to describe her past even to her husband. Details of her life before meeting Rev. Ames are discreetly absent from both novels. Lila hears the torment behind Jack's question, and reaches out from her impermanent haven from perdition in an attempt to rescue Jack from a false doctrine, or the faulty understanding of a doctrine that extends beyond mortal comprehension.

Apropos of this conversation in Robinson's two novels, I was able to ask the author in a recent interview for her thoughts on predestination, especially in contrast to the belief in free will as given—to believers, a gift from God—to all human beings. Is free will an illusion, I asked, if one is destined to heaven or hell before birth? In a Christian context, she replied as follows:

I really feel that there has to be something we don't understand about being, time, causality, something that would allow us a richer sense of alternatives than is offered by free will and predestination, both of which are very problematic notions from a theological point of view. I don't know if he did this, but Calvin could have made a predestinarian argument on the basis of the prodigal son—which tells us that whom God loves he loves, and no choice the erring son makes or fails to make changes that. . . . Jack sees it from the other side, of course. He can never answer to the faith and the virtuousness he sees in his family (and Della's family! As if his weren't enough) and he feels that the course of his life is determined, tending always toward "perdition." A good predestinarian would tell him he can't know that, that he might well be among those God loves no matter what. The irony of the question theologically is that free will implies we can be judged on the basis of what we do, and can at least tentatively judge ourselves and one another, while predestination means that God's view of us is essentially mysterious, that grace is a freedom he reserves to himself. In that light, free will implies a less fatherly view of us on the part of God than does predestination, which is always represented as harsh. Very few readers seem to find Jack beyond their compassion. On what grounds do so many of them assume that he would be beyond God's compassion, or his love? I think I let him be available to understanding in other terms.²²

What I would add to Robinson's description of free will as a less benign view of individual choice is that free will arises from consciousness. And consciousness, if attentive, can be disabused of limited, mistaken, or careless qualities of attention. If an all-knowing God does indeed know our hearts and minds, then He/She would also know whether we are trying to be fair, kind, and understanding, and might love us despite our faulty judgments. I have written earlier in this series of the key phenomenological factor of attention in determining feelings and actions—toward the self and others—that flower into good and evil.²³ Here we are concerned with the self-limiting judgment of doom, which can be seen as a form of evil derived from a restrictive quality of attention.

Jack is right that we cannot rid ourselves of our actual experience, including the opposites of deprivation, insult and violence. Lila is also right: people can change, everything can change. And change can rid us of private or societal condemnation of whatever aspects of the human condition we might judge as destitute, lost, failed, or doomed. The last word goes to Glory: the soul finds its own home if it ever has a home at all. By this I suggest that our capacity for personal judgment paves our way toward doom or redemption, hell or heaven, as we perceive the nature of destiny. Our interior quest remains unfinished until our attention stops changing and refocusing on what constitutes meaning in our lives.

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NOTES

- ¹ Frank, Joan. 2008. A homecoming for Marilynne Robinson, *The San Francisco chronicle*, Sunday, Sept. 14, 2008. <http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article>.
- ² Winner of the 2009 Orange Prize for the best novel written by a woman.
- ³ OED, Oxford: Oxford UP, Compact Edition, Vol. I, 1971, pp. 787–788.
- ⁴ Marilynne Robinson. 2008. *Home*. New York, NY: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

- ⁷ Ibid., p. 20.
- ⁸ Ibid., p. 6.
- ⁹ Ibid., p. 5.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 17–18.
- ¹¹ Enoch Gordis, M.D., “Imaging and alcoholism: A window on the brain,” Alcohol Alert from NIAAA (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism). <http://alcoholism.about.com/cs/alerts/l/blnaa47.htm>.
- ¹² Ibid., p. 45.
- ¹³ Woods, James. 2008. The homecoming: A prodigal son returns in Marilynne Robinson’s Third Novel, *The New Yorker*, Sept. 8, 2008. http://newyorker.com/arts/critics/books/2008/09/08/080908crbo_books_wood?print ... 12/29/2008.
- ¹⁴ Robinson, op.cit., pp. 115–116.
- ¹⁵ Baker, Simon. 2008. Homeward bound. *The observer*, Sun. 5 Oct. 2008. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2008/oct/05/fiction1/print>, 12/29/2008.
- ¹⁶ Robinson, op.cit., p. 303.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., p. 307.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., p. 309.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., p. 317.
- ²⁰ Ibid., p. 282.
- ²¹ Ibid., pp. 287–288.
- ²² Painter, Rebecca M. 2009. Further thoughts on a prodigal son who cannot come home, on loneliness and grace: An interview with Marilynne Robinson. *Christianity and Literature* 58(3): 484–492.
- ²³ See “Literature and the play of attention: A New/Ancient Look at the Roots of Evil,” *Analecta husserliana: The yearbook of phenomenological research*, Vol. LXXXV, *The enigma of good and evil*, 655–674. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer 2005; and “Fiction and the growth of moral consciousness: attention and evil,” *Analecta Husserliana* Vol. XCII, *Logos of phenomenology and phenomenology of the logos, Book five: The creative logos, Aesthetic ciphering in fine arts, literature and aesthetics*, 235–258. Springer, 2006.

MAN'S DESTINY IN TISCHNER'S PHILOSOPHY OF DRAMA

ABSTRACT

One of the most known of Roman Ingarden's pupils is undoubtedly Józef Tischner (1931–2000), whose anthropological and ethical views, approached from the point of view of man's destiny, are presented and discussed in the paper. The views are an example of original and creative achievement of Polish contemporary philosophy, stemming out of phenomenology, existentialism and the philosophy of dialogue. Under the influence of the dialogic tradition Tischner began to construct his own philosophy of meeting, which then transformed into the philosophy of drama. In connection with this he worked out his concept of *axiological I*. Tischner is deeply convinced that the *axiological I* is self-conscious and its positive worth is absolute. *Axiological I* is characterised by *axiological hunger* which means the desire to realise new and still new values in the world which, according to Tischner, is man's main vocation in this world. In connection with *axiological I* the category of truth and freedom, as understood by Tischner, are presented and analysed. Truth especially seems to be the precondition allowing the integration of a contemporary man, who is disintegrated to a great extent, and therefore badly needs re-integration. As far as the category of freedom is concerned, one cannot speak about freedom in any absolute sense; in this context one should notice that Tischner definitely rejects Sartre's concept of freedom. Tischner tries to define anew the phenomenon of evil. Evil appears within two contradictory experiences: a threat and a temptation. A threat means a refusal of a right to existence, whereas a temptation takes on a mask of a good. Despite a possible drama of human existence, which may sometimes lead to tragedy, Tischner is convinced that man should strive at being a master of his individual axiological choices, that there is a phenomenon of hope which may help man to overcome his evil; the Polish author thinks that striving at re-integration of man and realisation of numerous values constitute the true destiny of man.

Józef Tischner (1931–2000), one of the most known Polish philosophers, represents an original trend in contemporary philosophy, which was formed in discussion with two main, opposite streams of philosophy prevailing in Poland in the second half of the twentieth century: Marxism on the one hand, and Thomism, on the other. That he, as a Catholic priest, opposed Marxism, seemed natural, but some criticised him because he also opposed and criticised—on different occasions—the legacy of Thomas of Aquinas, particularly its versions developed in Poland. Tischner wrote his doctor's dissertation on Husserl's philosophy. It was entitled *Transcendental I in the philosophy of E. Husserl*; thesis supervisor was R. Ingarden. But R. Ingarden's phenomenology, as it eventually appeared, was somehow not enough for Tischner,

because phenomenology concentrated itself on describing mainly the world of phenomena (things), whereas Tischner, with the passing of time, became to be interested in the world of man, and consequently in the world of values (axiology). In result not only Husserl and Ingarden (who represented ontology), but first of all Scheler and Heidegger (ethics, anthropology) are of interest in his case.

Writing for Poles in the Communist times Tischner realised that philosophical thinking was creative only when it grew out of real living, when it grew out of meeting others. Tischner's philosophising grew out in connection with his pastoral work, as the remedy for painful experiences of Poles *living hic et nunc*. The Thomistic vision of man and the world seemed too static and therefore inadequate in this respect. It could not build a bridge between Catholicism and the painful legacy of the Communist era (contemporary world). Before one begins philosophising one should, claims the Polish author, choose the point of reference, the adequate horizon. In this context he consciously chooses the sphere of values. The ethical experience of man is the point of departure for true philosophising. There is no accident that one of his books is entitled *Thinking According to Values*. Especially during meeting others one refers to some, hidden or not, system of values. In the light of them one considers the other either as a friend or as an enemy. The Polish philosopher became to be interested in the philosophy of dialogue, as represented by M. Buber, F. Rosenzweig and E. Levinas. The meeting, according to Tischner, is the basic philosophical category. It contains its own individual contents. In this respect he was a kind of pioneer in Poland: studying, explicating and writing about the philosophy of dialogue. In this context he also paid particular attention to the creative thinking of the Polish well-known psychiatrist, Antoni Kepiński, who examined deeply and described the "resonance of meeting", accumulated in human consciousness. At present scientists are particularly interested in the process of communication among men, and they look at the problem from the point of view of sociology, psychology and other humanities, but the results they eventually get are usually partial, incomplete. The situation seems similar to the one described by M. Scheler in his work *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos*, in reference to the philosophical anthropology: we have many different sciences examining the phenomenon of man, but not a single one, which examines man as such.¹ At the same time the philosophy of dialogue tries to reach what may be called the *holistic* view of a meeting, which means that a synthesis is badly needed. And the phenomenon of meeting is a particular event, first of all. It is connected with experiencing of men one meets on one's way, on the other hand a meeting discovers the truth about man who meets the other; in this context Tischner notices that man discovers the truth about himself, "his truth of being".²

Referring to the views of E. Husserl Tischner points to the fact that man's being with other is connected with the horizon of experiencing and with the horizon of a meeting. The first horizon: "Defines the boundaries, within which the appearance of a subject or generally a theme remain, despite changeability and variability, nevertheless the phenomena of the same subject and of the same theme."³ The second horizon is connected with the first one, it is the horizon of a meeting, which is a horizon of a possible drama, which takes place in a dramatic time and dramatic place,

and which is accompanied by language. As far as meeting is concerned language fulfills the role of introducing oneself, of saying who one really is. During meeting there is the act of objectifying oneself: "I make myself an object and show myself as an object".⁴ The experience of values is characteristic of a meeting; therefore the meeting as such is of an axiological character. There is a chance, but only a chance, that some new values will appear as result of a meeting. According to Husserl the *other* appears in a subjective activity of a knowing subject, defined by the *transcendental I*, which defines the other as a being similar to myself, existing in the same space. Therefore the other presents itself as the other I, *alter-ego*. We have some knowledge of ourselves and on its basis we try to understand the other, the You. Buber, for example, propagates the opposite way, namely: we have the conscience of the You first, and only then we discover our I. Tischner does not decide where the point of departure for the meeting is. The meeting with other man becomes knowing oneself in a given interpersonal situation. An axiology is being created during meeting which enables the above mentioned "truth of being". The truth is necessary for such meeting; without it a meeting is impossible. In this context Tischner proposes his own theory of meeting, and expresses it using the following words: "I know that you understand me, therefore we are".⁵ The result of such meeting is not only knowing something new, not simple and pure knowledge, but a real existential event creating an interpersonal human bond, which becomes a new gain of human self-consciousness. The consequence of a meeting is mutual appreciation and mutual respect. Truth is the precondition of a fruitful meeting, the understanding of such truth recreates my "I" and your "You" in relation to the same (similar?) hierarchy of values.

When one introduces oneself one says who one is which means that he understands oneself in a certain way, and assumes that he will be understood in such way. He therefore mentions one's name and says: I am a teacher, I am a student, etc. Writes Tischner: "an act of introducing oneself to the other is an act of exteriorisation: it is an act of going out beyond oneself, it is presenting oneself as a being with space, with place."⁶ A meeting appears within what the philosopher calls "unstretchable space of sense."⁷ The act of introducing oneself points to the freedom of man. One's own name includes much more than things do, it includes the reality of human being, and points to the *axiological I*, and therefore to the transcendental dimension, which reaches beyond time (nontemporality). *Axiological I* "does not possess any general contents, but it possesses its dignity and is a value itself".⁸ Within the area of the namely (the adjective comes from the noun "name"!) horizon of sense an answer is given as to who man really is and what he can and also all possible answers are given as possible relations of man to man are considered. Human actuality (factuality) is described by the namely horizon of sense and then by the structure of space of being with the other. Abstract man lives and creates in social time and in social place.

There are different possible attitudes to the other. Man can be in front of the other, with, without, for and against the other. The relation of being in front of the other is very important. In such situation one looks at the other and is looked at, cares for the other and is cared for, thinks of the other and is thought of. In such situation the

other is a real *transcendens*. To be with the other or without means presence or lack of mutuality. In case of being for or against the situation is quite different. It points to the state of division, and a definite one, we should say, because it means being involved in a fight. The third situation is described as the sphere of ruling, which is connected with being over or under somebody. These three meaningful senses are the crystallizations (realizations) of a meeting. According to Tischner a man is “many layer existence”.⁹ In the namely space of sense appears the whole fulfillment of man (one may perhaps say that in such way man fulfills his own destiny!), man who is a person conscious of its own acts and achieves one’s fulfillment on the scene of life in front of the other.

Tischner for a long time was lecturing at the Faculty of Directing of the Higher State Theatrical School in Cracow; perhaps the institution he worked in was the source of inspiration for calling his philosophical views the philosophy of the drama; which is de facto an original version of the philosophy of dialogue. When talking about the philosophy of drama one should at first point out the time and place of it. The place is called scene. In this context Tischner repeats again and again that the so far existing philosophy has paid too much attention to the scene, but not enough to man and human affairs. The mode of monological thinking has dominated so far, but ultimately it must give way to dialogical thinking, which begins when one meets the other, when one confronts the other human being. The meeting cannot appear when one divides reality into subject-object cognitive sphere. The true meeting appears when one meets the other face to face, when he sees the other with one’s own eyes. Such seeing allows us to see the other as he or she truly is. The relation between the truth one has in oneself and one’s face is very close. Man is such as his face is. The Polish philosopher overwhelms from Levinas the concept of face, also from Levinas comes the conviction that face is a track, and the process of knowing the other is not a simple examination of other’s face, not a simple looking at it. And main demand coming from face of the other may be expressed as the demand of the sort: *do not kill*. Such demand is understood by Tischner as giving up misdoing. Such giving up is the result of a choice referring to to the world of values; therefore its nature is definitely of an axiological character. Below the axiological sphere there is also another horizon, an agatological one (agaton—good). It is in fact the place of confrontation of good and evil. When one talks about this horizon it means, according to Tischner, that one both in his loneliness but also in community with others is in a situation of danger, in a situation in which some good may be destroyed. Such situation of danger was often presented in Greek tragedy, a tragedy perceived as an inevitable characteristics of life.

The meeting is only possible when one uncovers one’s face. Face as such may be covered with a curtain. The obvious motif of such cover is shame. When one feels ashamed one tries to hide. Writes Tischner: “There are different covers for face, but one of the most natural and spontaneous is shame”.¹⁰ According to the author the one who is ashamed defends his or her values, it is the *axiological I* who, when feeling endangered, defends values in which it believes. The *axiological I* is at the same time the personal I rooted in the world of human affairs, and as such it stands in opposition to Husserl’s *transcendental I*, which is beyond

world and constitutes a certain idealisation of man. Writes Tischner: "The mask, similarly as curtain, appears only in the presence of the other man—in loneliness it loses its sense."¹¹ One can talk about the three kinds of masks: of feeling not glad, self-mockery (self-ridicule) and martyred (pained) consciousness. The psychiatrist, Antoni Kępiński, connects the first one with schizopchrenia. Writes Tischner: "The other kind of masking is self-mockery. Masking crosses itself with tearing off a mask. Self-mockery is approaching itself with a comedy attitude to oneself or even with an attitude of ridicule."¹² The third mask is an attitude of suffering, because it is expected that only it arouses mercy (pity). Therefore the philosopher writes: "It is the work of those who have not got command of themselves".¹³ Fear is the fundamental cause of putting on the mask.

Levinas straightly suggests that man lives thanks to killing living beings, men including. He uses the notion "epifany of face" when trying to catch what is really essential in face. Tischner refers to the notion and notices that the other's epifany of face confronts us as truthtelling person, having *desir*, desire written on face. This metaphysical desire is in fact goodness. The face of the other is a trace of Transcendence, it leads us to the traces of presence of Endless, of God. The description of face suggests that the access to it is of an ethical character. Writing about the metaphysics of face the Polish author notices that face appears as a gift of an agatological horizon, "the horizon, in which good and evil take the shape of a drama and the drama announces the possibility of tragedy or victory."¹⁴ In the metaphysics of face Tischner notices "gleam (glare) of ideal beauty, ideal good, ideal truth."¹⁵ Man transcends towards something which cannot be described by the philosophy of the scene, by ontology, for example R. Ingarden's phenomenological ontology.

But it is much worse when face is covered with a mask than with curtain. Because a curtain only covers, whereas a mask lies, deceives. Writing about a meeting Tischner notices that it is a special kind of meeting that he considers. The meeting should be a special contact with another man: it should be significant, important, special. Tischner writes: "A meeting with another man is in the deepest meaning of the word—an event. Since the moment of a meeting everything in man's life begins somehow anew."¹⁶ In reference to man's face the philosopher notices that face is the place where truth is revealed. The experience of face proves that between the world of things and the world of persons there is an abyss. "A face cannot be conquered—it can only be killed".¹⁷ A face reveals truth about a dignity of man, but also about man's misery.

But not every experience of face is a real meeting. The fundamental and necessary condition of a meeting is mutuality. The other asks questions which demand answers. One probably cannot agree with Tischner that the presence of the other is always connected with misery. What about joy in such context? When I truly meet somebody I take responsibility for him. I also feel obliged to do some good to him. I discover myself as a being destined to do good; this is really man's primary destiny—Tischner repeats again and again.

A lot of attention is contributed in Tischner's book *Philosophy of Drama* to the analysis of evil. Tischner does not seem to be interested in evil as simple, common unhappiness (e.g. earthquake, flood), he is rather interested in evil appearing

between persons, evil conceived as an apparition (spectre). Such evil seems to be ambiguous: it may be either the source of happiness or the source of suffering. The primary experience of evil is the experience of evil man. Evil appears as a threat or a temptation. Threat is the denial of the right to existence, and its aim is to enslave man through the danger of death, through suffering and condemnation. Within temptation evil gets the mask of good. The Polish philosopher tries to prove that man can overcome evil, because he himself is the only master of his axiological choices. A meeting, conceived as an existential event, appears to be the beginning of the drama of man with man. A horizon of meeting is the horizon of a possible drama. Therefore Tischner's philosophy of meeting constitutes the introduction to the philosophy of drama.

Some elements decide that man is a dramatic being. Firstly—as a dramatic being a person exists in a dramatic time, applying to persons who participate in the same drama. One would not be a dramatic person, if one would be surrounded only by the universum of things. This universum is, Tischner repeats, called the scene. One's dramatic nature is dominated by one's dialogic bondage with other men. The relation of man to the world is mediated by the dialogue of man with man. As far as the particular relations are considered Tischner points also to man's relation to earth, the relation called by him (stewardship) farming. There are four places in which such phenomenon takes place: home, workshop, temple and cemetery.

When mutuality is replaced (substituted) by a lie and treachery there appears a revenge and as result homes become hiding places, workshops—penal servitudes, temples—tribunals of condemnation, and cemeteries—places of blotting out memories of predecessors. Tischner conceives drama as a series of events among persons, at the end of which there appears the possibility of tragedy or victory. In victory (salvation) there appears some good and in tragedy there is a destruction of good.

An act is good, according to Tischner, when it is concordant with the hierarchy of values. This is an objective, material condition. But before man acts morally or immorally he should adequately know the hierarchy of values. In order to do this one should possess a moral sense which is free of illusions, and which is mature and healthy. The mature moral sense is connected with the existence of certain attitudes in man, which shape it and at the same time are its products (realisations). One should have the attitude of being open, generous, unselfish. Tischner calls such attitude "let it be" attitude. When a moral sense is disturbed, it means lack of sensitivity. In extreme cases it reminds moral insanity. But most often instead of moral insanity there appears the case of moral parochialism (insularity). But healthy moral sense is not enough for Tischner to guarantee positive ethical acts. Only the act flowing from the good will of man is a moral act. But also the above conditions are not sufficient. In addition to them the feeling of responsibility is needed. In result three conditions are required for a moral act to be truly moral: healthy moral sense, bound with good will, and the feeling of responsibility. The space in which man wants to act morally is called by the Polish author "field of responsibility". Every man has its own field of responsibility, which is not of a stable character. With the feeling of responsibility is connected essential hope. Writes Tischner: "Essential hope is the hope through which human person turns to the most appreciated values, in order to

find them and realise in the world, in other and in oneself".¹⁸ Thanks to such hope man does what he is called for, he fulfills his destiny. There can be also a pathological feeling of responsibility. It is of a dualistic character, which means that a man may either want too much and overestimates his possibilities of doing good or he is able to do more good than he actually does.

Tischner thinks that ethics and faith do not exclude each other. Contrary: they complement each other, faith in God does not exclude ethics but enriches it. *Sacrum* as such (understood in the way Scheler understands it!) in ethical life of man saves and strengthens in man what constitutes the fundamentals of his moral life: the feeling of his own worth and dignity and his good will, which are permanently threatened by evil. *Sacrum* also introduces order into man's moral life and as such it prevents the idolatry of the other. And, last but not least, *Sacrum* shows the sense of human sacrifice undertaken in the name of good, revealing before man hope connected with the realisation of human freedom, and values according to which man lives and dies. Concluding: the act of overcoming evil and realising new and still new good is a human primary destiny, claims Tischner. Ethics is treated by the Polish philosopher as an art rather than science; in addition to this ethics is the greatest of all arts, because it tries to create good by arousing and strengthening good in man and, in result, among men. It is really the art of revealing good, and as such it is unique, exceptional and admirable.

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NOTES

¹ Scheler, M. 1987. *Pisma z antropologii filozoficznej i teorii wiedzy*, trans. S. Czerniak, and A. Węgrzecki, 47. Warszawa: PWN.

² Tischner, J. 1990. *Filozofia dramatu. Wprowadzenie*, 17. Paryż: Editions du Dialogue.

³ Tischner, J. 1973. Fenomenologia spotkania. In *Analecta cracoviensia*, vol. X, 76. Polskie Towarzystwo Teologiczne.

⁴ Tischner, J. 1990. *Filozofia spotkania*, 68. Paryż: Editions du Dialogue.

⁵ Tischner, J. *Filozofia dramatu. Wprowadzenie*, op. cit., p. 70.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 75.

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ Tischner, J. 1977. Przestrzeń obcowania z Drugim. In: *Analecta cracoviensia*, vol. IX, 72. Polskie Towarzystwo Teologiczne.

⁹ Ibidem, p. 81.

¹⁰ Tischner, J. *Fenomenologia spotkania*, op. cit., p. 58.

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 63.

¹² Ibidem, p. 64.

¹³ Ibidem, p. 66.

¹⁴ Tischner, J. *Filozofia dramatu*, op. cit., p. 69.

¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶ Tischner, J. *Fenomenologia spotkania*, op. cit., p. 75.

¹⁷ Tischner, J. *Filozofia dramatu*, op. cit., p. 33.

¹⁸ Tischner, J. 1985. Etyka wartości i nadziei. In *Wobec wartości*, ed. D. von Hildebrand et al., 88. Poznań: W Drodze.

THE SOURCE, FORM, AND GOAL OF ART IN ANTON
CHEKHOV'S *THE SEA GULL*

ABSTRACT

Excessive attention to the personal dimension may distract the reader or audience member in responding to Anton Chekhov's *The Sea Gull* from noticing the most important meaning of the play: the dialectic over the source, form, and goal of art. As for the source of art, Chekhov's character Nina says that the source of her acting art is her faith in herself; Konstantin sees the source of art as a gush that spontaneously surges from the soul of the artist, as he or she tries to stop thinking; and the play shows Boris taking notes from life for ideas he has for stories and novels. As far as form goes, Konstantin writes literature full of abstract ideas in what might be called an idealist form. Boris's form is clearly realism. Pertaining to the goal of art, Boris clearly says that he wants to serve his country, the nation he loves, by describing the suffering of her people. The only objective stated by Konstantin is the self-referential one of creating new forms. Dr. Dorn says that no clear goal can be discerned in Konstantin's art. Although the play presents several personal motives for Konstantin's suicide, it also shows him realizing the superiority of Boris's approach to art. Thus, in having Konstantin commit suicide, Chekhov may be showing which side he takes in the debate.

If one focuses solely on the personal dimension of Anton Chekhov's *The Sea Gull*, the play appears to have an irritatingly trivial structure and theme: Semyon loves Masha, and Masha loves Konstantin, and Konstantin loves Nina, and Nina loves Boris, and Boris loves Irena, and Ilya loves Polina, and Polina loves Dr. Dorn but he merely tolerates her; and the characters can never be satisfied with being loved by the person who loves them. Even Chekhov would, himself, consider A loves B, B loves C, C loves D, etc. an adolescent theme. This is confirmed by his short story "After the Theatre" which he wrote in 1892, about four years before writing *The Sea Gull*. In this story, Chekhov writes of a sixteen-year-old girl who has just returned from the opera based on Alexander Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*: "I love you," she wrote, "but you don't love me, you don't love me!" Having written this she laughed" (85).¹ The author comments:

She was only sixteen and had never loved anyone yet. She knew that Gorny (an army officer) and Gruzdyov (a student) were both in love with her, but now, after the opera, she wanted to doubt their love. To be unloved and miserable: what an attractive idea! There was something beautiful, touching and romantic about A loving B when B wasn't interested in A. Onegin was attractive in not loving at all, while Tatyana was enchanting because she loved greatly. Had they loved equally and been happy they might have seemed boring. (85)

The author obviously thinks this is the interpretation of a great work of art by a rather flighty sixteen-year-old girl. Therefore, it is impossible that he would base a play of his own on the sole premise that to love – but “to be unloved and miserable” – is an “attractive” ideal basis for a play.

One must assume that Chekhov’s *The Sea Gull* is about something more adult and interesting than an adolescent’s idea of love. One clue as to what that transcending subject might be is the way *The Sea Gull* opens. As the play begins, we see a hastily built stage near a lake on the Sorin estate, upon which, as we soon learn, a play is to be performed—a play written by Konstantin and acted in by Nina. Konstantin explains:

See, that’s a theatre for you. The curtain, the first set of wings, the second set, and beyond that—open space. No scenery at all. You have a clear and open view of both the lake and the horizon. The curtain goes up at eight-thirty sharp, just as the moon is rising. (7)

The imminent presentation of Konstantin’s play sets off an intricate and protracted debate within Chekhov’s *The Sea Gull* about how literature might best present the sense of life. Although several characters contribute to the debate, the play mainly presents a debate between the ideas of Konstantin Treplyov in conflict with the ideas of Boris Trigorin. To analyze this debate, let us look at what the debate has to say about the source, form, and goal of art.

THE SOURCE OF ART

Several theories arise from the characters for the origin of art: dream images, copying from life, and faith in one’s self. These theories battle amongst themselves within the dialectic of the play. “Dialectic,” as Hans-Georg Gadamer says, is “the art of conducting a conversation,” but “is also the art of seeing things in the unity of an aspect,” (331). There is also an inherent implication in the way Chekhov wrote *The Sea Gull* that responding to earlier literature may also be a source of art.

For Konstantin, art derives from dreams. He says, “You mustn’t depict life as it is, or as it should be, but life as it appears in your dreams” (11). Thus, dream is the source of art in his view. Later, we hear more about Konstantin’s art. Dr. Dorn says that Konstantin “thinks in images, his stories are striking, vivid, and they move me deeply” (46). Konstantin, himself, says that he has realized that the true artist just writes without thinking because the writing “pours freely out of his soul” (47).

In contrast, Chekhov demonstrates Boris Trigorin drawing from life as the source of his art. He writes in his notebook whenever he sees something he might use for a story or a part of a novel. For example, after meeting Masha, Boris writes in his notebook, “Takes snuff and drinks vodka . . . Always in black. The schoolteacher loves her . . .” (24). Nina interrupts Boris in this activity, and he tells her: “I don’t often meet young girls—girls who are both young and attractive. I’ve forgotten what it feels like to be eighteen or nineteen. I can’t imagine it clearly, and that’s why young girls in my novels and stories are usually false” (24). Boris then explains how he might overcome this disadvantage in the source of his art. He tells Nina, “I’d like to live in your place—if only for an hour—to understand the way you think

and what sort of pretty little thing you actually are” (24). Nina admires Boris as a great writer, and she tells Boris, “Your life is beautiful!” (25). In part, Boris replies: “Day and night one persistent thought obsesses me—I must write, I must write, I must . . . I no sooner finish one story than for some reason or other I must write the next, then a third, and after that a fourth . . . I write endlessly, exactly as relay horses run, and I can’t do it differently. So I ask you, what’s particularly beautiful or brilliant about that? Oh, what a senseless and remote way to live!” (25).

Boris describes the double consciousness of a writer, tracing it to the source of his art. Even while he is conversing with a charming young woman in a pleasant setting, on a tranquil summer evening, he is torn by the need to use everything as a source for his art of writing: “I see that cloud over there, the one that looks like a grand piano. And I think—I must remember and use it somewhere in a story—that a cloud floated by looking like a grand piano. I smell heliotrope around here. And quicker than I can shake a whisker, I’ve jotted it down in my mind—a saccharine smell, the widow’s color, remember and use for a description of a summer evening” (25). Boris describes the stress of the double mind; whatever else he was doing, he was obsessed with placing sensations “in my literary storeroom” (25). After giving many examples, Boris exclaims, “What agony I went through!” (26).

Interestingly, both of the main protagonists feel a need for Nina as part of the source for their art—but in different ways. Konstantin believes he needs Nina as a source of his art, as an inspiration: Nina “doesn’t love me,” he says, “and now I can’t write” (33). In contrast, Boris needs Nina, not as an inspiration but more as a model for the start of his writing. Konstantin later tells Dorn that Nina “ran away from home and took up with [Boris] Trigorin” (42). Boris probably began his liaison with Nina, not because he loved her, but because when they were together, he could “live” in her “place.” Nina’s art is acting, and apparently she initially hoped that being around a man she believes is a great artist would stimulate her art in her. However, things did not work out as expected for the young girl. “She had a child. The child died. Trigorin fell out of love with her and returned to his former devotions, as might have been expected” (42). Boris probably had learned all he needed for the origin of his stories and novels from being around a young girl. Could a relationship based on such a premise have lasted? If Boris was interested in Nina so he could know how a nineteen-year-old girl thought, what good would she be to him when she got older than that, as she necessarily would? Nina later provides insight into why her side of the relationship weakened. In keeping with Boris’s previously stated expectation that Nina would be a “pretty little thing,” Boris “kept on laughing at my dreams, and little by little I too stopped believing and my spirit sank” (49). Boris “didn’t believe in the theatre,” says Nina (49). Konstantin says that Nina “kept on tackling the biggest parts, but she played them crudely, tastelessly, complete with the proverbial caterwauling and garish gesturing” (42). As a rejected suitor, Konstantin is bitter toward Nina and thus may not be a reliable critic. However, Nina herself says that because Boris undermined her confidence, she played her roles badly, “without a single thought in my head” (49).

In an exact example of Boris’s process of drawing inspiration from life, Boris sees the body of a sea gull that someone has shot, pulls out his notebook and starts

writing, interrupting his conversation with Nina. When she asks him what he is doing he responds as follows:

Oh, making some notes . . . A subject crossed my mind just now . . . [*Pocketing his notebook.*] A subject for a short story. A young girl has lived her whole life on the shores of a lake. A girl like you. She loves the lake, like a sea gull, and she's as happy and free as a sea gull, too. A man happens to come by, sees her, and having nothing else to do, destroys her like that sea gull there. (28)

The similarity of Boris's imagined story to the play we are seeing is striking, because Nina insists by implication that this sequence is exactly what happened between her and Boris. Konstantin says that after Boris left her, Nina "kept signing her letters: 'The Sea Gull'" and she "kept on repeating that she was a sea gull" (42). When Boris returns to the estate, planning to stay only for one night, he says, "By the way, I must take a look around the garden and that place where they produced your play. Do you remember? I've come up with an idea for a story, and the only thing I need do is trigger my memory of the place of action" (44). It is as if Boris is planning to write the play we are watching. Nina reiterates her claim. In the middle of saying how nice it is for Konstantin to have a warm, snug home with the wind howling outside, Nina suddenly says "I'm a sea gull," but then in confusion takes the statement back, saying, "No, not right" (48), but she repeats the exact sequence again a minute later: "I am a sea gull . . . No, not right. I am an actress" (49). In calling herself a sea gull, Nina almost certainly alludes to Boris's idea for the story of a man who callously destroys a young girl's happiness just because he can, just as a hunter shoots a sea gull for no other reason than he sees the bird while he has a gun in his hands. In fact, at this point in the play, Nina says sarcastically and bitterly that she's "A subject for a short story" (51). She understands how Boris transmutes events of life into fiction; how life is the source of his art.

Since leaving Boris, however, Nina says that she's learned the secret of the origin of her art of acting: "Know how to bear your cross and have faith. I have faith" (49). She says, "I'm a genuine actress now, I revel in the joy of playing roles, I'm enraptured. When I'm on the stage, I'm drunk with delight, and I feel myself beautiful" (49). Konstantin responds, "I don't have faith, and I don't know what my profession is all about" (49). A few minutes later Konstantin kills himself, and the cause is just as much the consequence of his accepting Nina's theory of the origin of art (that one must have faith in oneself) and its application to himself (that he lacks this faith), as it is the fact that Nina does not love him, announces her continued love for Boris, and leaves for another city to continue her acting career. Audience members may be provoked to ask themselves, well then if the gull died and Konstantin died, does that make him the symbolic sea gull, not Nina? Or could they both be victims? Could the sea gull symbolize each of them?

Thus, the implications of the characters' comments conduct a multi-sided debate over what is the origin of art. There is more: the play itself appears to have been inspired by previous literature. Perhaps this could be Chekhov's way of saying that one source of art is previous literature. One rather obvious source is *The Wild Duck*, a play by the Norwegian writer Henrik Ibsen, written in 1884, twelve years before Chekhov wrote *The Sea Gull*. In this play also someone shoots a water-bird and

this bird also has multiple possible symbolisms. There is a real wild duck in the play: the duck got a few pellets in it and dived to the bottom where it would have stayed until it died. But Old Werle's clever dog dived down and brought the wild duck to the surface. Old Werle had his servant Patterson give the duck to a little girl named Hedvig who nursed it back to health and kept it as a pet. How does this real wild duck become symbolic, and what does it symbolize? Old Werle says that Old Ekdal reacted like a wild duck does when it gets a few pellets in it. The duck dives to the bottom and stays there till it drowns. By becoming a deluded, alcoholic old wreck after being sent to prison, Old Ekdal is like the wild duck with a few pellets in him. Thus, in the play's title symbolism, is Old Ekdal the wild duck? Possibly. However, Gregers, the play's most dynamic character, believes that Old Ekdal's son Hjalmar is also living in a delusion in the wake of his father's disgrace. Gregers says he would like to be the clever dog that brings Hjalmar up from the bottom. Thus, is Hjalmar the Wild Duck? But Hjalmar hates the actual wild duck because he believes it is a gift from his wife's lover to the child who may actually be the lover's, not Hjalmar's. There is another candidate. When Hjalmar leaves his home, believing that his wife Gina had had an affair and that "his" daughter Hedvig is not his own, Gregers tells Hedvig that if she makes the ultimate sacrifice and kills her pet wild duck, her father will return to the family. The child Hedvig kills herself. Thus is Hedvig the wild duck? In both Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* and Chekhov's *The Sea Gull*, a sea bird is shot and stands for victimhood, and, in both Ibsen's play and Chekhov's play, more than one person is identified as a victim. Chekhov may even be implying that Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* is the source of his art in this play.

Supporting the view that *The Sea Gull* implies that previous literature may be a source of art are Chekhov's numerous, more-open references to other literature in *The Sea Gull*. A son with an intense relationship with his mother puts on a play to teach the mother something. The mother is a widow who has taken up with another man. What does this sequence suggest? Perhaps the scene in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in which the title character puts on a play? To reinforce this, the mother Irena ironically recites a line from *Hamlet* to her son Konstantin: "My son! Thou turn'st my eye into my very soul. And there I see such black and grained spots as will not leave their tinct!" (12). Irena's quote is ironic because—far from admitting wrongdoing, as Hamlet's mother was—Irena is letting her son know in advance that the performance of his play is not going to awaken her to the realization that she has chosen the wrong type of art in her acting career or the wrong action in becoming the mistress of Boris Trigorin. In his reply, Konstantin shows that he has grasped his mother's hint, but he defies her by quoting back another line from *Hamlet*: "And why did you give yourself to vice and seek love in the abyss of crime?" (13). These quotes are not, however, from the play-within-a-play scene in *Hamlet*, but from other scenes in the play. In Shakespeare's play, Hamlet always wore black. In Chekhov's *The Sea Gull*, it is Masha who always wears black, "Because," as she says in the play's second line, "I'm in mourning for my life. I'm unhappy" (5). Masha is an updated, female Hamlet in what may be Chekhov's little joke, asking us to compare his play ironically to Shakespeare's. After all, despite all the misery in the play, Chekhov announces in his play's sub-title, that *The Sea Gull* is *A Comedy in Four*

Acts. This may be an instance of what Paul Ricoeur called “rule-governed deformation.” In *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur sees every literary work as structured by a dialectic between “sedimented” previous material and “innovation” by transformation (70). Ricoeur shows how “rule-governed deformation” structures the action of this dialectic. One such rule, as Jerre Collins and I have suggested in a previous article, may be *changes in context* (62). Changing the gender of the black-clothed character and pulling quotes from disparate parts of the play changes the context enough to establish Chekhov’s originality. Since Konstantin is the son who is upset with his mother, as Hamlet was in Shakespeare’s play, Chekhov’s putting Masha in black clothes may be a deformation that simply signals the reader or audience member to think of *The Sea Gull* in the context of *Hamlet*.

Reinforcing the idea that Chekhov sees the source of literary art in previous literary art is the steady tattoo of references to other literature, even beyond the *Hamlet* references. These include the poets Nikolay Nekrasov and Heinrich Heine, plus Alexander Dumas *films*, Leo Tolstoy, Emile Zola, Nikolay Gogol, Ivan Turgenev, and Alexander Pushkin. In addition, Irena actually reads the following words from Guy de Maupassant’s story, “On the Water”: “And it stands to reason that for society people to mollycoddle novelists and to lure them into their homes is just as dangerous as for the corn merchant to breed rats in his storehouses” (19). Irena immediately denies that this fits her relationship with the novelist Boris Trigorin. She is probably right, but the quote may be the origin of the plot line of *The Sea Gull* by which a novelist (Boris Trigorin) is invited into a society person’s home and ends up running away with their teen-aged daughter, having an illegitimate child with her, and then abandoning the girl after the baby’s death. If so, one might ask why Chekhov reveals the origin of his idea for this aspect of his play. My answer is that the play is not just about the personal lives of the characters (A loves B, B loves C, C loves . . . etc.), but is a comment on the source, form, and goal of art—and the quote from Maupassant reveals the source of this part of the play.

THE FORM OF ART

Chekhov opens the debate on the form of art by having Konstantin say: “What we need are new forms. We’ve got to have new forms. And if there aren’t any, then we’d be better off to have nothing at all” (8–9). The audience gets a hint of what Konstantin considers a new form from his play. As quoted earlier, gesturing at the stage: “See, that’s a theatre for you,” he says. “The curtain, the first set of wings, the second set, and beyond that—open space. No scenery at all.” He will use nature as his scenery. “You have a clear and open view of both the lake and the horizon,” says Konstantin. “The curtain goes up at eight-thirty sharp, just as the moon is rising” (7). He asks his servant, “Do you have the menthylated spirits? And the sulfur? When the red eyes appear, there has to be a smell of sulfur” (10). Nina plays a spirit of the Earth in the far future who announces that she is lonely because for thousands of generations, there have been no living creatures on earth. She is in a contest with a devil that fears a return of life to the Earth. When two red spots appear, supposed

to be the devil's eyes, Konstantin's uncle complains about the stink, and his mother Irena laughs and ridicules the play. Konstantin stops it and stomps off in a pout. Irena says she would have been willing "for the sake of a joke" to listen to "ranting and ravings"; however, she will not be lectured to: "what we have here," she says, "are pretensions to new forms, to a brand-new era in art." She cannot accept that because to do so would mean to denigrate everything she's done all her acting career. "There are no new forms available, as I see it, just a bad temper" (14). We might suspect an oedipal motive for this mother-son conflict, especially given the *Hamlet* references, but to assure the audience that Irena's criticisms of the play's form are based in reality, we also hear Nina's analysis, given to Konstantin. Nina complains, "It's so difficult to act in your play. There are no living characters in it, none" (11). Konstantin agitatedly attempts to explain his new form, but Nina continues: "There's very little action in your play. It's just reading lines. And I believe a play must certainly have love in it" (11). She clearly implies that Konstantin's play has no love in it. Nina is not so much denying that new forms are available as saying she does not like his new forms. Nina's words, in effect, place her on Irena's side of the debate over the proper form of art. That, and Konstantin's childish resentment of her complaints, helps explain why the love affair between Konstantin and Nina did not work out.

Dr. Dorn, who thinks, "maybe I've lost my mind, but I liked that play," gives further insight into the "new" form that Konstantin hopes his play embodies. Having said the play was "fresh" and "innocent," Dorn tells Konstantin, "You chose a subject from the field of abstract ideas. And rightly so because a work of art must continually express some kind of significant thought or other." Dorn's statement verges on our next topic, the goal of art, but he makes clear that he is still dealing with form when he says, "Only the serious is really beautiful" (17). The dialectic continues, as some kind of abstract idealist form, represented by Konstantin, struggles against the form called "realism" as represented by Boris. One of the reasons for Chekhov's almost heavy-handed re-use of Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* may now be evident. Ibsen is almost the inventor of realistic drama. Previously, non-realist, idealist drama such as Goethe's *Faust* dominated the European stage. Even, Ibsen's first two major plays *Brand* and *Peer Gynt* existed in the idealist form; but then Ibsen radically transformed his art toward the realistic. So the dialectic in *The Sea Gull* between idealism and realism recreates the same conflict that occurred within Ibsen and was reflected in his career path. Thus, we find an irony in that Konstantin is actually advocating the older form of theatre art, while profoundly believing he is offering "new forms." Perhaps his inability to recognize that he is actually advocating a return to an earlier form is the basic reason why he is doomed to failure.

For Konstantin, the fight is personal: he sees his mother, the famous actress, and her lover, the successful realist writer, as his enemies and as representatives of all his enemies. He sees that they have won: "You people with your narrow-minded, run-of-the-mill conventions have grabbed the leadership in art today," but he claims they have done so illegitimately. "And you consider only what you do yourselves as genuine and legitimate. Everything else you squeeze out and suppress." He is defiant, at

least verbally: "I refuse to acknowledge you or your leadership!" Speaking directly to Irena, his mother, he says, "I just won't accept either you or him!" (33). Boris, for his part, thinks Konstantin has talent but that Konstantin is wasting his talent on the wrong form: Konstantin "still can't seem to hit the right note," say Boris, near the play's end, "There's something far-fetched, undefined, even resembling at times a delirious nonsense. Not one living character can be found in his writings" (45).

What, we may ask are the characteristics of Boris's realistic form? Obviously in a play, Chekhov can't insert a few paragraphs of something Boris has written. Thus, he must rely on comments by the characters. First, Konstantin describes what he fights against in his mother's and Trigorin's form of art: "the curtain rises on a room with three walls, illuminated by artificial light, and we see those great talented artists, those priests and priestesses of a sacred art, depict how people eat, drink, love, walk around, and wear their jackets" (8). This form, Konstantin implies, limits art to the trivial. Irena gives us an oblique glance at what the form of Boris's art probably is: "How much sincerity you have, simplicity, freshness, healthy humor . . . In one stroke of your pen, you can express what is both significant and distinctive—be it a person or a landscape. Your people are so very much alive" (35).

Konstantin himself makes a telling comparison between his form and Boris's form. Looking over a manuscript he's recently written, Konstantin says the following:

The description of the moonlit evening is long and much too precious. [Boris] Trigorin has worked out his own devices, it's easy for him . . . He'd have the broken neck of a bottle glistening on the dike and the shadow of the mill wheel looming darker and darker—and there it is, the moonlit evening all set. And what do I have? "The tremulous light, and the soft glimmer of the stars, and the faraway sounds of a piano, dying off in the calm, fragrant air . . . That's agonizing." (47)

In a footnote to the Norton edition of the play, the editor-translator, Eugene Bristow points out that "Chekhov used this particular image" of the bottle gleaming in the moonlight next to the deep shadow of the millwheel, "in his story *The Wolf* (1886) and mentioned it as a literary device to his brother Alexander in a letter dated May 10, 1886" (47).

Immediately after this admission by Konstantin of the superiority of Boris's form over his own, Nina enters, raising his hope that she has returned to him, a hope she quickly dashes, telling him that she finds her only satisfaction in life acting on the stage, and she reiterates her love for Boris, despite his detestable behavior toward her. Konstantin's suicide is not just provoked by his hopeless love for Nina. He also realizes the superiority of Boris's form. In a single succinct image of the moonlight on the broken bottle, Boris created a powerful effect that Konstantin could not match in his form—even with a lengthy passage.

By multiple allusions to Shakespeare in the opening scene of *The Sea Gull*, Chekhov invites comparisons on the issue of literary form. Shakespeare is clearly not a modern realist in his form. Think of the ghost in *Hamlet*, the witches in *Macbeth*, the fairy in *The Tempest*, and the entire kingdom of fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. What if a person were to say that people in Shakespeare's day believed in ghosts and witches and fairies, and so *he thought* he was being realistic, even if we do not see it that way today? Such a move still does not make Shakespeare a realist. Consider the literary form implied by Shakespeare. To say

this form is realistic, we have to pretend that people speak in iambic pentameter, cut up into ten-syllable lines. And how can it be realistic that in *The Merchant of Venice*, Antonio does not realize that the lawyer defending him in a lengthy, complex case is his beloved fiancé? The audience has to believe that he doesn't even know that the lawyer is a woman, just because she wears men's clothing. And yet in one of the most famous speeches in *Hamlet*, the title character endorses realistic acting as the proper form:

... do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus, but use all gently; for in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say, the whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness . . . Be not too tame neither . . . suit the action to the word, the word to the action; with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature. Act II, sc. ii.

The struggle thus implied in Shakespeare, between non-realistic and realistic form continues in the dialectic of Chekhov's *The Sea Gull*.

A great Shakespearean irony arises in that, in the midst of a play whose plot is totally driven by the appearance of a ghost, the title character makes an impassioned plea for realistic form in acting. Even beyond this demand for form, Hamlet explains that the reason the form must be realistic is that the goal of art is realism. He says, "for anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature" (Act II, sc. ii). Oscar Wilde picked up on the oddity of the non-realistic writer saying the goal of art was to realistically portray nature. Wilde gives us a narrator who holds that "life imitates art far more than art imitates life" (680). His narrator understands how outraged people might challenge him:

They will call upon Shakespeare—they always do—and will quote that hackneyed passage about art holding the mirror up to nature, forgetting that this unfortunate aphorism is deliberately said by Hamlet in order to convince the bystanders of his absolute insanity in all art matters. (680)

Wilde's narrator goes on to say that Hamlet's speech "is merely a dramatic utterance, and no more represents Shakespeare's real views upon art than the speeches of Iago represent his real views upon morals" (680). At the end of *Hamlet*, Horatio urges that he be allowed to publicly explain the events that led to Hamlet's death along with those of the king and queen, to calm men's minds so that no more awful things happen. Then, he gets a better idea:

But let this same be presently perform'd,
Even while men's minds are wild; lest more mischance
On plots and errors happen. Act V, sc. ii

What better play to make the events of *Hamlet* clear than the play *Hamlet* itself. If this is Shakespeare's way to tell us the goal of his art, we would make it out to be the reduction of anomie, the sense of isolation and alienation that comes when events cannot be explained or put into a meaningful context. Wilde probably did not have this passage in mind. Of course Wilde was, himself, a noted ironist and may be writing with tongue in cheek. However, Wilde's words capture an inconsistency in the body of Shakespeare's work. With that inconsistency, Chekhov, with his many references to *Hamlet* in the first scene of *The Sea Gull*, launches the dialectic over the goal of art in his play.

THE GOAL OF ART

In this argument over the goal of art, Konstantin fires the first salvo, saying that although his mother believes “she is serving the sacred purpose of art,” in the plays like that written by Boris and acted in by Irena, the goal of such art is to provide Aesopian morals, a goal he finds trivial. “When out of deadly scenes and shallow phrases they try to fish up a moral—a tiny, comfortable, easy-to-grasp moral, useful for consumption in the home” (8).

Boris, not surprisingly, can state his goal in more positive language. Speaking to Nina, he says:

But you know I'm not just a painter of landscapes. You know I'm still a citizen, too. I love my country and its people. I feel that if I really am a writer my duty is to speak up about the people and their sufferings, and about their future, to speak up about science and learning, about the rights of man, and so on. I speak up about everything. (27)

Even though Boris claims to Nina that he feels he often fails to obtain this objective, his words stand as a clear statement of at least one goal of his art.

What then was Konstantin's idea of the goal of art? It is hard to tell from the text of *The Sea Gull*. It may be that Konstantin was so obsessed with creating “new forms” that he made this the goal of his art. Dr. Dorn, after giving Konstantin encouraging words on the form of his play, provides him the following advice: “There must be a clear and definite thought in a work of art. You must know what it is you're writing for” (17). Dorn's next words not only emphasize the importance of the goal of art, but also prove eerily prophetic: “Otherwise, if you go along that picturesque road without a definite aim, you will lose your way and your talent will destroy you” (17).

In the play's final act, speaking to Konstantin's mother, after Dorn again endorses Konstantin's talent, he reiterates his analysis that Konstantin lacks a goal: “The only regret is that he doesn't have any clearly defined aims. He makes an impression, and nothing more. But you know, you don't travel far by impression alone” (46). This time, Konstantin does not hear Dorn's damning analysis, but Konstantin may have intuited some such insight himself. He shoots himself, which an audience member can attribute to Nina's second rejection of him, if that audience member focuses solely on the personal dimension of the play. However, Konstantin's last act on stage prior to his suicide is not to write a pathetic farewell letter to Nina. Instead, “In the next two minutes of silence, he tears up all of his manuscripts and throws them under the table” (50). It is interesting to juxtapose Chekhov's dramatic moment with what Jean-Paul Sartre says about a similar (though not identical) situation: Death “can only remove all meaning from life,” he says, “For example, this young man has lived for . . . years in expectation of becoming a great writer . . . But exactly at this point death strikes,” and “this expectation of being a great man, loses any kind of meaning” (689–690). By having this act be Konstantin's last act on stage, Chekhov suggests that the major issue in his play is a literary one. What is the source of art? Is it dreams and a mindless rush from the artist's soul as Konstantin assumes? Or is the source of art to be found in the faith of the artist in herself, as Nina says? Or is it the intricate interaction of the artist with life so that the artist can re-create life in literature—as we infer from the words and actions of Boris? What is the

proper form of art? Is it to be made up of abstract ideas and images from deep in the artist's soul as Konstantin deeply prefers? Or should it be the realism of Boris's stories and novels? What is the goal of art? Konstantin does not know, unless it is the self-referential one of creating new forms of art. This may be his fatal error, for Boris can clearly state the goal of his art—to serve his country by describing the sufferings of her people. Konstantin's suicide may be Chekhov's way of showing what side he took in this debate.

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NOTE

- ¹ The page numbers in parentheses in the text refer to the most recent date in the citation.

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SECTION VI
THE ARTISTIC QUEST VERSUS THE DISCERNMENT
OF TRUTH

A SHORT STUDY OF JAPANESE *RENGA*: THE
TRANS-SUBJECTIVE CREATION OF POETIC
ATMOSPHERE

*It is good that the Japanese are willing to study Goethe and Shakespeare. They are, however, not qualified to compete with the Germans unless the former are willing to study Basho and other Japanese thinkers in the first place.*¹

A B S T R A C T

Renga is a form of the traditional Japanese poetry which first appeared in a Japanese mythology. *Renga* is in a trans-subjective way with plural people creating one poetry in the same place. Unlike a wide-spreading belief, Matsuo Basho (1644–1694) was in fact a master of *Renga* rather than being a haikist. It was Masaoka Shiki who invented both the term and the concept of haiku in the Meiji Era. *Renga* is a kind of ‘linked poems’ (*tsurane-uta*) collaborated by plural subjectivities. Linking two strophes is called *tsuke-ku*. Basho admitted that there are a number of followers who could create a *hokku* as skillfully as he could, but that he had no rivals when it came to the art of linking and judging. We elucidate this linking (*tsuke*) by applying the passive synthesis theory of Husserl’s phenomenology in terms of identity, similarity and contrast. On top of that, *renga* makes use of certain cinematic methods like montage, focus, zoom, overlap and so forth. This essay is written in collaboration between Tadashi and Kiyoko Ogawa which may deserve an essay on *renga* in its true sense.

In the modern age the Western literary arts contain forms such as poetry, novels, and narratives. These literary arts are usually rooted in the subjectivity of their respective authors. In this essay I intend to discuss another literary form. Generally speaking, the literary work represents the expressions of an individual artist, as one can see by way of example in Goethe’s work. With a few exceptions, it is clear who the author of the respective work is. However, when we regard poetry as a literary art, should we grasp it absolutely and exclusively as an artist’s self-expression? This point must be seriously discussed. Is it fair to say that Western literary categories can speak for all literary production?

In Japan there was once a long tradition of *renga* of *haikai*. This tradition has largely been forgotten because poets like Masaoka Shiki (1867–1902) created the genre of *haiku* after the Meiji ERA (1868–1912), but it was Kuwabara Takeo (1904–1988) who dealt *renga* a fatal blow when he called it “a kind of Edo ditty” in his famous essay, “The Second Rate Art.”² Curiously enough, *renga* was not something totally unknown in the Western world, possibly reflecting a budding

renga Renaissance in Japan. Octavio Paz, for example, urged three other poets to participate in “rolling” (i.e., composing) *renga*.³ Moreover, it is simply incorrect to say that Matsuo Basho (1644–1694) was a great seventeenth century *haiku* master, despite the prevalence of this view in the West. Basho was a master of *renga*. He wrote *hokku* (an initial strophe of *haikai* roll), but he never composed *haiku*, which was not even a concept until Masaoka made it one.

- (1) I will attempt to rescue *renga* from oblivion by attempting to clarify its meaning as a literary art produced by collaborating subjectivities.
- (2) I will then elucidate the uniqueness of *renga* amidst the vast amount of poetic forms, ancient and modern, Eastern and Western.
- (3) I will then interpret and appreciate some exemplars of classical *renga*.
- (4) Finally, in light of the fact that the essence of *renga* lies in linking, I will try to illuminate this by applying the theory of passive synthesis from my structural phenomenology.

I

Because *renga* is now largely forgotten, I will begin with a brief description of its structure. *Renga* is a form of linking poetry in which many participants collaborate. A single *renga* is like a picture scroll, consisting of many strophes called *ku*, which are the minimum unit of *renga*. By creating *ku*, the collaborators (*renju*) participate in the formation of *renga*. A *ku* is roughly equivalent to a strophe (stanza) in Western poetry. Furthermore, there are two kinds of *ku*: a longer *ku* consisting of alternating lines of 5-7-5 syllables, and a shorter *ku* possessing alternating lines of 7-7 syllables. *Renga* also follows rules of succession: in many cases the longer *ku* is followed by the shorter *ku*, in an alternating succession that recurs until the end of the poem. When a longer *ku* and a shorter one are combined, it constitutes what we call the traditional Japanese *tanka* (*waka*) poems.

In this light, let us first examine the *renga* called “Watching Cherry Blossoms” in “Hisago [The Gourd],” an essay found in the famous *Basho Shichibu-shu* [the so-called *Seven Major Anthologies of Basho*].⁴ Basho himself composes the initial strophe (*hokku*).

Under the trees
both the soup and the fish
melt into cherry blossoms

In response to this *ku*, the poet Chinseki attaches the shorter *ku*:

the setting sun serene
it's a fine day

These two *ku* combine to share the same form as *tanka*, but unlike the latter, it is the joint work of two poets, who collaboratively create a *renga* in the form of a *tanka*. Typically they end up producing a combination of thirty-six alternating longer and shorter strophes, which is called “rolling a thirty-six *renga*.” Sitting together for about three hours, the collaborators link eighteen longer and shorter strophes.

Traditionally the main guest initiates a *renga*, whose first strophe is called a *hokku*. When a *hokku* is independently created without any connection to *renga* it is called *haiku*. *Hokku*, just like *haiku*, requires a season word (*kigo*) and a divisional auxiliary (*kireji*). Moreover, the initiator must try to choose a strophe that matches the current atmosphere or mood. In this sense, the *hokku* tries to articulate the whole world of the *renga* meeting. This sensitivity to the present world compels *renga* poets to sing of their surroundings quite objectively. As Nijo Yoshimoto claims in *Hekiren-sho*: “If you intend to host a party, you had better first choose the right time and the right natural view. If you look at the scenes transforming themselves according to the time, such as the time before the snow or the moon, or the season of fresh green, your mind may be moved deeply and words come out. You should visit a floral arbor for a splendid view.”⁵ In short, we should choose a lovely place in the beautiful season of cherry blossoms or of the moon, a beautiful restaurant, etc.

Hokku consists of 5-7-5 syllables, which are followed by a shorter strophe, called *wakiku*, consisting of 7-7 syllables. This is followed by another line of 5-7-5 syllables, forming the third strophe (*daisan*). *Renga* also follows the important rule of “giving up *uchikoshi*,” which is essential to making linked strophes a genuine form of *renga*. “Giving up *uchikoshi*” means to link directly to the previous strophe with no regard to the one immediately preceding the previous strophe, even if it happens to be the master’s *hokku*. In other words, *renga* proceeds by continually expressing a new image, word, or depiction of scenery. We must not stick to the same image. *Renga* avoids repetitions, ceaselessly seeking new images, becoming an open system of songs. *Rinne* or *kannonbiraki*, meaning the repetitions of images, is considered detestable in *renga*.

When an ordinary poet writes a poem, they control the poetic system from start to finish. In direct contrast, the openness of *renga* depends on the participants (*renju*) working together. Moreover, an element of alterity that could not be anticipated in advance enters the system of the particular *renga* due to the collaborative presence of the other participants. When another participant links to a strophe in an unexpected way, an element of alterity is introduced. No strophe of the *renga* can stand alone for it is always complemented by a strophe composed from another participant’s perspective. This complementarity, rooted in an individual strophe’s incompleteness, renders each strophe of the *renga* idiosyncratic. Utilizing a phenomenological concept, one can say that this sense of incompleteness opens up a freely moving space or the possibility of a horizon of satisfaction. This horizontality opens up a possibility that could be variously interpreted and, in this sense, it makes possible the complementarity between strophes. Nose Asaji notices “the exchange of moods” and “how each strophe should be, being made alive in the wholeness,” that originates in the opening present in each individual strophe’s incompleteness. In a fundamental sense, one could call this complementarity a “hermeneutical circulation.” That is to say, the respective poets create and interpret each strophe in light of the poem’s totality while at the same time attempting to understand each individual strophe within the contextual atmosphere of the particular *renga* as a whole. The exchange of moods is exactly the exchange of atmosphere called “Wind-as-living-flesh,” which

I understand as the atmosphere or mood that transcends the cubic bodies of each participant.

There are two kinds of linking order: *hiza-okuri* and *dashi-gachi*. The former means the linking by a small amount of *renju* (*renga* participants) in a particular order determined beforehand because in this case the particular talent of each *renju* is almost equal. In the *Basho Shichibu-shu*, three or four members composed most of the *renga*, and so this kind of order was appropriate. However, when there are ten or so participants, *dashi-gachi* is preferable. In this form, ordinary *renju* create strophes freely without a certain order, but overseen by a master. Basho admitted that there were a number of followers who could create a *hokku* as skillfully as he could, but that he had no rivals when it came to the art of linking and judging.⁶ The master's judgment is key. In both *hiza-okuri* and *dashi-gachi*, the master judges and sometimes corrects.

In short, the openness that originates in the participation of multiple composers is the essential characteristic of *renga*. Moreover, the fundamental rule of "giving up *uchikoshi*" contributes to and assures this openness.

II

In this essay I am attempting to thematize a new possibility for the literary arts. Modern literature, ranging from the novel, poetry, *tanka* or *haiku*, in some sense has been fundamentally understood as self-expression. No matter how varied and experimental it has been, literature expresses the self of its respective creator. Are not then all literary works egocentric? The prevailing European view grounded the essence of literature, especially lyricism, in the self. Hence, the authorship of every work of literature is clear. The exceptions to this principle prove the rule. It goes without saying, for example, that Goethe experimentally collaborated with Schiller to compose poetry. In China, too, poets attempted to co-write poems in accordance with their traditions. Apart from such exceptions, the modernity of Western literature can be found in its extreme concentration on the ego subjectivity of the author. This can be clearly seen in famous works like Rousseau's *Confessions* and Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Does the prevalence of this principle mean that literature can only be a subjective act of the authorial self?

The tradition of *tsurane-uta* (linked poetry), co-created by plural subjectivities, demonstrates that literature does not have to be an act of authorial self-expression. *Renga* is *tsurane-uta*. *Haiku* is especially cherished in the West as typical of Japanese traditional literature, while *renga* is little known. Yet, as we have seen, Basho, well known in the West, was a master of *renga* not *haiku*. Precisely speaking, *renga* means the *renga* of *haikai*. What, then, is the difference between *renga* and *haiku*? Why did *renga* decline as a traditional Japanese art? In what follows, I will decisively distinguish *renga* from *haiku*.

Haiku is not a purely traditional Japanese literary form. It was *renga*, precursor to *haiku*, that was deeply rooted in the Japanese tradition. What has been called *haiku* abroad is actually a genre established in the modern period of Japan. The initial strophe of *haikai-renga* was called *hokku*, which eventually became detached from

renga and was later named *haiku* by Masaoka Shiki.⁷ On the other hand, in the *renga* belonging to more traditional Japanese culture, the participants (*renju*) who formed the poetic partnership (*za*) put forth one strophe after another, thus creating either an 18-strophe or a 36-strophe chain (*kasen*) by making use of identity, similarity or contrast to link to the preceding strophes. This resulted in the creation of a great picture scroll of poetry. People at the *za* simultaneously share a certain atmosphere or mood and inspect a new strophe linked by a member of the party. It is the master who judges ultimately, but their literary inspection is close to what Roman Jakobson called *die Zensur* (the censor). In his famous dissertation on the generation of a language, Jakobson argued that when someone coins a new word and increases the vocabulary by making it a vogue-word, or when someone initiates a new form of pronunciation, it is his or her culture that inspects it and decides its acceptability. He named this role “the censorial function.”⁸ In short, a language is generated, transformed and established through a culture’s censorial function. I would argue that the formation of *renga* implies the collective function of poetic creation by the *renju* as they transcend their respective individual subjectivities.

Analogous to Jakobson’s censorial function, the entire congregation of *renju* examines the appropriateness of a newly linked strophe. Interestingly enough, there is no one, including the master, who can predict in what way a *hokku* (an initial strophe) is going to develop. This is because there is a possibility of the *renga* evolving in a totally unexpected direction, depending on the acceptance of a *hokku* and the approval of its evolution by both the *renju* and the master. There is even a case in which using the same *hokku*, different groups of *renju* roll their respective *renga* in different places. A good example of this is found in the *Hisago* poetry roll (*kasen*),⁹ which starts with this *hokku* by Basho: “Under the tree/both meat and soup/melt into cherry blossoms.” We can then compare it to another *kasen* in which the same *hokku* with a slightly different spelling is linked to a yet different *waki* (second strophe) and goes on rolling in a totally different way.¹⁰ Hence the same *hokku* yields two utterly distinctive *renga*.

I am now going to consider this phenomenon in terms of Basho’s *Haikai-Renga*.

All poetry follows rules, including *renga*. The latter’s rule is called *shikimoku*. There are two kinds of strophes, a long one consisting of 5-7-5 syllables and a short one consisting of 7-7 syllables. The *renju* work together to create *renga* following the order long-short-long-short, or occasionally long-long. Participating in a common atmosphere, the *renju* roll *renga* in accordance with that atmosphere or mood enabled by the co-subjectivity. It is true that the *Basho Haikai Shichibu-shu* consists of superb rolls of poetry, but we can distinctively understand the true excellence of Basho’s linking by contrasting the rolls in which he participated with those in which he did not.

The *hokku* is first composed, followed by the *waki(ku)*, and then the *daisan(ku)*, and so on, constantly renewing associations. What rule operates in each fresh and fully imaginative addition? Edmund Husserl articulated the rule of associations in terms of identity, similarity and contrast (difference-from-others) in his *The Analysis of Passive Synthesis*.¹¹ A new strophe is created according to such a rule of associations. (I will analyze this more fully in the final part of this essay.) Keeping

the rule of giving up *uchikoshi* in mind, one can say that linking to the previous strophe always aims to create a new concept and imagery. Indeed, what makes *renga* successful is the novelty and creativity of its associations. It is also important that another participant among the *renju* interpret the strophe at hand in an original way. Through successful linking, the strophe by the previous poet appears in a new and unexpected way. *Renga* is inherently open because neither the *renju* nor the master can fully control its flow as different collaborators take it in unanticipated directions. Such openness is the hallmark of true *renga*.

It is up to the master's authority and judgment whether to adopt a strophe produced by one of the *renju*, insuring that a unified world of poetry is generated. As I stated earlier, Octavio Paz attempted to revive *renga*, but he was not successful. To the European poets it may have looked as if the whole process of *renga* were exposed shamefully in front of the *renju*. Poets were accustomed to receding from the public into their own closed world and writing poetry in an invisible way. They may have thought that composing *renga* was like defecating in public.

In short, *renga* is something new in comparison with contemporary poetry in the following respects. First, *renga* is constituted inter-subjectively in the oneness found in the atmosphere of *za* (the *renga* composition session). Second, *renga* is a chain of poems that is always promoted by associations or coalitions. Third, it is the master, and sometimes the whole *renju* in an indirect sense, that decides on the acceptability of a new strophe.

In contemporary Japan there is a reevaluation of the *renga* of *haikai*, but it has not brought with it any profoundly philosophical analysis. The Japanese tradition of *renga*, simultaneously classical and contemporary, transcends modern literature in three aspects.

- (1) Overcoming egocentrism and respecting the atmosphere of *za* enables the inter-subjective, collaborative creation of poetry. This leads to the condition in which one can be simultaneously an appreciative audience and a contributing creator. In other words, a reader comes to participate in the collaborative creation in the common *za* by way of recognition and approval. This condition indicates that *renga* is an extremely modern and perhaps even post-modern form of literature, even though its form originates in the Japanese literary tradition. One scholar defines the characteristics of modern art as a respect for otherness, an appreciator becoming an incentive for the artistic creation, and the coincidence of the receiver with the creator.¹²
- (2) On linking a new strophe, "the phenomenology of association" is at work, in which the synthesis of images is based on the principles of identity, similarity and contrast. I discuss these details in another essay, but I will argue for their minimum indispensable content in the final section of this essay.
- (3) The inter-subjective work of collaboration employs methods that resemble cinematic technique (patchwork, montage, collage, etc.). There have been contemporary collaborations that attempt to combine *renga* and woodblock prints (*picture-renga*), as was implied in Terada Torahiko's essay on *renga*, where he pointed out the similarity between *renga* and cinema. Likewise, Roman

Jakobson implied the similarity between certain cinematic methods like focus, zoom and overlap, and certain poetic techniques.¹³

The essential basics of *renga* lie in both self-abandonment and the participation in *za*, which is “the opening place” belonging neither to one’s self nor to that of the others. In short, what matters most is to abandon the “funk hole” or “dugout” of the self and enter into the ocean of a shared life with others. Abandoning the belief that the origin of poetic creativity is located exclusively in the “funk whole” or “dugout” of the self, one must now try to face the openness that issues from the presence of others in order to create poetry collaboratively. This self-abandonment is the hallmark of *renga*’s anti-modernity, in contrast with writers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau or Guy de Maupassant, who thought that the enhancement and distinction of the self were the aims of modern literature.

Hence, the atmosphere or mood of a friendly and collaborative place is vital for rolling *renga*. Rolling even half a roll means working together in a shared commitment to preserving an amicable atmosphere. In this respect, Nijo Yoshimoto, who determined the flow of *renga*, advocated: “Clarify your mind, share the mood as the living flesh, and make every effort possible to versify and produce superb poems.”¹⁴ Sharing the mood as living flesh implies that *la mentalité collective* (Bergson) of the *renju* become one atmosphere or mood as “wind (*mi*).”¹⁵

Without the approval of the *renju*, it is impossible for the master to maintain his or her dignity. An excellent strophe is one that the *renju* acknowledges. For example, I once successfully linked a strophe according to the predestined rule of singing the cherry blossoms (*Hana-no-za*, position of cherry blossoms), and then both the master and the rest of *renju* welcomed it by clapping. I too felt that it was a nice linkage, implying full participation.

Renga’s mechanism could be defined as follows: the first thing to keep in mind is change. So from where does *renga*’s change derive? It comes from the other person seeing what I have not seen and thereby successfully linking a new strophe. Transforming the previous strophe, the other person is creating a context totally different from the previous one. This is what is meant by the abandonment of the self. The composer must forget their own particular interpretation and commit himself or herself to the perspective of the other. We can see this in a strophe by Soko:

The longer I watch,
the more elaborate the Buddha looks
engraved in a rice grain.

Basho’s link to Soko’s microcosmic strophe is grand:

Even if you swallow
some water from Lake Biwa
your abdomen won’t hurt.¹⁶

Soko’s strophe emphasizes the fineness of a Buddhist statue sculpted in something as tiny as a rice grain. In contrast, Basho macrocosmically links to the effect that even if you happen to swallow some water from Lake Biwa, it wouldn’t damage your abdomen. A gaze into something small is neutralized by the consciousness of

something extremely big. The meaning of the previous strophe is formatively de-framed and thereby acquires a new meaning. This is called both *hibiki-no tsuke* and *mukai-zuke*.

What does self-abandonment mean in this context? It is the acknowledgement of seeing something with the other person's eyes. In other words, the significance of *renga*'s continual opening up of a liberated space can be found in the way a particular strophe is interpreted by another as they recognize an alternate meaning in it and link to it anew. A core of the *renga* spirit is suggested by German verbs like *Umdeutung*, *Umfinden*, and *Umvariieren*. The German prefix *um* denotes transformation, which is the beauty of *renga*.

Renga is the creation of what Henri Bergson called *la mentalité collective*. The *renju*, governed by the trans-subjective atmosphere of the *renga* composition, cede to the talent and authority of the master, who, for his or her part, lives up to their expectations. As I already claimed above, a similar idea can also be found in the work of the structural linguist Roman Jakobson. In his folklore thesis, Jakobson, working through the problem of linguistic generation, argues that new vocabulary words are constituted inter-subjectively. They gain acceptance through the work of collective censorship. Folklore is generated in a similar fashion. A story related by someone to someone else gains widespread acceptance after it is granted approval through the collective censorship of the culture in question. *Renga* linkage is produced by an analogous operation.

III

I will now interpret some of Basho's important *renga* by examining their possibilities phenomenologically. As we have repeatedly seen, the zenith of *renga* lies in linking. Linking means the transformative interpretation of another participant's strophe.

I begin with the "Sarumino" *kasen* (*The Monkey's Straw Raincoat*, 1691), found in the *Basho Shichibu-shu*, in which Basho, Kyorai and Boncho rolled together:

In Kyoto city
smells are drifting,
the summer moon. (Boncho)

It's hot, it's hot
voices from every household. (Basho)

The capital center is chokingly hot and humid. Even in the evening strong odors linger. Looking to the heavens, the summer moon is illuminated. Basho wittily links to this *hokku* in a manner called *hibiki-no-tsuke*, which means linking like a bell's reverberation immediately after being rung. The *Kyoraisho* cites the following long-short strophes:

Smashing silver earthenware on the verandah,
look at the direction of a slender bowed sword.¹⁷

This situation indicates that something critical has happened to a samurai family. Silver earthenware is a precious commodity belonging to the upper class. To destroy

them and then to look at the bowed direction of their sword tells the family that either a serious event or a *coup d'état* is imminent. Basho reportedly made these gestures to explain this situation and such a linking is called *hibiki-no-tsuke*.

The *Kyoraisho*, the classic of *haikai* theory, deals with *renga*'s linkings, which may indicate that *renga* has long been at the forefront of the Japanese literary arts tradition. If someone calls Basho a master of *haiku*, this means that they have no idea what *renga* and *haiku* are respectively. As I have already indicated above, *haiku* is a term dubbed by Masaoka Shiki to describe a contemporary literary practice.

We find what Nose Asaji called *kingyoku-no-tsukeai* (very precious linkings) at the end of the "Sarumino" *kasen*.¹⁸ Basho links first:

Staying in a grass shed
for a short while
I come to abandon it. (Basho)

How delightful to hear
my poem was chosen for the Selected Anthology. (Kyorai)

How I wish
to experience
various new loves! (Boncho)

At the end of this world
we all end up being a Komachi. (Basho)

What kind of imagery chain is evident above? By referring to the interpretations by Nose Asaji, the most brilliant scholar of *renga* studies,¹⁹ let us reexamine the *kingyoku-no-tsukeai*. While remaining some measure of independence, these four strophes mirror each other. Here each poet links by the typical practice of using someone else's image.

Basho set out on a journey after spending some time in a shed. Eventually the grass shed fell to ruin, with all of the *fusuma* and *shoji* (paper screen) being torn out. Basho most likely kept the great twelfth century Buddhist poet Saigyō in mind, who had lived most of his life as an itinerant. When Saigyō returned to his shed, he received the news of a new *Imperial Selected Anthology* that would include his poem. In the Japanese tradition of *waka* poems, the *Selected Anthology* meant a great deal. It was great honor for a poet to have his or her poem selected for the imperial *Anthology*. Instinctively he was probably delighted, uttering, "How glad I am still to be alive!" In this context, Kyorai presumably recollected the following *waka* by Saigyō:

After getting older
did I ever imagine
I would get beyond this mountain?
Ah, still being alive,
I could manage to reach Saya-no-nakayama!²⁰

The itinerant Saigyō may have reminded Boncho of the poetess Ono no Komachi (Mid-ninth century. Dates unknown.) and the latter sings of an extraordinarily talented poetess who lived her life full of love affairs. Here the strophe about the

grass shed is totally forgotten as Boncho links directly to the strophe about the *Anthology*.

Finally Basho concludes:

At the end of this world
we all end up being a Komachi.

To my taste, this strophe is as good as it gets. The fundamentals of our way of life and existence are expressed here. In the final stage of this world all of us are doomed to be a hag or a senile person, and decay. By this strophe Basho penetrated both the end of our life and its world.

IV

The essence of *renga* is found in *tsukeai* (linking), and it is important what strophe is linked to the prior one. Yet precisely what does *tsukeai* mean in *renga*? It is a kind of synthesis of a prior and posterior strophe. In a word, a sort of imagery synthesis is achieved and hence Terada Torahiko called *renga* linking “a kind of synthetic formation.”²¹ He compared *renga* to a symphony, but in his masterwork, *The Essential General Theory of Haikai-Renga*, he uses the montage method of cinematic art as an analogy. Montage, the art of assembly, unites and synthesizes two different things. The results of this synthesis differ, depending on the aspect according to which two things are unified. The aspect may derive from the ordinary, logical layer of consciousness, or from an episode from the classical tradition, or from the darkness of the unconscious. The *haikai* of the Basho School fundamentally belong to the latter. Terada Torahiko therefore defined “subtle profundity (*yugen*),” “unsaid taste (*yojo*),” “tranquility (*sabi*),” “pity (*shiori*),” and “beauty (*hosomi*)” as the tunes unconsciously associated by the shimmering threads of synthesis, analogous to montage. The secret of linking “should be a plum’s scent on a dim moon night,”²² which is originally called “*nioi-no-tsuke* (linking to scent).”

When it comes to latent consciousness, Terada Torahiko obviously had in mind the Freudian analysis of the layers of consciousness. However, Freud’s analysis is over-determined by its sexual aspects and so in its stead, I recommend the analysis of passive synthesis, which neutrally analyzes the depths of consciousness phenomenologically, so that they can be used to describe the techniques of Basho’s *renga* in more concrete terms.

In the Basho School, linkings were classified in categories like fragrance, sound, shifting, image, aspect, and scenery. But putting too much emphasis on either classification or analysis spoils the understanding and creation of *renga*. According to Nose Asaji, the Matsunaga Teitoku School (Teimon) thinks highly of *mono-zuke* (linking to things), while the Danrin School values *kokoro-zuke* (linking to the heart-mind). *Nioi-zuke* (linking to scent) is the essence of the Basho School.²³

Mono-zuke is an approach in which the *renju* link word by word, especially by making use of associated words. In *kokoro-zuke* the *renju* tend to link in accordance with a context. Basho’s *nioi-zuke*, however, did not altogether exclude the preceding two methods, but the School’s hallmark of *nioi-zuke* links atmosphere

to atmosphere, mood to mood. What does this mean? Using my own conceptual analysis, I could paraphrase *nioi-zuke* as “linking by appearance.”²⁴ “Appearance” includes an atmosphere or mood suggested by a thing or a person.

How does one synthesize when one takes the example of appearance-linking? There are three manners of synthesis, namely, identity, similarity and contrast, all of which are used in response to the appearance of an image or thing.

The synthesis of identity involves a duplication of the thing at hand such that the part is included in the whole, such as spring/fall versus year, white sail offshore versus cloud, Paris versus the French government, and so forth. “Being included” has been called metonymy or synecdoche in traditional European rhetoric. The relation between combination and adjacency/inclusion is called the synthetic axis (axis of syntagma), in which a context is formed in a way that the whole is crystallized into the part and the part reflects the whole. In short, the unification with the present power prevails and everything turns explicit.

The synthetic relation of similarity is like an octopus and a tonsured bonze, or a fountain pen and an inkstand, in which the forms or usage-situations are similar. In this relation, things imply each other in each situation. Forming an axis of choice, these relations are called the *paradigma* axis in structural linguistics. On this axis not everything becomes explicit; what has not been chosen is put into state of waiting (a state of potentiality). Behind such potentiality lurks “the horizon.” This is called metaphor in traditional European rhetoric. In metaphor one thing stands for another and it is characteristically related by leaping over a domain.²⁵

The third synthesis is contrast, such as red and white. Citing an example from Husserl’s *Passive Synthesis*, the contrast of red ink spots on a sheet of white paper is actually a motive of difference-from-others, which is supposed to be latent in both identity and similarity. Contrast, the principle of differentiation, operates when something is designated as what it is in order to define it and to distinguish it from what it is not.

Jakobson refined the above-mentioned forms of rhetoric as the verbal theory of two axes. We can apply his theory to our analysis of *renga*’s linking. Let us begin with the following passage from the “Sarumino” *kasen*, as did Terada Torahiko. Boncho sings first:

Drippings from the laitance bucket
come to a halt,
a grasshopper sings. (Boncho)

The oil drops from the lamp lessen,
autumn when I go to bed early. (Basho)

Under the moon shade
I laid out new *tatami* mats,
their scent getting familiar. (Nosui)

I am glad to see
ten cups of sake lining up. (Kyorai)

Neither the verbal similarity of the Teimon School nor the stream of contexts of the Danrin School play any role in the above linked passages. At work, rather, is

an image or an appearance to my consciousness of what should appear. The first strophe by Boncho sings of an atmosphere or a scene in which little by little the littance drippings diminish to the point of cessation. To this *hokku* Basho performs the linking of atmosphere or scent; corresponding to the situation in which littance drippings diminish, Basho receives the autumnal scene and, in turn, he goes to bed earlier while the oil in his lamp similarly diminishes.

The second strophe accords with the first regarding the halting flux of littance drops and lamp-oil drops respectively. The similarity of the appearance of scenery functions here. My analysis accords so far with that of Terada Torahiko.²⁶ However, he did not analyze the relationship between the next three strophes, so I will venture my own interpretation.

The oil drops from the lamp lessen,
autumn when I go to bed early.

Under the moon shade
I laid out new *tatami* mats,
their scent getting familiar.

What is the relation between these two strophes? In order to enjoy the long autumnal night, Basho deliberately went to bed early in order to wake up in the middle of night. He smells the pleasantly fragrant new *tatami* mats, which are growing more and more familiar. Since it's still midnight, the moonlight enters the room. He links to Boncho's autumnal atmosphere by atmosphere or mood. Kyorai, in turn, changes the stream to the scenery in which ten people enjoy the moonlight as they each drink a cup of sake. Kyorai links by way of metonymy based on the adjacency of contexts. Analyzing and developing the implication of moonshine and new *tatami* mats, Nosui subsequently described the moonlight party with poet-friends. Indeed, it is a big transition that a single person sleeping early switches to ten people drinking sake during a moon viewing. Without this transition, however, we cannot truly call it an authentic *renga* linking. This development is similar to the overlap method of cinema, which produces the effect of changing scenes. When someone sleeps alone on a new *tatami* mat, the autumnal moonshine peeps in. Then focusing on the moon drifting across the autumnal sky, the scene transforms into the ten cups of sake held by those engaged in a moon viewing ceremony.

In summary, metaphors basically connect the first three strophes. Kyorai then links by making use of the adjacency of identical contexts, using metonymy. Finally there is the linking by contrast. This linking is also important because *renga* must continually change. Linking by contrast is called *mukai-zuke*, and it often overlaps with *hibiki-no-tsuke* (linking by atmosphere or association). I now turn to another example from the "Sarumino" *kasen*.²⁷

Look at that guy acting up
in a totally crazy way. (Shiho)

The lingering moon
in the blue sky,
the dawn starts. (Kyorai)

The first frost on Mount Hira,
it's autumn on Lake Biwa. (Basho)

Shiho sings of a human matter. Corresponding to this, Kyorai links by describing nature, which looks quite serene and even elegant. Betraying their expectancy of something moderate to come, Basho links by evoking the first harsh chill of autumn. The lake water cools and the cold is about to attack the land around Lake Biwa. The first frost has already fallen on Mount Hira, announcing the beginning of another cold winter.

CONCLUSION

We express our relations with the world and other people by using language and thereby literary culture is born. What position does *renga* occupy in the literary arts?

I conclude by claiming that the essence of *renga* is antithetical to the modern view of literature and its celebration of individual creation. Since *renga* is the collaborative creation of poetry, the artist has to attempt to suppress his or her ego. Nevertheless, it is possible for us to make some use of our individual self for what is decisively important is a relationship that is “not too close, not too far” with others. Basho referred to such a relationship as *tsukeai*. As I have already mentioned, he had much confidence in the superiority of his ability to link, admitting that there were some who were superb in creating *hokku*, but that there were none who out-matched his excellence in *tsukeai* (linking). The essence of *renga* lies in this linking, demanding that participants maintain a relationship that is not too close, not too far. It is therefore not necessary for each poet either to fuse into the other’s strophe completely, or to detach utterly from it. This relationship of “neither/nor” is also the traditional Japanese way of relating to other people.

To be accurate, however, this kind of relationship is not exclusively Japanese. I assume that in traditional European society the relationship between people was also “not too close, not too far,” which in *tsukeai* is the creative openness that allows one to take distance from other strophes. This stance is neither identity nor difference, but rather the non-duality of the two. A kind of chaos expresses this relationship more fully. This chaos is indecisive and therefore the *tsukeai* of *renga* is a chaotic relation and in this sense the atmosphere of the *renju* becomes vital. Human relations are reflected in their atmosphere or mood through such *tsukeai*. In this sense the spirit of *renga* offers a philosophically interesting avenue into the elucidation of the essence of literature and society.

Translated by Kiyoko Ogawa

POSTSCRIPT BY A POET, DESTINY OF A LITERARY
EGO: ANOTHER CONSIDERATION OF *SARUMINO*

Novelist Akutagawa Ryunosuke (1892–1927), at the beginning of his essay “Basho Note,” sarcastically writes, “Basho has never written a single book. What they call “*Shichibu-shu*” is nothing more than a text produced by his disciples.” I myself have long been indifferent to the chain of *renga* he spun out all over Japan with his *renju*. Instead, I was intoxicated with the beautiful style of his famous travel essay “*Oku-no-hosomichi*,” which led me to conclude that my reading of Basho’s literature was already sufficient.

It was in the spring of 2006 that my husband casually handed me a copy of his article on the subject. At that time his quotations from *Sarumino* interested me and I decided to translate the whole thesis into English.

What stimulated my poetic sensibility most were the following passages:

Modern literature...in some sense has been fundamentally understood as self-expression...(it) expresses the individual self of its creator. (Chap. II)

In direct contrast, the openness of *renga* depends on the participants (*renju*) working together. Moreover, an element of alterity...enters the system of the particular *renga* due to the collaborative presence of the other participants. (Chap. I)

Calling *renga* the co-creation of multiple subjectivities, the author attempts to elucidate its meanings.

Now, let us have a closer look at the second *kasen* of *Sarumino* Vol. 5. Here three poets, Boncho, Basho and Kyorai, spin out a total of twelve strophes each. First comes Boncho’s opening *hokku*: ‘In Kyoto city/smells are drifting/the summer moon.’ This is followed by Basho’s *waki*: ‘It’s hot, it’s hot/voices from every household’ (*Hibiki-no-tsuke*). In turn, Kyorai takes up the thread of the *waki* with its associations of the hot and humid season, and draws out the *daisan* or third strophe as follows: ‘Neglecting the second weeding/ears of rice have already sprouted.’ In this strophe, Kyorai’s humorous self-ridiculing verse slightly alters the direction of the warp of the *renga*. When the composition comes round again to him, Boncho unexpectedly steers the poem in a seemingly unrelated direction: ‘I knock the ashes off/a grilled sardine.’ It seems that the only common ground that sustains these juxtaposed strophes is carelessness and negligence.

In this way *renga* is spun out, but its process is so elusive that I find it hard to state an overall impression of the *kasen* as a whole. In such a situation, Terada Torahiko’s explanation gives me a clue: Linked poetry is not so much literature as music. (“*Renku-zasso*”). According to Terada, linked poetry consists of rhythm, melody and harmony. Each strophe possesses a meaning but the *kasen* as a whole

does not constitute a narrative plot. The formal ending of a *kasen* looks as if it were still unfolding because an *ageku* (a final strophe) does not function as a conclusion. Were *renga* music, then could I easily feel convinced that this explanation makes sense of the matter.

As one creates a strophe, is it possible to abandon one's ego completely, to give up the security of self-consistency? Even if the ego itself cannot be annihilated, it is no great matter to give up adherence to ego consciousness; instead, one can engage in the convivial atmosphere of the *za*, 'clarify your mind, share the mood as the living flesh, and make every effort possible to versify and produce superb poems,' as Nijo Yoshimoto put it. In short, 'be fully immersed in the verse, not full of yourself.' A passage from *Sarumino* I quoted above reminds me of the performance of a musical trio in which Basho plays as a concert master.

A little further down from the 'hot Kyoto' strophes, Boncho sings: 'It's chilly and harsh in winter/living in Nanao of Noto Peninsula.' To this Basho in turn links the following strophe: 'I've survived so long/as to lick fish bones.' What we notice here is his greatness in distinguishing his ego's personality by giving up the consciousness of ego. He transcends a mere personal complaint of an old man and intensifies the aging-process from which no one is immune into the realm of universality. It overwhelms me to see Basho singing with such lightness (*karumi*) of the inevitability of old age.

In the above article we have already examined and appreciated the very precious linking unit (*kingyoku-no-tsukeai*) in the fifth paragraph of the [Chapter 3](#). The fourth strophe runs: 'At the end of this world/we all end up being a Komachi.' However, the horrible imagery of this strophe was *not* presented as a final strophe. Actually, they added four more strophes, the last two of which are as follows:

I let lice creep on my palm/under the cherry blossoms.

Basho

Languorous is the noon/when the mist doesn't move.

Kyorai

Surprisingly enough, this *kasen* abruptly changes from the horrible mood of its climax, only to conclude with such lightness. Even a sense of being fed up lingers as if such a horrendous strophe as to see through to the limits of this world had not existed at all. Kyorai's *ageku* catches the mood of the previous strophe by his master as it is, rendering the atmosphere of lightness decisive as a finale.

However, this sense of languor is somewhat different from the cold, nihilistic *ennui* in the decadent tradition of Western literature. What should be noted is that Master Basho gazes through the microcosmic shades in terms of lice on a palm, and thereby the calmly detached philosophy of life becomes an integral part of *haikai-renga*.

In other words, the final two strophes may play the part of coda in the organic whole of *kasen*. It goes without saying that the ancient Japanese race cherishing harmony (*wa*) succeeded in creating this totality solely by dint of words.

We quite instinctively tend to seek for a plot in any writings, which have been taken for granted especially in the genre of a novel. It was the appearances of Marcel

Proust and James Joyce that brought about modernism, which liberated novels from a dynamically unfolding plot.

How about poetry then? Needless to say, modern poetry is teeming with examples of inaccessible works that ignore not only plot but also semantics and consequences. It may often be the case that even a poet cannot explain his/her own work. T. S. Eliot is one of those who caused such a formidable tendency, good or bad.

So lastly, I'd like to compare *renga's tsuke-ai* with the so-called juxtaposition in the modern poetry. According to the Ogawa article, in *tsuke-ai* a strophe should be organically connected with a previous one. On the other hand, an example of the disconnecting effect of juxtaposition is found in the concluding eleven lines of *The Waste Land* which, Eliot intended to be a polyphony.

I sat upon the shore
Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
Shall I at least set my lands in order?
London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down
Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina
Quando fiam uti chelidon—O swallow swallow
Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie
These fragments I have shored against my ruins
Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.
Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.
Shantih shantih shantih

Almost each line is isolated, and we can hardly connect a line with the preceding one in imagery. One eminent scholar of English literature once criticized wondering why Eliot could not write even the concluding passage of his masterpiece by using his own words.

I do not suppose every passage and every line all through *The Waste Land* is juxtaposed and disconnected. All I want to insist is this. A distinctive characteristic of the modern poetry may be that an author's single ego tends to propagate heterogeneous egos within a poem, which may confuse the reader's understanding and diffuse his/her focus. In contrast, plural egos of the *renju* in *renga* gather in one place in harmony, creating one and the common organic literature. Yet, each participant's ego or individuality could still be conspicuous.

I do not mean to discuss either superiority or inferiority of *renga* and juxtaposition. As one of the modern day poets I wish to re-examine the destiny of a literary ego that is apt to slip into the solitude hell or the 'funk hole.'

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NOTES

- ¹ Terada (1986, p. 597).
- ² Kuwabara (1968, p. 28).
- ³ Paz et al. (1971).

- ⁴ Basho (1966/1988, pp. 155–157).
- ⁵ Nijo, Yoshimoto (1982, pp. 213–215).
- ⁶ Ehara, Taizo. ed. 1939. *Kyorai-sho, Sanzoshi and Tabine-ron*. (Tokyo: Iwanami-Bunko).
- ⁷ The difference between *renga* and *haiku*, as well as the criticism toward Masaoka Shiki have been acutely discussed in *Renga as Possibility* by Taki Shuzo (Osaka: Miotsukushi 2004). Although this book does not assume the form of an academic study, it is so excellent as to succeed both “The Theory of *Haikai*” by aforementioned Terada Torahiko who attempted the renaissance of the modern *renga* and *The Study of Renga-Haikai* by Nose Asaji who used to be an outstanding scholar of *renga* and who deeply understood its philosophical background. (*Collected Works of Nose Asaji*, vol. 8, Kyoto: Shibunkaku, 1982)
- ⁸ Roman Jakobson and Petr Bogatyrev, “Die Folklore als seine besondere Form des Schaffens,” in Roman Jakobson, E. Holenstein and T. Schelbert eds. *POETIK* (Frankfurt:Suhrkamp, 1979), pp. 140–157.
- ⁹ Nakamura, Shunjyo. ed. 1975. *Basho Shichibushu*, (Tokyo: Iwanami-Bunko), p. 155.
- ¹⁰ Nakamura, Shunjyo, and Ogiwara Yasuo. eds. 1975. *Basho Renkushu*, (Tokyo: Iwanami-Bunko), p. 147.
- ¹¹ Husserl (1966).
- Husserl elucidated the structure of appearance, enumerating identity, similarity and contrast to consider the combination and synthesis of each appearance.
- Cf. Ogawa (1986), Chapter 11. Tadashi Ogawa (1993, pp. 25–35).
- ¹² “An interpreter is always an artist as well simultaneously.” Herrmann (1967, p. 46).
- ¹³ Jakobson, Roman, and K. Pomorska. 1982. *Poesie und Grammatik*, (Frankfurt a.Main: Suhrkamp), pp. 112–113. Also see my Book, *Logos of Phenomenon*, pp. 157–158.
- ¹⁴ Nijo Yoshimoto, op.cit., p. 213.
- ¹⁵ Ogawa (1998, pp. 172–191).
- ¹⁶ *Basho Renku-shu*, op.cit., p. 172.
- ¹⁷ Ehara Taizo, op.cit., p. 71.
- ¹⁸ *Basho Shichibu-shu*, op.cit., pp. 216–217.
- ¹⁹ Nose Asaji, op.cit., p. 296.
- ²⁰ Saigyō, *Sanka-shu*, (Tokyo: Iwanami-Bunko, 1928), p. 128.
- ²¹ Terada Torahiko, “Fragments of Linked Poetry”, op.cit., p. 510.
- ²² Terada Torahiko, “The Essential General Theory of Haikai-Renga”, op.cit., p. 580.
- ²³ Nose Asaji, op.cit., p. 361.
- ²⁴ Ogawa (2000, p. 3).
- ²⁵ Cf. Ogawa Tadashi, *Logos of Phenomenon*, pp. 157–158.
- ²⁶ Terada Torahiko, op.cit., p. 529.
- ²⁷ *Basho Shichibu-shu*, op.cit., p. 214.

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ALTERED STATES: THE ARTISTIC QUEST
IN *THE STONE FLOWER* AND *LA SYLPHIDE*

Those who seek the Dharma in the depths, are those who leave it behind in the shallows

Shido Munan

ABSTRACT

The ballets *The Stone Flower*, derived from a Ural folktale, and *La Sylphide*, derived from Charles Nodier's 1822 novel *Trilby, ou le lutin d'Argail*, both reflect the potential danger of an encounter with an altered state. Danila, the artist in *The Stone Flower*, undergoes instruction by the Queen of the Mountain and her court but is separated from his beloved Katerina. James in *La Sylphide* is enticed by a sylphid to the magical forest realm where his time is spent joyfully but is separated from his beloved Effy. These ballets are simple romantic tales that offer a cautionary note for what underlies the artistic quest. The characters and the dance passages are metaphors of transformation, love, and, sometimes, loss.

Infused with Platonic Idealism the Romantic quest as expressed in literature and art has as its goal some absolute notion of Beauty, Love, and Truth.¹ In the Jungian model of such a quest, as developed by Joseph Campbell, the seeker separates from society, descends into another realm to face challenges and instruction, and finally returns to society to share what has been learned.² Both *The Stone Flower* and *La Sylphide* are constructed upon these values, the choreographed idiom of classic and romantic ballet used to express the narrative trajectory of the quest, highlighting the emotional peaks and troughs with impressive solos, *pas de deux*, and corps de ballet dances. Although the Queen of the Mountain turns Danila to stone, the purity of his and Katerina's love reunites them with the understanding support of the Queen. James is not so lucky. By overlooking his engagement to Effy and offending the witch Madge, James sets up a chain of events that cause him to lose both Effy and the sylphid. The ballets (and their sources), best known in Yuri Grigorovich's choreography with the Kirov Ballet for *The Stone Flower* and August Bournonville's choreography for the Royal Danish Ballet for *La Sylphide*, together suggest that sometimes the necessary quest struggle leads to enlightenment and sometimes the quest is undermined through oversight of the dangers involved in reaching too high.

The introduction to the folktale "The Stone Flower or: The Goddess of the Copper Mountain" clearly places the narrative of Danila and Katerina in the context of a quest for internal wisdom:

This is a story from the mysterious Ural Mountains. It comes from a time when the spirits of forests and mountains still moved among humans, watching them, searching for those who could be taught their secrets before such ancient wisdom was lost forever.³

The Queen of the Mountain is Danila's guide to such wisdom and manifests her power on their first meeting:

She seemed to blur for a moment, turning into a woman as tall as pines, watching him serenely, her embroidered garments as green as malachite. Shapeshifting again, she became human sized, dressed in flowing garments the color of rubies and carnelians. Her face changed, darkened, and the robes were lapis lazuli, amethyst, shimmering, then fading, until Danila was amazed to see nothing but a small lizard. . .⁴

The wisdom Danila needs to gain is symbolized by the many colored gems of the Queen's domain, epitomized in Danila's dance with the spirits of the stones in Act III.⁵ Danila portrays the Romantic quest for the perfect work of art, a stone flower, but, after recognizing his love for Katerina, he discounts his effort: "How could he have wasted his time trying to carve something in stone that belonged only in the frail tissues of life?"⁶ There is a disconnect in Danila from the true essence of non-human nature. In a guided process of internal alchemy, exemplified by his *pas de deux* with the Queen and the presented dances of the spirits of the stone, Danila comes to a realization of the stone flower he is carving:

The stone has given me the secret of giving form to its soul, he thought. Sometimes he wondered if the stone's soul and his own weren't the same, so closely were they intertwined.⁷

Danila's narrative is a vision quest in the Native American sense: a breakthrough to another dimension for insight into the meaning of life. He undergoes the deprivations, isolation, and extreme introspection of such quests. The Queen's cavern and the spirits of the stones are the other dimension, and what he learns in his search for perfect artistic beauty is one of his breakthroughs. Part of the Queen's instruction even includes opening what yoga refers to as the third eye: "She touched his brow briefly, and rivers of fire wakened throughout his body."⁸ Danila, however, needs to apply his artistic wisdom to Shido Munan's so-called shallows, the essences of all manifestations of the everyday world, including Katerina.

Like Danila, who had memories of the Queen from childhood dreams and who first encounters her as a young man through daydream visions, James encounters the sylphid as he is woken by her from a dream at the opening of *La Sylphide*.⁹ Nodier's gothic-like narrative centers on the exorcism of a male sprite from the ferrywoman wife of a fisherman.¹⁰ This male sprite follows culturally diverse fairytale depictions of a mischievous being that sometimes helps with work to be done, in *Trilby* the husband's luck with fishing and his wife's success with contests at the fair.¹¹ The ballet transforms the gender of the sprite and the person she bewitches, and the ferrywoman becomes a Scotts farmer. The initial paragraph of *Trilby* introduces the general themes and *mise-en-scene* of the ballet:

... he enjoys provoking the old women who say ill-natured things about him during their long evening vigils, or troubling the sleep of maidens with incomprehensible but pleasing dreams. . . During the winter, his favorite place is the domestic hearth. . .¹²

In the ballet James sleeps by a fireplace perhaps subject to a dream from the sylphid.

Although the sylphid can be impish, snatching James wedding ring meant for Effy and dancing coquettishly with him, she is the etherealized embodiment of the Romantic ideal of Beauty. The etherealized love that entices the ferrywoman Jeannie in *Trilby* becomes this ideal of Beauty. Jeannie describes this in terms of love:

... he loved me with the same innocence as my sheep; he could not do without me... she suffered... that she was the sole cause of the sufferings of a charming creature who had never caused her harm, and whose innocent fondness she had feared too hastily.¹³

The sylphid first appears in an arabesque pose beside the seat where James is sleeping. She wears a delicate white billowy tutu. She has tiny transparent wings at her shoulder blades and a garland of flowers on her head. Her arms are extended forward. She is balanced on one leg with her other leg extended straight-kneed behind her. She is the idealized image of Romantic Beauty that concretizes Romanticism's search for beauty, love, and truth and of the Romantic ballet's aesthetic of the ballerina's ethereal qualities, rather than the lead male dancer's athleticism. After putting James's friend back to sleep with a touch, her demonstration of otherworldly power, she does a one-leg turn, prances around James chair, does a *rond de jambe*, her arms and hands in soft wave-like movements, and a succession of other lyrical turns, poses, and steps. When James wakes, she dances around avoiding his embrace and seamlessly leaps into the fireplace as the wedding party arrives. James is bewitched and his fate is sealed. He wishes to experience otherworldly beauty, but he is bound by his terrestrial nature that offends the old woman Madge and forgets his approaching marriage.

Ballet movement and dramatic gesture are metaphors for emotion and transformation. The Romantic Ballet is centered on the ballerina's *pointe* work, the extended elevation of the body balanced solely on the toes and combined with other movements becoming the metaphor of ideal beauty, as in *La Sylphide*. The Classic Ballet is centered on a more formalized precise grammar of steps and movement combined with dramatic gesture to propel a given narrative, the steps and movement residues of athletic and folk dance idioms, for example becoming a metaphor of the quest for artistic beauty, as in *The Stone Flower*. Compare the fairytale-like opening of *La Sylphide* to the grand dramatic expressive gestures in the opening of *The Stone Flower*. Danila holds a symbolic white flower, his model for a sculpted flower. He then dances with two white flowers given to him by Katerina, one in each hand, his expression of both the external quest for artistic beauty and an internal quest for purity and realistic, as opposed to ideal, love, his love for Katerina. He sits with the flowers in a state of contemplation. Then he and Katerina dance a lyrical *pas de deux* before the arrival of their betrothal party. This opening grounds the ballet in the dramatic trajectory of the mythic quest and the return from that quest while the opening of *La Sylphide*, James's dream, highlights the realm of an altered state immediately and is an evocation of its Romantic idiom that emphasizes this realm in and of itself. Contrariwise, this realm is introduced in *The Stone Flower* as the

spirit of the stone only after Danila's artistic quest and his love for Katerina, as well as the betrothal party, are presented.

The Romantic ideal of love in *La Sylphide* is expressed in its novelistic source by the spirit Trilby:

The love I have for you, Jeannie, is not of this earth; ah, how I would like to be able to make you understand that, in a new world, a passionate heart, a heart which has been deceived in its dearest affections in this one or which has been dispossessed of them before time, becomes capable of opening to an infinite tenderness, to an eternal happiness which can no longer be sinful! Still too earthbound, your senses have yet to grasp the ineffable love of a soul disengaged from all duty, and yet can embrace all the creatures of its choice with a boundless affection without breaking faith! O Jeannie, you do not know how much love there is outside this life, nor do you know how calm and pure is that love!¹⁴

Jeannie, as the Romantic idiom would have it, destroys what she loves but can't understand and consequently joins that idealized expression of love through her self-imposed death. The sylphid is likewise destroyed by James who likewise apparently dies of grief for her at the ballet's end. James's misguided love, his mystification by the sylphid, and his consequent abandonment of Effy lead to his demise. This great theme of literature, dance, and opera: love gained or love lost, is expressed at a deeper level in *The Stone Flower*. Danila accomplishes his quest for artistic perfection, the lifelike stone flower, under the Queen of the Mountain's guidance:

He was awed that the stone had allowed him to shape its music into such beauty. The petals seemed to breathe, lit by an inner radiance. The stone has given me the secret of giving form to its soul, he thought. Sometimes he wondered if the stone's soul and his own weren't the same, so closely were they intertwined.¹⁵

The Queen, however, knows that he has not achieved the inner wisdom of love, evidenced by his abandonment of Katerina and his unmediated mastery over his art:

He thinks he's accomplished what he came for but he's wrong. I've been able to awaken his artistic soul but not his human heart. Without both, one day he'll abuse what now has power to awe him. He's flawed, like a jewel with no warmth.¹⁶

One is reminded here of an anecdote about Picasso.¹⁷ When asked if he were to find his house on fire, which would he save, his painting or a cat, he chose the cat. In the inner realm of personal wisdom, in the ballet's narrative and Picasso's life, aesthetic perfection must be mediated by compassion and love.

The Stone Flower represents perhaps one of the most intensive alchemical internal explorations, Danila's education with the Queen of the Mountain, in literature and art, certainly in ballet. Reminiscent of Ulysses' sojourn with Circe, this episode and the nature of the Queen introduces the archetypal issue of impediments, trials, and dangers in the wisdom quest. Her erotic *pas de deux* with Danila in the mountain cavern almost makes her what the Japanese call a *hannya* or demon woman, a being who entices men and destroys them. The Queen is however obviously conveying wisdom to Danila even if at times in an evidently erotic manner, a mode of inner wisdom transference in some Tantric spiritual traditions. Also, the Queen even conveys a benevolent regard for her potential rival Katerina when in the ballet she destroys Severyan. This malevolent character who does not appear in the folk-tale initially fights in a stylized dance with Danila over Danila's first sculpture of a

stone flower. He later erotically pursues Katerina during Danila's absence. Another impediment to Danila's quest for wisdom, the search for the Queen of the Mountain, is reflected in the folktale through the trials of cold, lack of food, difficulties of terrain, and lack of direction, trials Katerina prepares for and fares better with in her pursuit of Danila in the folktale. In the ballet Danila and Katerina rather experience an easier passage into another dimension through a guide, Danila through his dance with the spirit of the stone and Katerina through her dance with a fire-fairy.

James in *La Sylphide* is impeded in his quest for Romantic beauty by the witch Madge and by the object of his quest, the ineffable sylphid. His tragedy is reminiscent of Janos Kadar's Hungarian film *Adrift* in which a fisherman saves a mysterious young girl from drowning. She seduces him and leads him away from his wife and forest home. At the film's end he is left alone with an awareness of his tragedy and races back to his home which is lit up at night, but the faster he races towards it, the further it recedes. The sylphid is something like that contemporary siren figure of the film. She seduces James with her ineffable beauty and leads him away from his future with Effy.

Embedded in both ballets is the spiritual quest, Shido Munan's Dharma, and the successes and failures in such a quest. James's quest is a failure because he has misguided love which leaves the Dharma and love, in Munan's words, "behind in the shallows." Danila is transformed by his experience. In the trajectory of the mythic quest there needs to be a reentry into the normal world. As with Shamanism, upon which many folktales are structured, the hero, to use Joseph Campbell's designation, must enter another realm and return from that realm to share his gained wisdom. This trajectory is often correlated with the seasons that dominate the agrarian communities many folktales are derived from. Thus Danila and Katerina return to their village in spring after overwintering in the Queen's realm. The season of the germination of seeds is an objective correlative of the germination of wisdom. In ballet this engagement with, disengagement from, and reengagement to a community is a staple of the corps de ballet, often centered, as in *The Stone Flower* and *La Sylphide* on a wedding party or the reunion of a husband and wife. James through his mystification forgets Effy and destroys the sylphid by listening to Madge who suggests he give the sylphid a shawl that had been poisoned. Thus there is no reengagement for James. He views a wedding party, with Effy now engaged to his friend Gurn, pass through the woods as they search for him and then watches the dead sylphid carried away by her sisters, as if a morally bankrupt Morley forced to watch the consequences of his actions in *A Christmas Carol*. Contrariwise, Danila introduces his wisdom to the community in the folktale's coda:

The villagers welcomed them with joy. Danila soon became famous for his wonderful stone flowers and people came from as far away as the Czar's court to admire them. Katya and Danila had many children and Danila patiently taught them the secrets of his craft.¹⁸

Danila is transformed by his quest for artistic beauty while James is destroyed by his quest for ineffable beauty. Danila overcomes the impediments to and trials of his quest, particularly the Queen's physical love for him, while James is destroyed by his own actions, offending the witch Madge, easily forgetting his beloved Effy,

and misunderstanding the ethereal nature of the sylphid. Thus James, like the fisherman in *Adrift*, is at the center of the perfect logic of a tragedy of misguided desire while Danila is at the center of Shido Munan's observation that wisdom and redemptive love are grounded in everyday existence. James experiences exile, tragedy, and death by not understanding this truth. Danila experiences wisdom, a holy marital union with Katerina, and communal integration by understanding this same truth. In the final scene of *The Stone Flower*, which encompasses the ballet's quest theme, Danila and Katerina are transported magically from the Queen's realm to the village forest in spring. Their initial *pas de deux* includes a huge lift with Katerina's legs fully extended, an image of their collective mastery and reunion, followed by an impressive succession of paired leaps, carries, and turns. The villagers then enter, admiring the couple, and proceed to dance in the background. Danila and Katerina engage in another *pas de deux*. The villagers and the couple bow. Finally, Danila and Katerina embrace and an image of the Queen appears as all the dancers' arms lift upward. The enlightened hero has returned to his beloved and is reintegrated with his community. Moreover, in the folktale's coda a deeper implication of the quest's gained wisdom, suggestive of an earlier Shamanic culture and a modern concern with deep ecology, is expressed: "... Katya taught them the most important thing of all – respect for the inner wealth and unseen powers lying in the trees, lizards, stones, rocks, and streams all around them."¹⁹ It is this wisdom that Danila gradually came to understand: Not to objectify anything in this world. Aldous Huxley has written somewhere that the dryads have been taken out of the trees. Ballet through tragic and non-tragic narratives is able to evoke the awe and mystery of when dryads still inhabited trees and the world was perhaps more necessarily enchanted.

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NOTES

¹ See the work of Abrams, M.H. 1953. particularly *The mirror and the lamp: Romantic theory and the critical tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

² See Campbell, Joseph. 1949. *The hero with a thousand faces*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

³ "The Stone Flower or: The Goddess of the Copper Mountain" re-told by Kathleen Jenks, based on Pavel Bazhov, "The Malachite Casket: Tales from the Urals." http://www.mythinglinks.org/euro-east-russia-folklore_StoneFlower.html. Accessed 27 Nov 2008.

⁴ Jenks, Kathleen Section II, p. 6

⁵ *The Stone Flower*, The Kirov Ballet, choreographed by Yuri Grigorovitch, DVD (NVC ARTS, 1991).

⁶ Jenks, Kathleen Section II, p. 4.

⁷ Jenks, Kathleen Section III, p. 4.

⁸ Jenks, Kathleen Section II, p. 7.

⁹ *La Sylphide*, The Royal Danish Ballet, choreographed by August Bournonville, DVD (NVC ARTS, 1988).

¹⁰ Nodier, Charles. 1993. *Smarra & Trilby*. trans. Judith Landry. England: Dedalus.

¹¹ Nodier, p. 78.

¹² Nodier, p. 67.

¹³ Nodier, pp. 74, 78.

¹⁴ Nodier, p. 118.

¹⁵ Jenks, Kathleen Section III, p. 4.

¹⁶ Jenks, Kathleen Section III, p. 5.

¹⁷ Recounted in Claude Lelouch's film "Un home et une femme."

¹⁸ Jenks, Kathleen Section III, p. 9.

¹⁹ Jenks, Kathleen Section III, p. 9.

TOO MUCH HAPPINESS, TOO MUCH SUFFERING ...
NEVER ENOUGH REALITY THROUGH NARRATIVE

ABSTRACT

This paper uses the controversial new book by David Shields, *Reality Hunger*, which advocates a new literary form, the “lyric essay,” to argue for the importance of retaining what Shields hopes to discard: a respect for and attention to the individual context and specificity of writers’ ideas and reflections on what constitutes truth. Referring to phenomenologists Iris Murdoch and Emmanuel Levinas, it emphasizes the moral nature of giving full attention to the Other as applied to the art of narrative. To illustrate the role of narrative in enhancing readers’ attention and moral consciousness, we discuss Alice Munro’s title story of her collection *Too Much Happiness*. In it the real-life mathematical genius, Sophia Kovalevsky, is presented as a woman whose one great love was poisoned by the man’s resentment of her acclaim as the first woman to receive the prestigious Bordin Prize. Munro’s narrative exemplifies the otherness of genius as well as the humanity of this woman’s loss of love and life. W.G. Sebald’s mixture of memoir, illustrated travelogue, and historical reflection on the unfathomable suffering of the Holocaust, as exemplified by the first story of his collection *The Emigrants*, exemplifies Levinas’s moral precept that we are responsible to be present to the Other in life as well as in the isolation of death. We explore these authors’ use of narrative to position readers as attentive outsiders to the suffering and isolation of Others, even as they face their own death.

In *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto*, David Shields asserts his right to proclaim the thoughts and phrases of others as his own, freeing himself from the tedious process of attribution. He hopes to further establish a literary form that goes beyond memoir: the “lyric essay,” a term he has borrowed from other writers. In our age of Web self-publication, headline news, viral soundbites, and unverified assertions in the blogosphere, Shields feels an acute need for this new form. In it he would take “fragments of things—aborted stories, outtakes from novels, journal entries, lit crit—and build a story out of them,” not knowing what his story would be, but feeling that he is setting “certain shards in juxtaposition to other shards” (172–173). Breathless praise adorns the dustjacket of his new book: Shields “tells us who we are and why we read” (Albert Goldbarth), like “an electric jolt in the solar plexus” (Wayne Koestenbaum), even “an exhortation to attend the sublime pleasures of truth and ‘truth,’ . . .” (Frederick Barthelme). Viewing Shields’s text from a phenomenological perspective, we prefer the less ecstatic blurb by Ben Marcus, who hopes the author’s book “helps to start a much-needed conversation.”¹

That conversation would likely start with the awkwardness of writers’ legal responsibility to identify individuals as creators of intellectual property, compared

with the borrowing of musicians, composers, painters and other artists less burdened by legal strictures. If Picasso did not have to declare his indebtedness to African masks in “*Les Demoiselles d’Avignon*” and other works, why should Shields have to acknowledge what he has lifted from Emerson? A worthy debate, but for phenomenologists, a more interesting conversation arises from Shields’s assertion that he is “hopelessly, futilely drawn toward representations of the real, knowing full well how invented such representations are” (175).

Bored with “out-and-out fabrication, by myself and others; bored by invented plots and invented characters,” Shields wants to “cut to the absolute bone,” lose the gimmickry, and write a book “whose loyalty wasn’t just to art but to life—my life” (175). He wants to be “part of the process, part of the problem” (172). His goal: “to play (reporter, fantasist, autobiographer, essayist, critic),” to “be as smart on the page as I want to be,” in a way that seems “true to how I am in the world” (173). He takes ideas from many excellent writers: Robbe-Grillet for example—“But a work of art, like the world, is a living form. It’s in its form that its reality resides” (597). We know this comes from Robbe-Grillet because Shields’s publisher, Knopf, insisted that Shields try to identify his sources in an appendix that the author asks us to ignore (209). Shields concurs with W.G. Sebald’s statement that something is “terribly contrived about the standard novel; you can always feel the wheels grinding and going on” (201). More on Sebald later. The fabrication of characters and plots, however, has long been based upon writers’ composites of real individuals and real events, and to be bored by such creations would deprive us of much that might be possible in our understanding of Reality as we perceive it.

Shields puts forth Vivian Gornick’s insight that the often critically disrespected memoir has become the form of writing that gives us “the power to make us feel our one and only life, as very few novelists actually do these days,” identifying memoirists as nonfiction truth-speakers who tell the story we now want told (201).² I agree with Gornick, but I’d prefer to have Shields give her credit for the thought rather than take it himself. When Shields paraphrases Emerson—“There are no facts, only art” (204) one wants to go back to Emerson’s essays to make sure the great thinker is not being taken out of context. Perhaps the clearest moral implication of Shields’s “Manifesto” lies in its final assertion, #618:

Part of what I enjoy in documentary is the sense of banditry. To loot someone else’s life or sentences and make off with a point of view, which is called “objective” because one can make anything into an object by treating it this way, is exciting and dangerous. Let us see who controls the danger. (205)

So it’s control he’s after. We all want that, don’t we? No problem . . .

Does Shields realize that he is setting foot on furiously fought philosophical grounds—the structuralists and deconstructionists versus the phenomenologists—those who play with and analyze language as part of a detached, value-free system, and those who use it to explore and understand individual human and moral experience? One could ask, Why not put aside who gets to control the danger for a moment in our conscious lives, long enough to learn something from another artist and thinker? This would require setting aside our ego, leaving ourselves open to someone else’s story of courage in the face of danger. Writing as a form of *Headline*

News, a collection of sound-bites, may let us feel as though we control some forms of danger, but it may open up others that are worse.

Iris Murdoch expresses it well in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, explaining that goodness becomes really difficult exactly when we consider duty as an indestructible responsibility, when we “examine more closely the intractable density of individual fates.”³ In her view,

Help from God or the unconscious mind must normally be thought of as arriving in a context of attending and trying. . . . Learning is moral progress because it is an asceticism, it diminishes our egoism and enlarges our conception of truth, it provides deeper, subtler and wiser visions of the world. . . . To attend is to care, to learn to desire to learn. One may of course *learn* bad habits as well as good, and that too is a matter of quality of consciousness. (178–179)

Our first phenomenological observation here is Murdoch’s emphasis on the quality of consciousness. Claiming that the desire to learn is essential to moral progress because it allows us to expand our understanding of the nature of truth, she notes the discipline required to pay attention to persons or things well enough to learn from them.⁴ This focused, ego-bypassing form of attention is a function of caring, which includes having respect for the source of information or wisdom. How does this quality of consciousness compare to Shields’s enterprise? How much does one care for the Other when one is intent upon controlling the game?

Murdoch continues:

I am speaking now of evident aspects of education and teaching, where the ‘intellectual’ connects with the ‘moral’; and where apparently ‘neutral’ words naturally take on a glow of value. The concepts ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ are at issue. Structuralism, which professes no morality, puts both these concepts. . . in question. . . . We (today) see all about us vast commercial and pseudo-intellectual proliferations of inane and corrupting rubbish which usurp the name of art. Yet in just this context we are led to claim our knowledge and experience of good art as something moral. It is not delight, it is refinement and revelation. Kant recognized this when he spoke of genius, and Schopenhauer allowed a contemplation of art as inducing, at least a temporary, state of selflessness. (179)

Let us contrast these insights with Shields’s enterprise of accumulating and recycling shards of others’ wisdom, tweaked by occasional thoughts of his own, in order to control the danger of intellectual ‘banditry.’ To do so we might pause for a brief appreciation of two works by two writers who do not offer wisdom spelled out on the page, but rather the silence of ego-free contemplation and compassion. One author is mentioned by Shields: W. G. Sebald. The other is strangely overlooked by him, perhaps because hers is the only story based on facts in a collection of short fiction, and Shields has declared himself bored with made-up stories.

Alice Munro, considered one of the greatest living artists of the short story form, has recently won the third-ever Man Booker International Prize for Fiction. The title story of her latest collection of stories, *Too Much Happiness*,⁵ would seem a combination of historical fact and fictional artistry that might appeal to Shields, if it were not for the difficulty he might have appropriating the wisdom of her narrative art as his own.

Munro’s title story brings to life the final years of Sophia (Sonya) Kovalevsky, perhaps the world’s greatest female mathematician before the twentieth century. “Too Much Happiness” makes us aware of political and societal forces that contribute to what Murdoch calls “the intractable density of individual fates.” It is

Munro's first venture into directly biographical, historical writing, mingling her narrative skills with the presentation of facts about an almost forgotten figure, one who, having been a novelist as well as a mathematical genius, captured Munro's fascination. Telling Kovalevsky's story, Munro makes us conscious of what Murdoch points out in her *Metaphysics*: "Metaphysical systems have consequences. . . . Political systems break against individuals, but may also break individuals" (Murdoch 197).

Kovalevsky (1850–1891) was born and raised in Czarist Russia, her father a military leader and wealthy aristocrat. When the walls of General Korvin-Krukovsky's estate house were re-papered, there was not enough to redo little Sophia's room. Rather than order more wallpaper from Moscow, her mother decided to use discarded sheets from a paper given to the General on differential and integral calculus. Sophia, who had no playmates, spent hours trying to piece these equations into their original order, and by age 15 showed a remarkable and original understanding of mathematics.

Sophia's older sister Aniuta was beautiful and talented as a writer.⁶ Russian universities were closed to women at the time, and educated women were forbidden to leave Russia unless accompanied by their husbands. It was through Aniuta that Sophia got the idea to escape from Russia to study mathematics by means of an arranged Platonic marriage. Thus Sophia was wed to Vladimir Kovalevsky, who sympathized with the plight of educated women. She succeeded in studying mathematics at Heidelberg University, then proceeded to Berlin to find the great German mathematician Karl Weierstrass. To test her abilities, Weierstrass dismissed her with a set of very difficult problems to solve. He'd forgotten her the next week when she reappeared with all of them solved, some brilliantly. When the University refused to allow her to attend lectures, Weierstrass met with her privately, the student as his peer. He submitted her thesis anonymously, and Sophia received her degree in 1874. By which time she'd published several original papers, also sent anonymously to leading journals by Weierstrass or with his encouragement. When she could not find a job in academe as a woman, Weierstrass wrote to a former student in Stockholm, who persuaded the new university there to be the first in Europe to hire a female mathematician.

Munro weaves these details effortlessly into her narrative, while bringing to life Kovalevsky's charm, intensity, and compassion. The latter caused her to eventually agree to a sexual relationship with her husband, which produced her only child, a daughter. By reading Kovalevsky's personal diaries, Munro discovered and shares with us that Sophia never loved her husband. More of our attention, however, is drawn to Sophia's one real affair of the heart, which took place after her husband, plagued by bad debts, committed suicide. Sophia's passion for Maksim, a distant relative of her late husband and bearing the same surname, seemed idyllic. They happily traveled together as though married, at least until one of her papers was submitted—anonously again—by Weierstrass to the French Academy of Sciences, and Sophia was awarded its prestigious Bordin Prize. This honor finally earned her a tenured professorship at the University of Stockholm. Maksim, a large man of imposing charm and intellect and a professor of governmental law, was suddenly reduced to unremarkable status when his brilliant companion became the toast of Paris.

Whereas Kovalevsky's various biographical accounts emphasize her mathematical awards, Munro utilizes her subject's personal letters and the written observations of her closest friends. Readers of "Too Much Happiness" learn of Maksim's cruel letter to Sophia, written after he flees Paris sulking to the south of France. Having escorted Sophia to the festivities in her honor, he writes to her that he is with a female companion, and includes "one terrible sentence. 'If I loved you I would have written differently'" (251). Only when a German gentleman courts Sophia seriously does Maksim remark half-seriously that she'll have to marry him, Maksim. When Sophia visits him in the south of France, Maksim jokes that after she returns to Stockholm, by spring—when they are supposed to marry—she won't be able to tear herself away from her teaching and her equations. Sophia recorded her anguish, which we witness via Munro's narrative, that Maksim may have meant that he *hoped* she would not be able to tear herself away. That is, he may have hoped that she would no longer wish to marry him.

As Murdoch is quoted above, political and societal systems can be broken by an individual, but can also break them. How much of Sophia's personal life was broken by her breaking the mold of female expectations? This Maksim, whom she loved so precariously, had wanted her to give up mathematics to be his wife, and had not changed his terms when she was suddenly taken from him.

Munro's narrative brings to light Sophia's conversation with the renowned mathematician Jules Poincaré, about the criticism he had received from her old mentor Weierstrass upon winning the Swedish math prize. Sophia reassures Poincaré that he will have this prize forever, despite Weierstrass's comments. However, when Poincaré, somewhat consoled, replies that his name will shine when Weierstrass's will be forgotten, the narrative adds, heartrendingly: "Every one of us will be forgotten, Sophia thought but did not say, because of the tender sensibilities of men—particularly of a young man—on this point" (260). We do not know whether Sophia Kovalevsky recorded this thought in a journal or letter to a friend, but it clearly reflects Munro's sensibilities as demonstrated in her fiction.

Here a master storyteller helps counteract the grim reality of the above comment, as she reintroduces Sophia Kovalevsky to the eyes of history and literature, even bringing Jules Poincaré to the awareness of non-mathematicians. Through Kovalevsky, Munro voices a thought as bitter as it is nostalgic:

How she used to love Paris. . . . In Paris, she had proclaimed, there is no such thing as boredom [as she had experienced in Stockholm] or snobbishness or deception [as in Russia]. Then they had given her the Bordin Prize, they had kissed her hand and presented her with speeches and flowers in the most elegant lavishly lit rooms. But they had closed their doors when it came to giving her a job. . . . The wives of the great scientists preferred not to meet her, or invite her into their homes. . . . Men whose brains were blowing old notions apart were still in thrall to women whose heads were full of nothing but the necessity of tight corsets, calling cards, and conversations that filled your throat with a kind of perfumed fog. (267)

Sophia quickly admonishes herself to stop fuming and admit that the Swedish wives had welcomed her in Stockholm. But we know that it was once-loved Paris where she had most wanted to be hired.

As one reviewer notes, there is always in the background the question Munro has used as the title of one of her stories, "the question no professional woman of her

time could escape: Who do you think you are?" But we trust this narrator, "precisely because she gives no answers; trust that she herself knows, even if she can't or won't tell us."⁷ Another critic points to Munro's "capacity to remind us that every individual's life is a narrative that can be shaped, spun, crimped or twisted in myriad ways—in order to make sense of the past, manufacture an identity or explain away a trauma."⁸ These observations are apt, but moreso is the novelist Anne Enright's assessment:

[Munro's] stories are not asking for our praise, they ask for our attention. They are not written for the crowd, but for the individual reader. They don't ask for noise, but for silence—and not awed silence at that. . . .but the silence that happens when you close a book and pause and continue your life, less lonely than you were before. . . .The stories have the feel of talk; their shape comes from a sense of "the way life goes," about how a character turns out, or who turns up.

Otherwise put, Munro's narratives help readers to increase our capacity for caring attention, which, as Murdoch has noted, is of real moral significance. Enright continues:

. . .Munro's work often concerns the past, but something still niggles about her relationship with history. Perhaps the problem lies in the difference between a past that is anchored in living memory and a past that floats free of it. Memory is a great and moral tool for this writer, the way it allows our past to be freshly revealed to us by events in the present. Because of memory, our lives shift and make sense at the same time. This might be a definition of what it is to grow; it may also be why Munro's stories are living things that refuse to be still on the page.⁹

Here Enright captures how great fiction and the artful narration of history can focus our consciousness. Great writing, after all, can only ask for our full attention. And attention, as Murdoch and Simone Weil before her point out, can be transformative—of sorrow as well as boredom and confusion. Attention allows us to learn something from life free from the constraints of ego. It is closely attuned to love, and is necessary to caring in general. To believers and moral thinkers, sincere attention is attuned to the Good, and/or to God.

It would seem that Karl Weierstrass, a died-in-the-wool male supremacist, worked so hard to open doors for this one female student because he cared for her as a genius, the peer he'd been waiting all his life to work with, and later as a young woman for whom he would have to open doors if she was to receive the recognition she deserved. As the actions of Weierstrass illustrate, when one is met by greatness, barriers of mind and culture are broken. But when such barriers are broken, we do not get answers so much as a new quality of silence. That should be where history and literature intersect: uncharted ground, territory hospitable to higher quality attentiveness, i.e. consciousness. That ground is, of course, narrative.

Irony resounds in the title of Munro's story, filled as it is with great pain and some joy, true of great art. The phrase "too much happiness" is a fragment overheard by a close friend as the dying Sophia spoke to her young daughter after she returned to Stockholm from visiting Weierstrass in Berlin in the winter of 1891. The trip back had been long, stressful, and frigid. A young Danish doctor recognized Sophia on a train, heard her cough, and convinced her to bypass Copenhagen, where he insisted there was a cholera epidemic that had been kept secret from the press. Sitting on a

cold hard bench in a rural train, Sophia observed a woman with a child about four, face bandaged with one arm in a sling, and surmised that the woman was taking her child to a country hospital, probably with children waiting at home and another in her belly. The narrator states,

How terrible is the lot of women. And what might this woman say if Sophia told her about the new struggles, women's battle for votes and places at the universities? She might say, But that is not as God wills. And if Sophia urged her to get rid of this God and sharpen her mind, would she not look at her—Sophia—with a certain stubborn pity, and exhaustion, and say, How then, without God, are we to get through this life? (294)

Did Kovalevsky actually think this? We would have to read her journals and letters ourselves to know, but should there be no trace therein of this line of thought, we would still trust Munro to have plumbed the depths of this person's response to her place as a woman in history. Sophia dreams of placing her tired head on Maksim's broad shoulder, "his coat of rich expensive cloth, its smell of money and comfort," but knows that in reality he would not appreciate her doing so in public (295). She agonizes whether a tall, heavysset man she'd seen receding from her in the Paris train station had been Maksim, "not sheltering her at all but striding through the station. . . as befitted a man who had a private life. His commanding headgear, his courtly assurance" (295). She had once rejoiced in her private life with Maksim, but when she outshone him in professional honors, he had run off to his villa in the south of France with another woman.

A strange euphoria offsets these bleak thoughts. We read about it uneasily, perhaps aware with its consoling impulse:

But there is more, as if her heart could go on expanding, regaining its normal condition, and continuing after that to grow lighter and fresher and puff things almost humorously out of her way. Even the epidemic in Copenhagen could now become something like a plague in a ballad, part of an old story. As her own life could be, its bumps and sorrows turning into illusions. Events and ideas now taking on a new shape, seen through sheets of clear intelligence, a transforming glass.(299)

She has seen through sheets of clear intelligence before, Sophia recalls, when she unlocked the mystery of trigonometry in her father's study. Decoding the language of optics had made her "intensely happy" but "not very surprised"; mathematics, for her, was "a natural gift, like the northern lights. . . not mixed up with anything else in the world, not with papers, prizes, colleagues, and diplomas" (299). How much of Munro's understanding of her own narrative gift, her own many awards, is present in this numinous prose? In any case we perceive Kovalevsky's euphoria as free of ego, focused on inspiration rather than self.

By various acts of kindness by others, and perhaps strengthened by her delirious high spirits, Sophia did make it back to Stockholm, where she was able to give a lecture without painful coughing. Afterward she attended a reception, but left early, "too full of glowing and exceptional ideas to speak to people any longer" (300). With great excitement she tells Weierstrass's former student, who'd found her the position in Stockholm, her plans for far more ambitious and beautiful mathematical work. "She was overflowing with ideas, she said, of a whole new breadth and importance and yet so natural and self-evident that she couldn't help laughing" (302). Ah no,

readers might respond, she is sailing away in a gust of imagined glory induced perhaps solely by mortal illness. Even if so, what better way to depart the mortal coil?

The next day she is more ill, and the next—her last—a close friend thinks she hears Sophia say to her daughter Fufu, “Too much happiness” (302). This friend, however, did not hear the remark in context. That is the dilemma of the Other as auditor of a distant conversation of a dying friend, or reader of stories that cannot convey a full sense of Reality. We cannot know the whole context, but we must be present to the Other, even though to the Other we are ourselves Others who cannot know the full story. For Sophia, the statement “too much happiness” could have been completely honest and perfect for her daughter to hear, as real as human experience—and phenomenology—gets.

Significantly, at Sophia’s funeral a laurel wreath was sent from Weierstrass, who was to outlive his student by six years. Maksim, we read with chagrin, appeared in time to thank the Swedish nation, in French, on behalf of the Russian nation, for giving Sophia, whom he did not describe as his fiancée but “rather as if she had been a professor of his acquaintance” (303). He thanked the Swedes for giving his colleague the chance to use her knowledge in a worthy manner, meaning to earn her living as a mathematician. How magnanimous. It is unsurprising that he never married, and is a mere footnote to history.¹⁰ However, the pain of Maksim’s arrogance, his lack of mourning for Sophia, we feel almost as our own.

The story ends as follows: “Sophia’s name has been given to a crater on the moon” (304). The Russians were the first to photograph the far side of the moon, seizing the opportunity to name many of its features.¹¹ We deduce that Sophia’s achievements eventually impressed the Russians enough to place her in their scientific pantheon and put her name on this crater. Too bad they had not allowed her to attend university or given her a job. The far side of the moon is often mistakenly called the dark side, by those who do not understand the moon’s rotation. On earth we do not see it, but the moon’s far side does experience the sun’s light. It is only that the earth’s gravity keeps one side of the moon ever facing us, in what is called captured rotation.

So it is that we perceive of history and our own lives in story form, in a kind of captured rotation. But there is always a far side that we cannot see, except through extraordinary effort—satellites with cameras, in the moon’s case. But there it is, like the crater named Sonya Kovalevskaya. When such extraordinary observers identify such a crater, they give it a name and take note of descriptive details. Who would not want to be described for the history books, always to be studied, never to die in the minds of those who care?

We are all craters. Most of us await greater technology, greater insight, finer attention to detail, especially from our own consciousness. But when the history of human experience is mapped, we cannot do without the art of fiction, of story, of recorded memory, to bring us to life as Alice Munro gives new life to Sophia Kovalevsky. Like craters, we exist as entities in the physical universe, but unlike craters we have human responsibilities to others who occupy what we call the real world.

As Murdoch points out, the structuralist and deconstructionist arguments that would remove language from the world it describes and release it from a one-to-one correspondence—such as David Shields seems to desire, not wishing to bother with attributions of ideas and written statements—requires an assumption that it cannot be anchored to the world at all (*Metaphysics* 200). But even in the realm of fiction as it depicts the world, Murdoch warns us: “The phenomena of rationality and morality are involved in the very attempt to banish them” (*Metaphysics* 203). She urges us to “retain our everyday and continually renewed awareness that no theory can remove or explain away our moral and rational mastery of our individual being” (213). Nor can the theory, put forth by Shields, that the form of writing he calls the lyric essay can dispense with the recognition of others’ works and ideas, and give writers like himself “control” over the “game”. The game he thinks writing is may be difficult to remove from what Murdoch calls the moral and rational mastery of our individual being.

How far removed is Shields’s freewheeling bricollage of others’ and a few of his own ideas, put forth as all his own, from ideologies of the past, such as those based on historical determinism? Those theories once presumed to control the game. Of course, we still have ideological groups with historically deterministic theories, some masquerading as religious doctrines, who seek power and control over others. Such elements, Murdoch notes, “flourish when we lose the ordinary fundamental sense of contingency and accident which belongs with the concept of the individual” (214). It made no difference, for example, to Al Qaeda, that many Muslims were killed in the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. To that group, if the Muslims in the World Trade Center were good Muslims they would have wanted to be martyred, and if not, they were in thrall to the Great Satan (the United States of America) and deserved to die. As Murdoch observes, “We are changed by love and pursuit of what we only partly see and understand. This activity is our awareness of the world” (222). This activity includes our awareness of—as Emmanuel Levinas has explored in many works—our inability to fully know combined with our obligation to fully respect other individuals, forever like but unlike ourselves. In this pursuit, Murdoch states, “Unselfish attention breaks the barrier of egoism” (301).

What Shields and most readers may find tiresome about the novel form and most memoirs is what Murdoch describes as bad or mediocre art, that can clearly be seen as “obeying ‘general rules’ or familiar formulae” (313). “We demand *truth* from art,” Murdoch insists, “and great works of art refine and extend our conception and grasp of truth. Genius *invents* its own ‘rules’ or modes. . . . In art the imagination operates freely according to its own laws to produce *beauty*, which in a way *symbolizes* morality. . . .” However, she warns, beauty is only an image of morality, and geniuses are not necessarily good (313). “Perception itself is a mode of evaluation”; “moral activity ‘shows itself’ and is essentially silent” (315). Perception capable of careful evaluation is, however, a rather egoless silence, one that is not distorted by desires to control the game of perception.

Returning to Munro’s perception of the life of Sophia Kovalevsky and her depiction of that unique person’s final euphoric, tragic death, we have to accept, as Anne Enright advised, that Munro’s artistry is not to be praised as much as to be attended

to in silence. But we should acknowledge that there is something acutely moral in the author's sensitivity to the plight of women in Kovalsky's time, and in our own. As Murdoch states, "Morality, as the ability or attempt to be good, rests upon deep areas of sensibility and creative imagination, upon removal from one state of mind to another, upon shift of attachments, upon love and respect for the contingent details of the world" (337). When we read that the day before her death Sophia insisted that her daughter Fufu dance for her in a Gypsy costume meant for a children's party, we are graced with one such contingent detail.

When we overhear, with a close friend, that Sophia speaks to her daughter of "too much happiness," we are afforded a glimpse into another realm of awareness and empathy, of joy and the sublime. We may be at a loss to enunciate the subtle connections, but we feel that they are deeply moral, in the superb quality of Munro's attention to the humanity and genius of her subject, as the culmination of her life history is crafted into narrative art. We may also feel grateful for the opportunity to share a fragment of this great woman's life, even at the far remove of readers. We may be connected only by our desire to learn about her, but it is Munro who surrounds the facts of Kovalevsky's otherness and creates a narrative that makes us reach out to her in sympathy and—though incapable of complete understanding—willingness to understand. It is possible that without this willingness to understand on the part of others who cared for her—this transformative attention—Kovalevsky may not have endured either her intense suffering or her moments of extreme happiness. Neither would she have enjoyed a truncated career as a mathematician.

If reading Munro's narrative of the last years of Sophia Kovelevsky puts us one step removed from the genius and sorrow of a historical figure, W.G. Sebald situates his readers as neighbors to a numberless community of displaced victims of the Holocaust, those who escaped murder but not the oppression of lost identity and bereavement for the loss of family and community. In Sebald's work we read about characters who are perhaps more totally Other than a female anomaly in a male-dominated mathematical elite. Sebald's memoir-like fiction addresses tangentially the immeasurable suffering of unexpressed sorrow and guilt. If "Too Much Happiness" could be said to narrate the unfathomable euphoria of the dying Kovalevsky, Sebald's narratives allow readers to feel mists from an ocean of suffering on the part of unknowable numbers of individuals and families lost to the horrors of Nazism.

Winfried Georg Sebald, child of German parents who supported Hitler, created a hybrid form of memoir, biography, illustrated travelogue, and historical reflection. His father rose to the rank of captain in the Nazi army, but the author grew up surrounded by adults who never mentioned the Second World War. Sebald's indirect sense of responsibility for his parents' generation's support of Hitler and Nazism comes through in his empathy, at a tactful and self-effacing remove, for the war's displaced victims. He writes as though his characters are real persons—and indeed, some are—in a series of memoirs of friends and acquaintances in his own life and that of his fictional narrator. He adds an appearance of reality to these recollections by the in-text placement of photographs of objects, scenes, and persons. Readers,

many of whom may not register that Sebald calls his work fiction, may simply trust that it is memoir, or assume that the author has called it fiction because a few details have been invented for the sake of continuity.

One thing seems clear: the compassion aroused in Sebald's readers is comparable to that evoked by works of actual memoir. Readers of autobiography and memoir characteristically seek inspiration from others' lives.¹² Their reward is often, with the finest personal accounts, an increase and deepening of compassion. This, as noted above, coincides with the ethical goals of phenomenologists such as Murdoch and Levinas. Levinas goes so far as to say that we must feel responsible for the death of our neighbor, the Other. To be worthy of our own existence as ethical beings we are answerable not only for the life of the Other but we must not leave him "to his isolation" as he faces death.¹³

Sebald's narrators take the role of the neighbor who does not leave the Other to his isolation, who listens to whatever his neighbor chooses to confide in him. The result is haunting stories that more often than not end in the subject's suicide or self-initiated annihilation of consciousness. Through Sebald's narratives, readers are brought to the brink of a character's otherness in death, but have not, in terms of our attention as readers, left that Other alone in the isolation of death. A representative example of this is the first story in Sebald's collection *The Emigrants*,¹⁴ "Dr. Henry Selwyn." As an early reviewer noted, the stories in this book cause one to experience

the registers of fact and fiction dream and reality, . . . to dizzying effect. It is as though the work mirrors the consciousness of Dr. Selwyn, who by the time the narrator meets him has abandoned his medical practice to devote "his entire attention. . . to thoughts which on the one hand grew vaguer day by day, and, on the other, grew more precise and unambiguous."¹⁵

The narrator, like the author, is a self-exiled German who is a professor in a university in Norwich. He encounters Dr. Henry Selwyn while looking for a flat to rent, with a woman he refers to simply as Clara, as if he were writing a personal memoir and has no need to introduce his wife. We shall bypass the heavy symbolism of the Yew trees as he approaches this property, the house giving the impression "that no one lived there" (4). What draws us into our topic is this passage: "Doubtless we should have driven on without accomplishing a thing, if we had not summoned up the nerve, exchanging one of those swift glances, to at least take a look in the garden" (4). What the narrator and Clara do, by their swift exchange of glances, is decide to overcome their fear and *put their attention* on this foreboding place.

Walking cautiously, they almost stumble over the prone body of an old man, who quickly rises, explaining, "at once awkward and perfectly poised," that he has developed the somewhat irritating habit of counting the blades of grass. And with a courtesy "long since fallen into disuse," he introduces himself as Dr. Henry Selwyn (5). We come to learn that Dr. Selwyn, though married to the Swiss owner of the house, is estranged from her, and lives in a stone hermitage on the edge of the property. We shall ignore the strange "female personage of indeterminable age" (9), with a crazed whinnying laugh, who is always busy in the dark kitchen but only cooks one meal in the duration of their stay at—ominously titled—Prior's Gate. These are details, however, that illustrate the narrator's absorbing attention, the kind of full

attention that Dr. Selwyn, in a perhaps more despairing way, gives to those thoughts which grew vaguer day by day and yet grew more precise and unambiguous.

The couple rents the place, a friendship develops, and Dr. Selwyn invites them to a dinner with an old traveling companion and entomologist. As they eat a meal composed of vegetables from the property's overgrown and untended garden, Dr. Selwyn, "after a certain hesitation," tells them about a 65-year-old Alpine guide, Johannes Naegeli, with whom he hiked extensively before the First World War, after he had completed his medical studies in Cambridge and spent the summer of 1913 in the Bernese Oberland (13). Never in his life, he confided, had he felt as good as he had felt in Naegeli's company. And nothing was as painful as being separated from him after he was called up for the war, not even the emotional and physical separation from his wife Elli. He was in uniform and living in barracks when news reached him that Naegeli had gone missing, presumably fallen into a glacial crevasse. Dr. Selwyn's resulting depression was profound. "It was as if I was buried under snow and ice." There is a lengthy pause, and Dr. Selwyn ends his account, "But this is an old story" (15). The doctor's lifelong sadness speaks for itself, but the candor of his confession, entrusted to one old friend and two new ones—and, by means of the generosity of narrative, an extended company of readers—lingers in the folds of our enlivened compassion.

A year later Clara bought a house "on the spur of the moment," and in 1971 the couple moved out of Prior's Gate (gate to or from whatever was prior? an unexplored or un-lived-in past?). But Dr. Selwyn continued to visit them, bringing fruit and vegetables from his garden. One day when Clara was away, Dr. Selwyn asks the narrator whether he has ever been homesick (implying that he is aware of the narrator's exile his own country, perhaps Germany, like Sebald's). This leads to a long conversation in which we learn that the doctor was born in Lithuania to Jewish parents, and is terribly homesick for the home he left as a child. He recalls "the high seas, the trail of smoke, the distant greyness, the lifting and falling of the ship, the fear and hope within us, . . . as if it were only yesterday" (19). We are also effortlessly attentive to his account of his boyhood love for his English teacher, whose every word he memorizes, becoming a scholarship student at a top private school, then on to Cambridge University.

Slipped into Dr. Selwyn's story comes an ominous statement that recalls how Enright spoke of Munro's ability to represent the oddness of things as they happen, and as inner reality gets expressed: "My confidence was at its peak and in a kind of second confirmation I changed my first name Hersch into Henry, and my surname Seweryn to Selwyn. Oddly enough, I then found that as I began my medical studies. . . my ability to learn seemed to have slackened, though my examination results were among the best" (20). The doctor admits that he concealed his "true background for a long time" from his wife, and that his income as a hospital surgeon would never have allowed them the luxurious lifestyle he had enjoyed with Elli's inherited wealth (21). He lacked the foresight to provide himself with a pension, nor has he been able to sell any of his possessions, "except perhaps, at one point, my soul" (21).

But wait. At what point did he sell his soul? Was it when he changed his name, or when he married Elli without telling her his origins? We'll never know. Perhaps he is not sure himself. What we are told is that he and his wife have drifted apart, he does not know why. Perhaps "simply the decline of love" (21). We learn that Dr. Selwyn *had to* give up his practice and his patients in 1960—again, not saying why—and that after this he "severed [his] last ties with what they call the real world" (21). The impact of losing his practice and his patients, like the loss of his hiking guide Naegeli, speaks for itself. We are there as though listening to this conversation, aware of our inability to comprehend the whole story, but sensing the depth of the speaker's pain. As Levinas might have observed, we are, by means of narrative art, staying with this Other in the isolation he feels before taking his own life. He offers the narrator his hand, "a gesture that was most unusual to him," in farewell (21).

Returning from a trip to France, the narrator learns that Dr. Selwyn has shot himself with an old hunting rifle he had saved from his days as a young doctor in India. We note, perhaps askance, that the narrator claims not to have much difficulty overcoming the "initial shock" of this suicide. He nevertheless soon makes a more believable point: "But certain things. . . have a way of returning unexpectedly, often after a lengthy absence." He states that in 1986 he was traveling in Switzerland and remembered Dr. Selwyn after a long while, only to see a headline in a Swiss paper that the remains of a Bernese Alpine guide named Johannes Naegeli, missing since 1914, had been "released by the Oberaar glacier. . . . And so they are ever returning to us, the dead" (23). Thus Sebald, though this narrator, widens our appreciation of the lingering effects not only of friendship and the personal attentions of quiet listening, but also the returning reality of history, of loss, and what is evoked by a haunting phrase describing Naegeli's "few polished bones" and "hobnailed boots" (23). After Naegeli's fall into the crevasse, hobnailed boots came to be personified by armies and oppressors to come, symbolizing something far removed from the necessary footwear for mountain climbing, and the trust and camaraderie that had endeared the old Alpine guide foremost in Dr. Selwyn's heart.

Another silence befalls the reader, one in which we are present to the Other, as we were to Munro's characterization of Sophia Kovalevsky. But with Sebald we become present to the Others that Hersch Seweryn left behind who did not survive the war, and to those left in Germany by the unnamed narrator who could not endure their silence of a less responsible nature.¹⁶ As the novelist and playwright Gabriel Josipovici noted about *The Emigrants*,

...all four stories depend ultimately on Sebald's ability to find ways of saying the unsayable, of conveying, through the scrupulous refusal of easy empathy, how unknown we are not only to others but to ourselves, and what deep forces drive us, even to death. Those forces, here, are the forces of memory as it tries to come to terms with the horrors of our century. . . .

In what could be said for all of Sebald's characters, Josipovici observes that "Sebald brings these wounded creatures and the forces that have wounded them to light, revealing in the process, that the alternatives are never, for the true artists, those banalities beloved of theorists, silence or betrayal: there is always a third way."¹⁷

Sebald's hunger, to assume Shield's vernacular, is not so much for "reality" or "wisdom," but rather for a compassionate focusing of attention, on those who have experienced trauma and alienation, in opposition to the human impulse to repress and try to forget traumatic, humiliating, and shameful experiences, and on what can be recalled of their experience.¹⁸ In various but profoundly consonant ways, Munro and Sebald enable us to be as present as possible, aware that we are Others ourselves, to the immeasurable suffering of people whose lives have been lost or only available fragmentally to history. And so, because we have opened our attention to the characters who represent them, putting aside momentarily the concerns of self and circumstance, we do feel less lonely, more part of a larger Reality. This is where history and narrative meet most productively: in the morally responsive realm of attention.

There is an extreme dissonance, therefore, when the specificity of the focus of that attention, the care expressed in respect for source and context, is ignored by those who claim to hunger for reality. Those who conceive of narrative expression as a game to be controlled somehow miss the need to be present to the individuality and otherness of those whose ideas and expressions they might wish to appropriate. Not to be present to the specific memories and contexts of those whose thoughts and words we wish to use as our own would be, in its own way, a refusal to respect the power of memory as it reflects the Other, in life and in the isolation of death.

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NOTES

- ¹ Shields, David. 2010. *Reality hunger: A manifesto*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, dustjacket.
- ² Shields identifies Gornick's text as *The Situation and the Story*. You'd have to Google it to find its subtitle: *The Art of the Personal*, and publishing data – New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001. Good luck finding where he got the Emerson and Robbe-Grillet snippets.
- ³ Murdoch, Irish. 1993. *Metaphysics as a guide to morals*, 178. New York, NY: Penguin Books.
- ⁴ I have contributed two earlier papers on the moral implications of attention to this series: "Fiction and the Growth of Moral Consciousness: Attention and Evil," in *Analecta Husserliana*, Vol. XCII, *Logos of Phenomenology and Phenomenology of the Logos Book Five: The Creative Logos, Aesthetic Ciphery in Fine Arts, Literature and Aesthetics* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006); and "Literature and the Play of Attention: A New/Ancient Look at the Roots of Evil," *Analecta Husserliana*, Vol. LXXXV, *The Enigma of Good and Evil; The Moral Sentiment in Literature* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005).
- ⁵ Munro, Alice. 2009. *Too much happiness: Stories*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.
- ⁶ Fyodor Dostoevsky published Aniuta's first story in a journal he edited, and eventually proposed marriage to her. Aniuta turned down the offer, and Dostoevsky made her a minor character in his novel *The Idiot*, 1869.
- ⁷ Gorra, Michael. 2009. The Late Mastery of Alice Munro. *The Times Literary Supplement/Times Online*, August 26, 2009. Web.
- ⁸ Kakutani, Michiko. 2009. The Delicate Arithmetic of Love and Independence, review of *Too Much Happiness* in *The New York Times*, November 30, 2009. Web.
- ⁹ Enright, Anne. 2009. Come to read Alice, not to praise her. *The Globe and Mail*, August 28, 2009. Web.
- ¹⁰ Maksim Kovalevsky founded the Party for Democratic Reform, favoring a constitutional monarchy in czarist Russia, and was denounced by Lenin as a reactionary.

¹¹ My husband, Martin J. Goldberger, an amateur astronomer, informed me of this.

¹² I have written on memoir earlier in this series: Painter, Rebecca M. 2009. Healing personal history: Memoirs of trauma and transcendence. In *Analecta Husserliana*, vol. IC, *Existence, Historical Fabulation, Destiny*, 139–154. ed. A.-T. Tymieniecka. Dordrecht: Springer.

¹³ Levinas, Emmanuel. 1999. *Alterity and transcendence*, trans. Michael B. Smith, 164. New York, NY: Columbia University Press [orig. published as *Altérité et Transcendence*, Fata Morgana 1995].

¹⁴ Sebald, W.G. 1997. *The emigrants*, trans. Michael Hulse. New York, NY: New Directions [Originally published as *Die Ausgewanderten*, 1992].

¹⁵ Cohen, Lisa, rev. of *The emigrants*, trans. Michael Hulse, in *The Boston review*, February/March 1997. Web: bostonreview.net/BR22.1/prose.html.

¹⁶ The silence of the German people and its writers is eloquently detailed in Sebald's nonfiction final text, *On the Natural History of Destruction* [*Luftkrieg und Literatur*, 1999], trans. Anthea Bell. New York, NY: Random House, 2003.

¹⁷ Gabriel Josipovici, rev. of *The Emigrants*, first published in *Jewish Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No. 4, 1996/7, posted on Web: [//sebald.wordpress.com/2010/03/23/Gabriel-josipovici-on-w-g-sebalds-the-emigrants/](http://sebald.wordpress.com/2010/03/23/Gabriel-josipovici-on-w-g-sebalds-the-emigrants/) Mar 23, 2010.

¹⁸ In an interview shortly before his untimely death, Sebald, answering a question about his novel *Austerlitz*—which we would have mentioned here but did not for reasons of space—stated: “The moral backbone of literature is about that whole question of memory. . . . But it is something you cannot possibly escape: your psychological make-up is such that you are inclined to look back over your shoulder. Memory, even if you repress it, will come back at you and it will shape your life. Without memories there wouldn't be any writing: the specific weight an image or phrase needs to get across to the reader can only come from things remembered—not from yesterday but from a long time ago.” Maya Jaggi, “The Last Word,” interview in *The Guardian*, 21 Dec 2001. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2001/dec/21/artsandhumanities.highereducation/print>

THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF MAURICE
MERLEAU-PONTY AND LITERARY ARTS

ABSTRACT

The presented essay concentrates on a very important issue, namely the close relation of the Merleau-Pontian genetic phenomenology and the literary arts. This version of phenomenology of *corps propre* has proposed new methods and approaches towards literature (poetry and novels). In order to properly grasp the purpose and meaning of the Merleau-Ponty's aesthetic project one is obliged at least in general terms to sketch his fundamental philosophical ideas. The latter are mainly concerned with intentional activities on part of embodied consciousness. Being-in-the world *corps propre* the body is not only a perceiving passive) being, likewise it cannot be reduced to pure cogito. The celebrated notion of ego-cogito must be replaced by a more genuine access to the transcendent world. This stance lets the French philosopher to explore the realm of *entre*—the in-between: mind and body, body and mind and their union with the transcendent world. The region of *entre* leads Merleau-Ponty to a new perspective: that of bodily gestures, functions, meaningful and symbolic. This is the most vital trait of our existing world—to wit—the expression. The latter is the indicator not only of our intentions, but of our freedom and creativity as well. Art in general and literary arts in particular is a miracle of expression revealing a certain system of equivalence. This is no less than a nexus of interrelationship an artist thinks that have never been displayed before and will be displayed since. This intentional act (an embodied expression) is according to Merleau-Ponty a visible sign of our transcending, overcoming of the pre-given reality. Although a linguistic act resorts to everyday language (fixed idiom) it has a distinct possibility of imaginary, uncommon and unusual use of language. In other words, a poet or a writer imaginatively transgresses the everyday language, creating for his/her readers potential meanings, thus presenting them with a possibility to realize their freedom. To sum up: according to Merleau-Ponty a work of literary art is not a mere entity in-itself. It is not ontologically and aesthetically accomplished. Due to its variations and systems of equivalences it must be constantly interpreted and reinterpreted as it is an ever open-ended form of expression, a certain *corps propre*.

It is an unquestionable fact exposed in various monographs devoted to existentialism resp. existential phenomenology (that existential views on art, art creators or art receivers, cannot be adequately presented without a definite reference to the philosophical background—to wit—to the fundamental ontology (Heidegger), *ontologie radicale* (Sartre), *Existenzerhellung* (Jaspers), philosophy of religion (Shestov), philosophy of *mystère* (Marcel) or *absurdité* (Camus). The profuse and rich work

of Merleau-Ponty is in no way different (in this respect) from the philosophico-aesthetical output of other members of the movement in question. The present author has on many occasions underscored the importance of the realm of art in Existentialism, attempting to adequately describe this unique synergy and/or feedback of the “main” texts and the pages, devoted to vital problems of aesthetics in general.¹ For most of the existential thinkers (some of them were excellent artists as well) art (or an artworld to resort to A. Danto’s term) is viewed as part and parcel of their philosophical descriptions, analyses—in a word—as a proper method for attaining incisive insights into what all existentialists refer to (under different names though) as a phenomenon of concrete *existence*.

As M. Greene rightly observes “Merleau-Ponty was a philosopher for whom artistic creation was a central theme, the paradigm, as we shall see, of the human condition. . . .”² Thus from a methodological point of view one should approach the aesthetical ideas of Merleau-Ponty as an illustration (concretisation as Ingarden might have said) of his genetic, existential and dialectic phenomenology of perception of *corps propre*. These views, however, influence (this is the kind of a feedback I have mentioned above) the “main” philosophical discourse of the author of *Phenomenology of Perception*. There is yet a very important fact concerning the Merleau-Pontian aesthetics. Many of his ideas, views, proposals and scattered remarks have been formulated as an evident polemic, controversy with Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. Again M. Greene “they were his artists: it was they who, in their novels and plays, exhibited concretely the common philosophical concern of all of them [...] the quarrel on the surface was political . . . but their difference went much deeper [...] it was philosophical”.³ That polemical part is of great importance in so far as the outline of the theory of literature (literary arts) is concerned. Although Merleau-Ponty has not presented a unified, systematic body of aesthetics (in the form of a series of essays or a single monograph as Sartre did) one is fully justified in referring to his views as aesthetics of painting or literature (literary arts) because of this close connection with the philosophical background. In his unique *aesthetics of word* the French philosopher locates the phenomenon of literary art within the most precious ability, faculty or a *possible* of human being (incarnate consciousness): that of overcoming, transcending the surrounding, pre-given reality. This internal power to perform the act of *dépassement* is best discernible and felt (*vécu*) in diverse acts of expression. The latter are invariably related to our ontic-ontological, epistemological and existential status of being-in-the-world (*au monde*) as embodied, incarnate consciousness. As one of the eminent Merleau-Pontian scholar has it, the Merleau-Pontian phenomenology of body is the center piece of his entire analysis. The problem arises immediately from the foregoing critique of the *prejudice of the world*. Perhaps nothing in man’s experience is more slighted than the body when the world is divided into *being-in-itself* and *being-for-itself*. For both empiricism and intellectualism, the body is a physical being belonging to the objective world, wether it is supposed to be moved by the spirit, to move the spirit, or to move only according to laws. It is treated thus by the empiricist, as has been seen—and by itself cannot make perception understandable, and the intellectualist’s reduction of sense to undifferentiated *matter* seems to leave

the body out of perception altogether and place it among the rest of the objects of the known world [. . .] In either case the body is not a perceiving being, it cannot in itself be the bearer or even, strictly speaking, the transmitter of meaning. Its objective status allows it no subjectivity at all. Nothing, according to Merleau-Ponty, is more contrary to experience, and it becomes his task to show the role and the significance of the body in the realm of perception".⁴ In his attempts to overcome the vicious antinomies of both the objectivist and subjectivist {idealist} stances Merleau-Ponty, and other members of the informal group called the generation of *the 1930s of the last century* turned to the Husserlian phenomenology in order to reach the sphere of authentic {genuine} knowledge. In *Philosophie de l'ambiguïté* A. de Waelhens states that the *monde vécu* (the life world) is taken by Merleau-Ponty as the intentional object (. . .) while perception is the conscious activity in which this object is constituted. Contrary to the Sartrean approach Merleau-Ponty reiterates that human being cannot be reduced to pure consciousness (a kind of *néant*: nothingness for Sartre) while the *ego cogito* must be replaced by more a genuine, more adequate, thus more verdical access to the transcendent world, inalienably the world-for-us, that is: *ego percipio*. This stance is better equipped to attune to our status of conscious, intentioned *corps propre* (the fact totally ignored by all sorts of idealists). Hence—claims Merleau-Ponty—we enter the realm of *entre*: the *in-between* mind and body, body and mind and their “staunch” union. The latter will in turn create the union with the transcendent world. (The Merleau-Ponty of the *Visible/Invisible* will declare that *chaire*: the living human tissue is at one with the worldly matter). Moreover, the real modus of human behaviour (symbolic *comportement*) is certainly (as demonstrated by the phenomenological experience) perception not the once celebrated thinking or reflection. This enormous stress laid on perception is—according to Merleau-Ponty—only the corrective measure in so far as the Husserlian phenomenology goes. However, this revised perspective has not eliminated the key {fundamental} concept of phenomenology: *intentionality*. Merleau-Ponty makes all our bodily gestures, bodily functions meaningful, symbolic and intentional. *Corps propre* is that by which there are objects (for us), it has been placed {situated} in a certain *milieu* which—underscores the French philosopher—should not be regarded as a mere collection or a totality of objects (filling us with *nausée* or even threatening us like in ontological visions of Sartre) rather as a phenomenal field. The nature of the latter is best rendered when it is treated not as a kind of in-itself. *Champ phénoménal* is nothing but the horizon present in all our experiences and itself is latent and anterior to every determining concept, idea or thought. As early as the time of his first important work (*Structure de la Comportement*) Merleau-Ponty began to regard all human behaviours {responses} as symbolic structures meaningfully grasping a given situation. Those responses were not reactions, like in the animal world that is something predictable, fixed and functioning one way only as it were. There is—underlines Merleau-Ponty—in human behaviour a unique trait pertaining to all of us: a kind of potentiality, spontaneity, freedom or transcendence. These celebrated terms in every version of the existential philosophy denote—generally speaking—our stance (provided we exist authentically) towards the given reality. The latter is to be transcended in diverse ways and manners.

Being-in-the-world is identified by the French philosopher with our perceptual contacts, experiences with “things”, “objects” and of course “others”. In his genetic phenomenology striving to reach the uncontaminated sources of all knowledge Merleau-Ponty propounds the concept that due to the nature of our perceptual intentionality we “learn”, “grasp”, “organize” the world in a gradual manner, step by step to put it this way. Things—says Merleau-Ponty—always appear to us in profiles. It means that when one aspect (profile, form, shape, or quality) is revealed to us now all the others stay hidden (to be revealed in future). The enormous richness of transcendent entities is displayed to perceptual consciousness in series of *Abschattungen*: acts of approaches. One trait, or quality always “announces”, sends over a human being to the other quality. This is the celebrated idea of the interplay and the system of equivalences applying to all entities in the whole world: things are also mutually interconnected and related with one another. It stands to reason that the transcendent reality given to or rather constituted by our perception (that is the condition of *sine qua non* of being in the world) cannot be reduced to either the pure idea or meaning. Likewise, pure consciousness à la Sartre is not in the centre of the world any more. As things, objects, relations are “ambiguous”, “dense”, “mysterious” their texture always transcends us. Moreover, they are never complete, “rounded off” or given-at-once to various *modi* (functions) of consciousness. The latter being-in and of-the-world is taken to be a constant flux, or flow made up of events, data which constitute the consciousness “make up”.

Like all existential phenomenologists Merleau-Ponty rejects the idealist (Cartesian) tradition of “interior man”⁵ the “constant I” standing behind all logical processes. Consciousness is always in a given situation but it is not a pure consciousness—it is *corps propre*. This is the so-called transcendental approach worked out by the French phenomenologist in reaction to all antinomies of both idealism and objectivism we have already referred to. As *the absolute source* of all reality we exist in a certain *facticity* and our existence is an unique movement by which human beings are in the world. Although all our intentional processes cannot make claims to be fulfilled, or completed, the transcendent reality—contrary to what other existentialists declare—is not absurd or tragic. In other words, the world towards which I turn, of which I am aware is an ambiguous, open-ended structure. I can (along with other *corps propre*) know it myself—says in one place of his *Phenomenology* Merleau-Ponty—“if only to be aware of my own ignorance”. Moreover before making any judgements, before forming clear concepts or ideas and notions a definite unity (interrelation) between me, my *corps propre* and the phenomenal field I exist in can be magically (mysteriously) felt. Now we can return to those faculties my embodied consciousness has at its disposal. One of them is the fundamental ability of every human being: the power of expression through which we appropriate the experience of objects by means of speech and verbal acts.

The present paper is devoted to artistic activities based on what Merleau-Ponty calls *la langue*, or *parole*. As has already been said art (as a celebrated domain of expression) plays no less important a role than philosophy does. Art (both painting and literature) as will be remembered is closely related with what Merleau-Ponty refers to as a *miracle of expression*. This key yet slightly unphilosophical term

denotes in the philosopher's *oeuvre* the fundamental, inalienable trait of our condition: expression is no less than a way we exist as embodied consciousness in a given situation—a certain *milieu*: “objective”, “natural”, or/and “cultural”. According to Merleau-Ponty diverse forms of expression: bodily gestures, mime, articulated speech are always intentional. Put it differently, expression is taken by Merleau-Ponty as *letting meaning appear*. It stands to reason that the very *corps propre* is a kind of expression itself: with all our gestures, facial and verbal we—due to our very presence in the world—mean something we either want or do not to. The body—we find the French author saying time and again—*radiates* with gestures. Expressions of various kinds intend (in the phenomenological sense) some “objects”, “values”, “relations”. Briefly—they introduce something not yet present, not yet constituted. As each authentic artwork (Merleau-Ponty uses the term *vrai*) is some sort of intentionality as the undeniable function or the way of existing of *corps propre* it must (be it a painting of Cezanne, a poem or a novel) reveal a system of equivalence—to wit—such a nexus of interrelationship an authentic artist believes not to have been “shown”, “discovered” or “presentified” yet. (In the case of already realized expressions an artist might propose their *dépassement*: overcoming in a dialectical way).⁶ A given system of equivalence described in terms of a style of a work of art is a true manifestation of not only an expression but of an intentionality in the first place. In any kind of genuine artwork (irrespective of its genre) three types of intentionality can be distinguished. As the expression an artwork expresses its object. Every element of a work of art is the expression of the style (e. g. constant *déformation* of elements used) or the system of equivalence. The elements of the work of art are always related to the whole, to the totality of it. The latter is never—according to Merleau-Ponty—a mere, mechanical sum total of the components it comprises. Last but not least, intentionality in the work of art is treated (that is seemingly an original contribution to modern aesthetics on the part of the French philosopher) as an expression of the artist himself: the way he exists in the world, the manner he “projects” his perceptual experiences, his knowledge and understanding and/or imagination on to the transcendent reality. Put it differently: he displays his condition in a certain situation he was thrown into.

These three aspects of intentionality indicate evident similarities with perception and the phenomenon of *speech*. Let us note that perceptual intentions—like all intentions—are always directed at something transcendent (*visé*). The same holds true in so far as the verbal gestures, *signs* are concerned. The latter—claims Merleau-Ponty—are evoked by concrete movements (*motoricité*). They are intended to point to something beyond themselves—in other words—to articulate an object, a thing, or some part of a given reality.

The linguistic elements point to a certain system of equivalence—which can be discerned in a literary work of art—in a language system to which they belong. It should be borne in mind that this system (like the *phenomenal field itself*) cannot be complete, closed or precisely determined. As a faithful disciple of de Saussure Merleau-Ponty takes for granted the openness of the linguistic system, its comprising nothing but differences but—the most important trait—its ability of reciprocal references. The latter create possibilities of inexhaustible combinations, changes,

modifications or variations of the pertaining elements invariably related to the whole of the system. It is only after an act of linguistic expression that one can refer to certain phenomena as “completed” or “rounded off” (until they are transcended again).

In the Merleau-Pontian version of existential phenomenology of *corps propre*, perception, intentionality and expression much stress has been laid on our spontaneity and freedom of our being-in-the-world. As perceptual experiences are given priority over *cogital* acts it is understandable that an act of a linguistic creation is not preceded by either an idea or thought—neither is it based on intellectual reflection (project). It may sound paradoxical but for Merleau-Ponty language is not employed for expressing thoughts (formed before an actual act of speech). Due to their nature language and thinking are closely related to one another. In other words: thinking is simultaneous with speaking, the latter comes along with the first one. However, certain points must be clarified now before any further analyses. If one juxtaposes two linguistic operations (intentional and expressive) namely that of reading and that of writing—the first one entails a recognition of certain intentions imposing a unity on textual meanings. Although—due to this propensity of sedimentation of our past experiences, of accumulating of—based on perception—the knowledge we all have at our disposal (eg. the pre-given alphabet, common grammar, vocabulary, syntax, rules of usage etc.) the intentions on the part of a writer (a creator) and a reader are not identical. It cannot be denied that a linguistic act of a writer/poet—underlines Merleau-Ponty—resorts to everyday language but in this case it displays a distinct possibility of imaginary, of uncommon, unusual use of a language. A writer can speak like any of us (any user of a shared language) but owing to this faculty of *transgressing* imaginatively the language he takes advantage of he is beyond the communal, practical or mundane linguistic *milieu*. To say the least of it, a writer creates for his/her readers potential meanings. If a reader grasps only fixed, (established in a given culture) meanings, *sedimented* in a system he/she is never to transcend the level of *la langue* covering the predictable, fixed code of communication. If—on the other hand—a reader transcends the linguistic given (prompted or “instigated” as it were by a writer) he/she will immediately immerse in what the French philosopher calls the living, spontaneous and ever creative speech—to wit—the acts of *language*.⁷ (Thus contrary to the tenets of the structuralism those two acts: reading and writing can intentionally achieve the same goal). The propounded theory of linguistic creation proposed by theory Merleau-Ponty is quite simple. The language of prose is a kind of algorithm but taking advantage of primordial resources of speech. Language as such (being a system of references) is identified by Merleau-Ponty with the instrument of “manipulation” and variation which takes place when a new syntax is introduced. It is an inalienable faculty of artistic creation, innovatory, creative writing not to move along the trodden paths, not to resort to established (fixed) meanings of only one way kind of reference). Instead, true writers seize new—that is—not yet objectified, not yet sedimented meanings and address to, or still better send their message to likewise creative, spontaneous consciousness of their readers.

In his aesthetics of literature {literary art} Merleau-Ponty treats on equal terms the reader and the writer. Both of them are communicating subjects: both are *corps*

props endowed with the power of transcending the given *milieu* (in this particular case the given language). Moreover, the French philosopher does not treat (that would be contrary to his existential phenomenology) a literary work as an entity *in-itself* (*en-soi*)—as something “closed”, ontologically accomplished. An authentic literary work of art—due to its “variations” and the system of equivalences—must be constantly interpreted and reinterpreted. In a word, it is always an open-ended form of an expression. Time and again the author of *La prose du monde* makes us aware of the fact that each work of art is part and parcel of a wider context. It is situated in a certain *monde vécu*, in a historically and culturally determined phenomenal field. No wonder that works of art appear against the background of dense, complex network of references. It is the *inter-monde* identified with the domain of culture. For the language of literary works is—as the philosopher has it—“the speech of a second degree in which one speaks about things or people to move {affect} the other embodied consciousness[. . .]”.⁸ Novels must be separated from the natural stream of speech. But similarly to the renowned model propounded by the psychologists of *Gestalt* persuasion (the source of intellectual inspiration of Merleau-Ponty) a figure {a work of art} “situates itself” in a meaningful manner against the totality of the language. Although the language of a second degree appears to bear the resemblance to everyday language it is the latent (in both a creator and the language he uses) power of *imagination* which establishes new configurations, new meanings and connotations. Any description or analysis of acts of linguistic creations should take into account the fact that speech itself is not a fully accomplished or realized phenomenon. Moreover, language elements, rules or syntax do not belong to the domain of consciousness. Like all perceptual experiences linguistic acts are filled with this ambiguity which makes the desired clarity impossible. Hence writers (creators of linguistic novelty and innovation, often—underlines Merleau-Ponty—fear of breaking the silence, they avoid with all their might all those linguistic gaps, innuendoes thus disregarding the *eidós* of true speech. In lieu of acting spontaneously the writers of this kind prefer to rely on the fixed (thus widely approved of by community of users) and established structures of correspondence between the denoting (*signifiant*) and the denoted (*signifié*). It seems only obvious that such a—unlikely to occur in authentic “speaking speech” *parole parlante*—correspondence does render a linguistic expression straightforward, clear and unequivocal but it leads—claims Merleau-Ponty—to the *phantom of pure language*. The latter is a self contradictory project of replacing the living speech, the expression of *corps propre* with a kind of divine ideal. In case of its realization we would create *one unified* sphere {world} of signs and their referents. To Merleau-Ponty’s understanding this would be a dangerous rebellion against the nature of a living, original and resourceful (not *cliché* type of communication). There is no single, and ever ready word, the only word that would fit in the artist’s schemat (project); it is just the other way round: language is (once again the similarity with perception itself is evident) like groping in the darkness, it is more like grappling with dense, opaque tissue of *monde vécu*. Owing to the temptation of absolute *clarté* haunting his imagination Mallarmé was paralysed by fear to articulate anything. Thus the fear of breaking the original silence may join the fear of using {articulating} an improper, inadequate word. But any

authentic user of language—admonishes Merleau-Ponty—should not refuse to go through this inalienable tension between the given, “fixed” language and a desire to express new configurations, new connotations hence an intention to embark upon the process of transcending the given reality.

It seems—adds Merleau-Ponty—that the first stage in a literary creation consists in stifling a strong temptation to resort to an algorithm (*the ideal of pure language*) in which the sign would ideally stick to the “thing”. We shall have known by now that such a stance would eliminate any authentic expression. The latter always leads (even if the language may be unable to achieve this) to new senses, new characteristics of a given reality (*monde vécu*)—in a word—to acts of transcendence. But a literary *dépassement* is not a destructive or negating but a constituting and establishing force and “the writer does not desire to replace the language with his own” but aims at the creative disturbance of some order. He just wants to introduce “the stability of some weirdness” and propose it to the Other, as this literary act takes place in the sphere (*inter-monde*) of “our” world. That is why I can, as a reader (a speaking subject), seize those changes and in the act of receiving I can experience, moreover—open myself up to the linguistic transcendence proposed by the writer. But like him/her, I should—states Merleau-Ponty—“start from some familiarity”. While beginning to read, I approach the concrete expression through the language that—as is supposed—I know perfectly well. In other words, as a receiver, I was given certain structures, vocabulary, a linguistic syntax, and some ideas constituted in previous linguistic acts. Having at my disposal “signs” existing in a given cultural field I now go towards the work offered by the creator.

Merleau-Ponty presented the phenomenological description of approaching the specific entity—a novel. Once again he mentions the analogy with perception. The moment of opening the book was compared by him to perceiving gestures, to a behaviour of other people which in relation to literary expression corresponds to some articulations of the expressed fragment of the world. The philosopher probably wants to emphasize the extraordinariness of such an encounter, such a dialogue with the writer. When I “lazily start to read [...] I mobilise only a part of my thoughts”.⁹ However, this moment of “opening oneself” is at the same time the moment of beginning of a new reciprocity, because “I give and get with the same gesture”.

Merleau-Ponty presents the idea of reception of a literary work in terms of interchanging and dialogue. “I have given the knowledge of the language, of what I know about the sense of those words, forms and syntax”.¹⁰ However, one should point to a very important thing we all share—to wit—the experience that we possess in relation to existence, this significant and undeniable fact of being in the world. It means that in the creation alone (*resp.* in the reception) of a literary work there will appear and there will always be present such events, questions and ideas that stress the metaphysical condition common to all of us. Together with the writer we have been thrown into a world, we experience a common *en situation* and we have to begin a specific cooperation and interaction. This takes place within a common sphere (Merleau-Ponty totally ignores the fact of differences between the epochs and historical *milieu*) of linguistic “activities”. In other words, the philosopher tries to make the primacy of speech visible, underscoring the fact that it is able to display

the traits of both the present world and the world that is not here any more but which can “once again” appear in front of us. So, this communion of the speaking subjects—a writer and a reader—“becomes the joust of the untouchable and full of glory bodies”.¹¹ Both the world (or rather its fragment presented by a work) and speech functioning in reality (in a form of a literary expression) constitute the level of this meeting, pointing to the fact that the literary speech is something authentic, existential, thus bringing about the tension between “existing” and “opening” (to be more precise: opening me up) in the act of reading of that which a writer has to reveal. Only in this way—in the act of reading—I can grasp the intentions contained in the work. “Speech sends us above our thoughts to the meaningful intention, pulsating from someone else”.¹² But this power of transcendence, of *dépassement*, with the presence of an act of communication and a literary expression, is invariably connected with the fact of our existence in the world, the fact that I am a speaking subject and, what is more important, normally functioning as an embodied consciousness. So, while reading, I have to use this bodily mechanism, the linguistic apparatus of the body existing in the world.

As has already been stated at the very beginning of this paper there is no coherent, systematic aesthetics of Merleau-Ponty. But—due to its unquestionably philosophical character his theory of art (both literary and visual) can be said to have constituted part and parcel of his phenomenology. This basic assumption of the latter is that embodied consciousness (incarnate) is immersed in the world. But contrary to some other existentialists Merleau-Ponty does not regard this “objective” factor as absurd or tragic. Our condition is limited, determined by this fact but we can choose or, still better, we are free to choose against a pre-given background to our advantage. “To our” means the important element of the Merleau-Pontian philosophy—that is intersubjectivity and a renowned concept of being-for-us. Hence art is closely related with the inherent faculty of expression. Through the latter we “let the meaning be”, while in the domain of visual arts—the eye—states Merleau-Ponty writing of his favourite Cézanne—inhabits being as a man inhabits his home. But his inalienable home is naturally his/her body—the instrument of our existing in the world. Similarly to literary arts painting does introduce, does propose a new order, a new—unprecedented configuration of perceptions. Paintings are not mere representations likewise novels, short stories or poems are not grounded in common, everyday manner of practical and pragmatical communication. It is the painters, like Cézanne, Renoir, Van Gogh, who “bodies forth” the visible aspect of ambiguous Being—emerging gradually. On the other hand Writers resort to living speech, language elements being quite aware that word signs—the fundamental building blocks of an act of speech do not carry their significations in themselves but in what they signify, intend (*viser*—in the phenomenological sense). All in all, like in a painting the ultimate object of our intentions (artistic expressions in the first place) is Being and our “living unity with it in separation” adds cryptically Merleau-Ponty.¹³ As speech is our expression of an equivocal unity of a person (*corps vécu*) so is the colour: “the place where our brain and the universe meet”¹⁴—All art is an evident sign of bodily rootedness: no work of art is conceivable without material, physical elements (sound, letters, colours or lines). Thanks to all those

(material entities—says Merleau-Ponty—an artist can embrace the transcendent reality (world), make our being fuse with distant objects, situations or relations. In a word, artistic vision (bearing the definite resemblance to perception, *in* and *of* the world) is our privileged modus of access to reality as we see it (as it is seen by us). Thus—like novels or poems paintings are the “mirrored images of ourselves”, they show us as others do. This *thèse pilote* of Merleau-Ponty epitomises the aesthetics of the French: artistic expression is always intended for communication with others being-in-the-same-world. This aspect of indwelling inspires true, authentic artists to bring into existence the common human world—the world full of “gaps”, “mysteries”, “unbroken silences” and first of all: the world imbued with ambiguity. Hence all art is a continuous attempt to express our condition of existing as *corps propre*. *To express* means necessarily to transcend that which is given—or still better—that which constitutes our *lived world*. It stands to reason that the expression of facticity is an inalienable trait, characteristic of our freedom. But it is always a situated freedom of bodily spontaneity, of bodily and mental activity. That union of body and mind is closely woven into ambiguous, complicated texture of life itself—never completed and ever open to the future. The authentic art highlights this condition in innumerable works of authentic (*vrai*) art.

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NOTES

- ¹ See my *Filozofia sztuki (Philosophy of Art.)*. Kraków, 1992.
- ² See Stewart, Jon. 1998. The debate between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. In *The aesthetic dialogue of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty*, ed. Marjorie Grene, 294. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- ³ *Ibidem*.
- ⁴ See Carr, David. 1967. In *Maurice Merleau-Ponty, incarnate consciousness*, ed. George A. Schrader, 393. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill Book Company.
- ⁵ See de. Waelhens, A. 1951. *Une philosophie de l'ambiguïté*, 102. Belgium: Publications universitaires de Louvain.
- ⁶ See Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1948. *Sens et non-sense*. Paris: Nogel.
- ⁷ See Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1964. *Signes*. Paris: Gallimard.
- ⁸ See Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1963. *La prose du monde* and others essays. Paris.
- ⁹ *Ibidem*.
- ¹⁰ *Ibidem*.
- ¹¹ *Ibidem*, See also Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1964. *l'oeil et l'esprit*. Paris: Gallimard.
- ¹² *Ibidem*.
- ¹³ *Ibidem*.
- ¹⁴ See, Merleau-Ponty, *l'oeil*. . . , op. cit.

“REVISITING STEINBECK’S LITTORAL
PHENOMENOLOGY: HUSSERLIAN ELEMENTS IN *THE
LOG FROM THE ‘SEA OF CORTEZ’*”

ABSTRACT

In 2010, *Analecta Husserliana* published a paper I had presented for the International Society of Phenomenology, Fine Arts, and Aesthetics entitled “John Steinbeck’s *Log from the ‘Sea of Cortez’*: One of Husserl’s Infinite Tasks?” In this paper, I will continue an argument begun there, that in *The Log from the ‘Sea of Cortez,’* Steinbeck often speaks in a distinctively phenomenological voice. To substantiate my claim, I will focus on passages from the text that deal with cognitive sedimentation and parts and wholes, aligning them with passages in the Husserlian corpus to draw out their phenomenological character. The project will be useful in two ways: it will educe additional phenomenological moments in Steinbeck’s *Log*, and it will provide new and helpful examples from Steinbeck’s work to illustrate themes from Husserl’s own work. In the end, I hope the comparisons show that Steinbeck’s *Log* can reasonably be regarded as a littoral phenomenology.

INTRODUCTION

In 2010, *Analecta Husserliana* published a paper I had presented for the International Society of Phenomenology, Fine Arts, and Aesthetics entitled “John Steinbeck’s *Log from the ‘Sea of Cortez’*: One of Husserl’s Infinite Tasks?” The text on which the paper focused describes the scientific expedition of Steinbeck, marine biologist Ed Ricketts, and five others, who spent six weeks in 1940 exploring the Gulf of California for the purpose of collecting marine fauna.¹ The group made around twenty-five stops, collecting over five hundred different marine species, fifty of which had not previously been identified. Steinbeck and Ricketts’s co-authored account of the expedition is widely considered “among the most important, if least understood, works in Steinbeck’s literary canon,”² and the purpose of the paper was to highlight its strong parallels with important ideas in Husserlian phenomenology, namely, the role and perspective of the scientist and the simultaneously absolute and relative nature of truth. The purpose of the present study is to further the comparison through a consideration of additional parallels.

In this paper, I will continue to argue that in *The Log from the ‘Sea of Cortez,’* Steinbeck often speaks in a distinctively phenomenological voice. To substantiate my claim, I will focus on passages from the text that deal with cognitive sedimentation and parts and wholes, aligning them with passages in the Husserlian corpus to

draw out their phenomenological character. The project will be useful in two ways: it will educe additional phenomenological moments in Steinbeck's *Log*, and it will provide new and helpful examples from Steinbeck's work to illustrate themes from Husserl's own work. In the end, I hope the comparisons show that Steinbeck's *Log* can reasonably be regarded as a littoral phenomenology.

COGNITIVE SEDIMENTATION

In *The Log from the "Sea of Cortez,"* Steinbeck considers the intermingling of warm- and cold-water fauna in the Gulf of California. He reports:

The Cape San Lucas-La Paz area is strongly Panamic. Many warm-water mollusks and crustaceans are not known to occur in numbers north of La Paz, and some not even north of Cape San Lucas. But the region north of Santa Rosalia, and even of Puerto Escondido, is known to be inhabited by many cold-water animals. . . . These animals are apparently trapped in a blind alley with no members of their kind to the south of them.³

Put more simply, fauna that typically make their home in temperate waters can be found in the warm waters of the upper reaches of the Gulf of California, bordered in, as it were, by the warm-water animals that one would more typically expect to find there. Steinbeck goes on to cite an explanation of this phenomenon proffered by J. G. Cooper in 1895. Given the presence of cold-water animals in both the Gulf of California and the Pacific Ocean at the same latitude—given, that is, the presence of cold water animals in two bodies of water separated only by Baja California—Cooper argues that one or more channels must have formed in the dividing ridge during the Quaternary period, allowing the animals to migrate into the Gulf.⁴ The problem is that the ridge shows no sign of any submergence. Another possible explanation for the presence of the temperate animals in the warm waters of the Gulf stems from the work of Eric Knight Jordan, a paleontologist interested in the mollusks on the Pacific coast of the Baja Peninsula. Jordan observed that when the Quaternary geological beds he was studying were laid down, isothermal conditions were being southwardly displaced, thereby allowing cold-water animals to live in more southerly conditions. Having reviewed the pertinent literature, Steinbeck hypothesizes that when the isotherms retreated northward again, the cold-water animals that had been able to survive near the mouth of the Gulf of California were pushed northward. Those that were pushed along the Pacific coast could retreat where they may, but those pushed into the mouth of the Gulf had nowhere to go but north, invaded as they would have been by warm-water animals from the south. And so it is, Steinbeck reasons, that the cold-water “animals, hemmed in by tropical waters and fortunate competitors, have maintained themselves for thousands of years, though in the struggle they have been modified toward pauperization.”⁵

Having presented the genealogy of his own hypothesis, Steinbeck remarks on the peculiarity of a paleontologist who works in one area laying the groundwork for a reasonable hypothesis in quite another area, and he uses this as an occasion to reflect on scientific hypotheses and, indeed, cognitive sedimentation, the calcification of

our judgments over time such that they become independent of the evidence that brought them about in the first place. Steinbeck says:

There is one great difficulty with a good hypothesis. When it is completed and rounded, the corners smooth and the content cohesive and coherent, it is likely to become a thing in itself, a work of art. It is then like a finished sonnet or a painting completed. One hates to disturb it. Even if subsequent information should shoot a hole in it, one hates to tear it down because it once was beautiful and whole.⁶

Steinbeck proceeds to furnish an amusing example. He tells the story of a "learned institution" sending out an expedition to determine whether or not sea-otters were extinct. Although the expedition found that the animal was indeed extinct, one of Steinbeck's acquaintances spoke with a woman who described animals that could only be sea-otters living in the surf near Monterey. Steinbeck writes:

A report of this to the institution in question elicited no response. It had extincted sea-otters and that was that. It was only when a reporter on one of our more disreputable newspapers photographed the animals that the public was informed. It is not yet known whether the institution of learning has been won over.⁷

In a certain sense, Steinbeck does not mean to be critical of those who make judgments and stick by them. He writes, "It is no light matter to make up one's mind about anything, even about sea-otters, and once made up, it is even harder to abandon the position."⁸ Still, given that "beliefs persist long after their factual bases have been removed, and practices based on beliefs are often carried on even when the beliefs which stimulated them have been forgotten,"⁹ we can recognize the gravity for Steinbeck of forming proper judgments.

For Husserl, the manner in which we properly come to a conclusion and the possibility of that conclusion becoming sedimented within our belief structure is also a serious concern. Husserl's most well-known example of cognitive sedimentation is perhaps the one taken up in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, where he considers the issue of the Galilean mathematization of nature and its resultant contemporary scientific and cultural crisis. Where Galileo seems to have been most affected by sedimentation was in his inheritance of pure geometry, which was "pre-given to Galileo as an old tradition, involved in a process of lively forward development."¹⁰ Husserl provides a genetic description of how our account of real and ordinary objects was transformed into pure geometry. Let us use an example.

Suppose we have an ordinary object before us, a square box, for instance. Through an act of imagination, we are able to vary our box into other shapes, some similar to it, like a rectangle, and some dissimilar, like a sphere. Practically speaking, there is a limit on our ability to perfect the identity of the real objects we have in mind. Still, what Husserl calls "limit-shapes" emerge as the ideals towards which our imaginative variations tend. The meaning of such limits is anticipated and even motivated by the activity of measurement, whereby we are able to secure the objectivity of real objects, like our box, for instance. Inspired by our impulse towards truth and objectivity, we are drawn into the "ideal praxis of 'pure thinking' which remains exclusively within the realm of pure limit-shapes."¹¹ Such idealizations have been taken up as the proper subject matter of geometry and, *mutatis mutandis*, all sciences. The critical issue that emerges, however, is that "like all cultural acquisitions

which arise out of human accomplishment, they remain objectively knowable and available without requiring that the formulation of their meaning be repeatedly and explicitly renewed."¹² Thus, Galileo was able to adopt and utilize pure geometry without investigating its origins, and while this is understandable, Husserl claims that the oversight was costly. He explains:

But now we must note something of the highest importance that occurred even as early as Galileo: the surreptitious substitution of the mathematically substructured world of idealities for the only real world, the one that is actually given through perception, that is ever experienced and experienceable—our everyday life-world. This substitution was promptly passed on to his successors, the physicists of all the succeeding centuries.¹³

Husserl identifies Galileo's "fateful omission" as his failure to "inquire back into the original meaning-giving achievement which . . . resulted in the geometrical ideal constructions."¹⁴ And this, for Husserl, is a prime example of "sedimentation or traditionalization, i.e., of the constant presuppositions of [our own] constructions, concepts, propositions, theories."¹⁵ In the case of Galileo, this one instance of sedimentation has played out to disastrous consequences: what was merely a mathematical method came to replace our direct experience of the world, came to replace the life-world itself. The result has been the technization of science, which obscures the role of subjectivity in scientific endeavors. And it is on account of this misplaced and alienated subjectivity that science is in a crisis, having lost its meaning for life, having lost, that is, its "human sense."

For Husserl, then, Steinbeck would be correct in claiming that when a good hypothesis is completed, it stands in danger of becoming "a thing in itself," its corners rounded, its content cohesive. Like Steinbeck, Husserl believes that "it is no light matter to make up one's mind,"¹⁶ and that "beliefs persist long after their factual bases have been removed, and practices based on beliefs are often carried on even when the beliefs which stimulated them have been forgotten." But rather than hating to disturb our hypothesis for fear of discomposing what "once was beautiful and whole," as Steinbeck claims, Husserl would likely take another tack. This is because, for Husserl, the issue is not that we *want* to preserve our sedimented theories, but that we do so unthinkingly. When sedimentation occurs, it is because we either do not bear in mind why we formed our judgments in the first place or inherit them as "cultural acquisitions." In the case of Galileo, we can say that the latter took place: he did not *investigate* the tradition that he received. Thus, it is not that we have formed a sentimental attachment to our theory, as Steinbeck suggests, but that the judgments supporting our theory have been forgotten or were never known. The issue for Husserl as for Steinbeck is thus the proper formation of judgments, and for Husserl, this means ever making judgments on the basis of self-evidence.¹⁷

To judge authentically, on the basis of self-evidence, means both to judge in the presence of that which is judged about and to do so thoughtfully and without mediating judgments. In cases where "cultural acquisitions" conflict with our own experiences and system of beliefs, we must effect what John Drummond has called an "evidential reactivation" of the pertinent traditional judgments.¹⁸ For those sedimented judgments that we ourselves have formed on the basis of objective self-evidence, however, it is generally sufficient to "de-sediment" them by

thoughtfully re-executing them on the basis of judicial self-evidence, and this in two senses.¹⁹

To understand the first sense, let us consider an example that Husserl offers in *Experience and Judgment*: a mathematical theorem. As we work the theorem out for the first time, we do so with understanding. The result is an immediate judgment. Subsequently, though, we might recall the theorem, though this time as “a ‘mechanical’ reproduction.”²⁰ In *The Log*, Steinbeck offers a similar example. He says:

The criterion of validity in the handling of data seems to be this: that the summary shall say in substance, significantly and understandingly, “It’s so because it’s so.” Unfortunately, the very same words might equally derive through a most superficial glance, as any child could learn to repeat from memory the most abstruse of Dirac’s equations. But to know a thing emergently and significantly is something else again, even though the understanding may be expressed in the self-same words that were used superficially.²¹

In both cases, we do not think the judgment through and so our judgment is mediate at best, inert at worst. While proper judging requires the immediacy of cognition, it also requires a second sort of immediacy: that of simplicity. This is because some judgments—mathematical theorems or conclusions from *modus ponens*, for instance—are complex. As such, they are built upon simple forms that are original and enable the production of the complex forms that rest upon them. In order for complex judgment-forms to be properly executed, the simple forms upon which they rest must be judged with insight, in the immediacy of cognition. If they are only languidly judged, the possibility arises that the judgments supporting the complex forms will become sedimented, so that objective self-evidence will not be brought to bear on them. So it was, one might say, that science lost its meaning for life and lately photographed sea-otters were nonetheless taken to be extinct.

PARTS AND WHOLE S

Throughout *The Log*, Steinbeck meditates on the nature and relationship of parts and wholes. In one portion of the text, he takes up the theme in relation to the collecting interests of his party. He says, “Our interest had been from the first in the common animals and their associations, and we had not looked for rarities.”²² He reports that some marine biologists specialize in rare animals, hoping perhaps “to tack their names on unsuspecting and unresponsive invertebrates.”²³ For Steinbeck, “the rare animal may be of individual interest, but he is unlikely to be of much consequence in any ecological picture.”²⁴ He explains:

The disappearance of plankton, although the components are microscopic, would probably in a short time eliminate every living thing in the sea and change the whole of man’s life, if it did not through a seismic disturbance of balance eliminate all life on the globe. . . . But the extinction of one of the rare animals, so avidly sought and caught and named, would probably go unnoticed in the cellular world.²⁵

In addition to focusing on common marine fauna, Steinbeck expresses an interest “in relationships of animal to animal.”²⁶ He offers the example of the pelagic tunicates, whose colonies form themselves into the shape of the finger of a glove.

Steinbeck says, "Each member of the colony is an individual animal, but the colony is another individual animal, not at all like the sum of its individuals."²⁷ For instance, Steinbeck reports that while some of the tunicates encircle the open end of the colony, others collect and distribute food, protected, as it were, from what is outside the glove. Steinbeck raises the question of whether the animal is really the colony or the individual, and supplies his own answer: "Why, it's two animals and they aren't alike any more than the cells of my body are like me. I am much more than the sum of my cells and, for all I know, they are much more than the divisions of me."²⁸ Turning to fauna in general, Steinbeck suggests that "species are only commas in a sentence, that each species is at once the point and the base of a pyramid, that all life is relational . . ."²⁹ He continues:

And the units nestle into the whole and are inseparable from it. Then one can come back to the microscope and the tide pool and the aquarium. But the little animals are found to be changed, no longer set apart and alone. And it is a strange thing that most of the feeling we call religious, most of the mystical outcry which is one of the most prized and used and desired reactions of our species, is really the understanding and the attempt to say that man is related to the whole thing, related inextricably to all reality, known and unknowable All things are one thing and . . . one thing is all things, . . . all bound together by the elastic string of time.³⁰

Within these remarks, we find a number of striking similarities with ideas in Husserl. To unpack some of them, we can turn to *Experience and Judgment*, where Husserl takes up the idea of parts and wholes in the context of describing the three tendencies of prepredication. Within these tendencies, an object first obtrudes on the ego from a pre-given field of passive data.³¹ Next, the ego gives way to the obtruding object, yielding to it passively.³² Finally, the ego turns towards the object in active receptivity, responding to the object in the modes of simple apprehension and contemplation, explicative contemplation, and relational contemplation.³³ In laying out these tendencies, Husserl makes three remarks in particular that seem relevant to our understanding of Steinbeck. First, he notes that in addition to explicating an object "in a single line," it is possible to explicate it in a ramified fashion. Such ramified explication occurs when, "in going out from a substrate, determinations do not, as it were, step out in the direct path; rather, the latter themselves function in turn as substrates of additional explications themselves."³⁴ This happens in two ways: either we make an explicate into our theme, abandoning our original object of explication, or we continue to more precisely determine our original object by further determining its explicates. Husserl provides an example to illustrate these cases. If a flower bed becomes an object of explication for us, we may become so interested in a particular flower as to lose interest in the bed—or we may further investigate the flower so as to better know the bed. The former is an example of our losing interest in our original object, while the latter illustrates how that interest might be retained and enriched by ramified explication. In both cases, the flower "is rendered independent as an object for its own sake."³⁵ In the former case, however, the ego does not continue to hold the original substrate, that is, the flower bed, in grasp, while in the latter case, which Husserl describes as "essentially more interesting," the flower bed "remains the object of principal interest," despite the independence of its determination.³⁶

The possibility of ramified explication leads us to our second point, namely, that the distinction between substrate and determination is somewhat relative. As Husserl says, "Everything that affects and is objective can just as well play the role of object-substrate as that of object-determination or explicate."³⁷ Still, substrates and determinations are not *completely* relative, for Husserl identifies what he considers their limit cases, that is, their absolute forms. He says, "*An absolute substrate. . . is distinguished in this way, that it is simply and directly experienceable, that it is immediately apprehensible, and that its explication can immediately be brought into play.*"³⁸ For their part, "absolute determinations are objects to which the form of determination is essential; whose being must be characterized originally and on principle only as the being-such of another being."³⁹ As Husserl goes on to say, "*Absolute substrates are independent; absolute determinations are dependent.*"⁴⁰ Although these descriptions seem straightforward and far-reaching, there is a complication, namely, that all cognitive activity presupposes a domain of passive pregivenness, understood as the environment, the world. This domain is always copresent and cogiven with what stands out from it. Thus, there is a sense in which *no* object is independent, for each one is given over and against the horizon of the world. Or rather, there is a sense in which only *one* object is independent: the world itself. Husserl says, "Every finite substrate has determinability as being-in-something, and this is true *in infinitum*. But in the following respect the world is substrate, namely, everything is in it, and it itself is not an in-something."⁴¹

These considerations move in the direction of our third and final point, namely, Husserl's distinction between wholes and parts. According to Husserl, "Every substrate can be regarded as a *whole* which has *parts* in which it is explicated."⁴² Generally speaking, a whole can be understood as a unity that admits of partial apprehensions, while a part is one of the resultant explicates.⁴³ Husserl proceeds to differentiate two kinds of parts: pieces and moments. The latter are dependent parts that cannot subsist on their own apart from the whole. The former are independent parts, which Husserl says are "*connected* in the whole with other parts, . . . and it is this being-in-connection which characterizes the pieces of a whole, despite their independence, as against the members of a set. The members of a set are not connected with one another. This implies that *the whole is more than the mere sum of its parts.*"⁴⁴

With these remarks in mind, it is not hard to see the similarity between Husserl's and Steinbeck's positions. For instance, both thinkers envision the whole of things as entailing nesting. Thus, Steinbeck is inclined to interpret scientific taxonomy as a guide to understanding nature rather than a definitive account. Similarly, Husserl is well aware that wholes are bidirectionally relative, so that a piece of a whole can itself be considered a whole, while the original whole can be considered a piece of yet a larger whole. A second similarity between their positions can be found in regard to the context in which an object might be considered. For Steinbeck, while it is possible to consider animals in isolation from their environment, in reality they "nestle into the whole and are inseparable from it." Similarly for Husserl, objects are only ever given against the horizon of the world, so that there is no genuinely independent object, or, rather, only one: the world itself, the whole. A third similarity

can be found in the openness of either thinker to the whole being more than its parts. For Steinbeck, this possibility expresses itself in his so-called “phalanx theory,” where Steinbeck accepts the possibility that we (and other animals) can be and do more together than we can individually. For Husserl, it means that wholes are not simply assemblies of parts, but entail pieces in connection with each other. As with Steinbeck, this is only significant because, for Husserl, pieces contribute more in unison with each other than they do individually. Although this position does not have the moral import for Husserl that it has for Steinbeck, there is no good reason to think that it couldn’t be stretched into Husserl’s own moral accounting. A fourth and final similarity between the two thinkers can be found in their appeal to time as the final horizon. For Steinbeck, all things are one thing, one thing is all things—and what binds them together is “the elastic string of time.” Husserl’s account of time is of course far more nuanced and developed, but it plays an equally decisive role. For Husserl, the very possibility of experiencing and explicating an object is predicated on the synthetic operations of internal time-consciousness. Indeed, internal time-consciousness makes the constitution of the unity of identity possible. As the condition for both immanent and objective time, it is, so to speak, the final horizon, that which all experience presupposes.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this paper, I have attempted to show two strong parallels between Steinbeck’s *Log from the “Sea of Cortez”* and similar ideas from various texts of Husserl. In “Searching for ‘What Is’: Charles Darwin and John Steinbeck,” Brian Railsback argues that Steinbeck patterned his attitude and approach for the Sea of Cortez expedition on Darwin’s *Beagle* voyage.⁴⁵ He says that “the Sea of Cortez was for John Steinbeck what the Galapagos archipelago was for Charles Darwin: a pristine panorama of the natural world, perfect for the illustration of profound interpretations of biology.”⁴⁶ Indeed, Railsback identifies Darwin’s influence for the Steinbeck book as “seminal.” While it would be difficult to argue against the facts of Darwin’s influence on *The Log*, I wonder if it might not still be possible to identify the book, and perhaps even Steinbeck himself, as phenomenological. Both in this paper and the one mentioned at its outset, I have traced strong parallels in the work of these thinkers. Although there is no reason to think that Steinbeck was in any way familiar with Husserl, or indeed even aware of him, his frequent appeal to central phenomenological themes nonetheless would seem to qualify him as a phenomenologist—or at least phenomenological. Perhaps in the spirit of so much of his work, and in the spirit of Husserl’s equation of being and truth, Steinbeck came by these phenomenological themes as he was wont to come by so much of his material: through nature, that is, naturally.⁴⁷

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NOTES

- ¹ Steinbeck, John. 1995. *The log from the "sea of Cortez"*. London: Penguin Books. With an introduction by Richard Astro.
- ² Astro, Richard. 1974. Steinbeck's sea of Cortez. In *A study guide to Steinbeck: A handbook to his major works*, ed. Tetsumaro Hayashi, 168. Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press.
- ³ Steinbeck, *The Log*, p. 146.
- ⁴ Cooper, J.G. 1895. Catalogue of marine shells, collected chiefly on the Eastern Shore of Lower California for the California Academy of Sciences during 1891–1892. *Proceedings of the California Academy of Science* 5(2): 37.
- ⁵ Steinbeck, *The Log*, p. 148.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 148–149.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 149.
- ¹⁰ Husserl, Edmund. 1970. *The crisis of the European sciences and transcendental phenomenology*, trans. David Carr, Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy, ed. John Wild, 24. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.
- ¹² *Ibid.*
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 48–49.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 49.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 52.
- ¹⁶ Husserl uses language reminiscent of Steinbeck's in §105 of *Formal and Transcendental Logic*: "[I]t is essentially necessary that naïve experiencing and naïve judging come first. And, when the reflecting is serious, their naïveté is not that of light-mindedness, but the naïveté of an original intuiting, with the will to confine ourselves to what the intuiting actually gives" (Husserl, Edmund. 1978. *Formal and transcendental logic*, trans. Dorion Cairns, 279. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff).
- ¹⁷ In "Time, History, and Tradition," John Drummond provides an illuminating account of the sense in which, for Husserl, "[individual] consciousness . . . is both traditional and autonomous" (Drummond, John. Time, history, and tradition 2000. In *The many faces of time*, eds. John B. Brough and Lester Embree, 127. Dordrecht: Kluwer). Drummond rightly suggests that "for all thinking to be fully authentic, evidential reactivation would be required for every traditional belief, custom, practice, and rule" (p. 140). While such reactivation is a "worthy goal for humans," Drummond argues for its practical and theoretical impossibility (p. 146). See pp. 139–147.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 129.
- ¹⁹ In cases where memory fails to accurately revive a state of affairs, "de-sedimentation" would require objective as well as judicial self-evidence.
- ²⁰ Husserl, Edmund. 1973. *Experience and judgment: investigations in a genealogy of logic*, rev. and ed. Ludwig Landgrebe, trans. James S. Churchill and Karl Ameriks, 23. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- ²¹ Steinbeck, *The Log*, pp. 119–120.
- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 177.
- ²³ *Ibid.*
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 178.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 136.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 136–137.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 178.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 178–179.
- ³¹ Husserl, *Experience and Judgment*, pp. 76–79.
- ³² *Ibid.*, pp. 80–81.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 103–155.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 130.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid. In the latter case, we might say that the flower is a sort of second-order substrate. Husserl explains: “If the explicate is then explicated in its turn, while the same *S* remains the general theme, then, indeed, the explicate itself becomes in a certain way the theme and receives the substrate-form relative to *its* explicates. But its unique validity as *S'* is then *relative*. It does not lose the form as an explicate of *S*, and its own explicates retain the form of mediate explication of a second level” (ibid., p. 131).

³⁷ Ibid., p. 132.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 134.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 136.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 137. It is important to note that, strictly speaking, the world is not an object so much as the context against which all other objects are given. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka also considers the whole—what she calls the “unity-of-everything-there-is-alive”—and offers a “phenomenology of life” to articulate it. See Tymieniecka, Anna-Teresa. 2009. *The fullness of the logos in the key of life, book I: The case of god in the new enlightenment*, vol 100, *Analecta Husserliana*. Dordrecht: Springer.

⁴² Husserl, *Experience and Judgment*, p. 141.

⁴³ As Husserl goes on to say, in the most pregnant sense, wholes are comprised of parts and can be dismembered. Their parts are pieces when they are independent, moments when they are not.

⁴⁴ Husserl, *Experience and Judgment*, p. 144.

⁴⁵ Railsback, Brian. 1997. Searching for ‘what is’: Charles Darwin and John Steinbeck. In *Steinbeck and the environment: Interdisciplinary approaches*, eds. Susan Beegel, Susan Shillinglaw, and Wesley N. Tiffney, Jr., with a foreword by Elaine Steinbeck, 127–141. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 127.

⁴⁷ My thanks to Mike Kelly, who was kind enough to read a draft of this paper and make many helpful suggestions.

THE ROLE OF ART IN THE PHILOSOPHY CAMUS
AND SARTRE

ABSTRACT

The presented article will depict the problem of art. In existential philosophy. Concentrating on philosophy of Sartre and Camus, one can recognize the role the existentialists attribute to art. Both *Nausea* by Sartre and *L'homme revolte* by Camus contain premises for the thought, that man can reach a specific kind of “salvation” or in other words, find oneself through art. This act is always accompanied by creation, struggle with reality of both the creator and the spectator. The art however, as the only domain of human activity, which cannot be achieved in any other way in his existence. The meaning or understanding—open for new interpretations and possible to be temporarily achieved are offered by art itself. The existentialists, developing the problem of existence of human being point out to its ambiguous condition, stretched between authenticity and inauthenticity, becoming oneself and failure of such project. The art, as Sartre emphasizes, can be also divided to authentic and inauthentic, the first one opening before the man the possibility of richer being, allowing to realize, what authenticity and the road to understanding it is.

In *The Words*, Jean Paul Sartre depicts the role of literature in the human condition. *The Words* is a kind of *Memoir*, the genre especially popular with existentialist thinkers. In a very private mode he describes his childhood, his relationship with his grandfather and his mother. What is the most important in that very particular book though, is the Sartrean understanding of literature and its role in existence.

Sartre grows up in the house of his grandfather, who is a very severe and authoritarian man. The library becomes his only shelter, the only place where he can exercise his individual freedom unrestrained. As Sartre himself puts it: “I never tilled the soil or hunted for nests. I did not gather herbs or throw stones at birds. But books were my birds and my nest, my household pets, my barn and my country side.”¹ In his book about Sartre and Camus, Germaine Brée identifies the love-hate relationship with his grandfather as the primary factor which tied Sartre with literature.² In other words, Sartre’s sad childhood, dominated by the intellectual attitude and the strictness of his grandfather, forced him to look for another world, for a “better” reality. Literature in itself has given such “better”, “improved” sphere.

Sartre’s first contact with literature has a significant influence on his imagination and is the root of his later conviction that literature is superior to real life. This conviction prevails in Sartre’s philosophy. Sartre’s concept of the man as *being-for-himself* emphasizes the open structure of the human being. Thus Sartre treats man as the one, who consistently creates himself/herself. What’s more,

being-for-himself is a being without essence. In consequence the man can never be complete and satisfied. Such condition of the man has got only one possibility—literature.

The role of the literature is not only to create the domain of freedom in human imagination. Foremost it is the act of creating values, it is adding to the inexplicable and unreasonable world the missing meanings. As Sartre describes it in *The Worlds*, writer is not only a man who writes a novel, it is a man who creates a new reality.³ Such understanding of creative act, establishes a connection between writing and responsibility—a special kind of attitude and consciousness of a man who creates.

In *Nausea* Sartre describes such role of the art. Roquentin—the main character of the novel—has been looking for meaning of existence for so long, that he almost forgot what has been his endeavor. As unmet historian, unaccomplished man, he loses his ends, and himself. It is the art—true—or as Sartre names it—authentic art—which brings back Roquentin to life. Sartre depicts it in the form of two spheres. First level is the peace of music—the old ragtime song, which brings Roquentin back from disappointment and dejection to hope and will of action. The second level is the decision to write a book. And this decision, this concept of writing brings him back the meaning. Allowing to believe, that Roquentin's life is not lost, and devoid of sense.

That concept of art, the true, engaged art, in *The Nausea* is contrasted with inauthentic art. Sartre describes Roquentin visiting the Bouville museum and the art gallery. There the pictures of the meritorious citizens of Bouville are presented. This is the kind of art which from metaphysical point of view, according to Sartre, is a forgery of being, and life. Frederic Willis analyzes the concept of Sartre's literature wrote: "Roquentin facing the imposture of men who try to turn their non-existence into a most stable form of existence. Those man (noble citizens) took the standards to their society. They were guilty of systematical and totally self-centered *mauvais foi*, for which Roquentin hates them."⁴ That example of inauthentic art, which produces artificial values and brings artificial categories into world shows, that art is not only important, but also, that art belongs to the domain of responsibility. *The Nausea* illustrates how role of art can be important for the man and how it can enhance his consciousness. Thus aspects of the art must be very carefully chosen.

The case of authentic art (the most important and the most precious for Sartre), shown in *Nausea* explains intuition which we find in *The Words*—art as a domain of free creation, a scope of the possibilities and meaning. What is impossible on the level of everydayness, what is abandoned in human condition is rescued in literature and creation. Undoubtedly literature for young Sartre had a therapeutic role. In his philosophy he discovered something more than only possibility of relief and creation to "improve" reality. In his philosophy Sartre shows, that human being has got a chance for justification of his/her existence. An Act of creation is not an act of refuge from reality and its problems. It is the act of deeper understanding of himself/herself. It is the act of bringing into the un-axiological world the values.

From the ontological point of view *Being-for-himself*, the being which is for nothing, in the act of creation can find justification. The art, literature gives what is

impossible in other aspects and situations—ends. Man as being for nothing appears as being for writing.

The responsibility put on writers has its special burden. According to Sartre, writing is not only an act of creation of world's meaning but also it is the act of communication with the reader. The novelist always communicates, presents meanings to the readers. Thus the readers have opportunity to participate in novel's meanings. "The reader, through the mediation of the words the writer selects from the common language, lends his own consciousness and time to the author for the duration of the reading and re-creates the novel world."⁵ This special sort of communication constitutes a "commune" between the reader and the writer, obliging the writer to a special awareness. The act of writing depicted in "*What is Literature?*" is constantly the act of giving new perspectives of thinking, new values, new dimensions to other people. Therefore according to Sartre, an artist must be constantly concerned.⁶

This understanding of the literature and the role of the writer is used by Sartre in his own practice. *The Roads to Freedom (Les chemines de la liberte)* trilogy broaches such problems as war, loyalty, dignity, freedom and responsibility, and should be considered a great example of engaged literature. This novel was written in response to the World War II, moral problems and difficult decisions of the man in the time of moral values breakdown. The trilogy consists of three parts—*The Age of the Reason*, *The Reprieve*, and *Iron in the Soul*. In these three books Sartre describes live and death of Mathieu, teacher of philosophy, his search for himself, struggle with his weakness. The character of Mathieu allows Sartre to show how important is self-consciousness and human freedom. The freedom which can change everything—even impossible situations and man's own character.

For example, the scene of Mathieu's death, illuminates a problem of self creation of the man. As *Being-for-himself* man is looking for the *essence*, trying to constitute himself/herself. But because he/she is all his/her life *Being-for-change*, he/she never reaches the *essence*. Man can permanently change himself/herself. Mathieu in the hour of his death re-constitutes himself. In the final moment of his existence, he made a decision which changed everything concerning his being. From a conformist and a unpecific man he constitutes himself as a man of act. For Sartre it is very important to convince his readers that man has always a possibility to change, to become himself, till he/she is alive. To the last moment of his/her existence man creates himself/herself—as Mathieu who's death was the last act of self-creation.

The Roads to Freedom obviously exemplify the engaged literature. But such engagement we can find in every novel of Sartre. Every time he remains concerned about human nature. In each of his books he tries to show how human existence evolves and produces man's stance. Frequently Sartre emphasizes that everything depends on man's acting and decisions.

The responsibility of the artist in that practical aspect of Sartre's activity confirms that writing is a kind of conversation. In that special relation with others, according to Sartre the artist can alert the readers of possibilities in their life, bringing to them what remained hidden before their eyes.

A very similar concept of art and the act of writing (creation in general) we can find in Albert Camus' philosophy. "The writer tries to draw the materials of his art

out of the complex world in which he is involved, and which he understands only partly, accepting the flux, pain and joy, fully yet without submission.”⁷

The concept of the absurd in Camus philosophy assumes that it is impossible to explain the world. Unreasonable, unacceptable, and variable world agitates man, annoys man’s consciousness and forces him/her to construct coherent theory about the world. But because the world is not as man projected it in his coherent theory, that unpredictable character of the world is revealed. When the man discovers that his/her expectations are pointless, he starts experiencing emptiness. The absurd is spread in front of the man.

Dealing with that condition is possible in the stance of the rebel. The rebel is against the lack of the meaning, the absence of values and the lack of the reasonable principles in the world. What is the most important, the rebellion is undertaken in the name of the other man. Thus we can say, that to rebel is the most ethical attitude in Camus’ philosophy.

The most successful aspect of the rebel is the artistic one. The artistic disagreement on absurdity of the world leads to creation of art. The literature is a special type of the art in which the man can—in most complete way—cope with the world. As Camus depicted, writer uses an element of the real world. But writings compose elements of real world into a solid shape. Consequently writer inscribes the lacking order, mixing senses into creating a plot. As Harold Durfee describes: “The center of Camus’ aesthetic theory is the suggestion that art, of any type, is an activity which affirms and denies reality in one and the same act. It is always a denial of the way things are but, at the same time, it is always an affirmation of some reality, it is attempt to give order to the chaos of the given.”⁸

Albert Camus, in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, said that he could not live without his art.⁹ And he claimed that “art, authentic art could not but be in the service of the true and freedom.”¹⁰ That truth and freedom are elements which don’t exist in the world as eternal, objective rules. This is what man needs, searches for. The role of the artist is to bring back to the man the truth about the world and give to the reader respite from absurd.

Similarly to Sartre, Camus treated literature like a form of the dialogue between the writer and the reader. “For him, the language of literature was a language that could encompass conflicts and contradictions and so throw light on the obscurity of the heart.”¹¹ This is the way for Camus as for Sartre, by which the writer has to take special responsibility for his/her texts. But comparing these two philosophers and writers we can notice that Camus’ engagement was different than that of Sartre.

As Simone de Beauvoir noted in her memoirs, Camus—in opposition to Sartre—refuses to be a “proletarian writer”. Beyond his engagement in social matters, in his writings Camus is focused on human condition. And as we can see, it is the condition of every conscious being. Here we find an opposition to Sartrean attitude. Germaine Brée comments that differences in such way: Sartre always felt distance to the working class, Camus behaves as one of that class. For Sartre his writings had a Promethean meaning, he intended to enlighten his readers. Camus rather described problems than tried to solve them or enlighten anyone. What is most important:

“Camus saw working men as persons rather than a class. He had no sense of them or of himself as a brand of human beings set apart.”¹²

Therefore in *Rebel* Camus could keep a distance to the history, and man's action. *Rebel* is the crucial text for Camus' concept of human possibility, and existential acting. Camus analyzes how man can create his values without transcendence and how he can act in the meaningless world. First of all, the rebellion is the answer to the absurdity. It has three dimensions: metaphysical, historical and artistic one. The historical rebellion must be confronted with revolution. It is very important moment in Camus analysis. Such distinction permits to take notice of man's action and violence.

Investigating history of human rebel, Camus shows it as a form of metaphysical act against gods, Prometheus' refusal, man's fight for his freedom. The first step, metaphysical riot to break man free from gods, divine law. But on the next level man has to resist against their ruler—other man. So the metaphysical rebellion turns into a historical one. In the consequence, the rebellion is transformed into revolution. The riot against injustice and lack of value become an act of violence.

That history of violence and struggle against discrimination is demonstrated by human fate. The human fate begins with inexplicable act of god (rejection of Kain's offering), imperfections of human accomplishment, inherent conflict of man's nature. The *Rebel*—focusing on human struggle against his/her fate, against that, what is incomprehensible—concern of every human being. Therefore Camus refuses to proclaim himself as a “proletarian writer”. Although he understands the problem of the working class, in *The Rebel*, he proves that existence in general, is confronted with meaningless world. Exploration of history allowed Camus to state, that every classification, and every conflict can bring just violence and misery.

Albert Camus' attitude as a writer is connected with his moral convictions. Camus is a writer who is looking for possibilities of ethical act. The *Rebel* finishes with a treatise on art. In the act of artistic creation Camus tries to find, not only an axiological dimension, but foremost a dimension in which the man comes to terms with himself/herself. “For Camus, emotion was the path to thought, and aesthetic emotion ranked high among the productive, creative emotion in human lives. He was rooted in humanity.”¹³

This position of Camus on human nature and creativity is illustrated by his novel *The Plague*. In this novel the spreading disease can be treated as inexplicable world into which the man is thrown. The main character, doctor Bernard Rieux, a very principal man, is foremostly depicted as a man tired of the world in which he has been living. Despite this tiredness (state of feeling man's absurdity) during the plague he decides to act. Doctor Rieux actively involves himself in events as a medical doctor, and remains as such to the end. Camus describes in a subtle way, how doctor Rieux from the man of absurd becomes the man of rebellion. His decisions to stay and help even without hope and without proper medical service (the lack of cure)—it is the rebel against the world and meaningless destiny of human kind. Bernard Rieux's attitude is in Prometherian terms the struggle, on the most ethical level. The doctor doesn't expect anything in exchange. By his acting, he just expresses his disagreement with such state of reality.

Comparison of *The Plague* and *the Rebel* allows us to realize how Camus understands the role of the literature. The literature can give some typifies, shows the way, brings back the value and meaning. But literature is not a substitute of real life and real acting. This is why Camus—in his *Essay*—criticizes Sartre's *Nausea*. The disease of the main character—Roquentin—Camus interpreted as a typically intellectual illness. The nausea is just affliction of consciousness.¹⁴ It is not the plague which engulfs human life, and forces the man to fight with fate. “Camus questioned the appropriateness of the novel's ending. To write a novel (by Roquentin) seemed to him a trivial resolution incommensurable with the real issue at hand, literature being no panacea either for the ills of the life or for those of the intellect.”¹⁵ That is why his character, doctor Rieux devotes himself to work, in opposition to Roquentin who escapes into another form of illusion.

But we have to remember that the comparison between Camus and Sartre can be done in another way. Germaine Brée interprets *The Plague* and doctor Rieux as an example of acting person. Rieux confronted with Roquentin and his doubts must reveal the weakness of the second. In another book by Sartre—*The Roads to Freedom*—we can see something different. As Ames van Meter puts it, *Nausea* is an illustration of “lonely frustration, horror of existence, fear of readom, relived only by a piece of jazz music. In the subsequent three-volume novel, *The Roads to Freedom*, there is a gradual climb toward social values in the war.”¹⁶

Piotr Mróz in his monograph on Sartre shows that the engaged literature describes an involvement of its character, by describing man of action. And *The Road to Freedom* brings the very interesting example of such literature.

Piotr Mróz gives attention to Mathieu and Gomez—two main characters in *The Roads to Freedom*. To understand the role of literature in Sartre's view, it is better to focus on these two characters. As Mróz puts it Gomez is the man of action, and Mathieu is his antithesis.¹⁷ In *The Roads to Freedom* Sartre describes one moment in which everything becomes clear for Gomes. When Gomes reads in *Parid de Soir* that Ormuz was conquered in one moment he makes a decision. Gomes leaves Paris in a hurry. He leaves behind himself an abandoned space of his atelier, everything that had matter for him earlier. Without any explanation he just jumps into the action, into the warfare. Consequently Gomes is shown by Sartre as the man who puts everything on one scale—only the war becomes a real aim and a real need for Gomes.

Mathieu as the antithesis—his Hamlet's attitude—in the face of the war has more doubts and it gives him more reason to considerations. The engagement of Gomes is a pure act, the pondering of Mathieu is an expression of human nature. Gomes can act because he renounces reflection. Gomes realizes that in absurd world the acting is the only solution. Opposite to this attitude Mathieu is still the man of thought. The absurd becomes for Mathieu an all-embracing power.

Thus *The Road to Freedom* is an example, not only of engaged literature, but also shows Sartre's point of view on action. At the end of the book readers can discover that both characters lose their life. Mathieu lets him to be shot by a German soldier, Gomes after defeat leaves Europe. Emigration to USA for Gomes means some kind of punishment, atonement, after loosing his faith in his values and believes.

To understand Sartre and his characters we have to remember about his concept of *Being-for-himself*. The *Being-for-himself* is always seeking to move beyond itself, is always anxiety about his/her decisions, and radical insecurity about his being. Therefore both Mathieu and Gomes are convicted to uncertainty.

Nevertheless the comparison between Sartre and Camus always links to conflict between them. It was not only Camus, who discussed with Sartre, in *Rebel*, in his essays, but firstly it was Sartre who criticized Camus' attitude. The philosophical roads of these two thinkers part, but some of their concepts remain the same. *The Road to Freedom*, as *The Plague* is a response to events and the situation of the world. Both books illustrate the situation of the man in the world. In other words, we can say, that they are examples of Heideggerian category of *being-thrown-into-the-world*. Both Sartre and Camus emphasize man's action as a very important occurrence—the only way to respond to the world and the only one possibility to put together the values in the universe.

The role of the art has its very special influences. Sartre and Camus struggle with creative act and fate of the man, pointing out engagement in art as an important tool in man's thinking and understanding. Thus, according to these philosophers the art allows to understand not only the world, which by artistic view gains values and meaning, but also permits to understand the man himself/herself. The special case of such role of the art is in *The Fall* by Albert Camus. Burton M. Wheeler analyzes this book focusing on the role of the Van Eyck's altarpiece.

Van Eyck's *The Adoration of the Lamb* in the Cathedral of Bavon, Ghent, is very rich with many presentations, symbols, and meanings. In *The Fall* Camus refers to *The Just Judges*. According to Wheeler Camus in his literature always refers to the events or facts which he had experienced or about which he had heard.¹⁸ In his creation Camus is sometimes like a journalist, who puts in a special order the phenomenon of the world. This is why we can suspect that Camus refers to facts (the altarpiece of *The Just Judges* was stolen). Nevertheless, more important is the fact of symbols and representations which we can find in Van Eyck's work. In other words, in this case, the inspiration of the life and its real events is linked with the inspiration of the symbols and meanings rooted in the masterpiece of the art.

The figure of John the Baptist, who is the patron saint the Ghent, corresponds to the main character of the novel: Jean-Baptiste Clamence. Camus describe Jean-Baptiste Clamence as the judge-penitent, repentant for his inauthentic life, and in the same time is playing an ambiguous role for other people, as for his interlocutor. Clamence as the judge-penitent separates himself from his previous life, and his attitude, and what's more he sentences himself to banishment. From Paris' lawyer he transforms himself into judge-penitent in Amsterdam, who helps criminals, and keeps in hiding the stolen *The Just Judges*.

There is some irony, and some special, profound meaning in building the parallel between Jean Baptiste Clamence and the Saint John the Baptist. "By the stagnant canals, Clamence's baptism is to confession that there is neither hope of innocence nor rebirth. The solution is a method – that of judge-penitent."¹⁹ Clamence in his monologue makes in the same time a confession as well as he preaches. Here,

Clamence reveals the problem of existence—man's hopeless search for the true and himself/herself.

In *The Fall* Camus many Times refers to Van Eyck's masterpiece. This reference is given in the dimension of Christ and Christian values. Deity, Supreme Judge, but also forgiveness, mercy—these are the values and elements, which justify Christ and Christianity in culture. For atheist Camus, Supreme Judge performs without God and Transcendence Level. It is just the man who can take notice of the problem of his/her existence, and solve it by himself/herself. Thus it is just Clamence who is taking the role of the judge-penitent and can judge himself. Because it is only Clamence who can find some meanings and rights in his life. As Camus shows, there will be no other Supreme Judge. As a consequence Clamence remains with himself, knowing that *the water will be always too cold to jump in and rescue the girl*.²⁰ Judge-penitent knows that everything what he has done will remain with him, in his consciousness, in his conscience.

Looking at *The Adoration of the Lamb* Clamence realizes (and with him readers) that his life is connected with searching for the right and valuable existence. Moreover Clamence realizes that his reference to *The Lamb* always returns him to himself. Clamence, as he mentions himself, took the role of the Pope in the prison camp. Therefore in imprisonment Clamence tried to help, but also to govern other prisoners. Very soon he learnt that to be the Pope—to be somebody who knows the rules and values—is impossible. In Amsterdam Clamence returns to his camp episode to enlighten the fact of man's inability of such knowledge. But he prefers his escape to Amsterdam from the emptiness of his past life. Knowing that there is no God and that man cannot take god's place Clamence is changing from his earlier choices and earlier attitude.

Thus, following Wheeler, "Clamence has effected a complete reversal of the traditional role of the Baptist. Clamence is Elijah without a Messiah, an empty prophet for shabby times. He finger is raised toward a threatening sky rather than toward the Christ (. . .). He has chosen the flat, negative landscape of Amsterdam for his prophecy. He seeks only confession, not repentance, and fears the *bitter waters* of his baptism."²¹

In *The Fall* readers can find the role of Van Eyck's masterpiece—as the art can influence man's consciousness. On the other hand, *The Fall* as the creation of Camus, reveals the problem of authenticity and struggle for man's being. Therefore *The Fall* should be considered a very special example of engaged literature.

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NOTES

¹ Sartre, J.P. 1960. *The words*, 31. Paris.

² Brée, G. 1979. *Camus and Sartre. Crisis and commitment*, 60. New York, NY.

³ Sartre, J.P. 1960. *The words*, *ibid.*, p. 42.

⁴ Will, F. 1961. Sartre and the question of the character in literature. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 76(4): 458.

- ⁵ Brée, G. *Camus and Sartre. Crisis and commitment*, *ibid.*, p. 169.
- ⁶ Sartre, J.P. 1960. *What is literature?*, 65. Paris.
- ⁷ Camus, A. 1960. *The Rebel*, 38. Paris.
- ⁸ Durfee, H.A. 1955. Camus' challenge to modern art. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 14(2): 201.
- ⁹ Brée, G. *Camus and Sartre. Crisis and commitment*, *ibid.*, p. 75.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 75.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 76.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 68.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 251.
- ¹⁴ Camus, A. *Essay*, (Paris), p. 160.
- ¹⁵ Brée, G. *Camus and Sartre. Crisis and commitment*, *ibid.*, p. 138.
- ¹⁶ van Meter, A. Existentialism and the art. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 9(3): 255.
- ¹⁷ Mróz, P. 1992. *Drogi nierzeczywistości*, 105. Kraków: Uniwersytet Jagielloński.
- ¹⁸ Wheeler, B.M. 1982. Beyond despair: Camus' the Fall LAND Van Eyck's "Adoration of the lamb". *Contemporary Literature* 23(3): 350.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 352.
- ²⁰ Camus, A. *The Fall*, Paris, *ibid.*, p. 38.
- ²¹ Wheeler, B.M. Beyond despair: Camus' the fall land Van Eyck's "Adoration of the lamb". *Contemporary Literature* 23(3): 351.

STAGING HEIDEGGER: CORPOREAL PHILOSOPHY,
COGNITIVE SCIENCE, AND THE THEATER

ABSTRACT

Identifying the extent to which neuroscience, bio-linguistics, and fundamental ontology intersect, this paper explores how cognitive science and Heidegger's hermeneutic approach both indicate that "the mind," as embodied in a physiological frame, operates in tandem with all of our affective mechanisms in order to fashion subjectivity and to construct a composite of "reality." Emergent data in cognitive science also coincides with Heidegger's assertion that the phenomenon of empathy plays a particularly salient role in human interaction and conceptions of selfhood. Since literary works can play such a radically important role in how we understand "the world" and how we conceptualize Otherness and since literature, itself, functions by evoking empathy, I propose that dramatic performance, as literature embodied, constitutes a particularly effective mode of representation through which being-in-the-world materializes aesthetically.

In this paper, I seek to illuminate the extent to which Heidegger's fundamental ontology intersects with emergent data from cognitive science, and I explore how these intersections situate the physical body as that through which meaning becomes in any way possible. Findings in cognitive science suggest that human anatomical structure informs and oversees the entire spectrum of our cognitive processes, so the "mind," as embodied in a physiological frame, operates in tandem with all of our affective mechanisms in order to fashion subjectivity and to construct a composite of "reality." As does Heidegger, data from cognitive science indicates that human beings glean meaning from spatio-temporal orientation, from what Heidegger terms factual concretion. Furthermore, as Heidegger determines that "shared intelligibility" occasions meaningful human interaction, discoveries in neuroscience have possibly decoded the physiological process of empathy. To varying degrees, our western philosophical inheritance—from Platonic Form to Cartesian Dualism to the Hegelian Idea—has systematically privileged the abstract over the material, thus explorations into the ways in which physiology informs philosophical thought constitutes a radical break from traditional notions of understanding the human sense of life, of living, and of understanding the world around us. Further still, since literary works can play such a radically important role in how we understand "the world" and how we conceptualize Otherness and since literature, itself, functions by evoking empathy, I propose that dramatic performance, as literature embodied, constitutes a particularly effective mode of representation through which being-in-the-world materializes aesthetically.

For now, we will delay our investigation into theater and examine the salient ways in which fundamental ontology and cognitive science are compatible and explore why such compatibilities matter. One cannot ignore, however, that comparisons between Heidegger's work and contemporary science may first appear troubling. Not only does he wrestle with empirical science and privilege interpretation over knowledge, Heidegger treats the body ambiguously in his writings.¹ In the *Heraclitus Seminar*, for example, he describes "the body phenomenon" as "the most difficult problem" (146). In *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, he speaks of "the neutrality of Dasein," but complicates this notion by continuing that "neutral Dasein is never what exists; Dasein exists in each case only in its factual concretion. . . in each case dispersed in a body" (137). Though these direct references to the body are scarce in his canon, the materiality of Dasein remains implicit throughout *Being and Time*.² To be sure, Heidegger acknowledges that, resulting from birth, each human being is thrown into the world at a particular place at a particular time, but we shall address Dasein's facticity in more detail shortly. Heidegger further articulates Dasein's temporal structure by asserting its finitude, for Dasein constitutes a being that inevitably "finds itself *faced* with the nothingness of the possible impossibility of its existence" (*Being and Time* 245) [266]. Between birth and death, human beings assimilate into a cultural matrix and utilize a network of objects as equipment for living. As stated in *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, "we understand ourselves and our experience by way of the activities we pursue and the things we take care of" (159). In *Being and Time*, Heidegger simply asserts, "one *is* what one does" (*BT* 223) [239]. The importance of equipment in human life clearly presupposes an embodied reality. To slightly tweak Heidegger's own classic example, when I use a hammer to build a fence *in order to* keep my dog in the yard for *the sake of* being a responsible pet owner, it is clearly my body that hammers. Moreover, when the hammer breaks, rendering the process no longer transparent, my eyes recognize the problem, and I am jettisoned from the rhythm of the task.

A subtler element of Heidegger's work, however, points to the implicit corporeality of fundamental ontology. The physical body informs the very language Heidegger uses, a language carefully crafted so as not to re-inscribe the philosophical tradition from which he seeks to deviate. With terms like *thrownness*, *fallenness*, *dwelling*, *clearing*, *being-in-the-world*, and *being-there*, Heidegger avoids terms like metaphysics, spirit, and soul, instead opting for metaphors conceivable only from within the context of an embodied reality. A brief foray into the theories of bio-linguistics posited by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson will help elucidate the bodily dimensions of some of these terms.

In *Philosophy of the Flesh*, Lakoff and Johnson argue that we can only understand abstract concepts metaphorically and that our capacity to construct metaphors is integrally linked to our physiology. Their primary finding is that metaphor "is embodied in bodily experience in the world" and that it "pairs sensorimotor experience with subjective experience" (73). In short, the ways in which we conceptualize language, space, and abstract thought stem from the cognitive unconscious and the embodied mind. Therefore, "when we conceptualize understanding an idea (subjective experience) in terms of grasping an object (sensorimotor experience)," we

produce conceptual metaphors (46).³ The primary metaphor above indicates that *knowing is grasping* (*I've got a handle on what you are saying*). Another primary metaphor indicates that *states are locations* (*I'm falling into a pit of depression*). Heidegger incorporates this notion extensively. For example, Heidegger's idea of being-*there* confronts abstraction metaphorically. Though described in depth in Sub-Sections 351–355 of *Being in Time*, Hubert Dreyfus succinctly outlines the concept of being-*there*. “*The world* is the whole of which all subworlds are elaborations. Now we add that subworlds are lived in by a particular Dasein by *being-in-a-situation*. Each Dasein's *there* is *the* situation as organized around *its* activity. The shared situation is called *the clearing*; being-in-the-clearing is *being-*there**” (165). To briefly unpack the metaphor, a clearing indicates a state of openness and extended visibility; to be in the clearing corresponds to occupying the shared terrain of a human socio-cultural situation. To possess a *there* is to possess a particular role in or understanding of this spatio-temporal orientation. *Being-*there** constitutes the *state* of participation in this situation. In terms of conceptual metaphor, Dasein's state *corresponds to a location*, be it in the clearing, in the situation, or in the *there*. At the same time, *thrownness* makes *being-*there** possible. *Causes are physical forces* denotes another conceptual metaphor (*That article launched my career*). Heidegger's term, *thrownness*, relies on the schema of conceptual metaphor. Resulting from my factual concretion, I am forcibly hurled into the material conditions out of which I forge my conception of identity. Throughout his conceptual rhetoric, Heidegger intuitively (and presciently) incorporates conceptual metaphor to articulate the nature of his thought. Since *Being and Time* suggests that Dasein gains access to being only through the physicality of everyday existence, the form of his language reflects the content of his premise. As one must possess a body to understand his metaphors, one must have a body to experience the disclosedness of being Heidegger describes.

Heidegger, however, goes to great pains to specify that one's access to being corresponds to one's *interpretation* of it, stating, “to have an understanding of being” amounts to one's ability to “sustain an interpretation of it” (*Being and Time* 13–14) [15]. This interpretation, however, remains always already shaped by one's factual concretion; spatio-temporal contingencies inform auto-disclosure. The very fact that the human exists compelled to interpret and remains driven to fashion his or her being in context with the material conditions of culture stands as a fundamental component of personhood. For Heidegger, “as a being, Dasein always defines itself in terms of a possibility which it is and somehow understands in its being” (ibid. 41) [44]. The *somehow* here is crucial. As an essential feature of Dasein, Heidegger concludes that this human capacity for and compulsion to self-interpret is pre-original, made possible by what he designates as *pre-ontological knowledge*. “The question of being is nothing else than the radicalization of an essential tendency of being that belongs to Dasein itself, namely, of the pre-ontological understanding of being” (ibid. 12) [15]. This primordial understanding equates to the manner in which we instinctively interpret ourselves in accordance with the shared social practices of which we are a part while simultaneously possessing an intuitive ability to recognize and adapt to these practices. Though no person is essentially predisposed

to manifest any particular interpretation, we are all, by virtue of being human, wired to understand ourselves insofar as we fit into a cultural matrix. Accordingly, Heidegger states that being human cannot be distinguished from interacting with other people. In this regard, “the world of Dasein is a *with-world*. Being-in is *being-with* others. . . Dasein in itself is essentially being-with” (ibid. 112–113) [118, 120]. Only by existing alongside the Other can I be “myself;” only by existing alongside the Other can I achieve my potentiality of being. With a mutually recognized and understood background of social practices, I participate in a sphere of shared intelligibility. In sum, a fundamental characteristic of being human amounts to our capacity to be with others by *acting* the way they do. Heidegger, however, does not tell us *how* we acquire this pre-ontological knowledge.

Cognitive science can assist us when addressing these questions. Research suggests that imitation, not language, constitutes that which separates human beings from other animals. For Hurley and Chater, imitation is “a rare ability that is fundamentally linked to characteristically human forms of intelligence, in particular to language, culture, and the ability to understand other minds” (Hurley and Chater qtd. in Iacoboni 43). As outlined in his 2008 work, *Mirroring People*, Iacoboni explains the anatomical origin of this human capacity to imitate. A special cell has been detected in the premotor cortex of the human brain called the mirror neuron. When we are infants, mirror neurons imitate actions that are not in our motor repertoire by distinguishing the *intent* of the action performed. By determining the goal that a person seeks to accomplish, this cell fires and imitates the action then constructs a memory of this action that can be later recalled to accomplish similar actions in the future. Our ability to infer the intentions (or to “read the minds”) of others parallels Heidegger’s notion of pre-ontological knowledge. The transmission of cultural practices occurs in a similar fashion. As genes pass down through generations, “memes” are cultural characteristics inherited by “non-genetic means,” that is, via imitation (Iacoboni 52). As mirror neurons enable a child to integrate into a culture by imitating background practices, those background practices themselves are perpetuated via collective imitation.

At the same time, however, Iacoboni stresses that mirror neurons do not reduce the human to a blindly imitative organism. We possess what he terms a “super mirror neuron” that controls and modulates the activity of the “classic” mirror neuron. Though research still needs to be conducted on these super mirror neurons, it appears that by way of super mirror neurons, we can shut down the process of mimicry and determine “that the observed action should not be imitated” (Iacoboni 203). This concept of selective imitation coincides with Heidegger’s notion of authentic being, an element of Heidegger’s work we will return to. In addition, as our bodies and minds develop and our catalogue of memories expands, our mirror neurons assume a different form of imitation. These neurons activate when we observe familiar events or behaviors and then trigger in us memories of similar actions that we ourselves have performed. Prompted by these memories, mirror neurons produce a mild simulation of the activities we witness. For Iacoboni, “we understand the mental states of others by simulating them in our brain, and we achieve this end by way of mirror neurons” (34). In this regard, therefore, mirror neurons enable human

beings to experience the complex emotion of empathy. Clearly, empathy assists us in forging relations with others and in sharing emotions, needs, experiences, and goals. We are empathetic insofar as we can relate to (or reproduce in ourselves) the experiences of the Other. As Heidegger asserts that pre-ontological knowledge positions Dasein as that which must exist alongside other beings to understand its own being, Iacoboni concludes that “mirror neurons are brain cells that seem specialized in understanding our existential condition and our involvement with others. They show us that we are not alone, but are biologically wired and evolutionarily designed to be deeply connected with one another” (Iacoboni 267). Mirror neurons, enabling empathy, undergird “shared intelligibility” and facilitate our existence alongside other people in this task of living.

A lingering question may well remain. What does any of this have to do with literature? For cognitive theorist Patrick Hogan, our ability to understand literature stems from neurobiological processes that enable us to generate any meaning at all. With limited cognitive capacities, we store only shards of our personal histories. “Only bits and pieces of incoming data are represented in memory,” so we visualize mere “fragments of experience” (Hogan 161). As Hogan states, “we do not really remember the past, we reconstruct it” (ibid. 161). Therefore, when reading a novel or watching a play, “we cluster together traits for scenes, characters, events. We engage in an ongoing synthesis of these in working memory. As we do this, we envision the scenes. . . in partial and fragmentary ways” (ibid. 162). In our aesthetic experience of literature, therefore, the neurobiological method by which we reconstruct the details of a fictional universe “is structurally parallel to the reconstruction of memory” (ibid. 162). In short, as far as our cognitive processes register data, there exists no difference between “the fictional” and “the real.” For this reason, Lisa Zunshine concludes that mirror cells and the Theory of the Mind “make literature as we know it possible” (5). After all, we understand literature insofar as we are capable of identifying a character’s emotions, relate those feelings to our own experience, and live those feelings vicariously. The more readily a work lends itself to this process, the more powerfully we may connect with it. To be sure, however, mirror neurons are *visually* stimulated. As Iacoboni states, “my brain is dealing with what it *sees*, and what it sees determines what I *feel*” (108). If mirror neurons enable empathy and if literature functions by evoking empathy, I suggest that this literary evocation emerges with particular clarity when deployed physically, that is to say, when depicted onstage.

As Heidegger and cognitive findings insert the physical body into philosophical discourse, dramatic representation inserts the physical body into literature. In a play, an audience confronts a body of work in which human bodies collide. Other forms of literary representation, like the novel, the poem or the short story, rely on the reader’s imagination to assemble the physical world in which the narrative transpires. Even in film, a modality in which the visual details are clearly provided, the audience is (a) divorced in time and space from the events presented onscreen, (b) confined to a specific perspective determined by the camera, and (c) observes two-dimensional, non-human forms.⁴ When watching a play, however, the spectator, in intimate proximity to the stage, *shares space and time with an embodied fictional*

world. To be sure, the presence of the action affords a dynamic unavailable in other literary modes. The actor's tone, inflection, volume of speech, gestures, and bodily movements deploy meanings all their own and can subvert the words spoken onstage. Since our bodies signify, Kier Elam asserts, "the physical conditions of performance. . .materialize discourse" (209).⁵ Dramatic performance, as does our day-to-day coping in the world, relies on the body to deploy meaning and requires others to recognize these material significations.

An analysis of a particular dramatic works is now in order. By briefly exploring Lorca's *The House of Bernarda Alba*, we can gauge the effectiveness of staged performance, identify how this effectiveness differs from other literary modes, and situate the work within a Heideggerian context.

The House of Bernarda Alba begins just after the funeral of a land-owning aristocrat in an Andalusian Vega in rural Spain. Bernarda, the matriarch of the family, assumes authority in the household upon the death of the patriarch. In deference to her inherited notions of appropriate conduct, she confines herself and her daughters to the domestic sphere as an expression of grief. "During our eight years of mourning, no wind from the street will enter this house! Pretend we have sealed the doors and windows with bricks. That's how it was in my father's house, and in my grandfather's house" (205). With the exception of Augustias, courted by the young philanderer in the village, Pepe El Romano, Bernarda forcibly sequesters her children and pronounces her daughters ineligible for marital union. The youngest of these women, Adela, most firmly resists her mother's authority. In open rebellion, Adela cries, "I don't want to be locked up! I don't want my skin to dry up. . .I don't want to waste away and grow old in these rooms. . .I want to get out!" (220). Protesting Bernarda's absolute power and unwilling to sublimate her desire, Adela eventually consummates her relationship with Pepe in an act of revolt against what she deems unjust cultural codes. By the end of the drama, however, once abandoned by Pepe and defeated by her mother's unbending power, Adela kills herself to avoid a life of confinement.

Finalized in the summer of 1936, *The House of Bernarda Alba* was completed just months before Francisco Franco formally seized power as regent of the Kingdom of Spain. Dreams of the New Republic were shattered, and fascism ruled the day.⁶ In this context, Bernarda's radical confinement of her family corresponds to Franco's totalitarian state. By situating the drama in the domestic sphere, Lorca (though clearly unknowingly) draws on conceptual metaphor. As Lakoff and Johnson assert, "authority in the moral sphere" has often been "modeled on dominance in the physical sphere" (303). Conceiving morality in these terms, however, is clearly problematic. For example, according to the logic of physical dominance, Lakoff and Johnson warn, since men are so often physiologically more powerful than women, men assume "moral authority" over women. Such a leap situates moral order as the outgrowth of natural order. This simply boils down to a might-makes-right philosophy devoid of any morality at all. Lorca's drama challenges the notion that morality is a system power relations. Bernarda, a physically large and overbearing woman whose threatening presence is intensified by the phallic cane she wields, embodies perverse moral authority because she uses her physical power to legitimize her

oppressive rule. Considering the extent to which Franco censored the exchange of information, violently silenced dissent, and positioned his regime as the absolute moral authority, the parallels between the Alba home and the socio-political dynamics in Lorca's Spain emerge partly through *physical* metaphors.

Furthermore, confinement is central to the moral logic of the play, and as embodied beings, humans conceptualize *Change as Movement*. Lakoff and Johnson establish that since change in movement results in a change in location, physical motion corresponds metaphorically to transformations in emotional, intellectual, or ontological states. Extending the metaphor, inability to move suggests an inability to change. In this regard, Adela and her sisters long to leave the house and imagine the olive groves beyond the walls as an emblem of freedom, as a place where they could "forget about what's eating away at us" (242). In addition, as Adela seeks a life with Pepe she conflates the world beyond the house's prison walls with a world of agency, self-actualization, and power.

Considering that the audience engages the drama from within the closed walls of a theater, the spectator is as confined to Bernarda's totalitarian rule as are her children. Under these circumstances, as Adela struggles for independence, I—as a member of the audience—identify with her plight as my mirror neurons fire and simulate past experiences in which my freedom has been constrained. When reading *The House of Bernarda Alba*, ellipses litter the text. In these pregnant pauses, Adela's body language and intonation convey a depth of tension that she does not articulate verbally. The spectator, by way of mirror neurons, possesses the privilege of filling in these gaps by *inferring Adela's state of mind*. Memories of similar events triggered *involuntarily and unconsciously*, endow the observer a capacity to endure, vicariously and simultaneously, the hardships with which the young woman grapples. This experience of recall, however, is enriched by the material conditions of the audience member. Confined to a chair and subjected to Bernarda's tyrannical rants, the observer's capacity to empathize increases since *this particular experience of observation* mildly reproduces captivity.

Lorca's dramatic form furthers an observer's ability to "participate" in the drama. According to Lorca, the more accurately a theatrical production depicts "realistic" socio-material conditions, the more effectively the performance will impact the audience. Autor, from Lorca's *Play Without a Title*, articulates this aesthetic: "reality begins because the author does not want you to feel that you are in the theater, but rather in the middle of the street" (qtd. in Soufas 14). In stark opposition to Brechtian alienation, Lorca seeks dramatic representation "so real" that it renders day-to-day affairs as accurately as does "a photographic document" (Stainton 430). Instead of jolting the audience from the complacency of observation, as Brecht does, Lorca asserts that the more closely a work of art simulates being-in-the-world, the more capable it is of eliciting empathy and the more capable it is, therefore, of initiating change. In Heideggerian terms, Lorca's realism presents props onstage, not as objects, but as a network of equipment through which a particular *situation* becomes intelligible. This event conveys far more than can "a photographic document" because the ideas at play onstage are dispersed in the bodies of the performers. As with the case of conceptual metaphor, abstraction materializes. When

presented “realistically,” the play recalls life outside the theater as my mirror cells recall my life outside the present. Though critics often reject realism because it re-enforces ontic-ontological conditions by mimetically reproducing them, Lorca conforms to aesthetic traditions to more effectively subvert a social order.⁷

It is here that Lorca and Heidegger intersect. As Lorca endeavors to present the socio-material conditions of the world, Heidegger’s conception of being cannot be extricated from those conditions. At the same time, however, Heidegger in no way proposes that Dasein must fully integrate into cultural practices. Since my capacity to be emerges from my pre-ontological knowledge, I can interpret my being only *in context* with the shared background practices of which I am a part. As Heidegger’s notion of the authentic comportment of being indicates, my interpretation of being is always *mine*. I exist free in my questioning and choosing and can reject prevailing ideology if and when it impinges on my interpretation of being. Though authentic being cannot be sustained, for one will fall again and again into the familiarity of conformity, there can exist moments of resoluteness during which one takes a stand for something and challenges a social system.

For Heidegger, authenticity is precipitated by what he calls Angst, experienced when “everyday familiarity collapses” and Dasein enters the “‘mode’ of *not-being-at-home*” (*Being and Time* 176) [188–189]. Since the world functions as our *dwelling*, not being at home in the world dislodges us from the zenlike harmony of being-in-the-world. As the hammer breaks the continuity of my task, angst occurs when background practices become no longer transparent, when they impinge on my capacity to pursue my utmost potentiality. In *House of Bernarda Alba*, none of the daughters exists at home in the abode, but only Adela musters the courage to revolt. At the climax of the play, when Adela smashes the “tyrant’s rod,” the audience actually sees the cane break and hears the wood splinter. This generates a somatic response in the observer that cannot be experienced when reading the play and is drastically reduced when watching a filmed performance. The power of physical expression, signified in and by the bodies of the actors and registered viscerally in and by the bodies of the spectators, is the privilege of theatricality. In theater, we see world of ideas come to life. For this reason, Aldo Tassi draws parallels between philosophy and performance when he states, “both philosophy and the theatre. . .originally arose as activities to take us beyond the empirical level to involve us in the pursuit of truth as an unconcealment process” (qtd in Krasner and Saltz 3). From a different tack, William W. Demastes proposes that “the life that grows from the theater” demonstrates “the result of material realities drawn together in ways that create a ‘life in theater’ not altogether different from a rising sense of consciousness” (9). The above propositions echo Heidegger’s essay, “Art and Space,” in which when he tells us that “art is the bringing-into-work of truth, and truth means unconcealment of being” so “space” becomes “decisive in the work of visual art” (307). Via conceptual metaphor and mirror neurons, audience members occupy a space in which they can bare witness to abstraction coming-into-the-presence-of-being. More specifically, as observers of *The House of Bernarda Alba* come to relate to a woman straitjacketed by an oppressive matriarch, they also come to understand the potential consequences of political injustice. Furthermore,

the ultimate tragedy in Lorca's play consists of the extent to which Adela's agency is limited. Though she repudiates totalitarian rule, her only recourse is self-destruction. In the play's socio-moral economy, freedom is impossible in a totalitarian state. As a cautionary tale, therefore, Lorca warns us that Adela's fate may be our own if we adopt cultural practices unquestioningly.

In sum, though emerging from within background practices and prevailing ideology, literary works permit us access to a conceptual realm in which cultural practices can be challenged with impunity. Though tethered to the social system in which we come to be, we always determine the extent to which we mimic culture or mirror behavior. By visually encountering our world, we make our choices. The theater replicates this endeavor. We empathize or identify with a situation or we may altogether reject a world depicted onstage. As in life, a performance transpires as actions do in the materiality of our everyday lives. . . in real time and among other human beings. Theater, therefore, occasions the union of the ontic and the ontological. As Heidegger urges us to rethink our roles and to pursue the liberating potential of authentic Being, we physically navigate a slipstream of cultural networks, slough them off and adopt new modes of being, in a finite recurrence we call living. Theater mirrors these transformations.

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NOTES

¹ For investigations into Heidegger's treatment of the body, see Cerbone, David R. 2001. Heidegger and Dasein's 'bodily nature': What is the hidden problematic. *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 8(2): 209–230, Didier Franck's "Being and Living" (Cadava, Eduardo, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy. 1991. *Who comes after the subject?* London: Routledge), and Krell, David Farrell. 1992. *Daimon life: Heidegger and Life Philosophy*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, and Levinas', Emmanuel. 1998. *Otherwise than being*, trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburg, CA: Duquesne University Press.

² For Heidegger's most extensive analysis of the body, see Heidegger, M. 1995. *Metaphysical foundations of logic: World, finitude, solitude*, trans. W. McNeill, and N. Walker. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, particularly pp. 200–250.

³ Convergent data indicates that conceptual metaphor exists in languages all over the world, from Hopi to Japanese to Pashto. Furthermore, American Sign Language utilizes conceptual metaphor. Additional examples of primary conceptual metaphor include: *Knowing is Seeing*, *Time is Motion*, and *Purposes are Destinations*. For an extensive list of primary metaphors, see Lakoff, G., and M. Johnson. 1999. *Philosophy of the flesh*. New York, NY: Basic Books, specifically pp. 50–54.

⁴ See Carlson, Marvin. 1990. *Theatre semiotics: Signs of life*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

⁵ Elam goes on to describe the varying methods of signification specific to theater. He outlines "kinesics," or body language, "proxemics," or the ways in which actors use space to articulate meaning, and "paralinguistics," or the ways that volume, pitch, and tempo of a speech pattern deploy meaning. For more on this, see Elam, Keir. 2002. *The semiotics of theatre and drama*. London: Routledge. Similarly, psychoanalyst-linguist Julia Kristeva addresses this "materialization of discourse," asserting that "language" consists of a bodily component, the "semiotic," and an organized component of grammatical and phonetic rules, the "symbolic." For Kristeva, the semiotic impregnates the symbolic and imbues it with meaning via intonation, gestures, and speech patterns. For more on this, see Kristeva, J.

1997. Revolution in poetic language. In *The portable kristeva*, ed. Kelly Oliver, 23–92. New York, NY: Columbia University Press or Kristeva, J. 2000. *The sense and non-sense of revolt*, trans. Jeanine Herman. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

⁶ Following economic depression and general civil unrest, Spain embraced left-wing government in 1931. The socialist policies, however, did not improve social conditions as quickly as the population demanded and in the fall of 1934, the socialist left was ousted for right wing government in a public election. Several labor organizations, most notably the trade unions and coal miners, feared that right wing government would morph into intolerant fascism akin to Hitler's rising regime in Germany. When these labor groups organized into a militia of thirty thousand armed men, the government responded with force. Concerned that socialist interests threatened the solvency of right-wing power, General Francisco Franco seized control and declared war on left-wing political agencies. Lorca, an outspoken member of left-wing political interests was targeted for "seditious" activities. In 1933, Lorca enlisted in an organization called Association of Friends of the Soviet Union, voiced his concerns for Hitler's activities in Germany, and supported the socialist party, The Popular Front, in 1936. Identified as an enemy of the state, Lorca was forcibly detained on August 16, 1936 and shortly thereafter disappeared. For more socio-historical analysis of Lorca, see Stainton, Leslie. 1999. *Lorca: A dream of life*. New York, NY: Farrar and Gibson, Ian. 1989. *Federico Garcia Lorca*. London: Faber and Faber.

⁷ For extensive critiques of realism as a viable mode of representation, see Case, Sue-Ellen, and Jeanie K. Forte. 1985. From Formalism to Feminism. *Theater* 16: 62–65 and De Lauretis', Teresa. 1990. Sexual indifference and lesbian representation. In *Performing Feminisms: Feminist critical theory and theatre*, ed. Sue-Ellen Case, 17–40. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press.

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**INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY OF PHENOMENOLOGY
AND LITERATURE (AN AFFILIATE OF THE WORLD
PHENOMENOLOGY INSTITUTE)**

Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, Program Coordinator

33rd ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Topic: **DESTINY: THE INWARD QUEST, TEMPORALITY,
AND DOOM**
Place: Radcliffe Gymnasium, 10 Garden Street, Radcliffe Yard,
Cambridge, Massachusetts
Dates: May 12 and 13, 2009

P R O G R A M

Tuesday, May 12, 2009
REGISTRATION, 8:30–9:30 AM

9:30 AM **INAUGURAL ADDRESS:**
 Chaired by: Rebecca M. Painter, Marymount Manhattan College

Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, World Phenomenology Institute

PUBLIC INVITED

PLEASE POST!

Tuesday, May 12, 2009
10:00 AM

SESSION I:
Chaired by: Piotr Mroz, Jagiellonian University

TEMPORALITY IN FITZGERALD'S *BABYLON REVISITED*
Bernadette Prochaska, Marquette University

"THE LIMITS OF ORDINARY EXPERIENCE": A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO
RAPPACCINI'S DAUGHTER
R. Kenneth Kirby, Samford University

THE NON-INTERCHANGEABLE CORRELATIVES OF FATE AND DESTINY
Imafedia Okhamafe, University of Nebraska

WHAT MASIE KNEW IN *WHAT MASIE KNEW*
Victor Gerald Rivas, University of Puebla

RECUPERATION OF DEATH BY TWO FRENCH FEMALE AUTHORS, SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR
AND SOPHIE CALLE
Marcelline Block, Princeton University

1:00 PM

Lunch at the Harvard Faculty Club

3:00–7:00 PM

SESSION II:
Chaired by: Bernadette Prochaska, Marquette University

HUMAN DRAMA IN PHILOSOPHY OF TISCHNER
Leszek Pyra, Krakow, Poland

THE TRANS-SUBJECTIVE CREATION OF POETRY AND ATMOSPHERE:
A SHORT STUDY OF THE JAPANESE Renga
Tadashi Ogawa, University of Human Environments, Okazaki, Japan

THE THEORY OF LITERATURE AND POETRY IN MERLEAU-PONTY'S PHENOMENOLOGY
Piotr Mroz, Jagiellonian University

HEIDEGGER AND MUSIL
Mark M. Freed, Central Michigan University

PRESENT ETERNITY: QUESTS OF TEMPORALITY IN THE LITERARY PRODUCTION OF THE
<<EXTREME CONTEMPORAIN>> IN FRANCE (THE WRITINGS OF DOMINIQUE FOURCADE
AND EMMANUEL HOCQUARD)
Silvia Riva, University of Milan

MORAL SHAPES OF TIME IN HENRY JAMES
Meili Steele, University of South Carolina

FAULKNER'S *THE SOUND AND THE FURY* AS ANTI-ENTROPIC NOVEL
Jerre Collins, University of Wisconsin – Whitewater

PUBLIC INVITED

PLEASE POST!

Wednesday, May 13, 2009
9:00 AM

SESSION III:
Chaired by: Victor Gerald Rivas, University of Puebla

ALTERED STATES: THE ARTISTIC QUEST IN *THE STONE FLOWER* AND *LA SYLPHIDE*
Bruce Ross, Hampden, Maine

A PERFECT PICTURE OF THE FUTURE: THE REPRESENTATION OF THINGS THAT THINK IN
DALTON TRUMBO'S JOHNNY GOT HIS GUN
William Scott, University of Pittsburgh

WHITHER GOEST TODAY'S PRODIGAL SON? MARILYNNE ROBINSON'S *HOME AS*
EXPLORATION OF PERSONAL DOOM
Rebecca M. Painter, Marymount Manhattan College

REVISITING STEINBECK'S LITTORAL PHENOMENOLOGY: HUSSERLIAN ELEMENTS IN
THE LOG FROM THE 'SEA OF CORTEZ'
Gretchen Gusich, Loyola Marymount University

1:00 PM **Lunch together**

2:00 – 7:00 PM **SESSION IV:**
Chaired by: Danzankhorloo Dashpurev, The Institute of Philosophy, Sociology,
and Political Science, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

GAIL GOODWEIN: NEGOTIATING WITH DESTINY IN *THE ODD WOMAN* AND "DREAM
CHILDREN"
Raymond J. Wilson III, Loras College

NATURALIZED PHENOMENOLOGY AND KING ALFRED'S TRANSLATION OF
AUGUSTINE'S *SOLILOQUIA*: AN ANALYSIS OF THE MOVE FROM SPIRITUALITY TO
MATERIALITY
Ronald J. Ganze, The University of South Dakota

THE ROLE OF ART IN CAMUS AND SARTRE PHILOSOPHY
Joanna Handerek, Jagiellonian University

PHILOSOPHY AS THERAPY: THE CASE OF HEIDEGGER
Robert D. Stolorow, Institute of Contemporary Psychoanalysis and Robert Eli Sanchez, University of
California at Riverside

TEMPORAL PARALYSIS: THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF SHAME IN BERNHARD SCHLINK'S
THE READER
Lewis Livesay, Saint Peter's College

TAIJA DIAGRAM: A MIRROR OF THE SUPER-SYMMETRIC WORLD
Tsung-I Dow, Florida Atlantic University

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**INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY OF PHENOMENOLOGY
AND LITERATURE (AN AFFILIATE OF THE WORLD
PHENOMENOLOGY INSTITUTE)**

Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, Program Coordinator

34th ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Topic: **THE SENSE OF LIFE REFLECTED IN HISTORY
OF LITERATURE**

Place: Radcliffe Gymnasium, 10 Garden Street, Radcliffe Yard,
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Dates: May 11 and 12, 2010

P R O G R A M

Tuesday, May 11, 2010

ON SITE REGISTRATION, 9:00–9:30 AM

9:30 AM

OPENING ADDRESS:

Chaired by: Bernadette Prochaska, Marquette University

Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, World Phenomenology Institute

PUBLIC INVITED

PLEASE POST!

Tuesday, May 11, 2010
10:00 AM

SESSION I:
Chaired by: Raymond Wilson, Loras College

THE STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS: LITERARY PSYCHOLOGY AS THE FIRST
UNIQUELY AMERICAN EXPRESSION OF PHENOMENOLOGY IN WILLIAM JAMES
AND HIS SWEDENBORGIAN AND TRANSCENDENTALIST MILIEU
Eugene Taylor

THE SENSE OF LIFE AND INTERNECINE INTRUSIONS: SHAKESPEARE'S
CORIOLANUS AND JONSON'S *CATILINE*
Paul J. Green

"THE SENSE OF LIFE" AS A PHILOSOPHICAL PROJECT
Dorota Probuska

THE SENSE OF LIFE IN LANGUAGE LOVE AND LITERATURE
Lawrence Kimmel, Trinity University, San Antonio, Texas

1:00 PM

Lunch at the Harvard Faculty Club

3:00 – 7:00 PM

SESSION II:
Chaired by: Bernadette Prochaska, Marquette University

THE EVOLUTION OF JUSTICE IN *THE ORESTEIA*
Heidi Silcox, University of Central Oklahoma

A DOUBLE PHENOMENOLOGICAL SENSE OF THE HYBRID OF FATE AND DESTINY
IN COMMUNITY IN ACHEBE'S *ARROW* AND HEAD'S *TREASURES*
Imafedia Okhamafe, University of Nebraska

ANCIENT LITERATURE: SCHOOLS OF BEING IN THE HOUSE OF STYLE
Damian Stocking, Occidental College

JAMES JOYCE'S *IVY DAY IN THE COMMITTEE ROOM*" AND THE FIVE CODES OF
FICTION
Raymond Wilson, Loras College

PUBLIC INVITED

PLEASE POST!

Wednesday, May 12, 2010
9:00 AM

SESSION III:

Chaired by: Victor G. Rivas, University of Puebla

THE GARDEN THEN AND NOW; SENSE OF LIFE – CONTEMPORARY AND IN GENESIS
Bernadette Prochaska, Marquette University

“MAIS PERSONNE NE PARAISAIT COMPRENDRE” (“BUT NO ONE SEEMED TO UNDERSTAND”): ATHEISM, NIHILISM, AND HERMENEUTICS IN CAMUS’ *THE STRANGER*

George Heffernan, Merrimack College

ON THE METAPHYSICAL VIOLENCE OF LIFE IN THE LIGHT OF ZOLA’S *THE HUMAN BEAST*

Victor G. Rivas, University of Puebla

THE DETAILS OF LIFE: SENSE AND MEANING IN FLAUBERT’S *MADAME BOVARY*
Harriet Stone, Washington University in St. Louis

STAGING HEIDEGGER: CORPOREAL PHILOSOPHY, COGNITIVE SCIENCE, AND THE THEATER

Thomas Blake, Monroe Community College

1:00 PM

Lunch together

2:00 – 7:00 PM

SESSION IV:

Chaired by: Mark Silcox, University of Central Oklahoma

HISTORICAL DISTORTIONS AND LITERARY DISCLOSURES IN D.M. THOMAS’S *THE WHITE HOTEL*

Lewis Livesay, Saint Peter’s College

W.B. YEATS, CULTURAL NATIONALISM, AND THE ESSENCE OF SPIRITUAL IRELAND
R. Kenneth Kirby, Samford University

THE KINDNESS OF STRANGERS: EPIPHANY AND SOCIAL COMMUNION IN PAUL THEROUX’S TRAVEL WRITING

Bruce Ross, Independent Scholar

THE SENSE OF LIFE REALISED IN VARIOUS PERSONAL ENCOUNTERS

Leszek Pyra, Krakow, Poland

EMERSON AFFINITIES: READING RICHARD FORD THROUGH STANLEY CAVELL

Lawrence F. Rhu, University of South Carolina

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