

Janus Head

Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies
in Literature, Continental Philosophy,
Phenomenological Psychology and the Arts

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Pittsburgh, PA 15216

ISSN: 1524-2269

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Janus Head

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Janus Head is a biannual journal published by Trivium Publications, P. O. Box 1259, Amherst, NY 14226. Visit our website at www.janushead.org. Subscriptions: \$20 for one year; \$40 for two years; foreign subscriptions, including Canada, add \$8 for mailing costs per year; institutional rate \$40 per year; \$80 for two years; single copy \$10. All payments from foreign countries must be made by United States money orders or checks payable in United States currency. ISSN 1524-2269

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Visual Art

Artist Statement

Katherine Ziff

The Bisimbi

These prints are a record of my reflections about the disastrous trauma of human enslavement, which has reverberated for centuries in America. They are also a figurative offering to nature, as a reminder (to myself mostly) of its role in recovery from the effects of the aggressions of humans. In what they describe as their Herculean if not Quixotic undertaking to compile the ways in which knowing and experiencing nature affect well-being, Roly Russell and colleagues (2013) note a *pervasive, visceral understanding that our nonmaterial connections to ecosystems provide rich benefits*. They propose that our connections with nature are forged through many different channels of experience and affect physical, mental and spiritual well-being and identity.

Ras Michael Brown (2006, 2012) has constructed a compelling account of how enslaved Africans brought their religious/spiritual and cultural understandings of nature to Carolina and made vigorous and creative use of their concepts. He introduces with his scholarship nature spirits known in Kikongo as *bisimbi*, who became part of the fabric of Carolina Lowcountry culture by virtue of the particular *time* (Early Period of 1710 to 1744) and particular *place* (Charleston area) of the arrival of enslaved West-Central Africans with their particular *culture* which was defined by *creativity and continuity*. Dwelling in springs and estuaries and rivers and rocks, the bisimbi were a source of other-worldly powers and able to *ensure community, material and spiritual survival and prosperity*. Thought to possess both *terrible and benevolent power*, the bisimbi themselves *were not portable across the Atlantic but the conceptions of them were*.

These images, created in January 2015 alongside a bend in a tributary waterway of the Port Royal Sound of Beaufort, South Carolina, are based

upon an imaginative resonance with time and place. Created through touch drawing, they are a response to experience, landscape, dreams, and the scholarship of others. Originated by Deborah Koff-Chapin (1996), touch drawing is an intuitive and contemplative way of knowing. I think of it as a knowing of the heart. It is done by rolling water-based oil paint on a board, floating a piece of tissue on top, and making marks with hands, fingers, wrists, fingernails. Technically the technique is monotype. If you use a pencil or other tool for mark making, it is not touch drawing. There is something about the immediate touch of the hands to the work surface that draws forth perceptions and images.

The images are 15" x 20" on tissue affixed to Arches 300 lb. cold press watercolor paper. Each is layered onto another image; two of them (ONE and THREE) have the "ghost" images of the monotypes layered on top. 1/ They are embellished with collage, graphite, and pastels both oil and chalk.

Reckoning with a past of racialized historical trauma demands what Erica Still (2014) calls prophetic remembrance: remembering the past (retrospective) and restoring possibility for a future (prospective). She suggests that we remember that trauma *inheres in the collective recognition of an event* (in addition to the event itself). That we *bring the unspeakable back into the realm of discourse*, that we *remember the inheritance* of the injuries done by the coercive and vicious regimes and structures of the enslavement of Africans and African Americans. And that we engage the future's possibility for creative *proliferation*. Then and now, after all, inform each other.

ONE: The Maafa

Agent: a means or instrument by which a guiding intelligence achieves a result (Webster's Third New International Dictionary).

Image of an agent of human bondage, a blind force doing the will of the economic and political engine connecting peoples, nations, lands, waters, and material goods. Driving and driven by the violent and coercive regimes creating the traumatic history of the enslavement of Africans and African Americans.

TWO: The Middle Passage

She sleeps and dreams of home. If she can sleep she can *be* home, a place of solitude where she is untouched. As she dreams she looks neither

forward nor backward, she drops deep into her heart into a timeless dream state.

THREE: The Bisimbi

A simbi, wearing a river and its tributaries as a veil. Inhabitants of the realm of the sea and of its estuaries, marshes, rivers, and springs the bisimbi offer permanence, connection to the land, a physical and spiritual familiarity.

FOUR: Breath

Dreaming on the beach of children, mothers, home, love. Dancing, the moon at her feet, in a galaxy of shells at the water's edge. The beach is her refuge, a cord between her place in this new land and the heavens swirling with starry beings. Torn, adrift, lost, and given breath again, a gift from the bisimbi.

FIVE: A Way Forward.

A simbi, *guardian of springs and souls, spiritual benefactor*, intermediary for the *permanence and potency of Nature*, gifts a *claim upon the landscape* to those who ask and listen.

1/ The “ghost” image is a secondary image from a single monotype print produced as follows. Removal of the first print from a paint-covered plate (in this case a large sheet of Plexiglas®) leaves spaces where paint has been removed and forms a new image. One places a second sheet of paper, in this case archival quality acid-free tissue, on the plate and transfers this image left on the plate to the tissue with the hands, a soft brayer or a baren.

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ONE: The Maafa

Katherine Ziff



TWO: The Middle Passage

Katherine Ziff



THREE: Bisimbi

Katherine Ziff



FOUR: Breath

Katherine Ziff



FIVE: A Way Forward

Katherine Ziff



Poetry

The Cottonwood

Arthur Brown

There on the cottonwood, the leaves
made shadows of a lighter shade
than those that gave the creviced bark its depth,
the trunk its girth. You saw the brown
that gave the gray its earthiness.
You knew the trunk was rooted to the ground
and that the ground was dry.

You knew a dove had made a nest inside
the tree—you'd seen it on the wire, back-turned,
a spray of sticks and grass sideways behind
its hooded head and shoulder.
You saw it rise on limp and knobby branches,
flap, fan-tailed, and disappear behind
the leaves. All morning long you'd heard its mate—

the Morse-code cooing of the white-winged dove—
and heard the sparrows, too, and heard the whistling
of its wings; you saw it come and go, cawing,
as if a crow had taught it how to nest.
Meanwhile the shadows of the leaves descended,
growing denser, less discrete,
and moving less against the creviced bark.

And all this made you know you, too, were there,
since all there was existed in reserve—
outside of you, beyond what you perceived.
No inventory of the visible
or audible—the cars, the barking dog,
the doves—restricted what was in the world.
The words you took up presupposed

the doves, the ground, the cottonwood.
From things you drew your language and your thought,
as from the earth the landscape draws its form
or from the sediment the stream its color.
All things have style; they have their way of being.
The trunk was resolute—so it appeared.
It knew you better than you knew yourself.

Immanence

Arthur Brown

A late snow disappearing—juniper
and piñon rounded by the morning shadows.
And hidden in my vision of those hills,
my body and my time on earth, the death
that's wholly mine that makes the vision mine
alone. And yet more wonder in the thought
that were I presently to ask my wife,
whom I hear painting in the other room—
a child's room, whose walls had been bright yellow—
if she would come and look at what I see,
she, too, would see those hills and what they hide.

Hunger as Letter

Amy Ash and Callista Buchen

appetite, emptiness, craving, ravenous
dispatch, message, missive, note

Dear Red, Don't walk into that house, all tooth and disguise, a kind of
hunger you would not expect, could never understand.

Dear Decadence, We eat the shell, the husk, the rind. It is never enough.

Dear Door, Why track in, why not wolf, show us your teeth.

Dear Child, You will know hunger before you know love. Your open
mouth sings need. I give and give. Still, you want more.

Dear Ache, Dear Pain, Dear Absence, Dear Need.

Dear Heart, Blood muscle tissue pulse, piece of meat, lump of dough.

Dear Gold, Go on, go on, eat, eat, eat.

Dear Moon, You are wasting away to nothing. Your face is so pale.

Dear Fox, Step ball change, the dance, the snow, ears flattened, what you
sense.

Dear Music, Somehow you emerge from the empty belly of the guitar.

Dear Butcher, Your hands slick with blood. You hold the animal in your
arms, almost tenderly.

Dear Lamb, How do we wash our feet, what follows the bleat.

Dear Stepmother, Dear heart, dear diamond eyes, where have our hands
gone, what fingers, electricity.

Dear Dinner Plate, Reflecting her face within your frame.

Dear Tumor, How much will you eat away? How much will you consume?

Dear Grandmother, By the sea the fish have stopped swimming, they hover, and stare with round, round eyes.

Dear Delta, Gravel-mouthed and thick with silt. We wait for your answer.

Nightmare as Reverse

Amy Ash and Callista Buchen

terrify, lurid, dread, dream
opposite, inverse, underneath, back

A gun ingests the bullet, a silver pill. The flash
first, the sound sometime later, retching and black.
Reassembling itself on the carpet, the body rises and stands
hinged, a puppet, what it means to blink, to nod. We go

backwards, spinning out of the undertow, the water
pulling like so many fingers. Liquid and dark, what
it means to breathe. We are lifted, suspended,
the river full of faces, the shore full of arms, reaching.

What it means to grasp. The wolf drags the infant back to bed
and the silence shouts: terrible bleating of now what, now what,
as the curved tooth, glinting like a shard of bone, of moon, snags
and all the windows crack, slicing the scene to fractures and screams.

And here we stand in cut-glass, gasping, swallowing the lullaby
caught
against gashes, what skips and whispers, even as we cover our ears,
our open mouths. We teeter toward the hole and what waits
at the edge of our throats, threatening to sound.

Articles

Education of the Artist

George Moore

Overture

Every one is an artist for we each must create our own life, even those who try to escape it. Every one of us must fill the void, blank canvas, empty stage, dance floor – and step out or forth to apply our will to create. The artist uniquely lives this paradox, delight and terror, with and before us not to supplant it – no one can – but to recast through a chosen symbolic medium our resolve to experiment with our freedom.

Artists change how we perceive -- it could not be more basic or “ontological”. If they decorate, intrigue, thrill, shock, provoke reflection or ethical protest – this is merely added or distracting. For we turn to art of any kind not for spectacle or instruction but to slowly or suddenly change how see, hear, even touch and move -- to attune all our senses -- subtly, powerfully, to re-envision the origin of all experience as creation.

An artist becomes an expert in alternate perceptions to refute by example the reduction of experience to its use or our seeming “place” within an ephemeral object-economy with -- a work of art -- to embrace reality beyond utility so we may fully perceive the surprise of existence. Use offers us naught but a practical cause, an empirical “coin” by which to exchange full perception for its or a preset value.

There are no preset values.

Art like life is a permanent revolution -- without guns or even overt protest and should be opposed to all fame-as-authority, careerism or money. It is not a pursuit of success except as the best way to evoke radiance across a global community of awareness. It keeps awe of a brief existence alive by inventing metaphors to lure us from repeating behavior

by rote. It soothes with beauty to spread, say, a rainbow over the ashes of alienation left by comrades lost to spiritual suicide. It resists capitulation to materialism and all behavioral rhetoric. It revolts against racism, sexism, ageism, class, country, religion, economic inequality, but without necessarily saying so. It invents an oasis of illusion by turning illusion against itself to reveal reality.

The freedom to originally perceive is the first *right* granted *every* human being. We may rediscover ancient truths in their nativity, but we may also birth them. We are here to uncover what would remain forever concealed save for our courage to perceive anew -- we, the creatures who temporarily awake.

* * *

Every child is an artist from birth: to explore by doing and creating scenarios from imaginary conversations and characters is already the beginning of fiction. Drawing or sketching what one sees or imagines even with a stick in sand or sculpting clay or mud is already visual art. Imitating voices and singing are almost as natural as breathing. We are shamed from creation early by adults who forfeit their freedom to a faux normality to survive within an object-economy. An artist invites us to back to our origins -- to the incept-flame of novelty -- we first intuited as our right to keep learning, imagining, playing with possibilities from the origin of who we are to whom we will become -- our "destiny" beyond determinism -- our life as a freedom. Children are right while reproving adults who unlearn imagination intuit less than the offspring they rule.

Every artist undertakes early the project to protect their creativity. A child can see the sacrifice of imagination on an adult face -- who made themselves homely -- eyes rolling at a supposed regression after noting with envy the gleam of eternity in the youthful eye (the awe) -- our first font of beauty. The adolescent chooses a life-strategy, which will include sacrifice and self-discipline: not to kill their spirits through a symbolic activity -- even if they lose "future earnings" or a place in the conformist parade.

Narcissists betray this goal and avoid full creation by multiplying a reflexive image of the self to reappear in a baroque funhouse *trompe l'oeil* for the admiration of cowards. Narcissists, smitten by their image within the mirror of art, freeze their image *as art*. This freezing is an attempt stop (reify or hypostatize) time to grasp and *have*, and this illusion ensnares us whenever having precludes becoming.

The transparency of a mirror ends with its reflection.

* * *

The illusion of a magical connection between consciousness and a thing or things, a conjured causation to reduce perception to owning or being owned by or as a thing, to ignore or even to liquidate the existence of awareness itself – this thing-ness first -- including the fantasy of owning a self – claims we are aware only as an “emergent property” and should ignore that *we* notice, name and describe *things* then “must” cede our choices (our awareness) to inanimate – objects! This assumes having precedes being. It does not. Being precedes having. And being is becoming. Consciousness is who we are and one may list its properties (why?) but it is not a property, nor can “it” -- *we* ever be owned.

Materialists ignore that the elemental power of the universe is creativity and not only may we practice it (creation) but can also conceive its negation *as* materialism.

The Transparency of Self

The self is conceived every moment we choose. It's like a window that cannot be seen or a glass without sides through and by which we are seen and see. We invent transparency by appearing and we are each a pure appearance who disappears. For with consciousness' transparency -- absence and presence are identical -- yet evident every moment we breathe. Suppose we exhale an ethos from this paradox? *Then an aesthetic.* Perhaps it already reveals: “Where we stand”, our perspective and answers: “Who am I?” and suggests an horizon for: “What shall I do?” Perhaps to see through one's self and let the world (and universe) appear uninflected, unmediated -- yet be strong as a presence from and through this seeming absence, this “no-thing”, to be invisible yet absolutely present -- *is* to be free? If we're obliged to remake such invisible “stuff” from nothing – in this gentle charting of the self by any name or concept -- rather than running interference with the world (screening, deflecting, even tinting) and rather than ignoring -- why not practice transparency of self? Honesty is – transparent.

The Struggle

Though it can occur any time in one's life, often in childhood or adolescence an artist refuses to surrender to a world reduced to things. The "reason" is rarely recalled in our retrospective rationales or the stories we tell except in utter candor -- not to refuse to "grow up" -- but reject that we must lose our playfulness, open-heartedness or spontaneity -- and so betray our imaginations.

Yet, this clears the playing field for what one can do and why one lives.

Anyone can be an artist in school or in their early twenties but can one, despite sporadic or small successes, or being wholly ignored, maintain creation throughout a lifetime? One needs be a Stoic with regard to all materialism, to re-read perhaps Thoreau's "Economy" from *Walden* and read behind his advice to "Simplify, simplify, simplify" to envision a dedicated writer who aspires to write full time without spending so as not to have to earn much money. The economy of the artist is the essential question, the riddle really, of how to pursue art but never to cheat anyone (including oneself) of a dime, yet live fully, pay bills, and even travel and enjoy oneself while "spending" one's time on earth celebrating the gift of consciousness -- without rancor or resentment.

The ethos of the artist should then be more honest and kinder than those who pursue normal professions. The discovery that all values are created much like a painting does not utterly relativize truth or dissolve its discovery but exposes its origin. Freedom is not license to regress or best conformists in deflection, slight-of-hand, malice or greed nor to fabricate excuses so as not to pull one's own weight financially. Art is not regression, a lack of responsibility, play-acting or license. To become an artist is not to inherit a privilege but to exercise by example the right to create.

If an artist is to be entrusted to express gratitude to be able to perceive at all -- to renew our perception not only within enclaves of an elite art-world but in every walk of life we need visions of the possible -- works of art -- to explore our freedom.

An artist is a "grown-up" who continues to *play* yet refuses to let others pay for their existence.

Freedom is work and involves anxiety, forlornness and responsibility. Art is work since to know its history, enough of one's contemporaries to respond to and enhance our culture (or community of awareness) then to isolate with what media and how one will reflect unique perception -- and (!) -- after years of intense practice -- *if one wishes to replenish the human spirit* -- become adept at offering a vision. The work of art, even if it offers a "negative pleasure" -- a critique -- adds to the delight in constant change inherent to our being briefly *and* fully awake.

The young artist begins to explore mediations, and may explore several to widen the latitude of his or her early learning, and this choosing shalt not be rushed so the young may enjoy a great education across all fields of study. An artist need not be a "specialty idiot" -- to quickly narrow and so conform to a division of labor, to deny breadth of vision, largess and perhaps the horizontal goal to which every one may aspire -- to become wise...

Some arts yield mastery to extreme youth, say, pop songs or instrumental virtuosity (e.g. Mozart) and rarely in poetry (Rimbaud). But many genres and mediums resist early mastery, say, feature films, full-length novels or discovering an original philosophy. The psychology of the practice may require decades. This takes staying power: stamina and patience. Yet long practice may ripen until a single note, brush stroke or sparest of compositions may reveal the unique ...

An artist unseals the urn of mortality to release the genii of wonder.

The Unique

If open to the unknown and unknowable -- as the former child within us to a flower or to the air -- an object observed or soul met does not reflect an estimation of a knowing-process or a forced wariness obliged by convention -- but to perceive the unique.

If experiences seem repeated -- *we* repeat them -- we render duplicate what is not. *Experiences are rarely "the same" 'til we make them so.* Since we create time by our recognition of it, just as it creates us, without inserting a temporal divide between creating and receiving we receive *when* we perceive & so create the unique as if it "just-appeared" (Is this innocence?). Convention separates creation from reception in a sequence to compromise the unique and innocence -- But!

Innocence is the child of wisdom.

And: Wisdom is the child of innocence.

And: The unique is not rare, perceiving it is.

For the artist to envision he or she will need be an expert in noticing fine detail, from one sliver or cameo of the whole, say from one violet petal to evoke all biologic life. This choosing too is experimental, and may seem highly idiosyncratic but only with a precise noticing of the unique – may we reflect universal experience.

In becoming an artist one experiments with what constitutes an object and what it is to be human.

After long, unrewarded years of practice to realize confidence as a craftsman as an artist masters a medium and the complexities of a genre with a vision that allows every or any perception to be unique even close friends may not recognize nor trust their own taste -- needing you to be conventionally successful to think you are. But even if one “is” one may discover it is not fame or money nor the trappings of name and status but the process of art from which one has learned through long, dilated experience: by suffusing intuition into knowledge one’s greatest work of art may be one’s own soul. Mind and spirit can evolve. What once appeared but a falling star on one’s mental horizon -- the possibility of becoming a great human being, may rise like a long-awaited dawn. Now even art or thought may appear as a symbolic “thing”, insofar as both mediate to reflect the origins of one’s soul.

* * *

Many artists never study philosophy but they are close to it nonetheless. Philosophy is mistaken for abstract conceptuality for its own sake yet this is but an encrypted extract from its origin. Philosophy opens every perspective of awareness not as an ideal but an engagement with how awareness makes everything “happen”. This is also the field celebrated by art. Philosophy is the exercise of free thinking — art — free imagination. Both, if pursued truly, presume perception is experimental. If an artist so wishes (or fancies!) they can grow conceptually to augment their metaphoric invention and the combination may prove athletic: the birth of character coheres with ideational fluency to let the artist deepen beyond the behavioral style of personality. One can explain, if one wishes

to, what one does. One may “have” an ethos as well as an aesthetic. One may slowly become a great human being. One may become wise.

* * *

We are born to a world that prizes things over experience. We hear of “gathering” or “accumulating” wisdom – but how to gather what is not a thing? “Things” are not alive and tell us nothing not assigned them by us for our use. How to grow more seasoned, keen, wider in experience? Perhaps the future-wise intuitively suspend ordinary causation and opposition, relativize (but not quite neutralize) good and evil, hot and cold etc. as co-relative (since they are) and withhold literal belief to cultivate tolerance? If we save or store not things but insights – might noticing minute differences reveal the original extempore music of improvising time by exploring our creation of it? Might the arrow (fate) that gathers nothing but insight fly through the literality of things to suspend belief — to reach tolerance & delight? To reveal the consciousness perceiving them, to personally, perennially burst, blossom, and flower?

Wisdom counsels us to bend with the wind. We are finite and must let go even of life. Yet if expectations must yield when may our resolve rise? It still requires one stiffen facial muscles to smile. In our brief series of days we face wind, darkness & cold: crimes of neglect & madness, the herd’s reproach, convention’s revenge, the ice of rejection, long, difficult projects, poverty, aging -- we need to bend yet stay resolute -- to let go *and* resist.

In our invisible absence, from nothingness, our consciousness ascends to the All to appear as never before in freedom. *Can we accept loss and remain revolutionary in our resolve to remake the world?*

Perhaps like a painter with a full palette before a blank canvas of events we may leave the world untouched or incarnate as color and shade in action, as we choose. Or as an astronomer studies light in space to the far reaches of the universe our perception can shift from spectral blue to red as we approach or withdraw at will.

Perhaps wisdom is a synthesis of intuition and knowledge, innocence and experience, inaction and action? The courage to experience without precedent -- the absence of any guide as to how one should think or act

— a momentary lifetime exploring a blank canvas of unrehearsed novelty.

Suppose: *Wisdom does not end with experience but begins an experiment with all experience.*

We can let the energy animating the universe flow through us in effortless efficacy without severing our identity with nature. We can stand out and *up*, resolutely, for the creation of new truth. We can pursue peace within and try ... to change the world.

Wisdom listens to secrets sent by intuition.

* * *

There are many theories of what art is and a few almost as beautiful as art itself. Yet there is no greater experience than freedom and this an artist must embody through acts of love called art. If art refers back to the origin of perception through metaphor as philosophy with concepts, if genius, demystified, is the courage to create from the origin of our being from nothing, if our souls dilate, transparent of self before the unique rising to universality: we eventually change how we perceive: *We educate ourselves to practice art then slowly it educates us:*

We presage to become sage.

Mortality as Paradox

Mortality is paradox: “I am aware that I will become unaware.” You can say it but never understand it. Time is paradox: if one could fully isolate a moment there would be no given continuity from before to the next, all identity, including the percipient’s, would dissolve. And how brief or long may a moment be? So we must impose an identity and invent ourselves -- but “who” imposes or invents anything when we vanish? There are many angels-on-a pin paradoxes in the history of logic. They are still separating mathematic and imaginary mustard seeds now, tossing rice at the frozen marriages of the mutually exclusive, but the puzzlement is no longer academic when it comes to our life. Zeno’s paradox, Kant’s antinomies, even Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle, all the great and manufactured “problems” are like invisible chess games yet -- do we really have time to play? When logic leads to its violation a plume of intuition escapes as in

a noiseless explosion but without heat or fire -- or are the fireworks then their tracers our dreams? The collision is our expectation meeting the mystery when the imagination's arc ends as it begins in awe: the incept-flame of novelty. Children and the wise have this in common: they honor the unknown but love the light more than the space between stars.

To paint fresh vistas across the field of perception, to sketch in silhouette future freedoms across our mortal sky, to dance the discovery tempo of the unique in a second innocence embracing all experience, to conjure melodies from the air to echo from a primordial advent of awareness to a new civilization of light; to critique, protest all constriction of soul, slavery of class, conformism or money, or the private flight of madness, solipsism or despair -- to raise the transnational flag of freedom for all imaginations within our invisible community of awareness -- *we reply to the silence of the universe* -- that we live briefly yet in gratitude for this chance to perceive -- and so to conceive who we are -- from nothing *but once!* -- in our fleeting moment on earth.

This is one why and wherefore. The how and what will unfold undetermined, absolutely open to radical individuality, and novelty.

Scattering the Articles of Textual Law: An interrogation of the poethical turn in the later work of Levinas

Lawrence Harvey

Abstract

This article interrogates the poethical turn in the work of the later Levinas. In the first instance, this reading brings to the fore the extent to which Levinas' early ethical position paradoxically repeats formerly denigrated aspects of Heidegger's philosophy. Secondly, through the aperture of Celan's poetry, Levinas' later ethical reformulation is examined. This article demonstrates that it is through a heightened attention to language that Levinas attempts to counter the tacit duplication of Heideggerian ideals. Crucially, this article seeks to establish that it is only when Levinas fully embraces the 'poetry of language' that the residual Heideggerian re-inscription is finally redressed; this process of redress being mediated via what Celan refers to as 'the not-to-be-deciphered' free-floating poetic word.

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In 1972, Levinas published an essay interrogating the work of the Romanian-born German language poet Paul Celan; an essay first published in *Revue des Belles-Lettres* and later reproduced in *Proper Names* (1976). Therein, Levinas tentatively accords the work of Celan an ethical dimension allied to his own ethical thought. As he states, for Celan the poem is 'situated precisely at that pre-syntactic and [...] pre-logical level' – a level which is 'pre-disclosing; at a moment of pure touching, pure contact, grasping, squeezing – which is, perhaps, a way of giving, right up to and including the hand that gives.'¹ A little later, and with direct reference to his own later ethical formulations, Levinas suggests that for Celan, the poem itself functions 'as an unheard-of modality of the *otherwise than being*.'² Distancing himself from Heideggerian poetics, Levinas adds that the poem in Celan's hands can be read as an act of giving that signifies 'signification' at level 'older than ontology and the thought of being.'³

The shadow of Heidegger hangs heavy over both Levinas and Celan. As depicted in his poem 'Todtnauberg', Celan met Heidegger in July 1967, one imagines to confront the aging philosopher with regards to his brief and yet publically un-recanted Nazi past:

auf eines Denkenden
(un-
gesäumt kommendes)
Wort
im Herzen

[hope today,
for a thinker's
(un-
delaying coming)
word
in the heart]⁴

As Celan's friend, the poet Jean Daive (re-)remembers it in his poetic memoir, the meeting seems to have afforded little in terms of recompense:

He [Celan] smiles. He goes on:

– I had illusions. I hoped to be able to convince Heidegger.
I wanted him to talk to me. I wanted to forgive. I waited for
this: that he would find words to trigger my clemency. But he
maintained his position.⁵

Celan lost his parents and homeland in the Nazi horror. For Levinas, whose father and brothers were killed in Lithuania by the SS, the egology of Heidegger served to re-inscribe a Platonic sense of epistemic 'lucidity' with disastrous ethical implications.⁶ In short, the 'light of Being' failed to elude what Derrida was to term the 'Greek domination of the Same and the One'.⁷ As such, the modality of Heideggerian *Being* became, within Levinas' terms, complicit with a negation of Otherness. Hence it is that Levinas defines his philosophical project as an attempt to leave, or depart from, the climate of Heidegger's thought – a departure that does not pay surreptitious homage to the principles of pre-Heideggerian ideals. As I will argue in this paper, in spite of this self-proclamation, the broad trajectory of Levinas' early work is not overtly distinct from that of Heidegger. As I will demonstrate, it is only when Levinas fully embraces

the ‘poetry of language’ that the residual Heideggerian re-inscription is finally redressed; this process of redress being mediated via what Celan refers to as ‘the not-to-be-deciphered [*das nicht zu enträtselnde*]’ floating *word*, a poetic inscription free from the ‘light-wedges [*lichtkeile*]’ of epistemic closure, which, nonetheless, speaks ‘in the cause of a *wholly Other* [*eines ganz Anderen*].’⁸

In order to pursue the aforesaid re-inscription, let us turn to an article Derrida published in 1964, an article entitled, ‘Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas’. It is claimed therein that by ‘making the origin of language, meaning, and difference the relation to the infinitely other, Levinas is resigned to betraying his own intentions in his philosophical discourse’ (*WD*, 151). How exactly does this self-betrayal occur? We should remember that Levinas’ ethical foundation is *not* a foundation. As Richard A. Cohen has put it: ‘Ethics does not have an essence, its “essence,” so to speak, is precisely not to have an essence, to unsettle essences.’⁹ I would argue that Cohen’s colloquialism, ‘so to speak,’ is telling in the above context. As with the critical analyst, Levinas has to in some way articulate or make textually palpable that which precedes the march of the word or *logos* – he has to speak, he has to write or communicate his ideas. In Cohen’s commentary, this process of articulation takes the form of a rhetorical double negative that serves to elucidate Levinas’ ethic. Upon further analysis, surely any posited foundation, albeit one set in negation, merely partakes in the effaced binary discourse of foundationalism? A negative foundation is founded in the ‘trace’ of its effaced counterpart. Arguably, the so-called betrayal of intent thus occurs at the binary level of the text. In slightly different terms, Levinas gestures towards that which is beyond, or apart from, the play of the text. Yet as Derrida is quick to point out, such a gesture calls us towards that which is impossible – it calls us towards an unutterable locus ‘beyond (tradition’s) Being and Logos’ (*WD*, 114). According to Derrida, it is not ‘possible either to think or state this call’ (*WD*, 114). In addition, Derrida claims that ‘the positive plenitude of classical infinity is translated into language only by betraying itself in a negative word (in-finite)’ (*WD*, 114). Herein, the thesis inhabits the anti-thesis at the level of binary signification. The negative essence, or in-finitely Other beyond the play of the word or *logos*, is equally grounded through what amounts to a process of antithetic articulation. As Heidegger before him, Levinas thus falls foul of the Greek lexicon of intelligibility. In short, the infinity of the beyond is assimilated within.

At another level, Levinas seeks to elucidate his thought by way of

metaphors pertaining to the Platonic light or Sun. Given his opposition to Platonic stasis, Levinas' appeal seems, to say the least, somewhat paradoxical. Nevertheless, Levinas maintains that the idea of infinity is revealed via the 'light of the face' (*TI*, 151); consequently, we thus 'encounter, in our own way, the Platonic idea of the Good beyond Being' (*TI*, 293). Of course, the qualifying phrase – 'in our own way' – is hesitant. Taken at face value, Levinas would seem to be suggesting that the Other and the Platonic Good or Sun transcend Being in an analogous fashion. Yet surely, the Platonic Sun is the transcendental signified *par excellence*? Nevertheless, elsewhere Levinas suggests that the 'Platonic conception of the intelligible sun situated outside of the eye that sees and the object it illuminates describes with precision the perception of things. Objects have no light of their own; they receive a borrowed light' (*TI*, 74). This analogy might be reconfigured thus: to be able to comprehend or 'see' an object that is apart from the self, and moreover, to be able to comprehend oneself by way of apperception, one (as an individuated subject) must receive a 'borrowed light.' Such a light is the 'light of epiphany' emanating from the infinitely Other. In other words, to see presupposes that which is 'outside of the eye' or 'I'. That which resides outside is the Other, an-Other situated, as the Platonic Sun, in the infinitely beyond. To summarize, an ulterior light is 'needed to see the light' (*TI*, 192).

If this chain of reasoning appears to be governed by a puzzling Platonic bias, elsewhere Levinas appeals to an antithetic light. As Derrida points out, Levinas sometimes maintains that the 'nudity of the face of the other' is an 'epiphany of a certain non-light before which all violence is to be quieted and disarmed' (*WD*, 85). Indeed, in later sections of *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas repudiates the light metaphor in no uncertain terms: 'The shimmer of infinity, the face, can no longer be stated in [...] metaphors referring to the light' (*TI*, 207). Yet is this appeal to a form of antithetic light any less problematic? It seems not, for arguably a light before the Truth, a light 'anterior to the Platonic light,' and thus a certain non-light, is merely an essence set in negation (*WD*, 91). At a rhetorical level, such a negation appears more palatable. And yet as Derrida is quick to see, the proffered non-light entails an exposure to a 'certain enlightenment' (*WD*, 85). In practice then, the thesis (the light) infiltrates its antithetic binary (the non-light) and, as such, subsists as an absent presence. Given the play of this differential schema, we can thus determine that Levinas plots a tacit return to the provisional Hellenic categories he utilizes in negation.

What can be seen in terms of an inside/outside dichotomy also holds sway in Levinas' thought. In the first section of *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas refers to the 'I' or *cogito* that apprehends itself through an act of inhabitation:

The *way* of the I against the 'other' of the world consists in *sojourning*, in *identifying oneself* by existing here *at home with oneself*. In a world which is from the first other the I is nonetheless autochthonous. It is the very reversion of this alteration. It finds in the world a site [lieu] and a home [maison]. Dwelling is the very mode of *maintaining oneself* (TI, 37).

The I' or *cogito* that is 'at home' with itself thus sojourns or arises as an autonomous monad; everything is comprehended within the site or locus of the Same. It is this type of egology that Levinas opposes through his appeal to the exteriority of the Other, an-Other sometimes reconfigured as the Stranger: 'the Stranger [...] disrupts the being at home with oneself' (TI, 39). Self-sufficiency within the edifice of the Same is thereby disrupted by that which precedes any act of inhabitation. In effect, the 'outside' can be seen and understood as a presupposition that challenges the interiority of ego-centred being. Yet upon reflection, this spatial dichotomy merely perpetuates the binary logic that underpins Heidegger's thought. For Heidegger one dwells in a state of 'thrown-ness' before the inhabitation of any conceptual frames. However, this 'outside the edifice' is in actuality within. That is to say, Heidegger deconstructs the conceptual edifice only to build anew what amounts to a primal shelter.¹⁰ Likewise, Levinas appeals to that which is exterior; he appeals to the exterior face, a *face* that in some sense exceeds the interior play of the Same. Yet according to Levinas, this *face* also precedes the imposition of impersonal Being. This overt opposition to Heidegger is somewhat dubious given the fact that the exteriority of the *face* is in actuality akin in its ideational orientation to the notion of Being. Indeed, arguably that which resides 'outside' of the deconstructed edifice (Being), is equal to that which lies beyond or exterior to the enclosed Same. It would thus seem that Levinas deletes or *obliterates* Heidegger's notion of exteriority but fails to erase it completely. Authentic exteriority becomes non-exteriority and hence, as Derrida puts it, 'its truth is its untruth' (WD, 112). For Derrida, Levinas therefore employs a spatial metaphor in a state of ruin – his thought is dressed-up in 'tradition's shreds and the devil's patches' (WD, 112).

Given the above factors, one might readily conclude that the post-Nietzschean super-foundationalism Habermas attributed to Heidegger is manifestly present in the counter-Heideggerian work of Levinas.¹¹

Gillian Rose, a critic of postmodernism in its ethical guise, alludes to this paradox thus: 'Levinas, in spite of the contrast between the foundational nature of Heidegger's *being-towards-death* and his own account as non-foundational, has produced a foundational account.'¹² In brief, the non-light, the non-foundation, leads to an (en)lightenment of sorts. The light, the truth, thus subsists as a silent axiom or *telos*. Consequently, to cite Rose, Levinas' thought is 'immersed in all the difficulties of modernity just as much as the philosophy' it would seem to transcend.¹³ The causal factors relative to this re-inscription might be surmised thus:

The attempt to achieve an opening towards the beyond of philosophical discourse, by means of philosophical discourse, which can never be shaken off completely, cannot possibly succeed *within language* [...] for language in its entirety already has awakened as a fall into light. That is, if you will, language arises with the sun. Even if 'the sun is never named ... its power is in our midst' (Saint-John Perse). (*WD*, 110-13)

In an essay entitled 'Responding to Levinas,' David Boothroyd suggests that any attempt to deconstruct, surpass, delimit, or go beyond the logocentric tradition is liable to end in failure. For Boothroyd, such a tradition exhibits a singular propensity for recapturing any discourse that sets its sights at such a process of transcendence.¹⁴ As Derrida has shown us, both Levinas and Heidegger are recaptured by the tradition they seek to exit. For Levinas, ethical liberation is thus offset by a reoccupation of a previously repudiated absolute. Set within the elliptic words of Celan, the attempt to knock away the 'light-wedges [*lichtkeile*]' of a posited Totality runs the risk of returning 'the floating word [*das schwimmende Wort*]' to the dawn of a new 'dusk'.¹⁵

For critics such as Étienne Feron, the pith of Derrida's reading of Levinas can be summarised thus: 'philosophical discourse can only say the Other in the language of the Same.'¹⁶ Despite such factors, ten years after the first publication of 'Violence and Metaphysics,' Levinas published his second major ethical treatise, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (1974) – a complex reconfiguration of his earlier work, composed in the 'light' of Derrida's critique. This second major treatise attempted to plot

an 'otherwise than (Heideggerian) being' or a 'beyond essence' – hence its rather laboured title. Yet is such a response to Derrida possible within the lexis of the Same? Is there an appeal to alterity that does not amount to an act of poisoned flattery?

In answer to these questions, let us re-examine Derrida's concerns. If one were to further summarise Derrida's argument, one might be inclined to suggest that it focuses on the problematic notion of representation. According to Derrida, the Other is re-presented within the founding terms of the Greek philosophical lexicon. In other words, Levinas attempted to breach the edifice of philosophical discourse through philosophical discourse; that is, he appealed to what Derrida terms a kind of 'unheard of graphics, within which philosophical conceptuality would be no more than a function' (WD, 111). But Levinas' 'unsaid' or 'unheard' re-presentation, his so-called 'true representation' (TI, 200), is reliant upon what might be termed an audible method of philosophical conceptuality. Such a method of conceptuality cannot be so readily reduced to an inert function. As Eaglestone has argued, true representation is still a form of representation – it is still complicit with the underlying violence of the Greek *logos* or word.¹⁷ Moreover, according to Derrida, Levinas' radical appeal to the straightforwardness of the face of the Other is a form of empiricism. As he suggests:

The true name of this inclination of thought towards the Other, of this resigned acceptance of incoherent incoherence inspired by a truth more profound than the 'logic' of philosophical discourse, the true name of this renunciation of the concept, of the [...] transcendental horizons of language, is empiricism. (WD, 151)

In simpler terms, Levinas appeals to the exterior face of the Other by way of a pre-conceptual empirical gesture. Yet in the final analysis, is not such an empirical gesture still fettered to the philosophy it would seem to precede? In Derrida's own terms, such empiricism is nothing more than an impossible dream that must 'vanish at daybreak, as soon as language awakens' (WD, 151). As with 'true representation,' Levinas' own brand of empiricism is therefore subservient to a pre-existing conceptual structure, a structure in which infinity's excess over totality is rendered in the language of totality. For Derrida, Levinas thus discards his principal weapon, his principal means of overcoming the Greek lexeme – in short, he rejects a profound 'disdain of discourse' (WD, 116). It is this rejection that leads to the paradoxical re-inscription of totality, a process of re-

inscription carried out in the name of infinity itself. The metaphor of the face is thus self-effacing as it harbours the rumblings of a suppressed (and thus suppressive) Truth. Arguably, a similar point can be seen at play within the lines of Celan's '*Ein Dröhnen*':

EIN DRÖHNEN: es ist
die Wahrheit selbst
unter die Menschen
getreten,
mitten ins
Metapherngestöber.

[A RUMBLING: it is
Truth itself
Walked among
men,
amidst the
metaphor squall.]¹⁸

Let us not be misled by the above analysis though; Derrida's reading is not to be construed in terms of a direct assault. On the contrary, as Derrida himself suggests, the questions raised in 'Violence and Metaphysics' are not objections *per se*; they are more accurately questions that are posed to us by Levinas himself. As Simon Critchley puts it, Derrida's text is 'not directed *against* Levinas' – nor is it a direct '*critique* of Levinasian "ethics."¹⁹ Instead, the questions that arise within the course of Derrida's reading, issue, in an immanent sense, from within their host. Derrida thus relinquishes any sense of objective critical purchase. In the place of a straightforward polemic, he opens up what he takes to be the incongruent or contradictory threads that give both shape and form to Levinas' philosophical tapestry. Such openings are treated as intrinsic fissures rather than gaping faults. Nevertheless, as I have illustrated, such fissures harbour a shadowy re-inscription of Heideggerian ontology. But according to Bernasconi and Critchley, this re-inscription is not paraded for the sake of critical or trenchant negation. Instead, they argue, Derrida's reading can itself be read as a subtle attempt to bring to the fore the manoeuvre *per impossibile* that occurs within Levinas' work. In other words, Derrida tenders what can be seen and understood as a 'double reading' of Levinas:

A double reading [...], which, by following and eventually leaving the path of commentary, shows, on the one hand, the impossibility of escaping from

logocentric conceptuality and, on the other, the necessity of such an escape arising from the impossibility of remaining wholly within the (Greek) logocentric tradition. Letting these two motifs interlace, Derrida's essay displays the necessity of these two impossibilities and suspends the critical moment of deciding between them.²⁰

For Critchley, Derrida thus offers a reading that leaves Levinas' thought 'suspended and hesitant' in a space set between two metaphysics (*ED*, 93). In effect, this state of hesitant suspension opens up what can be construed as a 'hollow space,' a space or locus set between the Greek and Hebraic traditions. On the one hand, Levinas would seem to evade or skirt the Greek tradition through 'recourse to a Hebraic origin and a messianic eschatology which are opened from within an experience of alterity which the Greek philosophical tradition can neither reduce nor comprehend' (*ED*, 94). On the other hand, Levinas' process of evasion occurs within the language of the Same or totality; in short, the escape is bound to the Greek representative *logos*. Derrida's text thus inhabits the vacuous space set between these traditions – a process of immanent inhabitation that suspends polarised judgement: 'we shall not choose between the opening and totality' (*WD*, 84).

Yet is it possible to merely acquiesce thus in the face of such tensile interplay? As Critchley asks:

Can one choose not to choose? Does not a choice secretly announce itself within the suspension of choice? Derrida does not wish to explore the space of messianic eschatology that opens within experience; he merely wishes to indicate it, to point it out, like Cortez before the Pacific Ocean. (*ED*, 95)

Yet Derrida's 'choice not to choose' can be read as a silent provocation; that is to say, his apparent acquiescence itself announces the need to reconfigure the pacific waters of alterity. As I shall argue, in what amounts to an implicit response, Levinas takes up this challenge. In fact, in texts such as *Otherwise than Being*, the later Levinas probes the opening Derrida is loath to explore. If Derrida can be likened to the passive Cortez standing before the Pacific Ocean, perhaps Levinas has more in common with Magellan in the sense of *facing* up to the Pacific divide.

Arguably, *Otherwise than Being* can thus be read in terms of a reconfiguration of Levinas' earlier work; a reconfiguration composed in

the light of Derrida's reticent reading. Indeed, although he at no point engages 'Violence and Metaphysics' in any direct sense, there is evidence to suggest that Levinas had absorbed Derrida's findings prior to the first publication of *Otherwise than Being*. In 1973 Levinas published a short essay entitled 'Wholly Otherwise'. This essay appeared in an edition of *L'Arc*, an edition dedicated to the work of Derrida. Therein Levinas suggests that Derrida's work signals a new break in the history of philosophy: it cuts into the heart of Western thinking and spells the 'end of a naïveté, of an unsuspected dogmatism.'²¹ Yet echoing the double-gesture in Derrida's essay, such applause is counterbalanced by discourse that challenges the validity of deconstruction itself. For Levinas, set within Derrida's radical departure from the truth, there still subsists a residual appeal to certainty or security: 'Derrida still has the strength to say "is it certain?" as if anything could be secure [...] and as if security and insecurity should still matter.'²² In what can be interpreted as an implicit allusion to 'Violence and Metaphysics,' Levinas would thus appear to highlight the fact that Derrida's polemic does not wholly depart from a re-inscription of logocentric discourse. In effect, Levinas would seem to find in Derrida 'some of the inconsistencies that Derrida had found in Levinas.'²³ Given such facts, there appears to be little doubt that Levinas had assimilated and actively interrogated Derrida's critique of texts such as *Totality and Infinity* prior to the publication of his second magnum opus, *Otherwise than Being*.

All the same, for Levinas, the task of this later text was akin to that of *Totality and Infinity*; both texts explored the 'possibility of a break out of essence.'²⁴ For example, in a key section of *Otherwise than Being* entitled 'Substitution', Levinas opens his discussion with the following epigraph:

Ich bin du, wenn
ich ich bin.

[I am you, when
I am I.]

(OB, 99)

Arguably, within this fragment of Celan's poetry *lies the essence* of Levinas' ethic as expressed in *Totality and Infinity* – the constitution of the 'I' (subjectivity) occurring within a non-allergic encounter with the wholly Other: 'I am you, when /I am I' (OB, 99). But how to express this ethical proximity in a manner that is not ultimately recouped within that which Levinas terms the closed images of thematic appropriation? (OB, 100).

As Derrida had graphically illustrated, the transcendental dislocation of the Greek *logos* is manifestly Sisyphean at the level of philosophical disclosure. In point of fact, Levinas seems to concede as much when admits that the *logos* recovers and covers over 'every ex-ception' – every negativity and nihilation (*OB*, 8).

Having said this, is there perhaps what Derrida has deemed a 'non-site' or non-locus from which such lucidity can be challenged? In an interview with Richard Kearney, Derrida suggests that he is unsure as to whether the site of his readings can be properly termed philosophical: 'I have attempted [...] to find a non-site, or non-philosophical site, from which to question philosophy.'²⁵ In a similar fashion, Levinas claims that *Otherwise than Being* 'signifies a null-site [non-lieu]' (*OB*, 8). Yet surely such a 'null-site' is harboured within discourse. By definition, such a site is an area occupied by something – in this instance, the intelligible Platonic Sun or Greek *logos*. Derrida agrees. In fact, as we have already seen, it is crucial for Derrida that we think of such a non-site in terms of an immanent locus. The later Levinas would seem to be of the same mind, for instead of appealing to an empirical Other beyond discourse, he changes tack and invokes the infinite within language itself. That is to say, the ethical encounter is said to occur within or through discourse. As Edith Wyschogrod suggests, Levinas thus 'deflects his attention from the Face as bearing the warranty of [ethical] language to language itself.'²⁶

According to critics such as Critchley, this process of deflection amounts to what he terms a 'linguistic or deconstructive turn' which produces an equivocal disturbance within philosophical discourse (*ED*, 8). I would argue that this disturbance forms an integral part of Levinas' reaction to Derrida's oblique critique. At the start, Levinas outwardly admits that the lexeme of the Same 'sticks like ink to the hands that push it off' (*OB*, 8). Or otherwise stated, he was well aware of the fact that any inscribed transcendence re-inscribes that which is ostensibly effaced. Given this fact, Levinas suggests that one might have to abandon normal inscriptive practices – that is, one might 'have to go all the way to the nihilism of Nietzsche's poetic writing, reversing irreversible time in vortices, to the laughter which refuses language' (*OB*, 8). And yet arguably, the poetic realization of Nietzsche's pugnacious polemic in the modernist poetics of writers such as T. E. Hulme is fettered to an ego-centric propensity that is irreconcilable with any sense of the ethical. 'As in extreme youth,' such radical subjectivity thus 'breaks with essence' at too high a price (*OB*, 8). Furthermore, with reference to Nietzsche's poetic reversal, Levinas maintains that 'negativity, still correlate with being, will not be enough

to signify the *other than being*' (OB, 9). The so-called 'strangeness' of Levinas' later text cannot therefore be attributed to a poetic reversal of terms. Instead, I would suggest that the enigmatic style of *Otherwise than Being* can be interpreted in terms relative a poetic textual turn designed to disrupt any final act of overt philosophical inscription. In point of fact, I would agree with Colin Davis when he argues that elements of Levinas' enigmatic method appear intended to disorientate the reader – that is, they seem calculated to 'delay rather than to facilitate understanding'²⁷.

Indeed, Levinas employs textual tactics that both impede passive consumption and bring to the fore the physical actuality of the word. For example, hyphens dissect what appear to be key phrases or terms. In the original French, some of these words are both hyphenated and italicized: 'disinterestedness' appears as 'dés-intéressement.' As Davis also points out, in the original French, multiple hyphens are used to connect and combine separate words. Such connections form awkward composites: 'prior to every memory' becomes 'antérieur-à-tout-souvenir.'²⁸

In a broader context, Levinas also utilizes what might be termed a micro/macro form. For example, rambling compound sentences coexist with a surfeit of aphorisms. The text can be construed as both vertiginous and claustrophobic. Without doubt, such disparate play is deliberately designed to disorientate. At a thematic level, Levinas also casts off much of his earlier terminology. In its place, he adopts a new vocabulary – a vocabulary that is far more fluid. As Étienne Feron points out, this new vocabulary 'ceaselessly interrupt[s] itself' as one posited term is substituted for another.²⁹ This process of fluid substitution prevents any sense of conceptual stasis. In the few cases where Levinas does employ what appear to be key terms, they are usually paradoxical or at least somewhat enigmatic. The recurrent phrase 'pre-original' is a case in point. One is left to contemplate what it is that can precede 'the origin which nothing can (by definition) precede?'³⁰ Thus, what Jean Daive has said of Celan's method of communication is arguably applicable to Levinas' poetic turn: 'Paul creates an aquarium effect that muffles what he communicates, makes it hard to hold on to, hold on to immediately.'³¹

At a certain level, the stylistic form of *Otherwise than Being* is therefore clearly different from that of *Totality and Infinity*. This difference is perhaps comparable to that which demarcates Joyce's *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. While *Totality and Infinity* sought to explicate the beyond in the manner of the Hegelian *Ulysses*, *Otherwise than Being* alludes to this project, but employs a textual style that appears, by design,

to be obstructive.³² That is to say, lucidity is eclipsed in Levinas' later text, be it by baffling paradox, contradiction, repetition or poetic surface play. As in the poetry of Celan, Levinas thus appears to be working at the limits of that which communicable. Yet whereas such puzzling play is often applauded in poetry or works of fiction such as *Finnegans Wake*, in the context of ethical thought it has met with a degree of enmity. Luce Irigaray for one has accused Levinas of employing a 'number of words without always defining or redefining them.'³³ Others have criticized Levinas for being indecisive.³⁴ In contrast, I would suggest that this wordplay and lack of lucidity is imperative. As will become apparent, to criticize what Levinas terms his 'barbarous expression[s]' (*OB*, 178) is to miss the point.

Unlike the fictional work of Joyce and the poetry of Celan, it is important to remember that Levinas' text remains a work of philosophical inscription; albeit, to quote Drucilla Cornell, a 'philosophy of the limit.'³⁵ Yet how does such a work 'that means to be philosophy' (*OB*, 155) escape philosophy? I return to the fundamental question: how does Levinas circumvent the violent re-inscription of the Other within philosophical discourse? Or within the imagery of Celan, how does Levinas avoid the 'permanent possibility of [linguistic] war' (*TI*, 21) thereby inducing the executioner's axe to flower?

ICH HÖRE, DIE AXT HAT GEBLÜHT,
Ich höre, der Ort ist nicht nennbar

[I HEAR, THE AXE HAS FLOWERED,
I hear, the place is not nameable]³⁶

In texts such as *Totality and Infinity* the ethical encounter was said to be pre-linguistic. In Levinas' later rejoinder, 'the ethical' becomes, to use Derrida's own turn of phrase, an 'ultralogical affect of speech' (*WD*, 133). In other words, the ethical encounter is no longer located at the level of pre-cognitive empiricism; instead, it is relocated as an épi-phénoménal (and as such, non-nameable) effect of language itself located 'upstream of the "content" of any message.'³⁷ Central to this reformulation is what Levinas terms 'the Saying' and 'the Said.'

There seems little doubt that we are linguistically constrained by the 'resources of logocentrism' (*ED*, 122), for to enter into (conceptual) discourse is to partake in the ubiquitous workings of the Greek *logos*. Construed in this specific light, discourse is what Levinas refers to as 'the

Said': 'The logos said has the last word dominating all meaning' (*OB*, 169). Levinas' earlier work thus re-inscribed an essence or 'last word' within the sphere of 'the Said.' Hence, as Derrida puts it, Levinas' earlier work (*ouvrage*) did not Work (*Œuvre*) for the 'wholly Other' became inscribed, and as such enslaved, within the discourse of Being.³⁸ Yet as Derrida also inquires, how does the later Levinas relocate the Other within discourse or language; that is to say, 'how does he manage to inscribe or let the wholly other be inscribed within the language of being, [...] within its syntax and lexicon, under its laws?'³⁹ In the final analysis, are not all transcendental 'explosions [...] recounted' (*OB*, 169) within the materiality of the Said?

And yet for the later Levinas, the Said is not the be-all-and-end-all of language. On the contrary, the Said is itself unbound by a secondary element. Derrida alludes to the possibility of such a secondary element thus:

Mustn't one reserve the question, at least in appearance, and ask oneself if [...] language is not *of itself unbound* and hence open to the wholly other, to its own beyond, in such a way that it is less a matter of exceeding [...] language than of treating it otherwise [...].⁴⁰

In *Otherwise than Being*, the Sisyphean effort to exceed language is indeed forsaken. Instead, Levinas treats language 'otherwise' through an appeal to what I have termed a secondary element. Literally, for Levinas, each and every utterance can be construed as a 'situation, structure or event in which I am exposed to the Other as a speaker or receiver of discourse'.⁴¹ Conveyance or reception of that which is Said therefore entails an 'exposure' of sorts, an exposure that Levinas dubs the Saying. For Levinas the Saying can be construed as a 'pre-original' aspect of language. In precise terms, the Saying is not what one might call a modality of cognition, but rather a profound openness to an-Other that, by itself, marks the very condition of any cognitive act. Devoid of any sense of temporality, the Said thus presupposes the Saying – a Saying that is the very condition of all possible communication (*OB*, 48). As Levinas puts it:

Antecedent to the verbal signs it conjugates, to the linguistic systems and the semantic glimmerings – a forward preceding languages – it [the Saying] is the proximity of one to the other, the commitment of an

approach, the one for the other, the very signifyingness of signification.⁴²

Thus, instead of marking a return to the Heideggerian 'primal shelter,' philosophical discourse is, at least in one important sense, conditioned by an 'abandon of all shelter' (*OB*, 48); that is to say, such discourse is conditioned by an exposure to an-Other. For Levinas, such insight cures the myopia that has so often afflicted Western philosophy – a philosophy that has focused primarily upon the Said to the detriment of the Other.

Arguably, this radical reformulation of the ethical encounter is problematic though, for how is Levinas able to communicate or make known the Saying? Surely the Saying can only be Said in the same manner as the Other can only be elucidated in the discourse of the Same. Can it be that Levinas has returned, like Ulysses, to the impasse set down in his earlier work? Is his radical reformulation nothing more than a literal re-formation of a defunct idea? I would suggest not. In order to see why, we must return to my earlier discussion of style. As I suggested above, for Levinas, *Otherwise than Being* is a work or text that 'means to be philosophy' (*OB*, 155). Yet notwithstanding this intention, Levinas' text is counterbalanced or interrupted by a multitude of devices that disrupt the sedimentation of the philosophical Said. The task or Work (*Ceuvre*) of *Otherwise than Being* can thus be seen in terms of an 'incessant unsaying of the said, [...] a movement going from the said to unsaid' (*OB*, 181). And yet surely, as Levinas seems only too aware, such disruptions are inextricably tethered to their host:

Every contesting and interruption of this power of discourse is at once related by the discourse. Thus it recommences as soon as one interrupts it [...]. This discourse will be affirmed to be coherent and one. In relating the interruption of discourse or my being ravished by it, I retie its thread [...]. And are we not *at this very moment* in the process of barring up the exit which our whole essay is attempting, thus encircling our position from all sides?⁴³

As Levinas suggests here, the stylistic endeavour to sever the logocentric Said appears to culminate in a conceptual process of retying. *Prima facie*, this process of retying serves to offset the Work of Levinas' work (*ouvrage*). As Levinas goes on to suggest:

Does not the discourse that suppresses the interruptions of discourse by relating them maintain the discontinuity under the knots with which the thread is retied again?

The interruptions of the discourse found again and recounted in the immanence of the said are conserved like knots in a thread tied again [...]. And I still interrupt the ultimate discourse in which all the discourses are stated, in saying it to one that listens to it, and who is situated outside the said that the discourse says, outside all it includes. That is true of the discussion I am elaborating *at this very moment*.⁴⁴

In the above, the thread of logocentric discourse is perhaps retied in and through the very act of textual exposition – in and through, that is, the act of exposing a radical discontinuity. Yet this said, internal disruptions subsist as knots in this performative excerpt; knots that ultimately slip or untwine when, *at this very moment*, an address is made. Crucially, the phrase ‘at this very moment’ is a performative node or knot in this instance. As Critchley has suggested, the repetition of this key phrase ‘involves a dislocation, or displacement, where the same phrase, when repeated in two different but related contexts, interrupts itself and says something wholly other’ (*ED*, 124). In summary, such an interruption offsets the Said by belying the logical law of bivalence. In this way, the phrase announces itself as an instant in which the Said becomes unsaid. As Critchley further suggests, Levinas thus ‘finds a way of retying the knot[s] which does not mend the thread, one which produces an irreducible *supplement*’ to the Said – namely, Saying (*ED*, 127). Consequently, any propounded process of exposition or elucidation is beleaguered by an irreducible supplement that manifests itself at the disruptive level of stylistic form. In a nutshell, such form unbinds that which is always already bound.

In a reworking of a short but perceptive reading by Jill Robbins, we can relate this notion of unbinding back to a short story by S. Y. Agnon – a writer who Levinas held in high esteem. Robbins focuses on a story entitled ‘Knots Upon Knots’. Therein the narrator leaves a popular craftsmen’s convention and pays a brief visit to an old bookbinder who is entrusted with his overnight things and some other belongings. The bindery is to be painted in the morning, so the narrator is urged to ‘clear out’ his things, for if ‘they were not lost they were sure to be messed

up.⁴⁵ Having no satchel, the narrator is obliged to improvise a means of conveyance. Under the watchful gaze of another, he attempts to tie his many packages together:

I went over to the biggest of the packages and took the rope that was on it in order to tie one package to another. The rope was old and knotted in knots upon knots, and on every knot that I unraveled I bruised my hands and tore my fingernails. And when I had finally unraveled all the knots, the rope fell apart. Its mate that I untied from a different package was no better. I unraveled it and it weakened, I knotted it and it disintegrated.⁴⁶

The practical or utilitarian attempt to unravel the impedimental knots thus amounts to nothing – the rope literally falls apart. In the absence of the knots, the integrity of the whole is compromised. Analogously, there is perhaps no sense of the conceptual Said in the absence of ethical Saying. Nevertheless, after some considerable effort, Agnon's narrator manages to fashion what appears to be an adequate rope, a rope constructed out of the many parts left to hand. Yet in the end, his labours prove futile:

I heard a dull noise and saw that my things were falling. The rope I had worked so hard to assemble had been weak from the start, and when I began to move, the package on my shoulders shook, the rope tore, and the articles scattered.⁴⁷

In an analogous fashion, logocentric discourse is retied in works that attempt to bear the burden of lucidity. To a certain extent, *Otherwise than Being* is akin to *Totality and Infinity* in the sense that it too bears such a weight. However, as I have shown, the burden of lucidity is counterbalanced in *Otherwise than Being* by a disruptive style that 'unbinds' that which is 'weak from the start' – specifically, that which is Said. Arguably, it is in this manner that the articles of textual law are scattered.

However, in the final analysis, for all its radical supplementation of the Said, Levinas' *Otherwise than Being* remains a work of philosophy. Perhaps, like a gentle breeze, it is only poetry, an aphotic poetry, a poethics without light, which can gather such scattered words in a

manner that denies final formulations. Levinas hints at such a possibility in his reading of Celan. In 1972 he published an essay entitled 'Paul Celan: From Being to the Other', an essay later reproduced in *Proper Names* (1976). As Robbins maintains, Levinas' central claim therein would seem to be that the 'poem in Celan goes toward the Other' – in other words, there is in Celan's work an underlying 'attempt to think transcendence.'⁴⁸ In Levinas' own terms:

[F]or Celan the poem is situated precisely at that pre-syntactic and [...] pre-logical level, but a level also pre-disclosing: at a moment of pure touching, pure contact, grasping, squeezing – which is, perhaps, a way of giving, right up to and including that hand that gives. A language of proximity for proximity's sake, older than that of 'the truth of being' [...] – the first of the languages, response preceding the question, responsibility for the neighbor, by its *for the other*, the whole marvel of giving.⁴⁹

Configured thus, the poem does not let the 'truth originate' in a quasi-Heideggerian aesthetic gesture; poetry is not 'the saying of the unconcealedness of what is.'⁵⁰ On the contrary, Celan's poetic mode is reconfigured in terms of a process of ceaseless self-interruption – in brief, at a pre-syntactic level, the inaudible language of proximity calls one to ethical account. In applied terms, I would argue that Celan's clarity of diction (or the purity of the Said) is counterbalanced or interrupted by the presence of multi-accentuality or what might be otherwise termed polysemic play. For example, in the first stanza of a poem entitled 'Etched away' (1967) one encounters the following lines:

... das hundert
züngige Mein-
gedicht, das Genicht.

[... the hundred-
tongued my-
poem, the noem.]⁵¹

As the critic Michael Hamburger explains in his introduction to Celan's work, "Mein-gedicht" could [...] mean "my-poem", but it could also mean "false poem" or "pseudo-poem", by analogy with the German word "Meineid", a false oath.⁵² In Levinasian terms, such internal ambiguities

render irresolute any cognitive or noematical purpose – they render irresolute that which is Said. Within this schema, Celan's polysemic play would appear to rupture the light of what Levinas had earlier termed Totality. Within Celan's own terms, although the poem might show an unmistakable tendency towards falling silent, it is this silent ambiguity (the un-said) which becomes a performative rapture from within which the poem reaches unto the '*wholly Other*.'⁵³ As Robert Sheppard has put it, if successful, poetry is 'arguably able to articulate [the] saying in the said of the dialogic performance.'⁵⁴ If *Otherwise than Being* can be construed as a movement 'going from the said to unsaid', it is thus perhaps only poetry that enacts an 'incessant unsaying of the said' (*OB*, 181). Consequently, despite Levinas' own early reticence with regards to a 'poethics', it is, I would argue, just such an aphotic mode that best enacts the breach of ontological Totality he sought.⁵⁵ In point of fact, Levinas comes close to articulating the selfsame sentiment when he proclaims that one can give oneself 'in saying to the point of poetry' – or contrariwise, one 'can withdraw into the non-saying of lies.'⁵⁶

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|-----------|---|
| <i>EC</i> | <i>Ethical Criticism</i> , Robert Eaglestone |
| <i>ED</i> | <i>The Ethics of Deconstruction</i> , Simon Critchley |
| <i>OB</i> | <i>Otherwise than Being</i> , Emmanuel Levinas |
| <i>TI</i> | <i>Totality and Infinity</i> , Emmanuel Levinas |
| <i>WD</i> | <i>Writing and Difference</i> , Jacques Derrida |

Notes

1 Emmanuel Levinas, 'Paul Celan: From Being to the Other', in *Proper Names* trans. Michael B. Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996) 41.

2 Levinas, *Proper Names* 46

3 Levinas, *Proper Names* 46

4 Paul Celan, *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan* trans. John Felstiner (New York & London: W. W. Norton) 314-315

5 Jean Daive, *Under the Dome: Walks with Paul Celan* trans. Rosemarie Waldrop (Providence: Burning Deck Press, 2009) 101. NB: '(re-)remembers' refers to the fact that Daive is recalling a conversation with Celan within the context of a poetic memoir.

6 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1996) 21, hereafter, *TI*.

7 Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1997) 83, hereafter, *WD*

8 Celan, *Selected Poems* 293 & 317 & Paul Celan, 'The Meridian: Speech on the Occa-

- sion of the Award of the Georg Büchner Prize' in Celan, *Selected Poems* 408
- 9 Richard A. Cohen, 'Introduction,' Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), hereafter *EI*: 10
- 10 Mark Wigley, 'The Domestication of the House: Deconstruction After Architecture,' *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts: Art, Media, Architecture*, eds. in Peter Burnette & David Wills (London & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 210
- 11 Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Massachusetts: MIT, 1991) 104
- 12 Gillian Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 134
- 13 Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law* 38. For a further critique of postmodernism that also addresses ethical issues, see: Gillian Rose, *Love's Work* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1995) 126-135
- 14 David Boothroyd, 'Responding to Levinas,' *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, eds. Robert Bernasconi & David Wood (London & New York: Routledge, 1988) 19
- 15 Celan, *Selected Poems* 316-7
- 16 Étienne Feron, *De l'idée de transcendance à la question du langage: L'Itinéraire philosophique d'Emmanuel Levinas* (Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, 1992) 260 qtd. in Colin Davis, *Levinas: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996) 66
- 17 Robert Eaglestone, *Ethical Criticism: Reading After Levinas* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997) hereafter *EC*: 132
- 18 Celan, *Selected Poems* 277. For an alternative, and arguably, more literal translation, see: Josh Cohen, *Interrupting Auschwitz* (New York & London: Continuum, 2003) 69 & 153n58. Cohen's translation is a modification of Michael Hamburger's translation.
- 19 Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), hereafter *ED*: 106n64
- 20 Robert Bernasconi & Simon Critchley, *Introduction, Re-Reading Levinas*, eds. Robert Bernasconi & Simon Critchley (London: Athlone Press, 1991) xii
- 21 Emmanuel Levinas, 'Wholly Otherwise,' trans. Simon Critchley, *Re-Reading Levinas* 3
- 22 Levinas, 'Wholly Otherwise,' trans. Critchley, *Re-Reading Levinas* 5. It is to be noted that Levinas is referring to a section of Derrida's *La voix et le phénomène* (Paris: P.U.F, 1967) 106 ('Is it certain?' – '*Est-ce-sûr?*')
- 23 Davis, *Levinas* 68
- 24 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998) 8, hereafter, *OB*.
- 25 Jacques Derrida, *Interview with Richard Kearney, 'Deconstruction and the other,' Emmanuel Levinas, Interview with Richard Kearney, 'Ethics of the Infinite,' States of Mind: Dialogues with Contemporary Thinkers*, ed., Richard Kearney, (New York: New York University Press, 1995) 159. For Richard Kearney's re-working of Levinasian ethics, see: Richard Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* (London: Routledge, 2002). Therein Kearney departs from the 'postmodernist obsession with absolutist ideas of exteriority and

otherness [...] lest it leads to a new idolatry: that of the immemorial, ineffable Other.'

26 Edith Wyschogrod, "'God and Being's Move' in the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas," *The Journal of Religion* 62 (1982): 150

27 Davis, Levinas 71

28 In the English translation by Alphonso Lingis, the majority of this syntactical play is removed. As suggested, 'dés-intéressement' becomes the slightly more palatable 'disinterestedness.'

29 Feron, *De l'idée* 118 qtd. in Davis, Levinas 70

30 Davis, Levinas 72-3

31 Daive, *Under the Dome* 71

32 It is to be noted that *Totality and Infinity* is by no means a (linear) analytical treatise. As Derrida points out in a notation: '*Totality and Infinity* [...] proceeds with the infinite insistence of waves on a beach: return and repetition, always, of the same wave against the same shore, in which, however, as each return recapitulates itself, it also infinitely renews and enriches itself.' In the self-same notation, Derrida further claims that *Totality and Infinity* 'is a work of art and not a treatise.' See: Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 312n7.

33 Luce Irigaray, 'Questions to Emmanuel Levinas: On the Divinity of Love,' trans. Margaret Whitford, *Re-Reading Levinas* eds. Robert Bernasconi & Simon Critchley (London: Athlone Press: 1991) 113

34 Tim Woods, 'The Ethical Subject: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas,' *Ethics and the Subject*, ed. Karl Simms (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997) 57

35 Drucilla Cornell qtd. in Eaglestone, *Ethical Criticism* 136

36 Celan, *Selected Poems* 334-5

37 Lars Iyer, 'The Unbearable Trauma and Witnessing in Blanchot and Levinas' *Janus Head* 6 (1), 37-63 (2003) 40.

38 *Ouvrage*: masculine: work, workmanship, (*texte, livre*). *Ceuvre*: feminine: work, task, undertaking, product(ion).

39 Jacques Derrida, 'At this very moment in this work here I am,' trans. Ruben Berezdivin, *Re-Reading Levinas* 16. As Bernasconi and Critchley suggest, Derrida's reading in 'At this very moment in this work here I am' is 'largely based upon *Otherwise than Being*, a text which [...] is far more attentive to the sort of problematic generated by deconstructive reading than *Totality and Infinity*. Second, one might also read "At this very moment" as a re-reading of "Violence and Metaphysics," an attempt to reformulate a response to Levinas's work in the light of Levinas's "response" to Derrida in *Otherwise than Being*.' See: Bernasconi & Critchley, Introduction, *Re-Reading Levinas* xiv.

40 Derrida, 'At this very moment in this work here I am,' Bernasconi & Critchley eds., *Re-Reading Levinas* 16-17

41 Davis, Levinas 75

42 Emmanuel Levinas, 'Essence and Disinterestedness,' *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, eds. Robert Bernasconi, Simon Critchley & Adriaan Peperzak (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996) 112

43 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being* 169. In 'At this very moment in this work here I am,'

Derrida quotes this passage and italicizes the phrase 'at this very moment.' I have retained this emphasis in my quotation.

44 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being* 170. Again, Derrida quotes this passage in 'At this very moment in this work here I am'. As in the previous quotation, I have retained Derrida's emphasis of the phrase, 'at this very moment.'

45 S. Y. Agnon, 'Knots Upon Knots,' trans. Anne Golomb Hoffman, *A Book that was Lost and Other Stories*, eds. Alan Mintz & Anne Golomb Hoffman (New York: Schocken Books, 1995) 125

46 Agnon, *A Book that was Lost* 126

47 Agnon, *A Book that was Lost* 127. For Levinas' approach to the fiction of Agnon, see, Levinas, *Proper Names*, 'Poetry and Resurrection: Notes on Agnon' 7-16. Therein, Levinas argues that Agnon's fiction frustrates the refuge in ontological stasis. That is to say, the Agnonesque aesthetic 'de-nucleates' the ultimate solidity or essence that subsists beneath the plasticity of forms (Levinas, *Proper Names* 10). Levinas suggests that in this specific sense Agnon's aesthetic mirrors the enigmatic modality of rabbinical interpretation – a mode of hermeneutical interpretation that shrouds the immobile or static movement of the sign within an intricate tissue of fluid commentaries. According to Levinas, just such a fluid breach of totality can be isolated in Agnon's rhetorical use of Biblical quotations – reticent quotations devoid of quotation marks. At one level, such pseudo-quotations echo what are termed 'master formulation[s]' (Levinas, *Proper Names* 9). Yet at another level, such quotations signify in the isolated context of the passage in which they (re)occur. In this manner, such tacit echoes become fissures that open up the closed structure of binary thought. Otherwise stated, Agnon's dissonant double-coding displaces a binary structure that cannot abide the presence (or absent presence) of what Levinas terms an 'excluded middle' (Levinas, *Proper Names* 10).

48 Robbins, *Altered Reading* 144

49 Levinas, *Proper Names* 41

50 Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (London & New York: Harper & Row, 1975) 74, 77. As with Levinas, Celan's attitude to Heidegger was somewhat ambivalent. For an extended analysis of the intellectual dialogue between the two thinkers, see: James K. Lydon, *Paul Celan and Martin Heidegger: An Unresolved Conversatio, 1951-1970* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2006).

51 Paul Celan, *Selected Poems*, trans. Michael Hamburger, (London: Penguin, 1990) 26

52 Michael Hamburger, Introduction, Celan, *Selected Poems* 26. In the main body of his translation, Hamburger translates 'Mein- / gedicht' as 'pseudo- / poem.'

53 Celan, *Selected Poems* 408-9

54 Robert Sheppard, *The Poetry of Saying: British poetry and Its Discontents, 1950-2000* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005) 14

55 See essays such as 'Reality and Its Shadow' for Levinas' quasi-Platonic critique of art and poetry. Put simply, Levinas appropriates the Platonic ethos but substitutes the Ideal for an encounter that he would later develop into the ethical 'face-to-face.' His logic dictates that any such encounter transcends the play of figuration or the aesthetic

presentation of absence. See: Emmanuel Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998) 1-14

56 Levinas, 'Ethics of the Infinite' 65

Dialogical Dasein: Heidegger on “Being-with,” “Discourse,” and “Solicitude”

Bradley Warfield

Abstract

In this paper I argue that the Heidegger of *Being and Time* is a dialogist, and ought to be situated in the tradition of other twentieth-century dialogists like Bakhtin and Gadamer. Specifically, I claim that Heidegger’s conceptions of the “Being-with,” “discourse,” and “solicitude” of Dasein in BT illustrate his endorsement of a conception of dialogicality. There are three advantages to proposing that Heidegger is a dialogist in BT. First, this paradigm offers a more perspicuous vocabulary for describing the discursive nature of Dasein’s Being-in-the-world as a Being-with others. Second, it provides a better way of understanding the normative dimensions of “solicitude.” Lastly, it helps to underscore how Dasein’s identity remains social even in the seemingly individualizing moment of becoming authentic.

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Introduction

In this paper I shall show how Heidegger’s notions of Dasein’s “Being-with” (*Mitsein*), “discourse” (*Rede*), and “solicitude” (*Fursorge*) illustrate how he has a conception of the dialogical in *Being and Time*. For my purposes here, the dialogical involves the following characteristics: 1) it is descriptive of discourse; 2) it requires the participation of at least one (embodied) person or agent; 3) given (2), it must be understood in terms of spatial metaphors or analogues; 4) it is inherently unfinalizable or open-ended; 5) it entails address and responsibility; 6) it has a normative dimension; and lastly, 7) it involves a to-and-fro movement inherent to interlocation. Importantly, the dialogical is not reducible to actual dialogue (i.e., conversation), for, as I shall show, the dialogical identifies the dynamics which obtain in actual dialogues and, by way of extrapolation, ascribes the characteristics of such dynamics to being itself.

There are at least three advantages to proposing that Heidegger is a dialogist in *Being and Time*. First, this paradigm offers an alternative, and more perspicuous, vocabulary for describing the discursive nature of Dasein's Being-in-the-world as a Being-with others. Second, it provides a better way of recognizing and understanding the normative dimensions of "solicitude." And third, it helps to underscore the ineliminable sociality of Dasein's understanding of itself and of others, such that its identity remains social even in the seemingly individualizing initial moment of becoming authentic.

A Brief Sketch of Dasein's Being-in-the-World

But before I attempt to show how Heidegger is a dialogist in *Being and Time*, it will be helpful to sketch briefly some of the basic features of his project therein. As is well known, Heidegger explicitly rejects the Cartesian metaphysical view of the self as a "thinking substance" (*res cogitans*), which exists separately, and is utterly distinct, from a supposedly independently existing external world of objects.¹ For Heidegger, the Cartesian self-world distinction neglects the fact that the human self always finds itself already immersed within a world, not as a self-enclosed 'ego' standing over and against an 'external' world of extended objects whose 'true objective' nature the 'ego' is burdened with trying to access through an act of pure cogitation. (Thus Descartes's strenuous attempts to prove (metaphysically) how the self as 'subject' can ever obtain (epistemologically) indubitable knowledge of both itself and of the 'external' world of 'objects' from which it is supposedly cut off.) As Heidegger says, Descartes "takes the Being of 'Dasein' (to whose basic constitution Being-in-the-world belongs) in the very same way as he takes the Being of the *res extensa*—namely, as substance" (BT 131; *Italics original*). Heidegger, then, rejects any notion of a "self" whose basic constitution is one of "thinking" or "consciousness." Thus Heidegger, in his description of the *incorrect* traditional Western metaphysical picture of the "self," writes, "The question of the 'who' answers itself in terms of the 'I' itself, the 'subject,' the 'Self'" (BT 150). For Heidegger, there is no 'pure' "I" or "ego" lying 'behind' the "self's" outwardly manifested actions.

In Heidegger's view, Descartes's metaphysical picture of the self-world relation means that he cannot offer an accurate description of how human beings encounter situations in their everyday lives (HPK 85). Guignon puts this clearly when he describes Dilthey's view, which was so influential for Heidegger, saying the "dualistic oppositions [of self and world]

are derivative from and parasitic on a more original kind of experience in which we exist as a 'self-world' unity. In our most familiar experiences, we are not aware of an 'I' or 'self' distinct from what is experienced. The subject-object opposition of traditional epistemology is... a high-level theoretical abstraction with no relevance to understanding concrete life."²

And for Heidegger, because any adequate picture of human beings must begin by looking at how they live in their everyday world (i.e., their everyday "dealings") (BT 95), Descartes's account cannot be correct. *Contra* Descartes, Heidegger claims that "Dasein itself—and this means also its Being-in-the-world—gets its ontological understanding of itself in the first instance from those entities which it itself is *not* but which it encounters 'within' its world, and from the Being which they possess" (BT 85; *Italics original*). As will become clear, Heidegger ascribes paramount importance to Dasein's kind of Being as being "always already" situated within a contextual world of relations. Because it is important to recognize the full extent to which Heidegger's view of Dasein as primarily relational and contextually situated emerges from his views regarding traditional epistemology, especially in its Cartesian form, I shall turn now to a basic sketch of some of the more fundamental features of his ontological project in *Being and Time*.

It is well known that Heidegger took the "question of Being" (BT 2) to be the most important—that is, most fundamental—question of all. He devoted his entire philosophical corpus to trying to answer the question: what is Being? The task of answering this question fell to what he called "fundamental ontology" (BT 34). Ontology is the study of Being in general. Specifically, one can ask, "What is it to be rather than not be? The necessity of accounting for this question is seen, as Heidegger pointed out, when we ask ourselves: Why is there something—*anything*—rather than nothing? Human beings can ask such ontological questions. Ontological investigation takes into its purview, then, the Being of "entities" (*"das Seiende"*). The ontic is a kind of investigation which studies properties and relations of particular "entities." As Guignon puts it, the term "entities," for Heidegger, "refers to anything of which we can say that 'it is' in any sense.... Symphonies, landscapes, thoughts, numbers, people, love, historical events: all of these *are* in some sense."³

For Heidegger, Being has a specific relation to entities. Namely, Being is the condition for the possibility of there being anything at all like entities, and of their being at all like the kind of entities they are. Being, Heidegger says, is "that which determines entities as entities, that on the

basis of which entities are already understood..." (BT 25-26). In his view, Being "determines" entities in that it defines their basic make-up, and it does so in a twofold sense: by both "*that* they are" (traditionally called 'existence') and "*what* they are" (traditionally called 'essence' (MH 93; Italics original). As Polt describes it, "Being is what allows us to encounter every entity" (HI 41). Any inquiry into the question of Being, then, is one which seeks to find out what it is to be an 'X' for any particular type of X." One could, for instance, inquire into the Being of a particular chair—in so far as it exemplifies "chairness"—just as readily as one could inquire into the Being of Winnie the Pooh, the honey-loving bear, or Macbeth, the tortured Prince. These entities form one of the two distinct kinds: nonhuman entities; Macbeth is, after all, a fictional character.⁴ The other distinct kind of entities is that of human beings, what Heidegger refers to as "Dasein" (literally "being-there," or, more straightforwardly "being-here").⁵

Dasein is fundamentally distinctive from nonhuman entities in its ability to ask about the nature of its own Being. As Heidegger says, "Dasein is ontically distinctive in that it *is* ontological" (BT 32; Italics original); that is, "Dasein, in its Being, has a relationship towards that Being—a relationship which itself is one of Being" (Ibid). In Heidegger's view, "Dasein is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an *issue* for it" (Ibid; Italics original). This means that in its everyday living the question—or meaning—of Dasein's Being arises for it. That for Dasein the meaning of its Being arises, or is an issue, for it is to say that its Being is something about which it cares. This feature of Dasein is what Heidegger calls "existence," and he takes over this term from the original Latin "*ex-sistere*," meaning "standing out." Heidegger, in fact, conceives of such care as an ontological structure of Dasein: "[T]he Being of Dasein itself is to be made visible as *care*" (BT 83-84; Italics original).⁶ But entities such as chairs and cats, for instance, do not have the question of the quality of their Being show up for them as something about which they should care.

Moreover, Heidegger says that "Dasein has turned out to be, more than any other entity, the one which must first be interrogated ontologically. But the roots of the existential analytic, on its part, are ultimately *existentiell*, that is, *ontical*" (Ibid; Italics original). The "existential" / "existentiell" distinction, for Heidegger, emerges in reference to kinds of understanding which Dasein exhibits. "Existential" understanding is a worked-

out understanding “of the essential structures of Dasein” (HPK 68). “Existentiell” understanding pertains to the “characteristics of a unique individual” (Ibid). It refers to an individual’s understanding of how she is to live her life, which roles she should take up, etc. “Existential” understanding is revealed through ontological investigation, where the fundamental structure of Dasein’s Being become illuminated for me. Yet I can access understanding of these possible ways for me to be through ontical investigation and without having undertaken (the more primordial) ontological investigation.

Heidegger’s use of the term Dasein is intended to indicate, among other things, the “situatedness” (*Befindlichkeit*) of human beings. Heidegger ascribes paramount importance to human beings’ “situatedness” to underscore the fact that we, as individual Dasein, are “always already” situated within a particular historical, cultural, socio-economic, etc. context in the world. (This is why Dasein should be understood more as “being-*here*” than as “being-*there*.”) His distinctive use of the double adverb “always already” is meant to highlight the fact that we are “thrown” into a world not of our own choosing. We are born in a particular time period, to particular parents, in a particular cultural, religious, etc. milieu. That is, we simply *find ourselves* in a given context ‘prior’ to our explicitly recognizing it as such. But becoming aware of my “facticity”—e.g. that I am a white, middle-class male, born in Maryland, that I have one brother, etc.—enables me to understand myself in certain ways which themselves shape my “existentiell” understanding of the “factual” possible ways for me to be (i.e., the roles I can assume, etc.)—e.g. that I can assume the role of a supportive, or estranged, brother, that I can choose to own up to, or reject, the commitment I have made as a professional academic-in-training, and that I can choose to accept that I am over thirty-years-old, or flee from that fact by acting out in adolescent ways.

According to Heidegger, what enables me to become aware of my facticity by way of “interpretation” is the “existential” characteristic of my Being as Dasein that he calls “understanding:” “As understanding, Dasein projects its Being upon possibilities” (BT 188). And “Interpretation is grounded existentially in understanding; the latter does not arise from the former” (Ibid). “Interpretation” is “the working-out of possibilities projected in understanding” (BT 188-189).

In a very real sense, then, Dasein *is* “understanding,” to the extent that, as a particular case of Dasein, I instantiate, in my “interpretations,” various

modes of “taking a stand” with regard to my life. As he puts it, “*Understanding is the existential Being of Dasein’s own potentiality-for-Being; and it is so in such a way that this Being discloses in itself what its Being is capable of*” (BT 182; Italics original).

That we are always already enmeshed within a complex totality of involvements—that we can never step out, so to speak, from the world in which we live—makes up a distinctive feature of Dasein’s Being; namely, that Dasein’s understanding of itself must be conceived primarily through its *relations* to itself, other Dasein, and the nonhuman entities Dasein encounters in its “Being-in-the-world.” He employs the hyphenation to emphasize that he conceives “the compound expression ‘Being-in-the-world’ as ‘a *unitary* phenomenon’” (BT 78; Italics original). Heidegger claims that such “relationality” is an ontological feature of Dasein—Dasein’s kind of Being *is* Being-in-the-world—which he describes with the terms “Being-in”⁷ and “Being-with.” He says explicitly that “*Being-in*’ is thus the formal existential expression for the Being of Dasein, which has Being-in-the-world as its essential state. ‘Being alongside’ the world in the sense of being absorbed in the world...is an *existential* founded upon Being-in” (BT 80-81; Italics original). It is important to note, however, that “being alongside” is a misleading translation, and should be translated as “being always already in,” “being amidst,” or “being at home with” the world.

My discussion above of the picture of Dasein’s “Being-in-the-world” which Heidegger offers elucidates the full extent to which, in our everyday “concernful absorption” (BT 101) in our “dealings” in the world, we experience ourselves and the world not as Descartes’s picture would suggest, but rather as selves “always already” enmeshed within a world of involvements. As Guignon explains, Heidegger’s “description focuses not on the situations in which we are passive spectators, but rather on the contexts in which we are active and engaged in the world” (HPK 86). Guignon notes further that “In the picture that takes shape in Heidegger’s description of Being-in-the-world, there is no longer any way to draw a distinction between a subject and a set of objects that are to be known” (Ibid).

Contrary to the traditional picture, the “who” of Dasein is in Heidegger’s view by definition non-isolatable. This is because “From the world [Dasein] takes its possibilities, and it does so first in accordance with the way things have been interpreted by the ‘they.’ This interpretation has already restricted the possible options of choice to what lies within the range of the familiar, the attainable, the respectable—that which is fitting

and proper" (BT 239). Heidegger uses the term "the 'they'" (*Das Man*) to invoke those instances in which we refer to "what one *typically* does" when "one" is acting appropriately or properly, that is, in accordance with the norms and expectations of one's society. When, for instance, I offer a purportedly justificatory explanation for prohibiting, say, "jaywalking," I might say, "One does not do that," in order to convey the sense of impropriety such an act would evince.

Thus Heidegger uses the "they" to refer to all of us in general and each of us in particular as those who explicitly and implicitly sustain the norms for what is typically expected of us. The "they" is thus the sustainer and purveyor of general opinion. The "they" is the 'ground,' so to speak, on which the intelligibility of our social relations, values, beliefs, goals, possibilities, etc. rests. As a complex web of meanings, the "they" lets our enactment of our "existentiell" possibilities have the meaning they do. In this sense, the "they" is of indispensable importance to Dasein's understanding of others and of itself (as being inextricably bound up in relation to others). We now see the full extent to which Heidegger claims the "they" bears on the "self" such that the self can at no time ever disentangle itself from the "they," and stand, at it were, over and against it as an isolated individual self. In Heidegger's view, we are always already *both* the "they-self" and the "authentic self," where the "they" and the "authentic self" are "existentialia" (i.e., ontological characteristics) of Dasein, not "existentiell" modes of being. This leads him to say, "For the most part *I myself* am not the 'who' of Dasein; the they-self is its 'who'" (BT 312; Italics original). And, moreover, that "The Self...is proximally and for the most part inauthentic, the they-self" (BT 225).

I described earlier how, in Heidegger's view, we are "thrown" into a world not of our own choosing. Because as everyday Dasein, we find ourselves always already "thrown" into a particular context pregnant with possibilities for us to take up, as our "ownmost potentiality-for-Being" allows, we cannot ever 'catch up' and 'get behind' ourselves as everyday Dasein, whose Being is "Being-in-the-world," such that we can view it *sub specie aeternitatis*. Heidegger captures this feature well when he says, "In no case is a Dasein, untouched and unseduced by this way in which things have been interpreted, set before the open country of a 'world-in-itself' so that it just beholds what it encounters" (BT 213). Heidegger says further, "Dasein constantly lags behind its possibilities. It is never existent *before* its basis, but only *from it* and *as this basis*. Thus 'Being-a-basis' means *never* to have power over one's ownmost Being from the ground up" (BT 330; Italics original). Heidegger is pointing to the fact that, as "thrown"

“Being-in-the-world,” we as individual Dasein find ourselves in a current of everyday life beginning from our birth, and, if we choose to, we can let ourselves remain *entirely* adrift and follow this current, which is comprised of the norms, routines, and conventions of public life. The qualifier “if we choose to” suggests, however, that there is a sense in which we can choose *not* to remain adrift. And this is indeed the case, according to Heidegger. Such a case involves our choosing *definitively* (but not unalterably) to take a stand regarding our lives.

But there is another sense in which we cannot ever *not be adrift* to some extent precisely because we are always already “thrown” into a world. Even if we choose to take a definitive stand of “anticipatory resoluteness” with regard to ourselves and our lives, such taking a stand does not mean that we have stepped out of the current in which we find ourselves. We cannot ever step out of the current and gain an irrevocably solid footing. As Dasein, the extent to which we let ourselves remain adrift is up to us. It is important to note, however, that the notion of “choosing” which I identified above must be understood whereby if we choose to remain adrift, then our choosing to do so is in fact a manner of choosing *not to choose*.

This mode of being (noncontingently) adrift is what Heidegger calls “falling” (“*verfallen*”) (BT 210). As Heidegger says, “Being-in-the-world is always fallen (BT 225). That is, “Falling is a definite existential characteristic of Dasein itself” (BT 220). As Polt puts it, “falling is necessarily our normal, everyday mode of existing” (HI 76). Therefore we cannot *not* be in a state of “falling.” Having described “thrownness” above, it is now evident how, as Polt notes, “falling is so pervasive because it is a direct result of thrownness” (Ibid).⁸ Of falling, Heidegger says that, “This ‘absorption in...’ has mostly the character of Being-lost in the publicness of the ‘they’” (BT 220).

For example, that I spend my weekdays working as a graduate student means that I assume the role of “graduate student,” with all of the expectations and responsibilities that that entails. But the particular *manner* in which I take up such a role depends on *how I understand myself as* the kind of person who has such a role. Insofar as I am still a student, I could adopt the expectation “one” has of “students” by spending my time away from schoolwork by, say, drinking a lot of alcohol as a way of ‘cutting loose’ from the weight and pressure of my weekday responsibilities. While at the bar, I can engage in the kind of routine conversations “one” has at a bar, the ‘chit-chat’ (i.e., what Heidegger calls “idle talk”)⁹ that is expected

in such social settings. I can therefore quite readily let myself drift along with the routines of everyday life as such routines are established and understood in the specific social and historical milieu in which I live. In this way, I live my life according to how “one” in my situation lives “one’s” life.

Heidegger’s description of “thrownness” and “falling” is meant to identify how each of us, as a particular case of Dasein in our everyday modes of “Being-in-the-world,” lets the “they”—of which we are a part—with its superficial ways of being and doing, obscure from us the insight that the “*existentiell*” possibilities of our everyday “Being-in-the-world” *are in fact possibilities* for living in a way radically different from how we have lived heretofore.¹⁰ One of the consequences, then, of letting ourselves remain adrift and be overtaken by, or delivered over to, the “they” is that we let ourselves overlook our possibilities *as possibilities* (BT 306). That we overlook our possibilities *as possibilities* amounts to a leveling out of the contours of our individual “ownmost potentiality-for-Being” of which our “*existentiell*” possibilities are a manifestation. In other words, our failure to see our possibilities as the possibilities they are for allowing us to take a stand toward ourselves and our lives means that we cover up and snuff out—although never altogether such that we cannot alter our course—that which is most distinctive about us as particular cases of Dasein.¹¹

That we can never not be in the states of “thrownness” and “fallenness” is what informs his claim that, even in becoming “authentic Being-one’s-Self” (BT 313) (as an “*existentiell*” mode), one is still a placeholder in the “they” (as an “*existential*”). That is, although we can be more or less authentic, all of us inexorably are, as an “*existentiell*” mode, part “they-self.” I described earlier an example of the way in which I can let myself remain adrift in the “they.” And I noted how such a “remaining adrift” involved my choosing not to choose. Such a way of being is, in that case, one of disowning my choices and, ultimately, my responsibility. I noted, further, how the particular way in which I take up my role as a graduate student—as one among other contemporaneous roles I have—depends on how I see and understand myself with regard to my life as a whole.

This helps illustrate how, for Heidegger, in becoming authentic, the change one makes is not in the “*what*” but in the “*how*.” For instance, my becoming “authentic Being-one’s-Self” (Ibid) is not just a matter of substituting for my old set of actions a completely new set, such that I forego going out to the bar and drinking each weekend, although it may involve that. Rather, the change in becoming authentic would lie in my chang-

ing the *particular way* in which I undertake those actions, such that my attitude toward them, and my understanding of their significance, takes on a radically different meaning. This is what Heidegger means when he says, “Authentic Being-one’s-Self takes the definite form of an existentiell modification of the ‘they’” (BT 312). But he is careful to note that, just because I may become authentic, it is just as possible for me to become less and less authentic, possibly to such an extent that I drift back entirely into the “publicness of the they” (BT 220) and into authenticity.

It has frequently been argued that Heidegger does not regard Dasein’s “existential” “falling” as deserving of moral disapprobation (or, for that matter, of the “anticipatory resoluteness” of authenticity as deserving of moral approbation). On this view, his use of the notion of “inauthenticity” is especially confusing at first glance, for the terms “authentic” and “inauthentic” for us in English typically have a moral or ethical connotation insofar as they reflect a value judgment. But upon considering that the German words Heidegger uses for “authentic,” “*eigentlich*,” and “inauthentic,” “*Uneigentlichkeit*,” are derived from “*eigen*” meaning “own,” then we get a better sense of how his notion of authenticity should be understood; namely, as Guignon suggests, as “enownment.”¹² Nevertheless, as Mark Wrathall has noted, “It is implausible to deny that authenticity is at least sometimes used in an evaluative sense. Taylor Carman suggests... that Heidegger actually has two distinct notions running side by side—a descriptive and a normative sense of ‘authentic.’”¹³

Heidegger as Dialogist: “Being-with,” “Discourse,” and “Solicitude”

Heidegger’s conception of “Being-with” illustrates, in part, how he endorses, albeit tacitly, a conception of the dialogical in *Being and Time*. In Paragraph 26, he writes:

“According to the analysis which we have now completed, Being with Others belongs to the Being of Dasein, which is an issue for Dasein in its very Being. Thus as Being-with, Dasein ‘is’ essentially for the sake of Others.... Even if the particular factual Dasein does *not* turn to Others, and supposes that it has no need of them or manages to get along without them, it *is* in the way of Being-with” (BT 160; *Italics original*).

This passage describes how Dasein’s Being-with others is an ontological, non-contingent feature of its existence. As Heidegger’s description above,

along with those he offers of the They, emphasizes, as individual Dasein, we cannot, as it were, escape *being-with* others. The social world is so pervasive, then, that it is only in theoretical abstraction from our everyday lives that we can consider ourselves as an isolatable individual, and even when doing so, it is always already from a standpoint situated in a social world of others. As Charles Taylor puts it, “One is a self only among other selves. A self can never be described without reference to those who surround it” (SS 35). This is what Taylor refers to as the “transcendental condition of interlocution” (SS 38-39). He describes the Levinasian view when he writes in *Sources of the Self*:

“The close connection between identity and interlocution also emerges in the place of *names* in human life. My name is what I am ‘called.’ A human being *has* to have a name, because he or she has to be *called*, i.e., addressed. Being called into conversation is a precondition of developing a human identity, and so my name is (usually) given me by my earliest interlocutors” (SS 525, endnote 13; italics original).

Our sociality is so comprehensive, though, that, as Heidegger points out, even when we are alone, we are not somehow removed from the condition—or the way or manner—of “Being-with” others. Thus Heidegger asserts, “Being-with is an existential characteristic of Dasein even when factually no other is present-at-hand or perceived” (BT 156). He describes this further by saying, “Being missing and ‘Being away’ [*Das fehlen und Fortsein*] are modes of Dasein-with, and are possible only because Dasein as Being-with lets the Dasein of Others be encountered in its world” (BT 157). Thus, William Blattner accurately claims, “Even...if one is a hermit or recluse, having retreated to a cabin in the hills of Idaho to get away from everyone, others matter to one, in this case, as being despicable or to be avoided. Being a recluse is an anti-social way of understanding oneself and one’s relations to others. Being anti-social is a ‘privative’ way of being social; it is a stance on the significance of what others pursue.”¹⁴

Heidegger’s descriptions of “thrownness,” “falling,” “Being-with,” the “they,” and “discourse,” among other central notions in *Being and Time*, show how we are born into a language community of interlocutors—a “we”—and we develop our identity as an “I” only by virtue of, not separate from, the shared practices, evaluations, and articulations of social interaction.¹⁵ Blattner calls Heidegger’s position here “ontological communitarianism” to underscore how Heidegger wants to avoid any notion of an ethical or political communitarianism (HBT 68). Echoing

Heidegger, Taylor argues that “There is no way we could be inducted into personhood except by being initiated into a language” (SS 35), or as Heidegger refers to it, “discourse,” which is the condition for the possibility of “language.”

Discourse, for Heidegger, does not refer to speech as verbal utterance. Rather, as Richard Polt suggests, “Heidegger describes discourse (rather vaguely) as the articulation and expression of” the world’s intelligibility.... “Discourse makes it possible for me to share my situation with others in language.”¹⁶ Thus Heidegger claims that “As an existential state in which Dasein is disclosed, discourse is constitutive for Dasein’s existence. *Hearing and keeping silent* [*Schweigen*] are possibilities belonging to discursive speech” (BT 204). Indeed, Heidegger’s differentiation of “communication”—in which, in one form, interlocutors merely “make assertions” or “giv[e] information” (BT 205)—from discourse suggests he is aware of the qualitative distinction between dialogical and monological interlocution, where “communication” is a strictly monological phenomenon.¹⁷

Discourse in general and language in particular (as Heidegger distinguishes them) play an indispensable role, then, in the formation of human identity. In sharing “webs of interlocution” (SS 36), Taylor claims, I articulate my identity as “an answer to the question of who I am through a definition of where I am speaking from and to whom” (Ibid). My identity comes to be constituted through my interaction with others, by what “stances” I take towards them, and how I respond to the stances they assume towards me. As Taylor notes, “[O]ur identity is never simply defined in terms of our individual properties. If I really identify myself with my deferential attitude toward wiser people like you, then this conversational stance becomes a constituent of my identity.”¹⁸

If the picture I have drawn of Heidegger so far is accurate, then his descriptions of the ontological features of Dasein’s Being-with others illustrate how human beings, in their everyday discursive comportment with one another, are *mutually solicitous* of one another, irrespective of the attitudinal stance they may actually adopt. That is, human beings, as discursive agents amongst fellow interlocutors, find themselves perpetually *called upon* and *addressed* by others and themselves. We find ourselves situated within human discourse in such a way that we are always already both addressers and addressees. (This particular aspect of solicitousness is one which came to feature so centrally for Levinas and one which he captured so powerfully.) I think this is precisely what Heidegger has in mind when he says that, “As a Being-in-the-world with Others, a Being

which understands, *Dasein* is ‘in thrall’ to *Dasein-with and to itself*; and in this thralldom it ‘belongs’ to these” (BT 206; *Italics mine*). The solicitous pull we feel from others—our sense of being called upon or addressed by others—is coeval with the outward-directed anticipation we have, noncontingently, toward others—our sense of calling upon others. The pull we feel from others would not arise, then, without the anticipatory outward-looking orientation we have as one of our ontological features.

The ontological feature of outward-looking anticipation is precisely what Heidegger is describing when he says both that “*Dasein* ‘is’ essentially *for the sake of Others*” (BT 160; *Italics mine*). That this outward-looking other-directedness is an essential feature of ourselves as particular cases of *Dasein* means that it is an ineluctable feature of our sociality, “it *is* in the way of Being-with,” that is, it is our very mode of Being-in-the-world. Even though this other-directedness is an ontological feature of our existence, as Heidegger emphasizes, this does not preclude our ontically choosing to ignore or remain impervious to the pull or call of others. Indeed, as Heidegger insists in his description of everyday inauthentic “falling,” our normal mode of going about our daily lives is precisely this (ontic) avoidance of the pull or call of others. Moreover, as I shall show in greater detail later, our choice to remain impervious to the pull or call of others exemplifies monological action.

Heidegger captures the different modes of our discursive comportment in his conception of “solicitude.” The normative dimension we find in Heidegger’s notion of authenticity is present as well in both “solicitude” and “care” (*Sorge*), with the latter forming the basis from which Heidegger derives his conception of the former. Blattner offers a clear description of these notions: “Simply in so far as *Dasein* is being-in-the-world, it is also being-with, and simply in so far as its own life matters to it, the lives of others matter to it. . . . Heidegger calls this mattering ‘care,’ and others’ mattering to me he calls ‘solicitude’ (*Fursorge*, literally ‘caring-for’). It is important to bear in mind that just as ‘care’ does not refer to a specific emotional state, such as worry or devotion, neither does ‘solicitude.’ ‘Solicitude’ is just a technical term for the way others matter to us simply in so far as we lead our own lives” (HBT 67).

Consider the following two passages, the second of which is especially illuminating for my purposes. Heidegger writes:

“[T]hose entities towards which *Dasein* as Being-with comports itself do not have the kind of Being which belongs to equipment

ready-to-hand; they are themselves Dasein. These entities are not objects of concern, but rather of *solicitude*” (BT 157; *Italics original*).

and

“[W]e understand the expression ‘solicitude’ in a way which corresponds to our use of ‘concern’ as a term for an *existentiale*. For example, ‘welfare work’ [*Fursorge*], as a factual social arrangement, is grounded in Dasein’s state of Being as Being-with. Its factual urgency gets its motivation in that Dasein maintains itself proximally and for the most part in the deficient modes of solicitude. *Being for, against, or without one another, passing one another by, not ‘mattering’ to one another—these are possible ways of solicitude.* And it is precisely these last-named deficient and Indifferent modes that characterize everyday, average Being-with-one-another” (BT 158; *Italics mine*).

These passages show that Heidegger understands “solicitude” as an ontological structure of Dasein’s Being-in-the-world. Further, that Heidegger speaks here of “deficient”—and elsewhere of “positive”—modes of “solicitude” illustrates how he tacitly holds a normative conception of solicitude. In identifying the deficient and positive modes of solicitude, Heidegger clearly seems to be offering a description of the ways that individual Dasein can fail or succeed as discursive selves or agents, although he of course omits any talk of “agents” *per se*. That is, he seems to suggest that we can be better or worse at comporting ourselves discursively with others, we can be more or less attuned to others. As he says, “solicitude is guided by *considerateness* and *forbearance*. Like solicitude, these can range through their respective deficient and Indifferent modes up to the point of *inconsiderateness* or the perfunctoriness for which indifference leads the way” (BT 159; *Italics original*). Thus, for Heidegger, solicitude marks one’s modes of “opening oneself up [*Sichhoffenbaren*] or closing oneself off” (BT 161). Only through solicitude can the “disclosure of the Other” arise at all (Ibid).¹⁹

The deficient modes of solicitude—“passing one another by” and “not ‘mattering’ to one another”—describe, I think, the way that we can fail to heed and appropriately respond to the solicitous pull of others by closing ourselves off from and making ourselves unavailable to others. These deficient (monological) modes thus account for the ways that we can be impervious to the call of others’ addresses to us.

The “positive modes” of solicitude have “two extreme possibilities”: “leap[ing] in” for the other and “leap[ing] ahead” of the other (BT 158). Solicitude, as Heidegger writes,

“can, as it were, take away ‘care’ from the Other and put itself in his position in concern: it can *leap in* for him. This kind of solicitude takes over for the Other that with which he is to concern himself. The Other is thus thrown out of his own position; he steps back so that afterwards, when the matter has been attended to, he can either take it over as something finished and at his disposal, or disburden himself of it completely” (BT 158; *Italics original*).

Heidegger continues to say,

“In contrast to this, there is also the possibility of a kind of solicitude which does not so much leap in for the Other as *leap ahead* of him [*ihm vorausspringt*] in his *exisentiell* potentiality-for-Being, not in order to take away his ‘care’ but rather to give it back to him authentically as such for the first time” (BT 158-159; *Italics original*).

Heidegger’s statements about solicitude—in both its positive and deficient modes—show that it is dialogical in character. The deficient modes of solicitude represent, however, a failure to fulfill the dialogical potential inherent in the phenomenon of solicitude, and thus amount only to monological action. It should be unsurprising that the “deficient” modes of solicitude fail to live up to the dialogical potential inherent in solicitude. But based on his description of “leaping in” for the other, *contra* Heidegger’s implicit suggestion, this “positive” mode seems monological in character as well, as it involves Dasein acting without regard for the interlocutory partner’s agency which makes the to-and-fro of mutual reciprocity possible in the first place. In “tak[ing] over for the Other” whereby “[t]he Other is thus thrown out of his own position,” Dasein in fact remains impervious to the to-and-fro movement constitutive, in part, of the dialogical. Thus, I want to suggest, it is only in the positive mode of “leap[ing] ahead” of the other that the dialogical potential in solicitude gets fulfilled.

Dasein’s fallenness in the “they” is the reason why average, everyday Dasein is ignorant of and impervious to the dialogical character of

Being-with and solicitude, and thus “proximally and for the most part” comports itself monologically, even if at times it can appear otherwise. As Heidegger says, “Being-with-one-another in the ‘they’ is by no means an indifferent side-by-sideness in which everything has been settled, but rather an intent, ambiguous watching of one another, a secret and reciprocal listening-in. Under the mask of ‘for-one-another,’ an ‘against-one-another’ is in play” (BT 219). Notwithstanding Dasein’s appearing to comport itself dialogically, its fallenness in and conformity to the “they” renders it impervious to the dialogical potential of discursive Being-with. “[T]he ‘they’ presents every judgment and decision as its own, it deprives the particular Dasein of its answerability” (BT 165), Heidegger says.

Heidegger describes what the authentic fulfillment of such dialogical comportment entails when he writes,

“Proximally Dasein is ‘they,’ and for the most part it remains so. If Dasein discovers the world in its own way [*eigens*] and brings it close, if it discloses to itself its own authentic Being, then this discovery of the ‘world’ and this disclosure of Dasein are always accomplished as a clearing- away of concealments and obscurities, as a breaking up of the disguises with which Dasein bars its own way” (BT 167).

Only in the positive mode of solicitude as “leap[ing] ahead” of the other does “Dasein discove[r] the world in its own way and brin[g] it close” (Ibid) authentically. Such solicitude entails Dasein acknowledging and heeding, most often tacitly, the dialogical character of Dasein’s Being-with.

If the picture of Heidegger as a dialogist in *Being and Time* is accurate, there still seems to be at least one pressing issue that requires address. Namely, is the “call of conscience,” as an integral part of the apparently individualizing moment of authenticity, truly dialogical? Heidegger’s conception of the “call of conscience” is arguably one of his most obscure in all of *Being and Time*, lending itself rather easily to mis-interpretations which take it as nothing less than mystical. The call of conscience emerges, in Heidegger’s view, as a response to Dasein’s feeling of “being-guilty.” Facing up to this feeling of being-guilty is what Heidegger refers to as “resoluteness.” “By ‘resoluteness’ we mean ‘letting oneself be called forth to one’s ownmost *Being-guilty*,’” (BT 353; *Italics original*), Heidegger writes. Heidegger’s conception of the call of conscience is arguably one of his most obscure in all of *Being and Time* because even his use of the

terms “conscience” and “guilt,” as Blattner has pointed out, is misleading. In using the term “conscience,” Heidegger is not describing the ordinary ethical conception we have in which conscience refers to the experience of feeling remorse about some past action or course of events. Heidegger in fact does not understand “conscience” or “guilt” in moral terms; they lie outside of morality altogether. Rather, by “conscience,” Heidegger refers to the ontological condition for the ontic possibility of anything like our ordinary conception of conscience to arise at all. As Taylor Carman puts it, “[J]ust as existential death and guilt are hermeneutic conditions of our ordinary concepts of death and guilt, so too conscience in the existential sense is what makes possible our ordinary ethical notions of conscience and conscientiousness” (HA 292).

Heidegger makes it clear that the “call” “is a mode of *discourse*” (BT 314; Italics original) and thus has a discursive structure: the “call” (*Ruf*) issues *from* Dasein’s ownmost possibility and its “uncanny” “authentic Being-one’s-Self.” The “call” is issued *to* the “they-self.” That is, the call of conscience addresses us in our everyday inauthentic mode of going along with the “they.” Thus Heidegger says, “Conscience summons Dasein’s Self from its lostness in the ‘they’” (BT 319). Even though “calling” is a mode of discourse, and the “call” addresses and summons us, the “call” itself should not be understood as the issuing of a “vocal utterance” (BT 316). Not only is “vocal utterance” “not essential for discourse, and therefore not for the call either” (Ibid), but authentic “discourse” is, in his view, “silence.” This is why Heidegger uses scare quotes around “voice” (*Stimme*) (BT 313). Indeed, he explicitly says, “*Conscience discourses solely and constantly in the mode of keeping silent*” (BT 318; Italics original). Nevertheless, “conscience” has a “disclosive” character, in that it “gives us ‘something’ to understand” (BT 314).

Somewhat strangely, this means that that which the “call” is “about”—i.e., what gets ‘said’ in the “call”—is “nothing,” understood as ‘no-thing’ (BT 318). As Carman notes, “The call has no determinate propositional content” (HA 293). “Nothing” gets ‘said’ in the “call” because of the indefinite nature of Dasein’s “Being-guilty.” Heidegger conceives of “guilty” (“*Schuld*,” meaning “debt”) as a kind of “indebtedness.”²⁰ But this “indebtedness” describes neither some definite “factual” possibility nor an “existentiell” mode which Dasein should, but has failed to, take up. It is not as if Dasein’s “guilt” is somehow a result of its not having chosen the ‘right’ projection over and against other possible ones. The indefiniteness of Dasein’s “Being-guilty” lies, rather, in a general and indeterminate sense of having come up short with respect to one’s life as a whole. What

we ‘hear’ in the call of conscience is a kind of existential guilt wherein we realize that we are not being all that we can be. Further, what makes the call of conscience possible is Dasein’s Being as Care—that is, that in Dasein’s Being, its “Being is an *issue* for it” (BT 32; *Italics original*), it is that about which Dasein cares. Thus Heidegger says, “Conscience is the call of care from the uncanniness of Being-in-the-world—the call which summons Dasein to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being-guilty” (BT 323).²¹ “Conscience,” then, motivates us to recognize and to understand normatively the fact that we have our own life to live.

It is clear that, in Heidegger’s view, “conscience” has a character of “*mine-ness*.” He describes the “mineness” of “conscience” when he says that “the call...comes *from*” the “uncanniness of thrown individualization” (BT 325; *Italics original*). But, interestingly, he says that the “caller” is “‘no-body,’” in the sense, I think, of ‘nobody *in particular*’ (BT 323). And, moreover, that “The caller is, to be sure, indefinite; but the ‘whence’ from which it calls does not remain a matter of indifference for the calling. This ‘whence’—the uncanniness of thrown individualization—gets called too [mitgerufen] in the calling; that is, it too gets disclosed [miterschlossen]. In calling forth to something, the ‘whence’ of the calling is the ‘whither’ to which we are called back” (BT 325-326). It is evident here that the call of conscience is issued *from me to me*, or, as Heidegger says, “The call comes *from me* and yet *from beyond me and over me*” (BT 320; *Italics original*). “The call of conscience,” Heidegger writes, “has the character of an *appeal* to Dasein by calling it to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being-its-Self; and this is done by way of *summoning* it to its ownmost Being-guilty” (BT 314; *Italics original*). In its “appeal” and its “summoning,” the call of conscience *attests* to the presence of Dasein’s “ownmost potentiality-for-Being-its-Self” as the possibility Dasein has of becoming “authentic Being-one’s-Self.” What gets expressed in the call of conscience, then, is the identifiable difference between on the one hand Dasein’s inauthentic self and on the other its authentic self, or its “ownmost potentiality-for-Being-its-Self.” The call of conscience is therefore an abrupt arousal from Dasein’s having had its authentic voice drowned out by the voice of the they.

That the call of conscience is discursive does not mean, however, that it assumes the form of typical kinds of discourse. As Carman writes, “[C]onscience does not literally have the structure of dialogue or conversation, or even of inner monologue, for the voice of conscience does not in fact articulate any definite interpretation of anything” (HA 294). The call

of conscience does not involve Dasein's talking to itself in any way. And there is no ontological to-and-fro structure characteristic of dialogue or conversation. This would seem to suggest that the call itself is monological. Such a conclusion would be a mistake, though, for it would overlook the dispositional stance required for the call of conscience to summon Dasein in the first place. In fact, the call of conscience involves Dasein's having adopted the same dialogical attitudinal stance as mentioned earlier: "When Dasein understandingly lets itself be called forth to this possibility, this includes its *becoming free* for the call—its readiness for the potentiality of getting appealed to. In understanding the call, Dasein is *in thrall to [horig] its ownmost possibility of existence*. It has chosen itself" (BT 334; Italics original).

Conclusion

I want to conclude, in part, by noting two important aspects to keep in mind for my claim that Heidegger is a dialogist. First, I am not claiming that he offers an explicit theory of dialogue. Nor am I claiming, secondly, that he identifies explicitly a sense of to-and-fro movement between interlocutors. I noted earlier that Heidegger endorses a notion of the to-and-fro because he does offer descriptions of the dynamics of interlocution which affirm tacitly a conceptual awareness of such back and forth movement. We find such descriptions in his discussion of "listening to," "hearing," and "keeping silent" (BT 206-208). Heidegger writes, for instance, that

"*Keeping silent* is another essential possibility of discourse, and it has the same existential foundation. In talking with one another, the person who keeps silent can 'make one understand' (that is, he can develop an understanding), and he can do so more authentically than the person who is never short of words. Speaking at length [*Viel-sprechen*] about something does not offer the slightest guarantee that thereby understanding is advanced. On the contrary, talking extensively about something, covers it up and brings what is understood to a sham clarity—the unintelligibility of the trivial" (BT 208; Italics original).

Heidegger is correct to note that just because an interlocutor does not remain silent does not mean she is acting with appropriate sensitivity to the to-and-fro of dialogue or conversation. It may be that precisely

in remaining silent the interlocutor is responding with the appropriate sensitivity and receptivity to her interlocutory partner. Conversely, it may be that the talkative interlocutor is the one insensitive to the particular circumstantial context of the dialogue or conversation. He may do so unconscious of his motives, but more often than not, it seems, as Heidegger emphasizes, such talkativeness is undertaken precisely to cover up or smooth over any latent possibilities of deeper, more meaningful understanding. As an illuminating example, one need only recall Tolstoy's description of the behavior of Ivan Ilych's colleagues and wife at his funeral.²² Tolstoy's depiction there accurately captures, I think, an instance of what Heidegger calls "idle talk." Idle talk, then, is a case in which most of the necessary conditions for dialogicality enumerated at the outset of this paper would be successfully met, yet it would still fail to be dialogical because it would fail to meet the condition of address and responsibility, that is, it would be an instance of the interlocutors failing to have the proper interlocutory attitude necessary for achieving dialogicality.

At least one further question remains, though. If all of the necessary conditions for dialogicality are met in a given interaction, does that guarantee that the interaction is an instance of authentic action, as Heidegger understands authenticity? I do not think so. This shows an important aspect of the relation between dialogicality and authenticity within the context I have described. I want to suggest that authentic action would necessarily be dialogical, but dialogical action would not necessarily guarantee authenticity. Though a full-fledged discussion of this is more appropriate for another study, I think it is plausible to suggest that this would be due to the lofty criteria that Heidegger has in mind when he discusses authenticity, criteria that most people never fulfill.

These caveats notwithstanding, Heidegger's notions of Being-with, discourse, and solicitude indicate the dialogical nature of his thought: 1) the dynamics of language, as the way in which discourse gets expressed, are inherently unfinalizable or open-ended; 2) such dynamics require embodiment and 3) interlocution; 4) they entail address and responsibility; 5) the various modes of solicitude have a normative dimension illustrative of the dialogical; 6) simultaneous with the recognition of address is the recognition of a sense of a solicitous pull from or call by others; and lastly, 7) a recognition, albeit tacit, of the to-and-fro of interlocution.

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Notes

1 See Guignon's descriptions of these issues in *Heidegger and the Problem of Knowledge*. (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1983), esp. Chapter 3, pp. 85-145. I shall abbreviate this hereafter as HPK.

2 Guignon, "What is Hermeneutics?", in *Re-envisioning Psychology: Moral Dimensions of Theory and Practice*. Frank C. Richardson, Blaine J. Fowers, Charles B. Guignon. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999).

3 Guignon, "Martin Heidegger: *Being and Time*," in *Central Works of Philosophy*, 4. Edited by John Shand. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006). Italics in the original. I shall hereafter abbreviate this as MH.

4 Such nonhuman entities constitute a "what," and Heidegger uses the term "Reality" to designate them.

5 See Daniel Dahlstrom's *The Heidegger Dictionary*. (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).

6 Heidegger uses the word "Care" (*"Sorge"*) as a technical term throughout *Being and Time*. For my purposes here, however, I shall not offer a detailed discussion it. See *Being and Time*, Division I, Chapter VI, titled "Care as the Being of Dasein," p. 225. To give a sense of the paramountcy which Heidegger gives it, I cite the following remarks: "Care, as a primordial structural totality, lies 'before' [*vor*] every factual 'attitude and 'situation' of Dasein, and it does so existentially *a priori*..." (BT 238; italics original). And: "Being-in-the-world is essentially care" (BT 237).

7 "Being-in" as an "existential" of Dasein should not be understood as a "Being-in-something" in the sense that we would mean it when we say that "water is 'in' the glass," as such a "Being-in-something" is proper only to the kind of Being of entities, not Dasein (BT 79). Such a notion of "insideness" as that designated in the expression "the water is in the glass" applies strictly to things "present-at-hand" (BT 82), where the "water" and the "glass" are entities or things (BT 79). They "have the same kind of Being--that of Being-present-at-hand--as Things occurring 'within' the world" (Ibid). Simply, only those 'things' which Descartes called "substances" have the kind of Being of "present-at-hand." See also Dreyfus (1990, esp. Chapter Three) and Blattner (2006, p.42).

8 Heidegger in fact places these two features together, as he titles § 38 "Falling and Thrownness." See *Being and Time*, p. 219.

9 See *Being and Time*, p. 211 for the beginning of § 35, entitled "Idle Talk."

10 It obscures from us also the fundamental structure of Dasein. This can be addressed only through fundamental ontology—the kind which Heidegger undertakes.

11 Heidegger cautions, however, that such "falling" "does not express any negative evaluation" as if "we were to ascribe to it the sense of a bad and deplorable ontical property of which, perhaps, more advanced stages of human culture might be able to rid themselves" (BT 220).

12 See "Achieving Personhood," p. 14, for Guignon's claims regarding this. Specifically, he notes that "authenticity" should be understood as connoting that which is "most proper."

13 See Wrathall's paper "'Demanding Authenticity of Ourselves': Heidegger on Authen-

ticity as an Extra-moral Ideal,” from the *Proceedings of the 48th Annual Meeting of the Heidegger Circle*, p. 154, n. 7. Wrathall is referring to Carman’s *Heidegger’s Analytic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 271. I shall hereafter abbreviate *Heidegger’s Analytic* as HA.

14 William Blattner, *Heidegger’s Being and Time: A Reader’s Guide*. (New York: Continuum Press, 2006), p. 67. I shall hereafter abbreviate this as HBT. See also Theodore R. Schatzki’s “Early Heidegger on Sociality,” from *A Companion to Heidegger (Blackwell Companions to Philosophy, Vol. 29)*. Ed. by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall. Schatzki’s discussion is thematically similar to mine, but our respective interpretations differ significantly.

15 As Taylor succinctly puts it, “[W]e are aware of the world through a ‘we’ before we are through an ‘I.’” “Interpretation and the Sciences of Man,” in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers, Vol. II*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 40.

16 Richard Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 74.

17 For Heidegger, the understanding we have of others is not a matter, strictly speaking, of knowledge as propositional or predicative knowledge: “[T]he understanding of Others...like any understanding, is not an acquaintance derived from knowledge about them, but a primordially existential kind of Being, which, more than anything else, makes such knowledge and acquaintance possible” (BT 161).

18 Charles Taylor, “To Follow a Rule,” from *Philosophical Arguments*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 173.

19 Further evidence of this is gleaned in Heidegger’s phrase that “the explicit disclosure of the Other in solicitude grows only out of one’s primarily Being with him in each case” (BT 161).

20 Heidegger explicitly says this when he writes, “This ‘Being-guilty’ as ‘*having debts*’ [“*Schulden haben*”]...” (BT 327; italics original).

21 For a (relatively) concise summary of the connection between these terms, see *Being and Time*, p. 343.

22 See also Paragraph 51, pp. 296-299 of *Being and Time* for Heidegger’s description of “idle talk” as part of the inauthentic fleeing in the face of death.

Toward a Feminist Critic of Science

Archana Barua

Abstract

It is undeniable that aspects of postmodernist thought are also useful to the feminist goal of unseating the hegemonic dominance of traditional male authority. The threat of moral relativism hangs over the Postmodernist head, and this stance is strongly criticized within feminist circles: As Carol Gilligan has said, "Life can't just be continually reconstructed; ...There is a complex reality, yes, but there is something called reality, and there is something called a you." A postmodern feminism can cope with the collapsed notions of foundationalist premises, such as that of the stable and unified self-concept. This article makes an attempt at re-visiting feminist critic of science in light of phenomenological and hermeneutical attempts at bridging the gap between science and life either in the Husserlian project of restoring the structures of the Life World, or in the Heideggerian quest for liberating the 'Being' from the prison house of language. Do they share similar concerns for overcoming the limitations of binary structures of understanding? The article makes an attempt at understanding the one from the perspective of the other and vice versa.

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Introduction

My reason for juxtaposing feminism and postmodernism together is to highlight some common concerns that are shared by both. Accordingly, this article is an attempt at re-visiting the feminist & the postmodernist critics of science in light of both positivistic and hermeneutic understandings of science. Finally, it is an attempt at understanding the nature and significance of the meaningful dialogue between postmodernism and feminism in their common quest for a wider scope of the hermeneutical philosophy of science. The first part of the article is a clarification of the terms: science, feminism and postmodernism taking note of the fact that there are different shades of meaning that add to the

complex character of this question:” what is science?”

What is Science?

Most people tend to respect science because of its successful applications in practically every field of human activity. The computer may appear to be a “black box” to most of us, but it can do fascinating things. The generally successful space program holds us in awe. The ability to obtain images of the brain and other parts of the body without cutting them open defies credibility. And the list goes on and on. Scientific knowledge also became the trademark of universally correct standard of knowledge that is free from subjective bias and prejudice. Positivistic interpretations of science could be characterized as extreme late forms of Modern rationalistic interpretations which, in certain respects, saw the phenomenon of science as a kind of logical and propositional enterprise focused upon theory and its subsequent verifications--or falsifications--and clearly framed in terms of modernist epistemologies. It is this modernist framework, which now falls into question.

Modernism, Post-modernism & the Feminist Critique of Science

Feminists’ main concern is the emancipation of woman from social wrongs and injustice and this initially is an acknowledgement of the fact that there is binary opposition between the one who wrongs and the one who is wronged. The feminists claim that the so called objective knowledge of science has a Eurocentric, ‘masculinist’ bias that needs to be rooted out. While the post modernist critic finds fault with the modernist against the ambitious epistemology projects and for charge of “essential zing women” and thereby eradicating the voices of women of color, the modernist -feminist criticizes the postmodernist-feminist position for relativizing woman’s issues and for undermining the importance of gender within that framework.” Nancy Hartsock, Christine Di Stefano , and others claim that an important strength of feminist theory and politics is to be found in modernist insistence on the importance of gender. Christine Di Stefano argues against the location of feminism fully in the terrain f the postmodernism. She writes: Contemporary Western feminism is firmly, if ambivalently, located in modernist position, which made possible the feminist identification and critique of gender. ¹

Similarly, other feminist theories argue that the postmodernists must be wary of the anti-Enlightenment criticisms.” They state, or imply,

that feminists are making a big mistake in adopting postmodernist postures. Luce Irigaray (1985) asks if post modernism is the “last ruse” of patriarchy. She provides a succinct summary of key aspects of the feminist case against postmodernism: First, postmodernism expresses the claims and needs of a constituency (white, privileged men of the industrialized West) that has already had Enlightenment for itself and that is now ready and willing to subject that legacy to critical scrutiny. Secondly, the objects of postmodernist’s various critical deconstructive efforts have been the creations of a similarly specific and partial constituency (beginning with Plato). Third... mainstream postmodernist theory (Derrida, Lyotard, Rorty, Foucault) has been remarkably blind and insensitive to questions of gender in its own purportedly politicized reading of history, politics and culture. And finally, the postmodernist project, if seriously adopted by feminists would make any semblance of a feminist politics impossible. To the extent that feminist politics is bound up with a specific constituency or “subject”, namely, women, the postmodernist prohibition against subject-centered inquiry and theory undermines the legitimacy of a broad based organized movement dedicated to articulating and implementing the goals of such a constituency.²

For some critics, it appears that there is some ambivalence in the feminist position here, that the feminist discourses re-instate those very discourses in the act of challenging them. That itself seems to be a trend toward valorization of irrationality that can only appear so if those dichotomies remain in place. However, the prime objective of the feminist is aimed at eradicating and destabilizing the dualisms of nature/culture, rational/irrational, subject/object, and masculine/feminine and so on, the feminist position keeps room for diverse positions within its frame that seek to resolve differences in a dialogical manner. Mostly, it is done in the manner of accommodating differences in a harmonious manner instead of rejecting the one for the sake of the other. For the feminist what is important is not that differences do exist and have become a part of our post modern phase of existing. But what is objectionable is the politicization of this difference in a biased manner. Sandra Harding draws attention to the fact that this is a difference as diversity and variety of understanding differences between women as richness and opportunity for cultural enhancement and understanding than as a threat to the self of the speaker. Difference is simply a cultural variation.

On the other hand there is the existence of difference due to structures of domination. Feminist epistemology must recognize these differences, along with substantive feminist theories, motivate, and enable women

to work against exploitive relations between women. Feminists have developed feminist strategies that value feminist perspectives as resources for organizing to end male domination. Feminist sciences and epistemologies should help to bring to consciousness- less mystified understandings of women's and men's situation so that these understandings can energize and direct women and men to struggle on behalf of eliminating the subordination of women and men to struggle on behalf of eliminating the subordination of women in all of its race, class and cultural forms. Feminist politics is bound up with a specific constituency or "subject", namely, women who is often the 'cultural other' in a male-female, reason-passion dichotomous way of understanding which the feminist seeks to overcome. The operative premise of Bordo's, Lloyd's and Hekman's and some other feminists' analyses is that the dichotomy of rationality and irrationality help to constitute the dualism of masculine/feminine and vice-versa.

The question that should be vital for a feminist philosopher is: 'is science beneficial'? If the feminist wants to raise this question she needs a theory of knowledge that enables her to do so. The positivist's commitment to 'maleness of reason' keeps no provision for a woman scientist who has a feminist agenda of correcting woman's position, her health and her subjugation, in a rational and enlightened manner, the way a scientist should proceed in this direction that differs the way of an uniformed layman. What is objectionable here is her feminine way of relating science to value thereby defiling the dispassionate scientific quest by subjective aspirations. Science is supposed to explain facts in a matter of fact way. Value questions are unscientific and 'non-sensical'. While science as scientism insists on dispassionate value-neutral 'view from nowhere', it fails to accommodate woman's 'womanly concerns' into its fold. Is hermeneutics of science a better option here? Science is now hermeneutical in its approach that keeps room for the human interpreter into the very act of understanding and interpreting reality. For the feminist, the vital question here is: 'does it enable her to safeguard the distinctive feminist-concerns that she so genuinely seeks to correct and resolve in a scientific manner?

Perhaps she has to look for other options if postmodernism and hermeneutics opts for 'Interpretationism' as an 'interpretation of the interpreter', only. This way 'interpretationism' also discounts feminist knowledge -claims in scientific and everyday contexts. If a feminist is totally committed to post modernism she will have to reconcile her fate by accepting the 'status quo.' Foucault, Rorty and others critics have

pointed out epistemologies that end up rationalizing the legitimacy of the beliefs of the powerful. In that case epistemology would be only an honorific used to designate the winners in such struggles. The feminist wants to assert the voice of the powerless and to prove that knowledge is not always a power – game only, else there is no point in making futile effort at struggling against stronger and more powerful knowledge claim made by the more powerful man. The feminist critic of science needs an abandonment of the narrow conception of scientism and also a critic of the complete abandonment of scientific endeavor. Is there a middle position for her?

That the feminist could continue to develop theories of knowledge although male domination continued to take new forms and, in significant forms, that itself makes position ambivalent. With her insistence on the role of the woman interpreter to be taken seriously in all matters of knowledge-producing, she is a critic of the dispassionate male-scientist, by not rationalizing the beliefs of the powerful, she is not fully post-modern. This itself is one of the ambivalent situations that a woman is confronted with, apart from many other ambivalent situations of this sort that needs her dual commitments and half-hearted loyalties to many options than a fanatic obsession for any one. .When confronted with uncertainties and disillusionments at every step of her life ,an woman becomes tolerant to differences and sensitive to a harmonious and a participatory mode of understanding .When a post modern feminist fails to understand why there is need for feminist - epistemology at all ,it is simply because for this type of post-modern modernist, just because there are differences and there are other voices, it does not amount to saying ,‘therefore there is no difference between an authentic claim and an inauthentic one, between a genuine claim and a false claim’.

And here comes the danger for a feminist who wants some assurance from others that her deteriorated situation and her subjugated position is not just a ‘phobia’ on her part. That it is so is well-grounded on facts and evidences as well. Otherwise, “when women appeal to “the facts’ to justify their claims in ways parallel to those routinely used by men, impressions of impartiality, disinterest, value-neutrality, do not arise (especially not for men). When women appeal to their interpretations of evidence, instead of this appeal having the meaning” this is a good (or plausible, justifiable, reasonable) interpretation” it asserts only that “this is just my interpretation.” Instead of certifying the evidence, the strategy has the effect of discounting it.” ³point out that a woman’s claim that “It is my opinion”, means that it is just her opinion; a man’s identical sentence

means he's got a right to his opinion. While feminists certainly have right to their interpretation of who contributed what to the dawn of human history, or why rape occurs, or the causal role of family forms in historical change, that is just their opinion. Since there is no knowledge claim made here, those who are not convinced of feminist opinions have all rights to differ from them.

The tragedy is that, whether a woman likes it or not, this post modern ambivalence is now forced to be a part of her identity. A woman is judged to be biased when she seeks to proceed scientifically, she is often claimed to be inferior to man because she is unscientific and indecisive, at a time when it is also acknowledged that the scientist is profoundly affected by the societies within which scientific work is done. Scientists have also learnt to appreciate many kinds of occasions on which scientific decisions are made some of which are extra scientific factors as the amount of fund that comes for a project and so on. We are now tolerant of uncertainties and inexactness of our ideal of truth. The revolutionary breaks with our familiar way of understanding science equals only to a post modern deconstruction that prepares us for continuous shock at the strangeness of the familiar.-

If it is accepted that lived life is always more complex than any explication of meaning can reveal, that knowledge both keeps room for authentic claims against an inauthentic one, provided what this authenticity in knowledge is also depended on how and in what manner an interpreter interprets a social phenomena (social) . There is danger if the interpreter, the male or the female, is completely removed from the scene in one's crave for 'view from nowhere.' There is equal danger if knowledge is just an interpretation of the interpreter. In order to understand the diverse positions of the interpreter in the act of interpretation, let me revisit the brief history of hermeneutics and its various interpretations.

Epistemology or Ontology? Hermeneutics and its kinds:

Modernist epistemologies, in this Euro-American context the primary alternative is one which seeks to find the relevance of hermeneutics for the sciences. But, interestingly, within the context of this search, there has emerged a strong tension concerning how hermeneutics itself is to be understood. Schleiermacher, a theologian, begins this second development by adapting hermeneutics as a distinctive humanistic and historical discipline which, in effect, becomes a philosophical

anthropology and a distinctive 'psychology.' But it is Dilthey who gives hermeneutics its 'canonical' modernist direction. Hermeneutics is generalized as the "human science" which applies to the various disciplines which deal with *Geisteswissenschaft*, the sciences of "understanding." Dilthey contrasts such sciences from the natural sciences, *Naturwissenschaften*, which are distinguished as sciences of "explanation." It is this distinction which becomes canonical and which remains operational within the still modernist hermeneutic traditionalists.

Modern hermeneutics thus becomes a 'humanities' methodology, broader than exegesis, but not a truly 'general' method, and it remains distinct from the natural sciences. The twentieth century, particularly the mid-twentieth century, sees philosophical hermeneutics enriched by yet another development: phenomenology. Here we arrive at the three European giants of the hermeneutic tradition: Martin Heidegger, Hans Georg Gadamer, and Paul Ricoeur. Enriched by Husserlian phenomenology, hermeneutics in these three thinkers becomes ontological. And, insofar as there can be a hermeneutic ontology there can be a methodological generalization which reaches beyond any merely historical or humanistic trajectory. Ontology precedes epistemology and this, itself, is already to overturn the claims of modernist epistemology. Hermeneutics thus becomes the foundation of all human sciences. There remain, however, epistemological implications of a hermeneutic ontology: Disappearance of a strong understanding/explanation distinction in the operative theory of these three hermeneutists. Phenomenologically enriched epistemologies of late modern hermeneutics shows how, in principle, scientific knowledge as well as cultural knowledge must be derived from (human) ontology. In Husserl this was already argued for insofar as the constitution of any special science must refer back to the Lifeworld. In Heidegger this becomes the derivation of the objects of science (*Zuhanden*) from the paraxial knowledge of *pragmata* or tools (*Vorhanden*). In effect this was to argue that scientific knowledge was derivative from practical knowledge. In Gadamer and Ricoeur, both somewhat more indirect in ontological claims than the former philosophers, it remains the blurring of the understanding/explanation distinction. The one view, supported most strongly by Karl Otto Apel, but also seconded by Dagfinn Føllesdal and others, holds that there can be a hermeneutics of science as a cultural and historical phenomenon, but there cannot be a hermeneutics of the objects or products of science.

Here we can make a negative yet strong influence of Kantianism. Kant's a historical approach led him to give us the foundation and

justification of the natural sciences and mathematics in 'pure reason. 'Dilthey's 'Critique of Historical Reason,' offers both a critique and a supplement of that reason; it provides the epistemological foundations of the sciences of man and his culture, spirit, history and society. In this project one feels the impact of both Nietzsche and Droysen. (Roy :1993).⁴Gadamer aptly delineates how Nietzsche's 'Will to power' changes the idea of interpretation. It is more an interpretation of the interpreter, than of the text, the text opens to endless interpretations. For Heidegger hermeneutics is not merely the methodology of understanding but an explication of the ontological ground upon which all these sciences are grounded. Interpretation is never prejudiceless. The basis of Heidegger's hermeneutics lies not in subjectivity but in the facticity of world and historicity of understanding. Finally, even in Heidegger, it is language that tells us about the nature of a thing, language remains the master of man. Slowly and steadily Heidegger turns from phenomenology to the 'linguisticity of Being'. Rorty is critical of Derrida that he too fell into similar trap with Heidegger. Derrida occasionally considers language as if it is a 'quasi-agent.' In place of such 'linguisticism', Rorty aims to present pragmatic hermeneutics. Rorty finds merit in Hermeneutics attempt to explode the myth that knowledge mirrors the essence of its subject matter (Roy :1993).

For Habermas, the concept of interest is knowledge constitutive. Hermeneutics draws our attention to the fact that knowledge is bound to a tradition. In these diverse trends for interpreting hermeneutics, we find modernist trend in Dilthey while Gadamer , Rorty and Derrida seek to delineate hermeneutic in the post modernist direction. Krishna Roy comments:" Here I think, if anti epistemological and anti-representational attitude characterize post modernism, Gadamer can be a post modernist. But Gadamer's view, unlike that of Derrida, Rorty and others, is not merely relativistic. With Gadamer hermeneutics goes beyond objectivism and relativism, it becomes truly philosophical. Following Gadamer and Heidegger one can say that understanding and interpretation are not something we have or not have, but what we live or experience. They are one with our existence."⁵

Beyond Modernism and Post-Modernism: 'Phenomenology of Hermeneutics'?

For the feminist what is most important is this meaningful interplay between both understanding and interpretations. She can not wipe away her real existential issues that are so crucial and decisive in constituting

her selfhood, nor can she opt for a complete relativist standpoint. Woman's problems need to be seriously addressed both personally and politically, and in this age of advancement of science and technology it will be a stupidity on her part if she fails to enrich her vision in an enlightened and informed manner. Science can be one of her strong aids provided her scientific approach keeps room for she being a humanist and a pragmatist. In order to do that the feminist philosopher must address this question: 'is science beneficial?' This can not be rejected as 'meaningless' or a naïve philosopher who makes a category mistake not differentiating facts from fictions, knowledge from personal opinions, or worst at it, who seeks to differentiate truth from falsehood when in reality there is nothing called truth.

The feminist epistemology projects, and their critics, are both attempts at escaping the damaging limitations of the dominant social relations and their conceptual schemes. Her theory of knowledge should keep room for accommodating this ambivalent, 'post-modern- modernist's position that she now seeks to undertake. That alone can safeguard her from making a choice out of limited options: 'Is she an epistemologist or an ontologist', a 'modernist or a post-modernist'? Sandra Harding wonders if this difference is at all to be resolved in any other way save learning to accommodating the otherness of the other in a more tolerant manner. She writes: 'In contrast, I think that the rationale for feminist ambivalence here should refer not primarily to feminist error, or even exclusively to intellectual and political inadequacies in the mainstream debate. More important in generating this ambivalence are tensions and contradictions in the worlds in which feminists move. From this perspective, at least some of the tensions between the scientific and postmodernist agendas are desirable; they reflect different, sometimes conflicting, legitimate political and theoretical needs of women today."⁶

This trend is toward post modernism but it is not postmodernism neither modernism nor postmodernism that can do justice to the feminist position. Science is not practiced in idealized situations, insulated from social influences, but neither can scientific knowledge be cast in purely relativistic terms Harding looks for an alternate way for safeguarding woman and her real problems that should not be given a mystical color. This she can do only by transcending the limitations of both objectivism and interpretations, of modernism and postmodernism, of positivism and hermeneutics, of epistemology and ontology that alone can keep room for meaningful dialogue between the two. For that, she needs to take a position and others should see validity of her claim in the process

of assigning some truth value to what she intends to say.: It needs a phenomenological dialogue between lived reality of her life situation and an interpreter's interpretation that is also conditioned by his or her distinctive contexts, interests, prejudices and so on. But woman's situation is not just 'no one's story' so that any one can make it his or her own story. An woman is a daughter for a father, a mother for a child, an wife for a husband and so on. But over and above all these, she is the one who is in continuous dialogue with her own self as it is she who is re-born in the- continuous process of learning and re-learning by trial and error, it is she who seeks to resurrect herself out of her own ruins so that she lives and let others live.

For Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, 'human 'intuitions' of reality are constituted, not given. ' Phenomenology needs to be redefined as analyzing people's relationships with the world. For that is what classical phenomenologist actually did. Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty did not describe the world but our relationship with it, be it in terms of 'consciousness', 'being-in-the-world', or 'perception'. Our world is interpreted reality' and our existence is 'situated subjectivity', but it is an interpretation that needs both the interpreter and the relation between the knower and the known. What the world 'is' and what subjects 'are', arises from the interplay between humans and reality. Re-interpreting Hermeneutics phenomenologically, Van Manen holds the two approaches - hermeneutics and phenomenology - in a dialectical relationship, wanting to 'let things speak for themselves' while recognizing that (social) phenomena need to be interpreted (through language) in order to be communicated to others. Van Manen puts special emphasis on the hermeneutic-phenomenologist participating in the research in the interests of acting out a set of pedagogical values: "When we raise questions, gather data, describe a phenomenon, and construct textual interpretations, we do so as researchers who stand in the world in a pedagogic way...pedagogy requires a phenomenological sensitivity to lived experience...a hermeneutic ability to make interpretive sense of the phenomena of the life world....(and)...play with language in order to allow the research process of textual reflection to contribute to one's pedagogical thoughtfulness and tact. " ⁷

Can this be an alternate approach from a feminist philosopher of science who has all the ingredients in her for combing successfully both these roles, a woman and a scientist, an woman of reason, and an woman who cares and loves. Sandra Harding looks for a wider horizon that can accommodate both enlightenment needs and post modern concerns in

the interest of acting out a set of pedagogical values as well. She writes: These projects are incomplete –we have not yet figured out how to escape such limitations. Most likely, we are not yet in an historical era when such vision should be possible. At this moment in history, our feminism need both Enlightenment and postmodern agendas-but we don't needs the same ones for the same purposes or in the same forms as do white, bourgeois, andocentric westerners.⁸

Notes

1 Dadachanji, Dinshaw K.. 1998.The Cultural Challenge to Scientific Knowledge. *The World & I*, Vol. 13: 172.

2 Harding, Sandra. 1986. *The science question in feminism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

3 Belenky, M.F, Clinchy, B.M., Goldberger, N.R., and Tarule, J.M. (1986) Women's Ways of Knowing. New York: Basic Books.

4 Roy, Krishna. 1993.*Herneneutics East and west*. Calcutta. Allied Publishers LTD.

5 Ibid.

6 Harding, Sandra. 1986. *The science question in feminism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

7 Van Manen, M. 1990. *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. London, Ontario: SUNY Press, pp.1-2)

8 Harding, Sandra. 1986. *The science question in feminism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Counter-Turning *The Turn of the Screw*

Virginia Hromulak

Abstract

For over a century, critics have typically approached Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* from the perspective of its young governess, whose obsession with her charges and the spectral figures that allegedly haunt them ultimately leads to disaster, the death of Miles. This article, however, offers a reading atypical of those previously accomplished. Analyzing the novella from a psychoanalytic and narratological perspective, it argues for a shift in point of view, contending that the locus of the novel, the manuscript ostensibly documenting the harrowing experiences of the young governess, is not penned by a woman but rather by a man, the principle reader of the thing itself, Douglas. Given the shift in point of view, it becomes wholly evident that it is Douglas's wildly erotic fantasy that becomes the substance of the manuscript, one culminating not in the death of a child but, rather, in the petite mort or the "little death" of sexual orgasm, the equivalent of a masturbatory episode on the child's part while in the passionate embrace of his governess. Read in this manner, the narrative coheres as a young man's romantic retrospective of desire, obsession and sexual initiation.

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I need scarcely add after this that [the story] is a piece of ingenuity pure and simple, of cold artistic calculation, an amourette to catch those not easily caught (the 'fun' of the capture of the merely witless being ever but small), the jaded, the disillusioned, the fastidious.

--Henry James, *Novels and Tales, Turn of the Screw*,
New York Edition Preface to Volume 12, 1908

In his 1908 Preface to Volume 12 of the New York Edition of *Novels and Tales*, Henry James lays down a gauntlet to readers of *The Turn of the Screw* that immediately challenges their ability to read the text as

he has crafted it: “[as] an amusette to catch those not easily caught.” Scores of scholars have since taken up that gauntlet and have approached James’ ghost story from a multiplicity of critical approaches – thematic, allegoric, autobiographic, and, of course psychoanalytic, to name a few -- so as not to be “easily caught” by its haunting, romantic narrative. While many have logically treated the prologue or opening scene as the sextant by which to navigate James’ story about a lonely governess whose neurotic pathology leads to disaster, only a few have chosen to look to the oblique riddle placed by a playful Jamesean wit in the 1908 Preface to the New York Edition to uncover the ‘calculated’ reading: If a story looks like a woman’s narrative, reads like a woman’s narrative and sounds like a woman’s narrative, is it really a woman’s narrative? If we answer in the affirmative, we allow ourselves to be counted among those “easily caught” by James’ narrative strategies. If, however, we challenge James at his word, we unravel a different tale altogether, one that unfolds and documents a coming-of-age story on the part of one of its major characters, Douglas, the tale’s second narrator, whose reading of the unnamed governess’s manuscript comprises the whole of the novella. We find, in fact, that the manuscript, ostensibly authored by a woman, is actually that of a man, Douglas himself, whom I believe embodies the character of Miles in the story. What I argue here is that it is Douglas who commits to paper his own memories of that pubescent period in his life when his desire for his sister’s (Flora) governess culminated not in death, as the manuscript alleges, but rather in an act of sexual initiation. Read in this light, the novella then becomes a chronicle of Douglas’s journey from adolescence to adulthood, a chronicle of a young man’s rite of passage.

Of the critics who have attempted to solve the riddle that comprises the very spine of novella through the Miles/Douglas association, who have held the “basic conviction that Miles and Douglas are one and the same,”¹ four in particular are most prominent: Carvel Collins, who was the first scholar to observe the similarities between both characters, namely, that they were “ten years younger than the governess” and that they met the governess during “summer vacation from school/college”;² Gerald Willen, who argues that the governess, in love with Douglas, documents her experience in “a fiction” with Miles playing Douglas;³ Louis Rubin, whose “Miles-Douglas identification” substantiates the object of the governess’s desire as Douglas;⁴ and Stanley Trachtenberg, who reads the story as “a confession of [Douglas’] childhood guilt.”⁵ A major critic of these readings, however, is Rolf Lundén, who finds them unconvincing as he believes they all take as a given the reality of the events at Bly and therefore prove “incorrect or inconclusive.” Lundén asserts, “If one

chooses to apply to the novella the Miles/Douglas grid, a much more consistent explanation is at hand – that the governess’s story is simply that – a story, a piece of fiction.”⁶ Contending the “events at Bly never took place,” Lundén, sees the novella as an encoded “love letter to Douglas” in the *guise* of a ghost story. Kalliopi Nikolopoulou is also uneasy with the Miles/Douglas identification as argued by Rubin and the “conflation between James and the outside narrator”⁷ as proposed by Susan Crowl.⁸ According to Nikolopoulou, it matters not whether Douglas and Miles or James and the external narrator are one and the same; what matters, she argues, is that “the story of the governess attaches itself to Douglas’ formative memories . . . Either way Douglas is written in her narrative, and in reading it, he also divulges his secrets, his fantasies, and his fears.” She therefore interprets the governess’s manuscript “as the reenactment of a memory – of a traumatic memory, in particular.”⁹

While my reading acknowledges the interpretative analyses of the novella offered by these critics, particularly the Miles/Douglas construct, it patently eschews the notion of the governess as author of the manuscript contained therein. It claims, rather, that the events documented in the manuscript are a product of Douglas’ memories, which flow from *his* pen.

My study, in essence, begins at the novella’s end, in the final chapter of the text, wherein Douglas, reading from the manuscript, reveals the governess’s reaction to “seeing and facing”¹⁰ the ghost of Peter Quint at the window. While initially horrified, she resolves to “keep the boy [Miles] himself unaware,”¹¹ and in so doing, gets “hold of him, drawing him close”. Yet fear is quickly superseded by elation when she is distracted by Miles’ voice, which, in that moment, proffers a confession confirming his pilferage of her tell-all letter to the Master, a confession she she had been pressing him for in the period before the spectral sighting:

. . . with a moan of joy, I enfolded, I drew him close; and while I held him to my breast, where I could feel in the sudden fever of his little body the tremendous pulse of his little heart, I . . . saw it [the specter of Quint] move and shift its posture.¹²

In this critical passage, the governess draws on signifiers of mutual sexual stimulation to reconstruct the event -- her “moan of joy,” Miles’ “sudden fever” and his pulsating heart. Indeed, the text that follows, the exchange between the governess and Miles regarding the reason for his expulsion from school, is rife with such signifiers – she speaks of his “breathing hard and again with the air,” his “beautiful fevered face,” his ‘panting,’¹³ his

“convulsed supplication.”¹⁴ The passage builds climactically, fueled both by the governess’s heightening passion to unlock Miles’ innermost secrets and Miles’ mounting agitation at the governess’s relentless questions about the expulsion. When Quint reappears at the window, the governess again attempts to shield Miles from the apparition, enfolding him a bit too tightly within her arms:

. . . he uttered the cry of a creature hurled over an abyss, and the grasp with which I recovered him might have been that of catching him in his fall. I caught him, yes, I held him . . . and his little heart, dispossessed, had stopped.¹⁵

The conventional reading of this passage suggests Miles dies in the arms of the governess, most likely from asphyxiation. My reading, however, is that the passage is ‘artistically calculated’ to catch Douglas’ auditors (and James’ readers) to believe the tale ends here. I contend the opposite – that it begins here. As noted, I believe that Douglas, as author of the manuscript, embodies the character of Miles, and it is through Miles that he memorializes his relationship with the governess, which is marked by nascent sexuality. Thus, what Miles/Douglas experiences in the wild embrace of his sister’s governess at the story’s end is not death but *la petite mort*, a masturbatory orgasm resulting from sexual stimuli that fuels his psychosexual fantasy about the governess while in her arms, which precipitates a veritable “fall” from innocence to experience. Clearly, the sexual signifiers of the preceding passage confirm this.

Neill Matheson, in his study of *The Turn of the Screw*, examines James’s use of euphemisms, particularly those employed by James for depicting masturbation. Matheson suggests that the idea of the “unspeakable” – a term that characterizes the behavior for which Miles/Douglas is expelled from school -- is a euphemism for transgressive sexuality; thus, references in the text to the “unspeakable” with regard to that expulsion would be legible to many nineteenth-century readers as an encoded sign of “the contagion of masturbation.”¹⁶ It would follow, therefore, given Miles/Douglas’ “unspeakable” masturbatory history at school, the heightening passion of governess during the Quint sighting, and the close proximity of their bodies at the time of the sighting, that Miles would be susceptible to sexual arousal, culminating in orgasm. For Douglas, this erotic moment serves as an entrée to and the beginning of manhood.

While one might argue that Miles/Douglas’ exposure to and acts of autoeroticism in school effected a sexual initiation of sorts, one must

consider his experience with the governess as far more profound and markedly different from that of his former infantile sexual experiences. In essence, what sets apart Miles/Douglas' masturbatory experience with the governess from that of his school days is the presence of a female other or object. Sigmund Freud acknowledges this point in his research on the "transformations of puberty."¹⁷ He asserts, "With the arrival of puberty, changes set in which are destined to give infantile sexual life its final, normal shape. . . . A normal sexual life is only assured by an exact convergence of the affectionate object and sexual aim. (The former, the affectionate current, comprises what remains over of the infantile efflorescence of sexuality)."¹⁸ For Miles/Douglas, his "infantile, sexual life" culminates in his first masturbatory orgasm *cum femina*, an event indelibly etched in his psyche as the initiation of manhood. Given the language of his intimate encounter with the governess in the last chapter of the manuscript, then, it is abundantly clear that all sexual feelings and frustrations heretofore displaced by Douglas onto others in the fantasy (the governess, Miss Jessel and Peter Quint) are, in fact, his own.

Intriguingly, the sexual language of the novella's conclusion, replete with its "affectionate current," rhetorically brings us back to its beginning – back to the flight of memory upon which the tale rides. As with any initiation story, Douglas relies on the fiber of memory – the imagination – to relive and memorialize in writing a profound pubescent experience. He demonstrates this in the very first chapter of the manuscript, through the voice of the governess who, when recalling her first day at Bly, states:

There had been a moment when I believed I recognized, faint and far, the cry of a child; there had been another when I found myself just consciously starting as at the passage, before my door, of a light footstep. But these fancies were not marked enough to be thrown off, and it is only in the light, or the gloom, I should rather say, of other and subsequent matters that they now come back to me.¹⁹

The "faint . . . far . . . cry of [the] child" startling the governess "consciously" as to what lies beyond her chamber threshold is actually the cry of the child within Douglas' 'unconscious,' that inner voice that impels him to traverse the threshold of memory, of imagination, to retrieve and relive that which haunts "the light, or the gloom" of adulthood – the "fancies" of youth that marked sexual initiation. Read from Douglas's perspective, the manuscript that comprises the central narrative of *The Turn of the Screw* coheres not as it *appears* – as

a young governess's account of perceived physical and metaphysical evil threatening her charges -- but as it *is* -- as a young man's romantic retrospective of desire, obsession and sexual initiation.

In order to further substantiate the shift in point of view of the manuscript from that of the governess to Douglas, a slight detour into the novella's frame narrative structure is essential. Ostensibly, there are three narratives comprising *The Turn of the Screw*: that of the external frame spoken by the original, nameless narrator, that of Douglas and that of the governess. In reality, however, there is only one -- that of the first narrator. It is he who predicates his rendering of Douglas's ghost story with his own imprimatur:

It appeared that the narrative he [Douglas] had promised to read us really required for a proper intelligence a few words of prologue. Let me say here distinctly, to have done with it, that this narrative, from an exact transcript of my own made much later, is what I shall presently give. Poor Douglas, before his death -- when it was in sight -- committed to me the manuscript that reached him on the third of these days and that, on the same spot, with immense effect, he began to read to our hushed little circle on the night of the fourth.²⁰

As transcriber of Douglas's oral prologue to the governess's manuscript and the manuscript itself, the external narrator directly addresses his reader in order to immediately and unequivocally vouch for the authenticity of his text, a strategy that attempts to gloss over the fact that the transcript he is about to read is "his own" and that it was "made much later" than those fateful Christmas holidays when Douglas first spoke it; in short, that it is the product of his memory and of his agency. Working vicariously through the external narrator, then, James aims to disarm his audience of any suspicion they may harbor with regard to the veracity of his text. He strategically silences the skeptical by closing the text before he opens it with the phrase "to have done with it," a bit of reverse psychology that, if undetected, successfully seduces his audience into buying into the story. In so doing, he virtually casts a wide net to "catch those not easily caught" with this "piece of ingenuity", this conflation of oral and written history. William Goetz, marking this strategy, characterizes it as one of "long novelistic tradition [that] does not seem to provide any special reason for questioning the authenticity of the text that Douglas will read"²¹ (or the external narrator will document). To the

informed reader, however, the game James so deftly plays in the crafting of his story is at once afoot.

When viewed narratologically, then, particularly from a Formalist perspective, we find that the first narrator's temporal framework establishes the distance between the chronology of the story's events, *fabula*, and the written representational narrative of these events, *szujet*.²² This narrative distance, *fabula* vs. *szujet*, logically calls into question the authenticity of the narrative overall since the original narrator depends not only on his own memory to recreate events of a distant past, but also on the collective memories of the narrators whose texts comprise the story – those of Douglas and the governess. Using the first person, the external narrator relates events of the past in real time: the action begins on Christmas Eve with a company of friends sharing ghost stories; on that same evening, one among them, Douglas, announces his possession of a manuscript whose tale is “beyond everything” heard that evening. Events then switch to the second day, when Douglas sends for the manuscript, to the third day when the manuscript arrives by post, and to the fourth, when Douglas provides his prologue and commences his reading of the governess's statement. While the external narrator recreates the events of that Christmas holiday in linear time, his allusion to the embedded history of the manuscript takes his audience out of the moment to a distant past; he states that the governess's “written statement took up the tale at a point after it had, in a manner, begun,” that it had been locked in a drawer and had “not been out” for forty years, and that it was not “committed” to him until just “before [Douglas'] death,”²³ some years later. He again perforates real time when he shifts to the distant future, the “much later” during which time he completed the narrative *in toto*. In this misalignment of fictional with actual time, the original narrator not only distances himself from the story he tells in a temporal sense, but he also distances himself from Douglas, the character upon whom his entire narrative rests. The distancing thus renders the tale's origin suspect. Shoshana Felman aptly notes this in her study of the novella's frame. She states, “the story's origin is unassignable to any one voice that may assume responsibility for [it];”²⁴ origin can therefore only be assignable to the deferred action of voices that “re-produce previous voices.” Felman concludes that the “story's origin is therefore situated . . . in a *forgetting* of its origin: to tell the story's origin is to tell the story of that origin's obliteration.”²⁵ Thus, distancing aids and abets that “forgetting” by effectively deflecting the reader's focus from the concentric narrative circles of the external narrator and Douglas to the embedded narrative of

the governess, subliminally causing the unsuspecting reader to privilege the governess's text over the others.²⁶

In addition to his narrative strategy, James also employs narrative techniques in the prologue to dupe "those not easily caught" by the riddle of the story via boldly encoded language placed within the prologue, which begs to be decoded. One major example of this linguistic dissemblance lies in the discourse between the external narrator and Douglas on the subject of storytelling. Assuring the "hushed little circle" awaiting Douglas' tale that it will answer all questions put to Douglas about plot and characters, including ghosts, the first narrator states, "The story will tell." Douglas warns, however, that "The story *won't* tell . . . not in any literal vulgar way."²⁷ In this interchange, James calls attention to the paradoxical properties of language itself, intimating that language constitutes experience as knowledge, which then leads to narrative as a particular in shaping language, thus making possible a kind of knowing. The tale is therefore shaped as an organized matrix of encoded language, an aporetic narrative containing patterns of saying things and not saying things, of knowing and not knowing. According to the manuscript, for instance, Miles (serving as surrogate for Douglas in the text), is expelled from school for 'saying things', the nature of which we know not.²⁸ Given the nascent sexuality of boys attending boarding schools and the cultural repression of infantile sexuality in the Victorian age, it is highly likely that Miles's expulsion was attributed to "saying things" about sex, specifically autoeroticism.²⁹ The governess, on the other hand, becomes more and more anxious over the circumstances of Miles' expulsion because she does 'not say things' – she does not confront him with her knowledge of his 'secret', his 'crime', until the story's end. In this tale, both saying things and not saying things are dangerous. Both are subject to interpretation.³⁰

James provides another rather obvious clue in the prologue to decipher the tale, having to do with narrative object. The first narrator asks Douglas if "the record", "the thing" he took down, is his own, to which Douglas replies: "Oh thank God, no! . . . Nothing but the impression. I took that *here* ' – he tapped his heart. 'I've never lost it.'" ³¹ This vital bit of information speaks to the illusory nature of "the record" and at once raises the question of authenticity on behalf of the owner of that narrative object. The interchange is skillfully placed within the prologue, for any question regarding the veracity of Douglas's "impression" – the illusion -- is immediately counterbalanced by the existence of the "manuscript" – the word. Thus, James warns us by this example to tread carefully through the narrative labyrinth he lays before us, to ask ourselves what is illusion

and what is word, what is known and what is not known, since, after all, the story will not “tell” itself.³²

When Douglas states the “story won’t tell”, he is in essence speaking of a story that he will tell orally *as if* by a character in the story; yet, I argue, the story he is about to relate, in truth, is his own told *through* a character -- the governess. Douglas, in essence, “adopts the point of view” of the governess to tell his story in order to throw off his auditors (and James’s readers) to the fact that the experience of the tale is his own and that it memorializes a childhood fantasy documented by him later in life. By relating the fantasy from the governess’s perspective, it logically follows that Douglas would take Miles as his surrogate. Thus, narratologically, the story *shows* more than it *tells* since Douglas is completely unaware of the unconscious thoughts of the governess and cannot concretize those thoughts in the form of spoken or written words. What comprises the manuscript, then, is the product of Douglas’s repressed memory as it is imposed upon and filtered through the perceived consciousness of governess, who figuratively serves as agent to the narrative. Thus, projections of self and other for Douglas — Miles, the governess and the ghosts, respectively -- are manifestations of self and sexuality in the guise, in the persona of characters.

As noted previously, there are multiple textual clues within that vital prologue that draw the parallel between Douglas and Miles. Most overt is the distinguishing dynamic of their mutual body language. Douglas frequently speaks to the company standing with his back to his audience, both hands tucked in his pockets; the external narrator writes, “I can see Douglas there before the fire, to which he had got up to present his back . . . with his hands in his pockets.”³³ Miles assumes the same physical attitude when speaking to the governess: the manuscript states, “Miles . . . stood a moment with his hands in his pockets . . . and Miles stood again with his hands in his little pockets and his back to me.”³⁴ More compelling evidence of the Miles/Douglas doubling is found in the prologue within the background information Douglas provides the company on the governess:

She was a most charming person, but she was ten years older than I. She was my sister’s governess. . . I was at Trinity, and I found her at home on my coming down the second summer. . . we had, in her off-hours, some strolls and talks in the garden — talks in which she struck me as awfully clever and nice . . . I liked her extremely and am glad to this day to think she liked me too.

If she had n't she would n't have told me. She had never told any one. It was n't simply that she said so, but that I knew she had n't.³⁵

In unlocking his first memories of the governess, Douglas privileges her “charm” over her demographics; that she is ten years older is given in a qualifying sense. Miles is also ten years younger than the governess and aged ten³⁶ when he meets her for the first time, just days after she began service. While we don't know Douglas's age at that time, it would appear that he was an adolescent, since he did not act on his desire for the governess in word or deed but rather assumed that she fancied him as he did her. Douglas' statement, “I liked her extremely and am glad to this day to think she like me too. If she had n't she would n't have told me,”³⁷ serves as verbal acknowledgement of the governess's fondness for Douglas and therefore feeds his already concupiscent attraction toward her. Moreover, what the governess does not say is far more telling to Douglas as a sign of her mutual attraction; she does not tell “any one” of her feelings for him. He translates her silence into intimate knowledge -- he “knew” that she did not tell anyone. Thus, in this passage, Douglas establishes the framework of pubescent psychosexual fantasy and the very pattern of silent communication that shapes his relationship with the governess, a pattern mimicked in Miles's desire for and system of communication with his governess within the manuscript.

Therein, in fact, lies the heart of the novella – the issue of desire. Alluding to the first Freudian interpretation of *Turn of the Screw*, done by Edmund Wilson in 1948, Felman points out that the “Freudian critic's job . . . is but to pull the answer out of its hiding place – not so much to give an answer *to* the text as to answer *for* the text: to be *answerable* for it, to answer *in its place*, to replace the question with an answer.”³⁸ If, indeed, we read the prologue to *The Turn of the Screw* as a riddle, and if we divine a solution to that riddle that is “*answerable*” for the text -- the notion that Douglas is the author of the manuscript, not the governess -- a rather different “Freudian reading” is exacted from the text overall.

At the outset of the manuscript, the governess ponders her surroundings at Bly within the context of romantic myth, stating “Wasn't it just a story-book over which I had fallen a-doze and a-dream?”³⁹ Using the terms, “a-doze” and “a-dream”, the governess speaks not of the dream state but that of daydream or fantasy. Freud defines “phantasies” very much like daydreams:

Like dreams, they are wish-fulfilments; like dreams, they are based to a great extent on impressions of infantile experiences; like dreams, they benefit by a certain degree of relaxation of censorship. If we examine their structure, we shall perceive the way in which the wishful purpose that is at work in their production has mixed up the material of which they are built, has re-arranged it and has formed it into a new whole.⁴⁰

When reading the manuscript through a Freudian lens from Douglas's point of view, it becomes a "story-book" of sorts. This is not to say that the story itself is fantasized and therefore a fiction, as some critics maintain. The events that comprise the manuscript are quite real. Rather, within the context of a story, Douglas resurrects and chronicles fantasies of sexual "infantile experiences" and unfulfilled wishes causally related to his nascent feelings of desire for the governess, which inevitably culminate in a very real sexual response.

Douglas factors into the fantasy as the mysterious Miles, who at "scarce ten years old"⁴¹ unabashedly sweeps into the life of the governess when he is sent home from school for an undisclosed transgression. Despite his expulsion, or perhaps in spite of it, she is immediately transfixed by Miles/Douglas' presence, a rather commanding one for such a young child,⁴² which she sees as "something divine."⁴³ Arguably, the moment the governess acquiesces to the charm of precocious little Miles/Douglas, the moment she raises his authority to that of the 'divine', she relinquishes her "supreme authority"⁴⁴ over him. She virtually takes her place within the community of women at Bly -- Miles's sister, Flora, and Mrs. Grose -- whose love for Miles/Douglas is tantamount to adoration. Miles/Douglas's authority is further enabled by the absence of the elusory "Master" of the house, the children's uncle. Several critics, including Felman, see him as "the condition of the unconscious . . . a form of Censorship."⁴⁵ Felman, in fact, argues that through the Master's "inaugural act of forwarding *unopened* to the governess the letter addressed to him from the Director of Miles' school, mastery determines itself as at once a *refusal of information* and a *desire for ignorance*." This 'inaugural act', coupled with the strict caveat that the governess tell him nothing about his niece and nephew, might indeed have rendered the Master "a form of Censorship" for the governess, but, I would argue, not for Miles/Douglas. By keeping the Master ignorant of any 'trouble' (the governess keeps silent the contents of the headmaster's letter and the apparitions), she becomes the sole agent of censorship on the erotic imagination. As such, she censors nothing, leaving wide open, unchecked,

the space within the imagination for eros to thrive. Without a censorial voice informing and shaping his adolescent psyche, Miles/Douglas acts purely on libidinous instincts toward the governess, who is, after all, the embodiment of eros for him. Fantasy, then, benefits from this “relaxation of censorship.”

Evidence in the manuscript certainly confirms a lack of censorship on the part of the governess toward the children, giving rise to notion that Douglas’ suspicions of a mutual attraction between herself and Miles/Douglas were founded. He expounds on the emotional and physical affection the young woman lavished upon Miles/Douglas and his sister, which is corroborated by the governess’s manuscript. Reflecting upon her relationship with her charges, she comments, “They were at this period extravagantly and preternaturally fond of me; which . . . was no more than a graceful response in children perpetually bowed down over and hugged . . . We lived in a cloud of music and affection . . .”⁴⁶ It is noteworthy that the governess defines her relationship with Miles/Douglas within the language of music and affection – both are nonverbal language systems. Within the “not talking,” the sexual relationship between the governess and Miles/Douglas operates and flourishes. Take, for example, her assessment of his musical sensibilities:

The musical sense in each of the children was of the quickest, but the elder in especial had a marvelous knack of catching and repeating. . . . I had had brothers myself, and it was no revelation to me that little girls could be slavish idolaters of little boys. What surpassed everything was that there was a little boy in the world who could have for the inferior age, sex and intelligence so fine a consideration.⁴⁷

One wonders why the second sentence in this passage dealing with the governess’s knowledge of little girls as “slavish idolaters of little boys” is wedged between the two-sentence valuation of Miles/Douglas’s musical abilities. What has puerile idolatry to do with musical acumen? Clearly, the comment borders on Freudian parapraxis, a slip of the tongue, exposing the governess’s own repressed, “slavish” idolatry of this precocious little boy.

More palpable displays of affection on the part of the governess towards Miles/Douglas are to be found in Chapter 17, where the governess expounds on her “endless obsession” with him. She stands outside of his

bedroom door one evening, “impelled to listen for . . . some betrayal of his not being at rest.”⁴⁸ Once within the room, sitting on the edge of his bed, accepting Miles/Douglas’s extended hand, she intimates, “. . . I felt as I held his hand and our eyes continued to meet that my silence had all the air of admitting his charge and that nothing in the whole world of reality was perhaps at that moment so fabulous as our actual relation.”⁴⁹ During the verbal exchange that ensues, the governess learns that Miles/Douglas is intent upon leaving Bly for “a new field”; horrified that this new experience will propel him into an even more worldly state (with “still more dishonor”),⁵⁰ that he will become more corrupted by alleged carnal influences than those she perceives he encountered at his former school, she “threw [herself] upon him,” intimating “I embraced him...My face was close to his, and he let me kiss him, simply taking it with indulgent good humour.”⁵¹ The moment culminates with Miles/Douglas’s insistence, “To let [him] alone.” If we suspend disbelief for a moment and accept the governess’s overtures toward Miles/Douglas as real, then this act of affection, as remembered by Douglas, may be interpreted as a reciprocal act of desire on the part of the governess. However, his insistence upon being left “alone” just as the moment of possible consummation of that mutual desire presents itself suggests Miles/Douglas’ fear and anxiety of such a consummation, despite his desire for it. Here fantasy and reality intersect. For, in reality, as the manuscript implies, Miles/Douglas associates consummation of an illicit sexual attraction with the figures of former servants, Peter Quint and Miss Jessel, a union that is as forbidden as it is infamous.⁵² In a sense, Miles/Douglas’ manifestation of these lovers as phantasms in his narrative represents a very real displacement of his own self-destructive sexuality, most likely begun at school. This would align with Freud’s observations on displacement: he notes, “. . . displacement usually results in a colourless and abstract expression in the dream-thought being exchanged for a pictorial and concrete one. . . . A thing that is pictorial is . . . *a thing that is capable of being represented* . . .”⁵³ For the Miles/Douglas figure, older than Flora and already pubertal, the ghosts not only represent erotic activity, as noted, but by extension, they further serve to metastasize the corruption of innocence that resulted in Miles/Douglas’ expulsion from school. Ultimately, all of these preternatural sexual instincts intruding upon and plaguing Miles/Douglas’s psyche culminate in the sexual act born of sexual fantasy in the final chapter of the novella – spontaneous orgasm in the arms of the object of desire – the governess.

While I offer yet another Freudian reading, I believe my argument yields

a psychoanalytic analysis atypical of those previously accomplished. For when considering the tale from Douglas' point of view, it becomes wholly evident that his adolescent, psychosexual fixation with the governess culminates not in the death of a child but, rather, in the *petite mort* or the "little death" of sexual orgasm, the equivalent of a masturbatory episode on the child's part while in the passionate embrace of his governess.

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Notes

1 Rolf Lundén, "Not in any literal, vulgar way: the Encoded Love Story of Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*." *American Studies in Scandinavia* 32.1 (2000): 30-44. <http://rauli.cbs.dk/index.php/assc/article/view/1484>.

2 Qtd. in Parkinson.

3 Qtd. in Lundén, 31.

4 Ibid, 31.

5 Ibid, 31-32.

6 Ibid, 32-33.

7 Kalliopi Nikolopoulou, "Autospectrography: On Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*." *Journal of Modern Literature* 28.1 (2004): 1-24. *Project MUSE*. Web. <http://muse.jhu.edu/>.

8 Cowl writes, "The form of the story, an introductory frame and tale within a tale, is similarly consistent and repetitive in the nested inversions of reality and story-book romance which are the governess' attempt at a perspective on her shifting experiences at Bly" (122). While Cowl attributes the tale's "nested inversions of reality and story-book romance" to the governess as a means of reconciling her experiences at Bly, the same could be said of Douglas, as author and auditor of the manuscript.

9 Nikolopoulou, 9-10.

10 Henry James, 81-82. *The Turn of the Screw*. Norton Critical Edition. Ed. Deborah Esch and Jonathan Warren. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999,

11 Ibid. 82

12 Ibid, 82.

13 Ibid, 83.

14 Ibid, 85.

15 Ibid, 82.

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17 Sigmund Freud. *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality. The Freud Reader*. Ed. Peter

Gay. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989: 239-291.

18 Ibid, 279.

19 James, 11.

20 James, Henry. 4.

21 Goetz, William R. "The 'Frame' of *The Turn of the Screw*: Framing the Reader In." *Studies in Short Fiction* 18:1 (1981), 72.

22 Qtd. in Genette, 168.

23 James, 2-4.

24 Shoshana Felman. "Turning the Screw of Interpretation." "The Turns of the Story's Frame: A Theory of Narrative." *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory 1900-2000*. Ed. Dorothy J. Hale. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, 317.

25 Ibid, 317.

26 Goetz suggests that "we are so immersed . . . in the governess's voice that we have likely forgotten that any other voices preceded it" (73).

27 James, 5.

28 Ibid, 101.

29 Michel Foucault, in the chapter entitled "The Repressive Hypothesis" of *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, discusses sexuality as the *discursive erethism* of the 19th century, an abnormal tendency on the part of modern society to 'speak' of sex "ad infinitum, while exploiting it as *the secret*" (37). According to Foucault, the discourse of sex is yet another societal power relation that plays off repression. In essence, discourses of sexuality that attempted to repress sexual behavior in effect produced them. One of the sexual categories to which the concept applied was infantile sexuality, particularly that of elite, English boys who attended boarding schools. Foucault argues that "the sex of the schoolboy became in the course of the eighteenth century -- and quite apart from that of adolescents in general -- a public problem" that was addressed, in part, by publishing "books of exhortation, full of moral and medical examples" (28). According to Foucault, "Around the schoolboy and his sex there proliferated a whole literature of precepts, opinions, observations, medical advice, clinical cases, outlines for reform, and plans for ideal institutions" (28). In essence, while the schoolboy was mandated by pedagogical authorities to repress sexuality, he was simultaneously drawn into its discourse by virtue of public exposition on the issue. Foucault also attributes the very construct of the boarding school itself as a contributor to the sexuality of its young residents: "one can have the impression that sex was hardly spoken of at all in these institutions. But one only has to glance over the architectural layout, the rules of discipline, and their whole internal organization: the question of sex was a constant preoccupation. . . . What one might call the internal discourse of the institution -- the one it employed to address itself, and which circulated among those who made it function -- was largely based on the assumption that this sexuality existed, that it was precocious, active, and ever present" (28).

30 Shoshana Felman's seminal study on *Turn of the Screw*, "Turning the Screw of Interpretation", argues, in part, that James' tale "constitutes a trap for psychoanalytical interpretation to the extent that it constructs a trap, precisely, for suspicion. It has indeed

been said of psychoanalysis itself that it is a veritable “school of suspicion” (189). Thus, she suggests that the novelette begs psychoanalytic interpretation since the career of such interpretation is to be *not* “easily caught” by rhetoric and “the desire to be *non dupe*, to interpret . . . and avoid, the very traps of the unconscious” (187).

31 James, 2.

32 James’ warning almost anticipates Gerard Genette’s study on the complexity of narrative discourse, which argues that “no narrative can ‘show’ or ‘imitate’ the story it tells. It can [only] give more or less the *illusion of mimesis*” (164). Genette argues that when dealing with silence in a text (not words but “silent events and actions”), we can only “handle the narrative object so that it literally ‘tells itself’ . . . without anyone having to speak for it” (164) through “showing”—“a *way of telling* . . . [that] consists of both *saying about it* as much as one can, and *saying this ‘much’* as little as possible” (166). *Showing, telling*—both work to instill within the reader a false sense of security in what is said and not said, and who is saying or not saying it.

33 James, 3.

34 Ibid, 94-95.

35 Ibid, 2.

36 Ibid, 11.

37 Ibid, 5.

38 Felman, 105.

39 James, 9.

40 Sigmund Freud. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Trans. James Strachey. New York: Avon/Bard, 1998, 530.

41 James, 11.

42 Miles’ speech acts are often marked by the language of impertinence; i.e. he calls the governess into his bedroom with the words, “I say, you there – come in . . . what are *you* up to? . . . You’re like a troop of calvary!” (60).

43 Ibid, 13.

44 Ibid, 5.

45 Felman, 145.

46 James, 37-38.

47 James, 38.

48 Ibid, 60.

49 Ibid, 60.

50 Ibid, 62.

51 Ibid, 62.

52 As Felman points out, having been witnesses to the “presumed liaison between the two dead servants, the children, in the governess’s eyes, are in possession of knowledge which is at once *knowledge of meaning* and *knowledge of sex*” (158).

53 Stanley Renner, in his study of the ghosts of the novella, also associates the ghosts with sexuality; he argues that the “story’s spectral figures, colored by the governess’s sexual fear and disgust, symbolize the adult sexuality just beginning to ‘possess’ Miles and Flora as

they hover on the brink of puberty” (224).

“Do you see the story?” Consciousness, Cognition and Crisis of Narration in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*

Avishek Parui

Abstract

The aim of this article is to examine the ways Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* dramatizes an existential crisis that is psychologically as well as politically underpinned. It explores how the novel is reflective of the ideological complexities of its day while also corresponding to current ideas in cognitive psychology and philosophy of mind which examine the entanglements of embodied feelings, subjective sentience and the ability to narrativize experientiality in shared language. In investigating how the crisis of narration in *Heart of Darkness* is reflective of the psychological and existential alienation experienced by the protagonist in the novel, the article draws on debates on the role of the literary narrative as a vehicle to communicate the phenomenal quality of consciousness.

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As a pre-Modernist who is essentially unclassifiable and “floating uncertainly somewhere in between Proust and Robert Louis Stevenson” (Jameson 2006), Conrad’s writing epitomizes the epistemologies and uncertainties in fin de siècle cultural imaginary. Consequently, his fiction offers not so much the pleasure of masculinist adventure tales along the lines of Henry Rider Haggard’s stories but rather showcases the tensions and indeterminacies essentially and stylistically incompatible with high-Victorian imperial ethos. While the political knowledge in *Heart of Darkness* emerges as an articulation of the ethical ambivalence around European imperialism, the narrative praxis in Conrad’s novel is symptomatic of later Modernism’s tendency to foreground psychological interiority over external materiality, the process of consciousness over the perceived object.¹ Thus unsurprisingly, Conrad’s narratives are characterized by a cognitive mode that emerges with a self-reflective process aware of its own incompleteness. There is a deliberate deconstruction of the typical imperialist romance in Conrad’s

narrative where the resolutions of the conventional adventure fiction are deliberately problematized by narrative complexities which incorporate entanglements of shifting time, memory and crises in storytelling (Lodge 75). *Heart of Darkness* dramatizes such crises as an unsettling of the narrative agency which informs the embodied self. Such unsettling emerges as a psychological as well as existential alienation in Conrad's novel represented in a deliberately defamiliarized language.

In a letter to H. G. Wells on 30 November 1903, Conrad commented on his view of writing thus: "[F]or me, writing—*the only possible writing*—is just simply the conversion of nervous forces into phrases" (Conrad, *Collected Letters* 3:45).² Pervasive throughout Conrad's narratives—especially in *Heart of Darkness*—is the manner in which nervous experiences and embodied feelings are translated into language. *Heart of Darkness* may be considered as an attempt in fiction to communicate existentially disoriented states of being that self-reflectively flag up crisis in storytelling (Ambrosini 84). With its economy of incomplete apperceptions and delayed decoding, the novel is reflective of Conrad's own discourses on the nature of writing, most abundantly explicated in his Preface to *The "Nigger" of the Narcissus*—a passage that underlines Conrad's approach and aspiration apropos creative expression (Watt, *Conrad's Preface* 103)—where he states that the appeal of art to be effective

[. . .] must be an impression conveyed through the senses [. . .]
All art, therefore, appeals primarily to the senses, if its highest desire is to reach the secret spring of responsive emotions. It must strenuously aspire to the plasticity of sculpture, to the colour of painting, and to the magic suggestiveness of music, which is the art of arts. (Garnett 51)

Conrad's fiction frequently foregrounds emotional states where existential motivation emerges disconnected to experientiality (Stanzel 93) and this disconnect is most often focalized through a crisis in narrativity. The cognitive quality in Marlow's narration in *Heart of Darkness*—a "parabolic text" (Miller, *Heart of Darkness Revisited* 31) that incorporates a process of unveiling—is further heightened by the self-reflexivity of the narrative and the way the same emerges entangled with shifts in consciousness and processes of thought (Fludernik 20).

In one of his autobiographical asides, Conrad himself had thus spelt out the location of the sentient self that oversees the creative process at work:

In truth every novelist must begin by creating for himself a world, great or little, in which he can honestly believe. This world cannot be made otherwise than in his own image; it is fated to remain individual and a little mysterious, and yet it must resemble something already familiar to the experience, the thoughts and the sensations of his readers. (Conrad, *Notes* 7)

The entanglements between epistemological reflexivity and ontological materiality, between private perception and shared communication run across the entirety of Conrad's fiction. In *Heart of Darkness*, for instance, narration often emerges as a backwards process whereby objects are objectified post-perception. Marlow's knowledge of an existential experience of loss and the eventual impossibility of communicating the same in shared language highlight the unreliability inherent in his narrative process. The narrative impossibility and unreliability of Marlow, which he acknowledges right at the heart of his tale, correspond complexly with current thesis in cognitive psychology that only a self-reflective autobiographical narrative by the feeling subject can be a valid measure for understanding subjective experience of horror, shock or loss (Libet 97). The failure of narrativity in Conrad's novel and the consequent crisis of agency are also in close correspondence to the thesis in modern cognitive neuroscience that the ability to construct a narrative and give shape and meaning to one's life is underpinned by abilities in abstractions, metaphors and complex symbols in language. Together those inform the self-awareness and agency which make us uniquely and mimetically human (Ramachandran 291). Such views find resonance in the claims of modern cognitive narratology which state that storytelling can emerge as a means of "distributing intelligence—disseminating knowledge about or ways of engaging with the world—across space and time" (Herman 227). Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* may be read as a story about the crisis in storytelling and the resultant loss in the self's existential situatedness in an experientially shared world.

Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* emerges as an unreliable and nervous narrator who, with "the stammerings of his conscience and [. . .] the outspoken consciousness of the difficulties of his work" (Garnett 53) points to the inadequacies of the classic-realist narrative and normal cognitive processes. The sensory quality of Conrad's writing, one that underlines the self's embodied and experiential struggle to situate its relation to the physical world is thus described by Michael Levenson:

The fragility of identity, the barriers to knowledge, the groundlessness of value—these great Conradian (and modern) motifs appear most often in terms of sensory derangement that casts the individual into unarticulated space, a space with no markers and no boundaries, with nothing behind, nothing above, nothing below. (Levenson 6)

More significantly, as that “evasive centre that is everywhere and nowhere” (Miller, *Fiction* 39), the contingent storytelling voice that characterises the narrative economy in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* is remarkably dialogic with current theses in philosophy of mind that examine epistemological differences between purely subjective points of view and objective orders of meaning.³ Marlow’s narrative unreliability, with its sudden shifts in consciousness that compulsively defy the norms of standardized realist narrative, may be read as an authorial strategy of mixing psychological and narrative confusion in a story which signals “the coordinates of an otherworldly map” (Williams 154).

The intense and explicit self-reflexivity of Marlow’s story (he flags up and pathetically justifies his own nervousness, reprimands his audience for not being attentive enough, and mocks their sense of complacent civilized security which flies in the face of the horror of his Congo experience) may be read as a substantiation of the phenomenological view that inner awareness is most often an integral component of human consciousness, before it becomes “an appropriate pattern of neural activity” (Smith 95). Marlow’s narrative predicament is underlined by his crisis in conveying his inner awareness in a shared discourse. In substituting empirical and “imperial coordinates” (Williams 156) with psychological allegory, Marlow’s tale in *Heart of Darkness* unfolds as an inconclusive enquiry into existential interiority.

The complex cognitive quality of Marlow’s narrative is highlighted early on in *Heart of Darkness* by the unnamed narrator thus:

But Marlow was not typical [. . .] and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one those misty halos that, sometimes, are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine. (Conrad, *HD* 9)

The uniqueness of Marlow’s narrative thus lies in its scooped-out quality, its “radiating significance” (Said 96) which self-reflectively extends

its interiority over and above its formal frame. This entails a form of decentering pervasive throughout Marlow's tale whereby characters appear more as apparitions than as palpable presence, and where the journey to the centre can only end with an embodied experience of centrelessness (Todorov 152).⁴ The centreless quality of Marlow's tale is frequently made evident in its descriptions. Thus Kurtz is "hollow at the core" (*HD* 58), the Manager tells Marlow that men who arrive in the Congo "should have no entrails" (*HD* 25) and the brick-maker appears to Marlow as a "papier-mâché Mephistopheles" composed of "a little loose dirt" (*HD* 29) on the inside. What emerges as fundamental in Marlow's story of the horror of hollowness is Conrad's "seemingly endless pursuit of the quality of solidity in things" (Meyer 32). The existential anxiety of such pursuit is evinced thus in Marlow's exclamation:

Do you see him? Do you see the story? Do you see anything? It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream—making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation, that commingling of absurdity, surprise, and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt, that notion of being captured by the incredible which is the very essence of dreams [. . .] It is impossible. We live, as we dream—alone . . . (*HD* 30)

Marlow's attempt in *Heart of Darkness* to make the reader *see* the story emerges as an extension of Conrad's aim as a writer, famously described in the Preface to *The "Nigger" of the Narcissus* where he asserts his objective as an artist was "by the power of the written word to make you [the reader] hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, is to make you *see*" (Garnett 52). The failure of narration in *Heart of Darkness* is thus coplanar with the crisis of cognition and both inform the existential unsettling characterising the speaking subject. Conrad's novel with its narrative difficulties and cognitive crises is very much a text of its times, especially in relation to the emergence of new theories of the mind at the turn of the twentieth century.⁵ It also anticipates current works in cognitive psychology and philosophy of mind which investigate the interfaces between the embodied self and its existential subjectivity.

In their work on brain and the inner world of the self, Mark Solms and Oliver Turnbull go on to analyse how units of consciousness (*qualia*)⁶ proceed by forging links between the feeling subject and felt objects. Referring to the work of Antonio Damasio on the cognitive role of emotions, Solms and Turnbull argue that "consciousness consists of awareness of what is happening around us, grounded in a background medium of self-awareness"

(Solms 93). It is interesting to establish an analogy between the difficulty faced by Conrad's narrators with the psychological notion of *extended consciousness* and the phenomenological awareness of one's cognitive self. In their work on the extended mind, Andy Clark and David Chambers define *active externalism* as being "based on the active role of the environment in driving cognitive processes" (Clark 643).⁷ Extended cognition in Clark and Chamber's view – underpinned by factors such as external environment, shared signs and learnt language – is a crucial component of the core cognitive process rather than an accessory. Such a view is also harboured by cognitive psychologists who believe that "information is a relational feature of the environment" (Chemero 108). *Heart of Darkness* offers an excellent example of the cognitive disjointedness of the otherwise healthy feeling subject apropos of the immediate environment, and how such state ultimately underpins an existential crisis. This is evident thus in Marlow's description of the journey up the Congo:

We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings, we glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse. We could not understand because we were too far and could not remember because we were travelling in the night of the first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign—and no memories. [. . .] The mind of man is capable of anything—because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future. (*HD* 37-38)

The existential isolation experienced by Marlow (ironically exacerbated by the use of collective pronoun "we") is thus a function of extended otherness and cognitive unsettling. The reference to the "mind of man" at the end of the passage further highlights the translucent quality of human consciousness whose interiority is informed by its relationality with external signifiers. More importantly, Marlow's disjointedness from his immediate environment and the existential and psychological alienation consequently experienced point also to the crisis in generating a feeling self which can cognitively correspond to mental images (Damasio 17).⁸

A further instance of Marlow's cognitive unsettling features in *Heart of Darkness* thus:

You lost your way on that river as you would in a desert and butted all day long against shoals trying to find the channel till you thought yourself bewitched and cut off for ever from everything you had

known once—somewhere—far away—in another existence perhaps. There were moments when one's past came back to one, as it will sometimes when you have not a moment to spare to yourself; but it came in the shape of an unrestful and noisy dream remembered with wonder amongst the overwhelming realities of this strange world of plants and water and silence. (*HD* 36)

What is depicted here is an existential disjointedness underpinned by a nervous and cognitive crisis extending into the crises of narration and recollection which otherwise inform the embodied and feeling subject. It may be argued that the epistemology of narration in Conrad is synchronic with the slippage between the narrative self and its incomplete awareness of its own subjectivity which struggles to grapple with the lived reality around. The disconnect described above in *Heart of Darkness* depicts how learnt and internalized patterns of meaning which give a sense of the self are violently defamiliarized along with the language which accompanies the subject. Such defamiliarization takes place with a series of cognitive and epistemic unmappings which compromise not just Marlow's subjectivity but also his narrative agency. It may indeed be argued that Marlow's struggle to sustain and fully inhabit his story augments the thesis in modern cognitive narratology that "storytelling acts are grounded in the perceptual-conceptual abilities of embodied human minds" (Herman 169). Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* dramatizes the disruptions in those otherwise taken-for-granted abilities and thus highlights "the connection between epistemology and narrative technique" (Pettersson 95).

As the narrator of *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow is evidently aware of the inconclusive quality of his narration that borders on the absurd, and, appropriately enough, juxtaposes his nervousness and his narration in an attempt to account for his imperfect and frustrated articulation:

"Absurd!" he cried. "This is the worst trying to tell. . . . Here you all are each moored with two addresses like a hulk with two anchors, a butcher round one corner, a policeman round another, excellent appetites, and temperatures normal—hear you—normal from year's end to year's end. And you say, Absurd! Absurd be—exploded! Absurd! My dear boys, what can you expect from a man who out of sheer nervousness had just flung overboard a pair of new shoes? (*HD* 48)

The passage foregrounds the anxiety of losing the attention of the audience, an anxiety that accentuates the haunted order of loss⁹ that Marlow is forced

to embody through his narrative. As Robert Ambrosini suggests, Marlow's narrative indeterminacy and loss of control "undermine the white man's language – and consequently, many of the ideological presuppositions which ground his audience's response" (93). The "excellent appetites" and "temperature normal" that characterize his listeners are in sharp contrast to the narrator's "lean appeared face [that] appeared worn, hollow, with withdrawn folds and drooped eyelids with an aspect of concentrated attention" (*HD* 48) that emerge as obvious pointers to the nervous awareness of the horror that he cannot completely communicate. In effect, Marlow's failure of narration in *Heart of Darkness* – a text that may be read as a "melancholic response to crisis" (Ash 196) – enacts an epistemological enquiry into representation of the lost subject. The horror that Marlow cannot communicate in his narrative is as much mimetic as emotional and constitutes "a psychological confusion between self and other(s) which, in turn, deprives subjects of their full rational presence to selfhood" (Lawtoo 240).¹⁰ Conrad's novel is a graphic account of such failure of selfhood and its representation, one that underpins an existential crisis in a politically charged setting.

In its dramatization of interiority and embodied experientiality, Conrad's writing emerges as a "narrative self-consciousness" (Roberts 7)¹¹ reflective of phenomenological perceptions of the changing existential self and its locations in language. First used by Ian Watt and described as the "forward temporal progression of the mind, as it receives messages from the outside world, with the much slower reflexive process of making out their meaning" (Watt, *Conrad in Nineteenth Century* 175), Conrad's delayed decoding attracts attention from literary critics who view it as a strategy of narrative apprehension, of a deliberate frustration of linear temporality and processes of apperception. As Bruce Johnson contends, Conrad's delayed decoding "resembles the attempt of Hemingway and before him of Mark Twain to recognize that there is no such thing as an isolated and meaningful fact or event or object. Meaning [. . .] is a function of connectedness" (Johnson 60). Delayed decoding in Conrad dramatizes the disintegration in the act of perception while also mapping the same onto the act of narration. As the "gap between impression and understanding" (Watt, *Conrad in Nineteenth Century* 176-77), delayed decoding in Conrad corresponds to what modern cognitive psychologists classify as the distinction between *simple awareness* and *reflexive awareness* whereby the reflexivity associated with the immediate cognitive function of language is unsettled by the experience of cognition itself. The delayed temporality characterising Marlow's subjective awareness in *Heart of Darkness* supports the idea that increasingly interests researchers in cognitive psychology as well as

phenomenology, one that states that “time comes into being as a function of our embodied interaction with the world” (Gibbs 17). As a cognitive condition that is unreliably reported in the retrospective narrative, delayed decoding in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* takes the reader “directly into the observer’s consciousness at the very moment of perception, before it has been translated into its cause” (Watt, *Conrad in Nineteenth Century* 175).

Psychologists have come to classify the cognitive process involved in recollection as constituting an *explicit memory system*, one that encodes information and later integrates the same into memory, an *imagery system*, a *language system* and a *narrative reasoning system*, one that is instrumental to the production of narrative from events in memory (Rubin 54-55). Thus the cognitive psychologist William Brewer defines narrative discourse as a system that “attempts to embody in linguistic form a series of events that occur in time” (223). What is emphasized in Brewer’s analysis is the link between language, storytelling and cognitive ability and how narrative reasoning informs the epistemological process of self-making. Likewise Jerome Bruner asserts the importance of narrative as a mode of thought in itself, one that attempts to “locate the [cognitive] experience in time and space” (13). Such attempts at narrativization emerges as an internalization as well as an extension of the self’s awareness of its sentient processes. As David Lodge argues:

In a world where nothing is certain, in which transcendental belief has been undermined by scientific materialism, and even the objectivity of science is qualified by relativity and uncertainty, the single human voice, telling its own story, can seem the only authentic way of rendering consciousness. (Lodge 87)

The loss of the cognitive self that Marlow experiences as happening simultaneously with the loss of the narrative self bears interesting resonance with what Mikhail Bakhtin classifies as “lateral transgradience”, that corresponds to the necessity to retain the authored self as well as the authorized self. Analysing the dialectics of Dostoevsky’s poetics, Bakhtin contends thus:

The most important acts, constitutive of self-consciousness, are determined by their relation to another consciousness (a ‘thou’). Cutting oneself off, isolating oneself, closing oneself off, those are the basic reasons for the loss of self [. . .] To be means to communicate [. . .] Man has no internal sovereign territory; he is all and always on the boundary; looking within himself he looks

in the eyes of the other or through the other. (Bakhtin 311-12)

Bakhtin's analysis describes the epistemology of the *narrative self* in relation to the *cognitive self* that situates itself through the fictionalized and subjectivized 'Other'. The cognitive disconnect Marlow suffers in *Heart of Darkness* emerges as a failure to fictionalize as well as to subjectivize, in a world of epistemic uncertainties. Instead, in *Heart of Darkness*, the human subject and its narrative voice are left only with an "epistemological solipsism" (Vulcan 95) that is increasingly detached from the frames of familiar cognition. Conrad's narratives, in showcasing "the workings of the human mind attempting to come to terms with the flux of experience" (Pettersson 93), reveal the fractures in time and space in a consciousness that attempts to inscribe its own incompleteness. Marlow's journey across the landscape of otherness in *Heart of Darkness* is beset with cognitive unsettling and incomplete apprehension of embodied experience. The failure of Marlow to convey the same in shared language highlights Conrad's private belief that "realism in art will never approach reality" (Jean-Aubry 1:302-03).

The delayed decoding so characteristic of Conrad's fiction is perhaps most famously exemplified in *Heart of Darkness* in Marlow's travel up in Congo where the forests around appear as effects even before their *meaningful materiality* is cognized by the perceiving mind. This is spectacularly demonstrated as Marlow travels through Congo between various telegraphic stations and sees the effect of the shower of arrows on his senses before decoding their symbolic signification. The passage described thus illustrates an unsettled process of apperception:

Then I had to look at the river mighty quick because there was a snag in the fairway. Sticks, little sticks, were flying about, thick; they were whizzing before my nose, dropping below me, striking behind me against my pilot-house. All this time the river, the shore, the woods were very quiet—perfectly quiet. I could only hear the heavy splashing thump of the stern-wheel and the patter of these things. We cleared the snag clumsily. Arrows, by Jove! We were being shot at! (*HD* 45-46)

The cognitive process in operation here moves from the effect to the cause, from the impression of the object to the materiality of the same. It thus depicts a manner of decoding that is a reversal of the normative process of cognition where the object appears before the effect it creates in the mind of the perceiving subject. This takes place through an economy of affect

and shock, with the “juxtaposition between a *story* of ‘what happened’ to Marlow and a *tale* of the effect that those events had on him” (Ambrosini 85).

Delayed decoding also appears in Conrad’s *The Shadow Line* (1916) in the scene where the narrator describes the rain first by its effects on his senses and then by its material and real presence. The passage from the novel (where the word ‘delayed’ itself emerges with its palpable effect on the embodied self) thus depicts the enigmatic epistemology of cognition:

I became bothered by curious, irregular sounds of faint tapping on the deck. They could be heard single, in pairs, in groups. While I wondered at this mysterious devilry, I received a slight blow under the left eye and felt an enormous tear run down my cheek. Raindrops. Enormous. Forerunners of something. Tap. Tap. Tap. . . . [. . .] Suddenly—how am I to convey it? Well, suddenly the darkness turned into water. This is the only suitable figure. (Conrad, *The Shadow Line* 113)

The passage problematizes the normative process of cognition in which conscious experience is integrated in the brain through the process of decoding done by the nervous system which also works as “an information network [. . .] [that] generates and transmits information in accordance with definite natural codes” (Bunge 49-50). Instead, the difficulty of communication becomes the core content of the passage as the tap sounds turn into rain and the darkness turns into water. Crucially, the moment of cognition is mapped onto the moment of embodiment, whereby the raindrops are recognized only when those touch the subject’s body and meaningful experientiality is generated through an integration of information and embodied awareness (Gallagher 7). Marlow’s struggle in *Heart of Darkness* to negotiate his narrative between the objective and the subjective, the real and the perceived orders is analogous to the “complex boundary crossing” whereby “emotions in response to imagined events collide with emotions in response to the real-world narratives that report those imagined events” (Currie 4). Conrad’s novel is characterized by a vocabulary of violence that is operative not just at the immediate physical and political level at the heart of European imperialism but also at a cognitive and narrative level whereby the report from the heart of darkness can only end in its own failure to convey its crisis and loss.

Heart of Darkness showcases its crises at several levels which respond complexly to psychological studies in trauma. Marlow’s continuous

reference to “hearing” the voice of Kurtz appears in resonance to Freud’s notion of traumatic repetitions in dreams and “the difficulty of reporting the thoughts behind them” (Freud 149).¹² The spectral quality with which Kurtz appears in Marlow’s mind, one which furthers the novel’s narrative indeterminacy, is underlined by his description thus:

A voice. He was very little than a voice. And I heard—him—it—this voice—other voices—all of them were so little more than voices—and the memory of that time itself lingers around me, impalpable, like a dying vibration of one immense jabber, silly, atrocious, sordid, savage, or simply mean without any kind of sense. (*HD* 48-49)

Marlow’s voice-hearing in *Heart of Darkness* is characteristic of what Conrad himself had classified as a condition where the subject loses “all sense of reality in a kind of nightmare effect produced by existence” (Conrad, *Cunninghame Graham* 114). The voice of Kurtz and his dying words that come back and keep consuming Marlow with their haunted presence – he hears the whispered cry “The horror! The horror!” as he stands to wait for Kurtz’s Intended by a mahogany door – is symptomatic of the séance “wherein figures of imperialist fantasy and guilt are plied with technological dreams and terrors, scientific discoveries and speculations” (Warner 277). The metonymic construct of Kurtz — he had been “educated partly in England [. . .] His mother was half-English, his father was half-French. All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz” (*HD* 50) — if characteristic of the product perfected and manufactured by the industries and ideologies of European civilization, is also in itself a pointer to the impalpability that Marlow experiences while attempting to find a narrative rationale that would describe Kurtz’s presence. The contingency that characterized the construct of Kurtz appears more explicitly at the end when Marlow receives varying reports on Kurtz’s political and personal attributes from his various acquaintances and relatives. Marlow’s confusion about Kurtz who remains more a voice, a spectral presence and a symptom of hollowness out of excess rather than a palpable individual is made evident thus:

[. . .] to this day I am unable to say what was Kurtz’s profession, whether he ever had any—which was the greatest of his talents. I had taken him for a painter who wrote for papers, or else a journalist who could paint—but even the cousin (who took snuff during the interview) could not tell me what he had been—exactly. (*HD* 71)

In his permanent incompleteness and contingency, Kurtz remains for Marlow what Derrida had classified as an *inaccessible articulation* that characterizes the play between the spirit and the revenant. In his spectral quality that frustrates rational understanding and narrative reasoning, Kurtz is also a dis-appearing apparition that paradoxically perpetuates presence. For Derrida, analysing the *apparition of the inapparent*,

For there to be a ghost, there must be a return to the body, but to a body that is more abstract than ever. The spectrogenic process corresponds therefore to a paradoxical *incorporation*. Once ideas or thoughts (*Gedanke*) are detached from their substratum, one engenders some ghost by giving them a body. [. . .] a more acute specificity belongs to what could be called the “second” ghost, as incorporation of autonomized spirit, as objectivizing expulsion of interior idea or thought. (Derrida 126)

With his entanglement of the *apparition of the body* (appearing more as a voice than a living body that is always described through abstractions) and the *body of the apparition* (the posthumous voice that constructs its unique body against time), Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* appears to embody Derrida’s “second ghost” that is impossible to exorcise or expostulate away but must be mourned forever in a manner that approximates the process of fetish-formation. It is interesting to analyse how such process operates at a level of cognition in *Heart of Darkness*. Thus Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* embodies what Marlow at the beginning of the novel had classified as an “idea”, “something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to” (*HD* 10), that desperate clinging onto a strategy of abstraction in an attempt to redeem the vulgar materiality of imperialism and its exploitative machinery. Kurtz’s over-identification with the imperial order (Žižek 27) – he moves from being a “universal genius” (*HD* 71) to a degenerate, from being a painter-musician to an anarchic ruler presiding over savage ceremonies – emerges as a further pointer to the complex cognitive mappings in *Heart of Darkness* whereby affect precedes the object. The complexity of Conrad’s novel is also borne by the manner in which Kurtz’s centrelessness and spectrality are conveyed at three different yet connected orders of reception: Marlow’s, his immediate audience’s and the readers’. The horror that Kurtz articulates in the end, one that appears in Marlow’s mind as an “expression of some sort of belief [. . .] the appalling face of a glimpsed truth” (*HD* 69), stems from the self’s cognition of its own hollowness, in “that inappreciable moment of time in which we step over the threshold of the invisible” (*HD* 69).

The knowledge that Marlow gains from his journey into the heart of darkness, one that he cannot completely convey or disclose like the trade secret of the unnamed Belgian company he had worked for in the Congo, comes to consume him with its hysteric formations. Haunted by the hollowness and horror articulated by Kurtz as well as increasingly tormented by the memory of Kurtz's death¹³, Marlow is increasingly characterised by an order of guilt which is intentional as well as existential, inasmuch as it is directed toward something specific as well as being indescribable.¹⁴ Back in the sepulchral city of Brussels that sees little men run with their little businesses, Marlow confesses his impotent rage at the spectacle of triviality thus:

They were intruders whose knowledge of life was to me an irritating pretence because I felt so sure they could not possibly know the things I knew. Their bearing, which was simply the bearing of commonplace individuals going about their business in the assurance of perfect safety, was offensive to me like the outrageous flauntings of folly in the face of a danger it was unable to comprehend. (*HD* 70)

The privilege that Marlow ascribes to himself emerges also as loss, one that comes with the nihilistic knowledge of the inadequacy of the shared civilizational security that runs across the European metropolis and its mental life. As he "tottered about the streets" (*HD* 70) the scene of urban life appears to Marlow as essentially one of ignorance and inanity and the loss that he experiences and embodies paradoxically bypasses "extreme grief" in its emptiness and "takes the form of apathy" (*HD* 44).

Appearing as he does as a survivor of a crisis that had consumed the best of Europe, Marlow emerges as essentially incompatible with the smooth seamlessness of the metropolis and its mental life. Embodying an unsettled nervous condition, Marlow at this point is characterised by a rupture in the "reciprocity between self and others" (Ramachandran 289) through which the being interacts with the social world while also maintaining the desirable degree of privacy. He is subjected to an existential change which entails "an all-enveloping shift of one's sense of 'belonging to a shared world' [. . .] that all of one's thoughts, experiences and activities more usually take for granted" (Ratcliffe 15-16). Unsurprisingly, Marlow describes himself at this phase as "not very well" (*HD* 70), "grinning bitterly at perfectly respectable persons" (*HD* 70) with a temperament that "was seldom normal in these days" (*HD* 70). In his neurotic temperament and existential disconnectedness following an experience of horror and loss,

Marlow may be read as a figure embodying the state of the Turgenevian Superfluous Man who embodies an “egoistic (albeit intelligent) sensibility, rather decadent or neurotic in its oscillations of mood; a cynical or ironic quality; and, above all, that sense of being superfluous, without role or function; isolated from society” (Watts, *Preface* 66).¹⁵ Ending as he does “in the pose of a meditating Buddha” (*HD* 76) Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* emerges less as a signifier of spiritual wisdom than a hollowed-out seer who can pose like a prophet but is unable to articulate his knowledge of loss as “that would have been too dark—too dark altogether. . .” (*HD* 76)

Heart of Darkness is a complex narrative that situates the self and its existential inwardness in moments of epistemic violence and cognitive crises, with the backdrop of a real imperial setting with all its horrors and hubris. Its uniqueness – despite the rhetoric of its times which it retains in its descriptions of non-Europeans and African atavism – stems from its “tensions of a split heritage, divided between the demands of the adventure and the ‘literary’ novel” (Boehmer 44). In its self-reflexive epistemology of unlearning and uncertainty, Conrad’s novel maps a feeling and changing mind onto an imperial order that historically perpetuated its ideologies through an “entanglement of falsehood and self-contradiction” (Joravsky 294).¹⁶ In its articulation of failure and its failure of articulation, *Heart of Darkness* dramatizes a complex political, psychological and existential ambivalence that shows what it means to be fully and painfully human in a world of ideological overdeterminism. It reveals the ability of a literary text and a work of fiction to describe the complexities of human consciousness and embodied experience, mapping the same onto a crisis of knowledge and narration.

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Notes

- 1 The Modernist worldview as it appears in its most representative works of fiction, emerges as an indeterminacy about "the subjectivity of perception and cognition, a subjectivity that calls into question the unity of the observing subject as well as its relationship with the outside world" (Ross 6).
- 2 As Martin Bock suggests in his research, Conrad was known, by his friends, to write hysterical persona letters (Bock 77).
- 3 See Nagel, 20-27. It is interesting, at this point, to establish an analogy between Nagel's analysis of the subjectivity and objectivity and Conrad's treatment of the subjective experience and its unreliable narration. The view from nowhere that Nagel studies seeks to "combine the perspective of a particular person inside the world with an objective view of that same world, the person and his viewpoint included" (3) and bears structural similar-

ity with the narrative model Conrad espouses in *Heart of Darkness*, where the subjective view of Marlow who retrospectively narrates his experience in Congo is contained within the more objective frame of the unnamed narrator in a complex economy of storytelling.⁴ See also Meisel, 20-28.

5 As Judith Ryan argues, consciousness in the twentieth century novel – as depicted in the works of Proust, Musil, Joyce and Woolf – was deeply influenced by the scientific and psychological discourses contemporaneous to it. William James's and Ernst Mach's philosophical underpinnings of psychology gave rise to the discourse of empiricism that "rejected the dualism of the subject and the object [arguing instead that] everything that was, subsisted in consciousness itself" (Ryan 2).

6 The term *qualia* may be used to refer to the distinctive and phenomenal quality of sensory experience "such as the pain of a toothache, the taste of chocolate, the sound of violin, or the redness of a ripe Bing cherry" (Gibbs 40). In his work on the storytelling propensities of the human mind, the neuroscientist V. S. Ramachandran describes qualia as "the ineffable subjective quality of conscious experience" (Ramachandran 115).

7 In their essay, Clark and Chambers describe the distinction between *epistemic action* and *pragmatic action*. While the former corresponds to cognitive processes such as recognition and search, the latter relates to forms of physicality which are desirable for their own sake (the example offered is that of applying cement in a hole in a dam). Language, in the study of Clark and Chambers, emerges as the central means by which cognitive processes are extended into the external world. Thus disjointedness in cognitive processes would have its immediate impact on the production of language and shared signifiers of communication. The cognitive and narrative crisis in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* appears to underline such a state.

8 In this enquiry which explores the relation between self and the cognitive mechanism related to the appreciation of images, the neuroscientist Antonio Damasio describes how "if no self is generated, the images still are, although no one, inside or outside the organism, knows of their existence. Subjectivity is not required for mental states to exist, only for them to be privately known" (Damasio 17). Marlow's cognitive crisis in the passage quoted and studied above may thus be read as a crisis of subjectivity, whereby the images exist without the subjective interpretation of the same. Such situation may also be compared with what the philosopher Thomas Nagel describes as the "view from nowhere" whereby subjective awareness and understanding is almost completely effaced in the face of a "bleached-out physical conception of objectivity". In elucidating the significance of subjectivity in mental understanding, Nagel affirms "how things appear to us depends on the interaction of our bodies with the rest of the world" (Nagel 15).

9 It is interesting to draw parallels with the Derridean sense of *hauntology* here, in order to signify a play between presence and non-presence that informs the revenant that Kurtz comes to embody in Marlow's hysteric imagination. Referring explicitly to Hamlet (a figure who in his nervous knowledge of the uncertainty of epistemology can be connected to a number of fictional figures in Modernism, most immediately to Eliot's Prufrock), Der-

rida states that the hauntology of Marx's Europe has immediate parallels with the ghost in Shakespeare's play who does not answer. Hauntology is thus to be as well as not to be and thus constitutes the end as well as the return of the ghost. It is interesting to extend this idea into Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in seeing Kurtz as the dead order that appears again in its affirmation of a knowledge that Marlow, like Hamlet is unable to articulate or enact except in its incompletion. As a spectralized substance, hauntology entails an irreducible category of knowledge that determines the dangerous "phenomenality of the political" (Derrida 51).

10 Lawtoo goes on to suggest that Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is marked by an "outbreak of mimetic phenomena" including somnambulism, hypnosis and depersonalization that "haunt the Conradian conception of the subject" (240). Such analysis supports the claim made here that *Heart of Darkness* is a narrative where language, nerves and feelings enmesh to enact the crisis of being in nothingness.

11 Roberts goes on to suggest how this self-consciousness in Conrad's writing "is associated with scepticism about the possibility of truth and understanding" (7) and generates an epistemological doubt which makes his narratives "attend closely to processes of communication and exchange" (8).

12 Marlow's narration about Kurtz also appears to be synchronous to Freud's description of the rupture between repetition and remembering which characterizes the neurotic. Thus the neurotic, according to Freud, "is obliged to *repeat* the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of, as the physician would prefer to see, *remembering* it as something belonging to the past" (Freud 602).

13 Marlow and Kurtz may be interpreted as agents of the same imperialist war and Kurtz's death, as reported formally by Marlow to Kurtz's Intended, is couched in the typically romantic rhetoric characterizing military honour. The existential crisis of Marlow may thus be interpreted as a form of survivor's guilt and is further exacerbated by the lie he is forced to voice while attempting to retain Kurtz as a romantic hero who gloriously gave his life for a noble cause.

14 For a phenomenological study of these different orders of guilt, see Ratcliffe, 138-40.

15 In his analysis of the Turgenevian Superfluous Man and the figures in which such attributes are replicated, Watts includes Eliot's Prufrock, Sartre's Roquentin, Camus's Clamence and Beckett's tramps. Watts' choice of figures is interesting inasmuch as they share a cynical irreverence towards the normative social and cultural systems, an irreverence that borders on the comic by the time one gets to Beckett. In their knowledge of the hollowness of the social and cultural rituals around them, the superfluous men in the literature of the twentieth century flag up their uselessness in such systems of signification, often using metaphors of bodily and performative crises that are mapped onto their economy of epiphanies and insights.

16 Joravsky interestingly contrasts Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* with Kipling's "The White Man's Burden", published in the same year, as suggests how Conrad's depiction of uncertainty and alienation – as opposed to Kipling's arrogance of assertion – has "won generations of readers beyond the author's life" (294).

Simulation of Life: Laughter and Knowledge in *The Custom of the Country*

Jessi Snider

Abstract

Laughter takes a great many forms in the novel of manners, signifying different things at different times for different characters in different situations. Linguistics, philosophy, rhetoric, psychoanalysis, poetry, art, and film have all attempted to tackle the subject of laughter, yet in relation to manners, and the novel of manners, the matter remains fraught and underexplored. By examining laughter in Edith Wharton's *The Custom of the Country* (1913), this paper attempts to show how laughter on a micro level mirrors the simulacra and simulations that comprise manners, characters, and even the progression of the novel on a macro level. What the study of laughter in *The Custom of the Country* reveals about knowledge, sign systems, and commodity and exchange, could nuance the way in which we read laughter in the novel of manners, a type literature built upon knowing and understanding the conditions of the personal and social simultaneously.

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It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself. — Jean Baudrillard¹

Laughter takes a great many forms in the novel of manners, signifying different things at different times for different characters in different situations. Linguistics, philosophy, rhetoric, psychoanalysis, poetry, art, and film have all attempted to tackle the subject of laughter, yet in relation to manners, and the novel of manners, the matter remains fraught and underexplored. By examining laughter in Edith Wharton's *The Custom of the Country* (1913), this paper attempts to show how laughter on a micro level mirrors the simulacra and simulations that comprise manners, characters, and even the progression of the novel on

a macro level. What the study of laughter in *The Custom of the Country* reveals about knowledge, sign systems, and commodity and exchange, could nuance the way in which we read laughter in the novel of manners, a type literature built upon knowing and understanding the conditions of the personal and social simultaneously.

Problematically, the bulk of scholarship on laughter deals specifically with humor: what is humorous, what is not, how humor functions, and why. Theoretical perspectives on humor abound as the comic, and by extension the laugh, is argued to result from specific social and psychological preconditions. Linguistic models of humor including The General Theory of Verbal Humor (Attardo and Raskin) attempt to propose overarching theories of how humor and laughter function. A far smaller body of literature disassociates laughter from humor and ponders the possible implications of such a disassociation. This paper intervenes at the intersection of laughter and manners by examining the at once personal and social functions of laughter in the *The Custom of the Country*, and by extension, the novel of manners generally.

Scholars of linguistics researching laughter have noticed the almost universal association of laughter and humor. Some however, examine laughter outside of these narrow confines. Robert Provine argues that “[there] is only a partial correlation between the behavioral fact of laughter and the abstract and subjective category of humor. The focus on humor deflects consideration of broader and deeper roots of laughter in human vocal communication and social interaction (296). John Morreall, a scholar of humor and comedy adds:

Laughter and humor do not always occur together, of course... something’s making us laugh is not a sufficient condition for its being humorous. Nor is laughter a necessary condition for humor. Often, especially when alone, we are amused by something without breaking into laughter. The link between laughter and humor is not one of constant correlation but one of tendency: humorous things or situations tend to make us laugh, under the right conditions. (294)

Significant in both Provine and Morreall’s disassociation of laughter from humor is the positioning of laughter within the social: we laugh aloud when in public, yet rarely “[break] into laughter” when we are alone. Laughter then is primarily social; it is produced in the face of the other

in order to relay information, to hide it, to divert attention, or to gain it. Laughter functioning in these manners permeates *The Custom of the Country*, while laughter as a result of something comic occurs only rarely. In this way, a bleak novel already colored by greed, adultery, and suicide, can be read as almost entirely comically void, filled with hollow laughs, signifying only their social function, and indeed their very emptiness.

The Custom of the Country concerns the beautiful, young, Undine Spragg who takes a decidedly business-like approach to the marriage market. By engaging in a series of marriages to men of ever greater fortunes, Undine manages to climb both the social and economic ladders. Ellen Dupree, reading *The Custom of the Country* through the theoretical framework established by Luce Irigaray, suggests that Undine's behavior in the novel is a feminist strategy, a:

form of mimesis in which a woman deliberately exaggerates or mimics patriarchal discourse for the purpose of escaping its power to define her. By momentarily 'jamming the theoretical machinery' it is possible to expose the disparity between the discourse and what it presumes to describe...[S]uch a response is the only way in which women can 'introduce ourselves into such a tightly-woven systematicity,' for, of course, it is impossible to use the male discourse to attack its own presumptions. (5)

Does laughter in the novel function similarly, as a form of mimesis, or does it function separately and differently from discourse? I argue that laughter in *The Custom of the Country* most often reveals an epistemological gap. It is variously "embarrassed," (352) "angry," (292) "disenchanted," (293) and even "astonished and agitated" (271). It is "scornful" (24) and "nervous" (34). Rarely, is it joyous or heartfelt; laughs are frequently about projecting something other than what one is feeling. Though the laugh in *The Custom of the Country* frequently reflects a certain type of knowledge, knowledge of power, people, situations, and savoir-faire, the intention of the laugh is often impenetrable, its true intention outwardly *unknowable*.

The Custom of the Country approaches the epistemological difficulties of laughter by revealing the laugh to be an extension of sign systems generally as they apply to the world outside of language. The "echo" of laughter occurring throughout the text is the prime example of laughter functioning in this manner. At several points in the novel, one character

will laugh, and another will “echo” it. These echoes inadvertently channel Jean Baudrillard’s concept of simulacra in which the simulation of something comes to stand in for the real of something, until a simulacrum of the simulation is all that exists. Though he is concerned with systems of exchange, revolution, and capital, his theory is equally applicable to systems of manners. A laugh that is not rooted in humor, signifying something other than its true animating intention, which is then echoed by the laugh of another character, communicates only its remove from reality, its positioning as simulacrum, its entry into a hyperreal² world where manners come to speak their own language, absent and removed from the animating intentions on which they were once built.

Jean Baudrillard does not seem to be an obvious theorist to consult in regards to manners or laughter in that he applies post-structuralist critiques to economic theory, death, lust, and politics. Yet *The Custom of the Country*, with its emphasis on exchange, commodities, and commodification, and with a protagonist who continually adapts to be successful in such systems, begs for Baudrillardian critique. In “Simulacra and Simulations,” Baudrillard argues that representations have overtaken reality to the point where they come to represent reality itself. He builds upon linguistic theories which argue that a sign functions only because it gets repeated as something which is not perfectly unique. If a sign were completely unique, it could not signify, and therefore, by very definition, it must be repeatable. A written or spoken utterances’ capacity to function as a mark is constituted by its possibility of completely breaking off from its original context. It must be able to break, not just from its original context but from every context. Baudrillard’s analysis confirms this supposition by showing that indeed all signification mirrors this structure of language and that our perceptions of reality have broken off from their original anchoring in ‘the real.’ The hyperreal thus supplants the real. Enter laughter. Laughter, a variable sign signifying no reliably consistent meaning, signifies on the surface its own emptiness. It is a conduit in which meaning can be inserted, but it cannot anchor meaning; the laugh is always variable, and frequently unknowable. Interlocutors may endow it with meaning; however, the meaning with which it is endowed is highly suspect, possibly erroneous, and always revealing a gap in animating intention and reception. By employing the word “variable,” I imply that laughter is a vacant sign always waiting to have meaning bestowed upon it, even if that meaning is misunderstood or misinterpreted. Thus, I am arguing that laughter functions like all spoken or written utterance in its iterability, yet presents a unique

challenge linguistically in that it frequently, even purposefully, signifies an intention incorrectly, and this misalignment between intention and reception is built into its very structure.

Laughter as simulacrum is no place more obvious than in the echoed laughter of *The Custom of the Country*. Echoed laughter reverberates throughout the novel and functions as simulacrum: it is a simulation of a laugh that itself is a simulation of merriment, joy, or humor. Thus, this type of laughter in *The Custom of the Country* is hyperreal, being both removed from the original intention of the original laugh and radically removed from humor. And it is Undine, a hyperreal vixen obsessed with costume and beauty, who frequently echoes the laughter of others. The echoing further echoes the fact that Undine echoes the manners of her betters throughout the novel in order to climb to the next rung on the social ladder. Therefore, Wharton's use of the word "echo" as it relates to laughter mirrors, in language, the narrative of Undine learning to mirror, mimic, and echo the manners of the social sets she wishes to infiltrate. On a micro level then, Undine's echo of the laughter of others calls attention to Undine as simulacrum herself: she is a vessel, a receptacle for the manners she emptily mimes while voiding them of the meanings with which they were once laden. Undine, unlike Mrs. Heeny for example, is constantly morphed and shaped by the manners around her in order to make her into someone, or something, that can advance socially.

Mrs. Heeny, sincere and unchanging, plays a small but vital role in *The Custom of the Country*. Although by class she is an outsider, she is privy to the ways of the wealthy and understands certain things about them precisely *because* she is an outsider. After manicuring and beautifying Undine's hands, Mrs. Heeny tells Undine to put her engagement ring back on "with a laugh of jovial significance; and Undine, echoing the laugh in a murmur of complacency, slipped on the fourth finger of her recovered hand a band of sapphires in an intricate setting" (Wharton 84). The laugh of Mrs. Heeny is a knowing laugh. She knows what Undine has accomplished in her engagement to Ralph Marvell and she further understands the significance of the elaborate, though old fashioned setting of the ring. While Charles Bowen may be regarded as the social anthropologist of the novel, Mrs. Heeny is no less as keen an observer. Undine's laugh "echo[es]" Mrs. Heeny's laugh as hollow imitation of the "jovial" knowing laugh. The echoed laugh is a laugh in pantomime. This echoed laugh, laughed for affect, acknowledges the space it is meant to fill, but fills it only as simulation. Undine laughs because Mrs. Heeny laughs, but not because her engagement is particularly amusing. Yet it is

satisfying enough, and for the time being, it will do.

Once married to Ralph, Undine echoes his laughter too. When Ralph “laugh[s] impatiently” (160) about Undine’s lack of understanding concerning the proper etiquette for a woman in society, it is also not a comic laugh. It is a grave laugh, an attempt at patience, a simulation of good humor. But when Undine “echoe[s] his laugh...with the good-humoured curtness that was the habitual note of intercourse with the Spraggs” (160), it reveals the simulacrum that laughter has become in Mr. and Mrs. Marvell’s discourse. The learning curve of manners is steep for Undine, and Ralph, at first genuinely in love and laughing out of true happiness, eventually tires of her insolence and unceasing selfishness. Here, his laughs turn “impatient” (161) as the understanding between the couple begins to fray. Undine takes these impatient laughs, already somber, and echoes them in “good-humoured curtness” that is hardly good-humored at all. This simulacrum of laughter matches haughty for haughtier, revealing even on the level of language that Undine always intends to get the last word, or to have the last laugh as it were. Ralph laughs because he is losing his patience and the laugh acts as a buffer between his thought and the articulation of this thought. Undine laughs because Ralph laughs, showing impatience for impatience, revealing little and communicating even less.

Echoed and impatient laughter continues to plague the Marvells’ union. When Undine announces to Ralph that Van Degen has asked them to sail home on the *Sorceress*, “[s]he flashe[s] it out on a laugh of triumph, without appearing to have a doubt of the effect the announcement would produce” (176). Ralph’s reaction is to feel disgusted. Looking at Undine, he finds her “no longer beautiful—she seemed to have the face of her thoughts. He stood up with an impatient laugh” (177). A laugh “of triumph” is parried with “an impatient laugh.” Ralph’s echo of Undine’s laugh may be an attempt to retain his composure. Though like so much of the laughter in *The Custom of the Country*, it occurs in an unfunny situation, signifying the inherent disconnection of laughter and humor in the novel, and reveals another instance of a laugh’s presence in a moment of tension and misunderstanding. The laugh in these instances functions as interpersonal lubrication in an attempt to make a social situation unfold with less friction.

The echo of laughter is also employed to teach Undine lessons or to show her the error of her ways. When Undine gripes to Van Degen about only

going to the Adirondacks for the summer, she complains that she will not need Paris clothes for the trip: "It doesn't matter, at any rate," she ended, laughing, 'because nobody I care about will see me.' Van Degen echoed her laugh. 'Oh, come—that's rough on Ralph!'" (232). Undine laughs out of anger, jealousy, and disappointment. This is laughter divorced from the comic and firmly rooted in a bevy of negative emotions. Van Degen echoes her laugh in order to reverberate her shallowness and cruelty back at her. Rarely in the novel does anyone get through to Undine. Yet here, after Van Degen's echoing of her laugh, she immediately, even if only for affect, admits that she should not have implied that her husband does not matter to her. This echoed laughter, because it is not Undine who animates it but her social better, is received by her with the appropriate solemnity and consideration. As Undine learns to navigate society and to properly imitate the manners of others, the emptiness behind her actions becomes more evident; here, Van Degen's echo, endowed with meaning, forces Undine to confront the knowledge of her own cruelty.

Even as a child Undine fixates primarily on the social, with the genuine considered only an afterthought if considered at all. She forgoes regular childhood play and instead yearns only to play dress up. The interest in "play[ing] lady" never diminished, and as a young woman "she still practiced the same secret pantomime, gliding in, settling her skirts, swaying her fan, moving her lips in soundless talk and laughter" (22). Laughter for Undine from her childhood on is a practiced, mimed reaction. The pantomimed laughs of Undine's girlhood become the pantomimed and echoed laughs of her womanhood. When her laughter is genuine, it is most often cruel. Her empty simulacrum of laughter is perhaps preferred to her laughter endowed with meaning, for that meaning most frequently reveals nastiness and baseness, and little more.

Beyond her simulacrum of a laugh and her cruel laugh, Undine has a laugh that is part of her manner which, also humorless, relays meaning despite itself. Mrs. Fairford actively works to engage young Undine at her first big dinner party in New York society, but Undine remains socially awkward. Her "nervous laugh that punctuat[es] all her phrases" (34) has the dual function of expressing her discomfort while simultaneously creating discomfort in her company. She, with her nervous laughter and awkward reactions, is the girl from Apex, an outsider, rendered highly visible by her audible discomfort. In this instance, laughter attempts to break the tension. It is a shield attempting to protect its originator from the judgments and unkind proclivities of the others. Yet it fails. A nervous

laugh is read as a nervous laugh; it reveals internal discomforts perhaps better than other audible cues ever could. The nervous laugh is the rare site where knowledge is perfectly relayed: a nervous laugh is legible. A nervous laugh is a specific kind of laugh which is one of a group of laughs that are more intimately bound to their signification:

...certain cultural standardization of meanings is built into at least certain kinds of laughter. And intuitively we interpret a wide range of meanings in the laughter we hear: sincerity, nervousness, vapidness, hysteria, embarrassment, amusement, mockery, friendliness, raillery, sycophancy, taste, strength of character, even sanity. The scope of these intuitions is indeed so great that it seems to me to raise serious questions about how much is encoded in the sound of laughter -- about how much even can be. (Edmonson 28)

A great deal may be encoded, and may even be knowable in certain types of laughter, but true intention may still prove elusive. Undine with her nervous laugh reveals first and foremost that she has not entirely mastered the manners she tries so earnestly to emulate. She is anxious to please and is not fully conversant in the language of New York society. Clare Van Degen too shares Undine's propensity to extraneous, excessive laughter. Clare "was neither beautiful nor imposing: just a dark girlish-looking creature with plaintive eyes and a fidgety frequent laugh. But she was more elaborately dressed and jewelled than the other ladies, and her elegance and her restlessness made her seem less alien to Undine" (36). Here, the laughter makes Clare akin to Undine: they are both girls out in society not always completely comfortable in their own skin. Yet Clare's jewels and elegance set her apart. Undine sees in Clare, and perhaps begins to understand, that if one has the proper name, the proper circle, and the proper accoutrements, a "fidgety frequent laugh," though not desirable, can be acceptable enough. Perhaps it reveals the socially precarious position of the young female in society: anxious to please, attempting to relay one's kindness through empty, incessant laughter, which seems implicitly to beg: "like me, please like me, I am likeable."

At the same dinner party, Undine becomes aware of some of the open secrets common to the social set she is trying to take by storm. Her "ear was too well attuned to the national note of irony" (36) for any of their cutting remarks to escape her. Suddenly, "[h]er attention was diverted by hearing Mrs. Van Degen, under cover of the general laugh, say in a low tone to young Marvell: 'I thought you liked his things, or I wouldn't

have had him paint me” (36). The “general laugh” here is a diversion, a guise. It is a chance for those not joining in the laugh to say true things, secret things. The consuming nature of laughter for an individual and the noise produced by a group laughing, provide an excellent cover for covert conversation. Laughter, genuine, uproarious laughter, acts as a camouflage for the exchange of actual communication in *The Custom of the Country*. Shielding the reader from the impetus of the “general laugh,” shared by the group and likely humorous, yet providing access to the truths exchanged beneath its veil, reveals the role of humor in the book: the narrative actively bears witness to its lack. The general laugh exists in the text. We read the words “general laugh.” But we are not let in on the joke. Instead the comedic laugh is background noise, signifying nothing but its own existence.

When Wharton does allow the reader into a comedic laugh, it most often has biting sarcasm or unkindness at the root. When Mr. Spragg secures an opera box for Undine, he asks if she has considered taking her parents, he and Mrs. Spragg, with her. Yet “[t]his was so obviously comic that they all laughed—even Mrs. Spragg” (42). This may be a rare instance where the knowledge gap is decidedly narrowed; all parties know the score. Undine would no sooner take her parents on this first outing to the opera than she would a pet. Everyone *knows* this. The laugh merely confirms the rare exchange of mutually shared knowledge. Yet even here, cruelty, or at the very least exclusion, is at the root of the humor. Undine would never think to take her parents to the opera because it would not advantage her socially to have the slightly crude, small town, nouveau riche parents at her side. Having their money in her bank account is well enough, but going around with them socially is another matter entirely. The whole family laughs because the whole family understands.

By examining who is invited to laugh and when, a great deal is revealed in regards to social hierarchies, power positions, and social strivings in the text. Frequently in the novel of manners, or at the very least this novel of manners, a laugh will allude to hidden knowledge or willful ignorance of place, time, or situation. Munro S. Edmonson, writing on the linguistics of laughter in the 1980s, argues it is:

...obvious that laughter signals far more than amusement, and more nuanced information than who is laughing and how hard. Laughter is primarily a mode of social expression, occurring only rarely in solitude. Its phonetic features appear to be organized expressly to enable an individual to vote audibly and identifiably

in a group context, and thus to make his feelings known in response to a certain range of situational cues. And each individual has the option of coding his presence and pleasure or displeasure, as well as participation or nonparticipation in a more or less complex proposition presented by the context. The sounds of laughter must thus encode a range of interpretable messages, feigned or sincere, revealing and sometimes involuntary. They do so, not in the segmental sequences of articulate speech, but in the overdetermination of the sound dimensions by multiple simultaneous emotional considerations. The laughter utterance is thus a multiple-track statement, more akin to music than to speech. And its structure is consequently elusive. (28)

This “range of interpretable messages, feigned or sincere,” is precisely where the epistemological gap occurs: a “range” is not one meaning, anchored and secure. It is a spectrum. “Interpretable” implies open to interpretation and thus able to be *mis*interpreted. “Feigned” suggests willful deceptive, purposely signifying something artificial. And even when intention and laugh are not misaligned, when they are precisely inline and functioning, where intention matches laugh and the willful intent is to relay this internally consistent message, things can still go awry. This is the case when Undine discusses divorce when dining with the Marvells. She suggests that Mabel Lipscomb will leave her husband Harry because “she’ll never really get anywhere till she gets rid of him,” thus causing the entire dinner party to recoil in horror at her statements. After she speaks, there is a “palpitating silence, broken by a laugh from Ralph. ‘RALPH!’ his mother breathed...Ralph interposed with another laugh, ‘You see, Undine, you’d better think twice before you divorce me!’” (95). Ralph is genuinely amused at the turn of conversation, thinks the elders are perhaps foolish for taking it so seriously, and laughs a joyous, heartfelt laugh. Yet in so doing he reveals his utter naiveté. In this scene, despite the sincerity of the laugh, there is a general want of knowledge and understanding. Undine does not understand traditional New York society. Her views may mirror those of the unfolding twentieth century, but these are shocking views to the vanguards of tradition. Ralph laughs because he does not see that Undine is deadly serious in her assertions of the righteousness of a woman leaving a man who does not live up to her expectations. The new worldview cannot comprehend the old, the old cannot comprehend the new, and Ralph, attempting to be the suture between the past and future, laughs. But his laugh is misplaced and ignorant to the coming disaster of his union with Undine. Rather than his laugh acting as the intended suture between disparate ideologies, it is

the laughter of the oblivious, of the fool.

Laughter, as empty echo, as naiveté or foolishness, is countered in *The Custom of the Country* by laughter as a call to action. Sometimes the laugh is employed to make *somebody* do *something*. Both Ralph and Undine attempt this tactic. For example, Ralph:

could not rouse in [Undine] any scruple about incurring fresh debts, yet he knew she was no longer unaware of the value of money. She had learned to bargain, pare down prices, evade fees, brow-beat the small tradespeople and wheedle concessions from the great—not, as Ralph perceived, from any effort to restrain her expenses, but only to prolong and intensify the pleasure of spending. Pained by the trait, he tried to laugh her out of it. He told her once that she had a miserly hand—showing her, in proof, that, for all their softness, the fingers would not bend back, or the pink palm open. (181)

Here laughter is a call to action, a rhetorical devise attempting to *make something happen*. By laughing and teasing while shaming Undine, Ralph is trying to change her habits, to narrow the chasm he sees between his own gentle ways and her more crude methods. His mocking laughter has a dual purpose: make an unbearable situation bearable and politely, through light comedy, force Undine to change her behavior.

Undine too employs the tactic of laughter as impetus to action. When Undine finds herself in a situation with Chelles similar to her previous situation with Ralph, she begins to panic. Money in this new situation:

...represented not the means of individual gratification but the substance binding together whole groups of interests, and where the uses to which it might be put in twenty years were considered before the reasons for spending it on the spot. At first she was sure she could laugh Raymond out of his prudence or coax him round to her point of view. She did not understand how a man so romantically in love could be so unpersuadable on certain points. (495)

Again the laugh is a rhetorical devise deployed in an attempt to change the behavior of another; again, it specifically concerns money. First, Ralph tries to laugh Undine out of her spendthrift ways. Then, Undine tries to laugh Chelles into them. The parallel structure in Wharton's language as

it relates first to one husband then to another suggests that in marriage, the person trying to laugh someone into something is the disempowered individual. Ralph tries to laugh Undine out of her spending, but she ignores him and spends him into debt. She controls the relationship. She tries to laugh Chelles into allowing her to spend more and it falls on deaf ears. In neither case is the attempt fruitful. Wharton implies through this parallel that laughing someone into something is an impotent and pathetic gesture and that power differentials are not easily bridged through laughter.

When Undine realizes she has no power over Chelles, she begins to revel in small acts of selfishness, slowly tainting the environment of Saint Desert. Yet:

[i]f anyone had told her, a year earlier that one of the chief distractions of her new life would be to invent ways of annoying her mother-in-law, she would have laughed at the idea of wasting her time on such trifles...Her husband had mastered her in essentials, but she had discovered innumerable small ways of irritating and hurting him. (518)

The fact that she thinks she would have found her current mode of existence laughable in the not-so-distant past is evidence of the small, cloistering effect wrought by being isolated with the du Chelles family. She would have laughed at the idea, but the reality is not laughable. In it, she is vindictive and takes pleasure in hurting people. If an Undine not of the situation could find the situation humorous, then the situation *is* inherently humorous, or at the very least, absurd. In the situation, Undine finds it far from amusing even with the knowledge that outside of it she would see the absurdity of her ways. There is a willful disconnection between understanding her behavior as absurd, and being so mired in the moment that she refuses to see it or cease the behavior. Yet it is all half-lies and half-truths because she is haunted by the ghost laugh of the Undine from “a year earlier” watching, silently laughing, revealing a knowledge that she will not admit to herself beyond a half-admission ascribed to this earlier, absent self.

While the particularities of laughter in the novel are dark, rhetorical, or even sad, the general sense of laughter is as a metaphor for the social. Realizing that Ralph must know she is spending time with Van Degen, Undine questions his silence and wonders what he knows. Such “thoughts were with her as she dressed; but at the Ellings’ they fled like

ghosts before light and laughter. She had never been more open to the suggestions of immediate enjoyment" (225). The actual relationship with her husband is of no consequence to Undine. Only the social, the "light and laughter," are what matter. They draw her out and give her sustenance. Laughter as a metaphor for well-to-do society is an apt one indeed: as an empty sign endowed with unstable and largely unknowable meaning, laughter reflects the vapid, rapidly shifting situation of the society Undine breaches. The "light and laughter" occupy her; they temporarily shield her from the knowledge that she knows that her husband knows she is spending time with Van Degen.

It is no coincidence that the character continually brought into unfortunate, undesirable knowledge reacts by laughing hysterically, uncontrollably, maniacally. This character is Ralph. Ralph, recalling the night of dinner party where Undine made the flippant comment that Mabel would likely leave her husband "could still hear the horrified murmur with which his mother had rebuked his laugh. For he had laughed—had thought Undine's speech fresh and natural! Now he felt the ironic rebound of her words" (322). Knowledge in the character of Ralph is inexorably tied up in laughter: he laughs when he does not know but he laughs even harder when he does. When he receives a letter he thinks is from Undine and instead it is from "a firm of private detectives who undertook, in conditions of attested and inviolable discretion, to investigate 'delicate' situations," he begins to come unglued. For a while, "Ralph sat and stared at this document; then he began to laugh and tossed it into the scrap-basket" (325). Ralph laughs a defeated laugh; a frantically melancholy laugh. The groan which follows says a great deal, but the laugh expresses something the groan cannot: the absurdity of the situation in which he has allowed himself to be drawn. Laughs, perhaps more than any other utterance, reveal absurdity and the failure of language to properly express the full extent of the absurdity. No character in *The Custom of the Country* has a keener understanding of absurdity than Ralph. Wharton reiterates this point later when Ralph is talking to Mr. Spragg and learns the entirety of Undine's plan:

...nothing was clear to him save the monstrous fact suddenly upheaved in his path. His wife had left him, and the plan for her evasion had been made and executed while he lay helpless: she had seized the opportunity of his illness to keep him in ignorance of her design. The humour of it suddenly struck him and he laughed.
 "Do you mean to tell me that Undine's divorcing ME?"

“I presume that’s her plan,” Mr. Spragg admitted.
 “For desertion?” Ralph pursued, still laughing. (333)

In a moment of great sadness, Ralph laughs. It seems an inappropriate reaction, but laughter as a malleable sign waiting to be endowed with meaning--is just as applicable in times of shock and grief as in moments of hilarity. Later, after thinking on the matter, Ralph becomes hysterical. He “had begun to laugh again. Suddenly he heard his own laugh and it pulled him up. What was he laughing about? What was he talking about?” (334). These moments of Ralph’s laughter, particularly the ones that occur in private, are at odds with theories of laughter in that “[l]aughter is a universal, stereotyped, species-typical component of the human vocabulary that is emitted almost exclusively in social settings” (Provine 291). Further, “[t]he few examples of solitary laughter may be responses to imagined or recalled social encounters, an auditory example of so-called ‘displaying to the people in your head’” (291). Though male hysteria has been explored at length elsewhere, it is noteworthy that Ralph’s hysteria always centers on coming into unwanted knowledge. Again when Ralph hears of Undine’s engagement, he reverts back to the uncontrolled, feverish laugh. Upon hearing the news:

Ralph laughed, and his laugh sounded in his own ears like an echo of the dreary mirth with which he had filled Mr. Spragg’s office the day he had learned that Undine intended to divorce him. But now his wrath was seasoned with a wholesome irony. The fact of his wife’s having reached another stage in her ascent fell into its place as a part of the huge human buffoonery. (431)

Ralph’s laugh *seems* to be uncontrollable and wild, but it is precisely the opposite. His laugh indicates that he knows. He knows Undine’s plan, he sees it in action, and he understands his part in it. This laugh, this “dreary mirth” is a kind of delirium which only the truth and insight bring forth. Ralph laughs because he sees the truth, and the truth is ugly. This laugh is “an echo,” a simulation of the his earlier laugh, indicating that it no longer has the same meaning as the earlier laugh. Perhaps Ralph has accepted Undine too as the simulation, as the empty, embodied sign that she is; yet this is inherently destabilizing as “it is dangerous to unmask images, since they dissimulate the fact that there is nothing behind them” (Baudrillard 4).

Knowing what he knows, seeing Undine for who and what she is, Ralph

finally attempts to move on. As he begins to write his novel, Ralph slowly feels the spark return within. He does not go about bragging about his writing, “[h]e kept his secret with the beginner’s deadly fear of losing his hold on his half-real creations if he let in any outer light on them; but he went about with a more assured step, shrank less from meeting his friends, and even began to dine out again, and to laugh at some of the jokes he heard” (427). Here it can be assumed that Ralph’s laugh is an honest one, a hungry one. In it is no doubt a yearning for mirth, for a return to a former time and a former self. He laughs not because he is happy, but perhaps because he thinks he can be.

But Ralph’s happiness does not last: he kills himself after learning that Undine had been Moffat’s bride before she was his own. Ralph’s hysteria and eventual suicide result from a confrontation with the realization that Undine herself has proceeded through the “successive phases of the image” (Baudrillard 4). The young Undine married to Moffat represents “a reflection of basic reality.” She is a small town girl who marries a small town boy with the ambition she so admires. After she moves to New York and passes herself off a woman never engaged, much less married, she is in the second phase of the image which “masks and perverts a basic reality.” When she leaves Ralph and converts to Catholicism, it becomes apparent that she has moved into the third phase of the image which “masks the absence of a basic reality.” There is no stable reality to Undine. Her manners are all citation and grafting, simulacra and simulation. She is what she needs to be in any situation to further herself socially. As she perfects her manners, she moves from reality to simulation. Finally, at the end of the novel, married to Moffat but longing for more, in her pastiche of a home littered with precious artifacts ripped from their cultural contexts, she is pure simulacrum, detached and devoid of any connection to reality whatsoever. Because Undine can imitate a virgin, a never-married woman, and a Catholic with ease, she inadvertently proves that there is nothing behind these designations. If there were an essence, a stable identity or an inalterable *something* to any of these designations, she could not merely speak their language, coopt their signs, and thus borrow their identities. She merely says she is *something*, and so she is. When Ralph realizes that there is nothing behind the façade, that Undine was never what she pretended to be, he can no longer face the world. This new hyperreal environment into which his knowledge thrusts him, where nothing is as it seems, where meanings are endlessly adrift and gaps and slippage constitute *the* reality, it is more than his delicate, artistic soul can bear. And thus, he like so many referents before him, is annihilated.

Yet hope springs eternal for the men in the novel as each takes his turn marrying Undine. The scene where Chelles first sets his sights on Undine is a crucial one. Charles Bowen tells Chelles that marriage in America is not like marriage in Europe. Chelles wonders why Americans still have marriage at all and Bowen answers "Oh, it still has its uses. One couldn't be divorced without it" (278). At this:

Chelles laughed again; but his straying eye still followed the same direction, and Bowen noticed that the fact was not unremarked by the object of his contemplation. Undine's party was one of the liveliest in the room: the American laugh rose above the din of the orchestra as the American tables dominated the less daring effects at the other tables. Undine, on entering, had seemed to be in the same mood as her companions; but Bowen saw that, as she became conscious of his friend's observation, she isolated herself in a kind of soft abstraction; and he admired the adaptability which enabled her to draw from such surroundings the contrasting graces of reserve. (278)

Chelles does not take Bowen's discussion of divorce seriously, just as Ralph did not take Undine's flippant talk of divorce seriously. In the laughter on both of these occasions seems to lurk a willful ignorance: they do not see what they do not want to see. The simulation successfully masks itself. That the American laughs are so much more obvious than the other laughs, and that Undine is the most conspicuous of the Americans is no coincidence: she has learned to stand out precisely as she has learned to fit in. And she will laugh all the way to the bank.

Undine's laughs, for all their emptiness or cruelty, urgings or impatience, also reveal that she slowly comes to witness herself as an extension of the commoditization metaphor which drives the text. That she trades husbands like the brokers around her trade stocks is no chance parallel: exchangeability is precisely the point. Upon hearing the news that Indiana Frusk has married James J. Rolliver, for example, Undine becomes distressed: "'Oh—' she stammered with a laugh, astonished and agitated by his news. Indiana Frusk and Rolliver! It showed how easily the thing could be done. If only her father had listened to her!" (271). Undine's laugh reveals her petty jealousy: she is not happy for Indiana; she is only sad for herself. The "astonished and agitated" laugh may sound like any other laugh, but behind it is pure pettiness. Significant though is not just the jealousy directed at Indiana, but the anger directed at her

father over “how easily the thing could be done.” Trading up, marrying well or better than well, begins to consume Undine. This stammered laugh reveals a peek into her machinations: if it can be done, if someone else is doing it, then she should be doing it. The laugh reveals that Undine has accepted her lot as a prize to be won, and she is frustrated that the prize has yet to go to the highest bidder.

Ultimately, Moffatt is that bidder. Moffatt tells Undine that she is not as beautiful as she once was, but is now “a lot more fetching” (568). This “oddly qualified praise made her laugh with mingled pleasure and annoyance.” Undine understands that it is not just her beauty which carries her now: it is her commodification. She is a highly sought after commodity with a value exceeding her beauty by novel’s end. Her fading beauty annoys her because she understands that her value will decline in proportion to its decline. Human value, like the value of stocks, peaks and falls. But, for the time being, she is still “fetching” and this fact is pleasing enough, so long as she fetches the right suitor.

Moffat, having longed to possess Undine the entire novel, finally throws down the gauntlet, telling Undine that she has not got the nerve to divorce Chelles. In reply, she “laughed a little and then sighed. She wished he would come nearer, or look at her differently: she felt, under his cool eye, no more compelling than a woman of wax in a showcase” (374). The laugh here is knowledge. She knows that he wants her as part of his collection. She sighs because a part of her also knows that it will inevitably happen and she will do what she needs to do to be as wealthy as she wants to be. The laugh is a wretched laugh—Undine understands herself and yet in her laughter we see a certain resignation to her abhorrent nature: when she laughs, the reader sees that she sees who she really is. The simulation is self-aware.

When Moffatt has acquired Undine and she has acquired his money, they manage to purchase Chelles family tapestries after all. When Undine first sees them in the couple’s new home, she complains about how small they look. To this, “Mr. Moffatt gave a slight laugh and walked slowly down the room, as if to study its effect. As he turned back his wife said: ‘I didn’t think you’d ever get them.’ He laughed again, more complacently. ‘Well, I don’t know as I ever should have, if General Arlington hadn’t happened to bust up.’ They both smiled” (587). The complacent laugh and the shared smile reveal that the precession is complete: there exists no reality outside of them; they are pure simulacra. The tapestries have moved from their rightful place and the context for which they were designed, into

a new context. The old meanings do not signify here in quite the same manner; here they signify only wealth and acquisition. The paraphernalia of the French aristocracy is cited and grafted, cut and pasted into the gauche ballroom of the American nouveau riche. The Americans usurp their manners, their products, and their ways, but their manners, products and ways are emptied of the contexts and meanings upon which they were built. Taking Chelles' family heirloom tapestries and placing them in the ballroom completes both Moffatts and Undine's march to a hyperreal environment full of signs signifying realities to which they are no longer attached. And, of course, in this instance, they laugh.

Laughter, one of any number of utterances in a system of signs, does not signify a reliably consistent message in the novel: between animating intention and an interlocutor's reception, there is inevitably a gap. This gap is frequently a knowledge gap. It reveals a possessor of knowledge, a transfer or exchange of knowledge, or the supreme want of knowledge that there is even knowledge to be exchanged. Laughter is a site of knowing and not knowing: one laughs because s/he knows, but one may also laugh because s/he does not know that s/he does not know, that s/he does not know. Laughter, and by extension language and sign systems generally, Undine and thus manners, and the larger metaphor of exchange which drives *The Custom of the Country*, all reveal a certain obliteration of the signified. Wharton's emphasis on exchange reiterates the claim that "it was capital which was the first to feed throughout its history on the destruction of every referential, of every human goal, which shattered every ideal distinction between true and false, good and evil, in order to establish a radical law of equivalence and exchange" (Baudrillard 12). In this system, meaning and the real are thus supplanted by the unknowable and the hyperreal. Manners in the novel are mimed and emptied, a mere 'going through the motions' signifying nothing but their own self-referentiality, acting as a means to an end. By pairing critiques of systems of manners with that of systems of signs and exchange more generally, we are allowed a fresh framework for evaluating that well-trod territory of that most highly canonical form of literature, "the novel of manners."

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Notes

1 The full quotation from "Simulacra and Simulation": "It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself; that is, an operation to deter every real process by its operational double, a metastable, programmatic, perfect descriptive machine which provides all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes. Never again will the real have to be produced...A hyperreal henceforth sheltered from the imaginary, and from any distinction between the real and the imaginary, leaving room only for the orbital recurrence of models and the simulated generation of difference" (Baudrillard 2).

2 The "hyperreal" is Baudrillard's term for a reality no longer resembling anything in profound, or basic, tangible reality. His primary example of this is Disneyland where everything is crafted to resemble the real world, but in creating these simulations, a world removed from profound reality begins to take on a life of its own. Things in this world signify with no allusion to the referents upon which they were based. For the purposes of this essay, the "hyperreal" comes to represent the world of manners no longer attached to the cultural imperatives which gave rise to them.

Making Meaning of the Colonial Experience: Reading *Things Fall Apart* through the Prism of Alfred Schutz's Phenomenology

Dominic Ofori

Abstract

This essay offers a Schutzian reading of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, arguing that the so-called critical ambivalence in Chinua Achebe's hermeneutic of the colonial experience makes sense if situated within his lived experiences in colonial Nigeria. Grounding its interpretation of Achebe's meaning-making of the colonial experience in Schutz's phenomenology, the essay begins with a close reading of the novel itself, highlighting significant areas of ambivalence. Next, it explicates Schutz's (1967) constructs of intersubjectivity and phenomenology of literature. In the next section in which Achebe's biography is examined, an attempt is made to show how a Schutzian reading of Achebe's social relationships can help us understand his account of the colonial experience as represented in his first novel. Ultimately, the paper concludes by noting that the ambivalence that characterizes *Things Fall Apart* reflects the author's realism and investment in both the African and European cultures he sought to critique.

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Introduction

Published in 1958 at a time when Nigeria was still a British colony, Achebe's epoch-making novel seeks to tell the story of the African colonial experience from the inside. *Things Fall Apart*, then, was what Achebe (2000, p. 79) conceived as part of "the process of 're-storying' people who had been knocked silent by the trauma of all kinds of dispossession." Writing his first story was part of Achebe's grand design to remind his people of their glorious past and to counter the dominant colonial narrative that denied the reality of African culture and civilization. As he

tells Odinga (2005, p. 32) in an interview,

... the white man was still around when I was growing up. The white man says: this is your story, this is your history. This is the story of your civilization. Your civilization is empty. When you hear that, something tells you that this man is wrong, because that's not my experience. My experience is different. My experience tells me that this is very deep and profound.

A counter-narrative, then, *Things Fall Apart* contests the European "image of Africa as a historical-cultural tabula rasa waiting to be inscribed with European creations by Christian missionaries and colonial adventures" (Ogundele, 2002, p. 134). Far from being "helpless primitives and delinquent adults," Africans have always had rich cultures and a sophisticated view of the world (Ogundele, 2002, p. 134; see Rhoads, 1993, p. 63). Indeed, as the novel reveals, before European colonialism made its inglorious entrance into the African world, Africans had well-established cultural and social systems, ones that addressed Africans' every need: democracy, legal system, institution of marriage, economy, and religion, among others (see Osei-Nyame, 1999, p. 156; Rhoads, 1993, p. 64). Achebe (1964) himself powerfully articulates this view thus:

African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity." Africans, therefore, had no need of Europeans. (p. 157)

Considering these strong views, one finds it surprising that the picture of both the African and European cultures that emerge out of the pages of *Things Fall Apart* are neither a straightforward eulogization of the one nor an outright condemnation of the other; rather, both cultures are portrayed as very organic but inherent with contradictions, espousing both the good and the bad. This picture of nebulosity and inherent contradictions has rightly led scholars to judge Achebe to be ambivalent in his cultural critique. Quayson (2003), for instance, offers a hermeneutic of ambivalence as the overarching posture adopted by Achebe, stressing,

reading culture out of a novel is valuable but inadequate, and that this needs awareness that *Things Fall Apart* ... possesses a richly ambivalent attitude toward its culture that can only be

discovered by paying attention both to the reality processed and to the larger discursive strategies employed. (p. 244)

For Osei-Nyame, (1999) in “Achebe[’s] appropriation of ethnographic modes of representation to prove that the communities of his African past were neither ‘primitive’ nor ‘without history’” (p. 148), one observes conflicting worldviews filtered through the different voices in the narration as evident in the inconsistent representations of gender issues and Igbo cultural practices, Osei-Nyame argues (1999). Snyder (2008) also argues that the manner in which the narrative voice presents events is quite ambivalent: he simultaneously comes across as an “insider” and “outsider” (p. 154). He contends, “neither the author nor the narrative voice of *Things Fall Apart* can be aligned simply with a monological African (or even West African, Nigerian, or nineteenth-century Igbo) perspective despite the persistent critical tendency to do so” (p. 154). Indeed, Snyder (2008) is emphatic “that Achebe’s perspective at the ‘cultural crossroads’ is manifest in the narrative voice of *Things Fall Apart*, which moves along a continuum of proximity and distance in relation to the culture it sympathetically describes” (154). From Achebe’s vivid description of Ibo culture, his use of the English language, and his interlacing the narrative with Igbo words, to his objective portrayal of Ibo metaphysics, Snyder (2008) encounters a consuming presence of ambivalence.

Clearly, there can be no doubt that the above-referenced scholars are justified in their judging Achebe to be ambivalent in his cultural critique. Yet, what these scholars fail to do is to provide a compelling argument for this apparent inconsistency in the narrative. In this essay, I purpose to provide a Schutzian reading of Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, arguing that the so-called critical ambivalence in Achebe’s hermeneutic of the colonial experience makes sense if situated within his lived experiences in colonial Nigeria. Grounding my reading of Achebe’s meaning-making of the colonial experience in Schutz’s phenomenology, I begin with a close reading of the novel itself, highlighting significant areas of ambivalence. Next, I explicate Schutz’s (1967) concept of intersubjectivity and phenomenology of literature. In the next section in which Achebe’s biography is examined, an attempt is made to show how a Schutzian reading of Achebe’s social relationships can help us understand his account of the colonial experience as represented in his first novel.

Representation of Ibo and European Cultures in Things Fall Apart

As noted above, ambiguity and ambivalence characterize Achebe's cultural critique of the Ibo of Nigeria and the British colonizers in his debut novel *Things Fall Apart*, as he presents both the ugly and beautiful sides of the two cultures at the same time. One cultural institution presented with ambiguity is marriage. In one instance, Achebe seems to suggest that, among the Ibo, marriage involves a complex process of negotiations between families of prospective couples, but in another instance, he presents a completely different image of marriage. In the account of the marriage involving Obierika's daughter, for example, the narrative voice tells the reader that marriage among the Ibo is a social event, characterized by an elaborate ceremony culminating in a communal meal. The significance of each stage of the ceremony is underscored by the vividness with which it is described by the voice. For instance, Obierika's relatives count the number of pots of wine the girl's suitor brings to the wedding ceremony and expresses satisfaction:

Young men and boys in single file, each carrying a pot of wine, came first. Obierika's relatives counted the pots as they came. Twenty, twenty-five. There was a long break, and hosts looked at each other as if to say, 'I told you.' Then more pots came. Thirty, thirty-five, forty, forty-five. The hosts nodded in approval and seemed to say, 'Now they are behaving like men.' Altogether there were fifty pots of wine. (Achebe, 1958/1996, p. 82)

This beautiful picture of celebratory communal life is quickly undermined by the manner of Okonkwo and Ekwefi's marriage. According to the narrative voice, the marriage between Ekwefi and Okonkwo, a titled man and defender of traditional values, takes place under intriguing circumstances:

Many years ago when she was the village beauty Okonkwo had won her heart by throwing the Cat in the greatest contest within living memory. She did not marry him because he was too poor to pay her bride-price. But a few years later she ran away from her husband and came to live with Okonkwo. (Achebe, 1958/1996, p. 28)

Achebe's implicit critique here is that although Ibo culture privileges the communality of the institution of marriage, it does not sanction powerful

members of the society that use their position to steal other people's wives.

Achebe is also critical of the way Ibo husbands treat their spouses. Okonkwo, for example, is presented as one who rules his wives and children with iron fists, beating Ekwefi, his favorite wife, on the Week of Peace. This animal behavior is subtly condemned through the narrative voice's account of another wife-beating incident. Here, the narrative voice recounts that, in retaliation for Uzowulu's beating Mgbafo, his wife, her brothers descend upon him, soundly beating him, and taking away their sister. To get his wife and children back, Uzowulu appeals to the *egwugwu*, the ancestral spirits. The society's disgust at wife-beating is clearly conveyed in the threat of Odukwe to castrate Uzowulu for any future repetition of his animal behavior: "If, on the other hand, Uzowulu should recover from his madness and come in the proper way to beg his wife to return, she will do so on the understanding that if he ever beats her again, we shall cut off his genitals for him" (Achebe, 1958/1996, p. 65). More important, the final verdict of the *egwugwu* undercuts the chauvinistic ideals dominant in Ibo society: "Go to your in-laws with a pot of wine and beg your wife to return to you. It is not bravery when a man fights with a woman" (Achebe, 1958/1996, p. 66). Such a statement is an indictment of men like Okonkwo who find fulfillment in unjustifiable wife-battering: they are beasts and mad men.

Moreover, Achebe casts doubt on the existence and potency of traditional gods by detailing episodes in which they are portrayed as powerless. For instance, the narrative voice tells the reader of the transfiguration of Chielo when she is possessed by the Oracle of the Hills and Caves. Yet, as Ekwefi follows her around in the dark on the occasion when Chielo is commanded by the oracle to bring Ezinma to the shrine, she cannot identify the one following her. In fact, her words sound as if she were an ordinary mortal and not the embodiment of the powerful Oracle of the Hills and Caves: "Somebody is walking behind me! She said. Whether you are spirit or man, may Agbala shave your head with a blunt razor! May he twist your neck until you see your heels!" (Achebe, 1958/1996, p. 74). Surely, the spiritual being possessing Chielo should not have any difficulty identifying the tracker? Besides, Ibo traditional deities are presented as lacking the power to punish offenders in the face of Christian intrusion into their sacred space. According to the narrative voice, when the Christian missionaries come to Mbanta, they are allotted a portion of the Evil Forest where they could build their church. The

traditionalists actually expect the Christians to die when they go to live in the Evil Forest. However, the Christians live, leading even the traditionalists to admit the possibility of the Christians' having a much more powerful God.

The account of Ibo funerals as exemplified in the case of Ezeudu also problematizes Achebe's attitude toward his traditional culture. As the narrative voice describes the funeral celebration, it highlights the apparent reverence accorded the egwugwu among the Ibo:

Now and again an ancestral spirit or egwugwu appeared from the underworld, speaking in a tremulous, unearthly voice and completely covered in raffia. Some of them were very violent, and there had been a mad rush for shelter earlier in the day when one appeared with a sharp machet and was only prevented from doing serious harm by two men who restrained him with the help of a strong rope tied round his waist. Sometimes he turned round and chased those men, and they ran for their lives. But they always returned to the long rope trailing behind. He sang, in a terrifying voice, that Ekwenzu, or Evil Spirit, had entered his eye (Achebe, 1958/1996, p. 86).

In this episode, the respect and reverence accorded the ancestral spirits is subtly undermined by the suggestion that some of them are violent and have to be restrained by mere mortals. Obviously, the idea that ancestors pose a danger to public safety is inconsistent with their traditional role of protecting the tribe and enforcing morality. If such revered spirits could act insane and violent, and have to be restrained, then probably the egwugwu are no different from ordinary men. Implicitly, there is no justification for the reverence society accords them. The power of the egwugwu is further undercut even by the narrative voice's observation that not all the egwugwu are violent: "But some of the egwugwu are quite harmless. One of them was so old and infirm that he leaned heavily on a stick. He walked unsteadily to the place where the corpse was laid, gazed at it a while and went again – to the underworld" (Achebe, 1958/1996, p. 86). Again, the narrative voice's portrait of a spiritual being as infirm undercuts the popular notion that ancestral spirits are powerful and agile. Obviously, the "ancestral spirit" depicted here is, in reality, a very old man, probably as old as the dead revered Ezeudu.

Furthermore, the narrative voice questions the wisdom in carrying guns

at funeral celebrations by recounting the inadvertent killing of Ezeudu's son by Okonkwo. Implicit in the account is the suggestion that the gun is the last weapon to carry on such occasions where people lose their bearing in the heat of the moment:

The drums and the dancing began again and reached fever-heat. Darkness was around the corner, and the burial was near. Guns fired the last salute and the cannon rent the sky. And then from the centre of the delirious fury came a cry and shouts of horror. It was as if a spell had been cast. All was silent. In the centre of the crowd a boy lay in pool of blood. It was the dead man's sixteen-year-old son, who with his brothers and half-brothers had been dancing the traditional farewell dance to their father. Okonkwo's gun exploded and a piece of iron had pierced the boy's heart. (Achebe, 1958/1996, pp. 87-88)

The narrative voice in depicting the tragic scene dispassionately seems to be questioning the wisdom in carrying deadly weapons. The darkness and the emotionally charged atmosphere should have warned the *egwugwu* of possible danger on the horizon. The gross display of reckless irresponsibility, together with the society's inflexibility in its application of justice on this occasion, deconstructs any idea of perfect culture.

Yet, Ibo culture has a number of redeeming qualities. It is a culture that promotes democracy, as no one person can impose his or her will on the collective; every decision that had to be made for the good of the community had to be openly debated before a consensus is reached. Similarly, inter-tribal diplomacy is privileged among the Ibos for whom war with other ethnic groups was always the last option. They would not go to war unless every other available option had been exhausted (see Scafe, 2002, p 127; Rhoads, 1993).

As he does in the case of his Ibo culture, Achebe treats its European counterpart as destructive yet productive. A case in point is the killing of the royal python, the emanation of the god of water, by one of the Christian converts at Mbanta. The narrator's sympathy for traditional religion is evident from the way he subtly contrasts the attitudes of the two religious groups in the Ibo society toward sacred objects:

The royal python was the most revered animal in Mbanta and all the surrounding clans. It was addressed as 'Our Father,' and

was allowed to go wherever it chose, even into people's beds. It ate rats in the house and sometimes swallowed hens' eggs. If a clansman killed a royal python accidentally, he made sacrifices of atonement and performed an expensive burial ceremony such as was done for a great man. No punishment was prescribed for a man who killed the python knowingly. Nobody thought that such a thing could ever happen. (Achebe, 1958/1996, p. 112)

The profound respect traditional Ibo society accords the royal python is obvious in the narrator's account. The converts, however, have no such reverence! In fact, even before the killing of the python, the new Christian converts taunt the traditionalists, dismissing their religion as empty (Achebe, 1958/1996, p. 110). This Christian intolerance reaches its climax when Enoch, a convert, publicly unmask one of the revered ancestral spirits, making a confrontation between the two religious groups inevitable. According to the narrative voice, Enoch's action is unprecedented and a threat to the very survival of the Ibo clan. Later in the evening, the narrative voice sympathetically captures the somber mood of the clan in the wake of the spiritual "killing" of the egwugwu thus:

That night the Mother of the Spirits walked the length and breadth of the clan, weeping for her murdered son. It was a terrible night. Not even the oldest man in Umofia had ever heard such a strange and fearful sound, and it was never to be heard again. It seemed as if the very soul of the tribe wept for a great evil that was coming—its own death. (Achebe, 1958/1996, p. 132; see Ogbha and Achebe, 1981, p. 3)

The mourning is not just for the desecration of the egwugwu, but also for the total eclipse of traditional culture by its European counterpart. Undoubtedly, Achebe judges Christianity, a foreign religion, as destructive, disrespectful, and confrontational.

Still, the Ibo people themselves cannot be exonerated from the evisceration of their culture by the Other's culture. The fact is that, for Achebe, Europe's success in colonizing Africa was partly due to the complicity of Africans themselves. In *Things Fall Apart*, some Africans are portrayed as active collaborators with the enemy. Religiously, Africans, not Europeans, are the ones who instigate Christianity's confrontation with traditional culture, ultimately hastening its disruption (Ogbha and Achebe, 1981, p. 3). Politically, too, Africans serve as the white

man's soldiers, messengers, and clerks. In the destruction of Abame, for example, the large colonial army consists of only three whites, and the rest, all Africans. The irony in Africans' participation in the destruction of their own culture is powerfully conveyed in Obierika's account of the Abame tragedy:

For a long time nothing happened. The rains had come and yams had been sown. The iron was still tied to the sacred silk-cotton tree. And then one morning three white men led by a band of ordinary men like us came to the clan. They saw the iron horse and went away again. Most of the men and women of Abame had gone to their farms. Only a few of them saw these white men and their followers. For many market weeks nothing else happened. They have a big market in Abame on every other Afo day, as you know, the whole clan gathers there. That was the day it happened. The three white men and a very large number of other men surrounded the market. They must have used a powerful medicine to make themselves invisible until the market was full. And they began to shoot. Everybody was killed, except the old and the sick who were at home and a handful of men and women whose chi were wide awake and brought them out of the market. (Achebe, 1958/1996, p. 98).

Achebe blames Africans for the European invasion of their continent. Similarly, in the final confrontation, which results in the tragedy of Okonkwo, the African complicity stands out in clear relief. Firstly, it is Enoch, a new Christian convert, who sparks the conflict by unmasking one of the egwugwu in public. Then, it is other Africans who help get six of Umuofia's elders behind bars. More disgustingly, it is the same blacks, not whites, who manhandle the revered elders even when these blacks are ordered to treat them with respect. And as if that was not enough, they take advantage of the plight of the elders by asking for 250,000 cowries instead of 200,000, which is the fine imposed on them by the illegitimate foreign authorities. Ultimately, though, Europe must take blame for the corruption of Africans, for without the rude intrusion of the European culture into the African social world, there was no way they would betray their continent (Scafe, 2002).

In spite of its destructive tendencies, the European culture depicted in the novel also has some redeeming qualities, which, even the locals recognize. For example, the missionaries, backed by the colonial administration, introduce formal education and, with it, new forms of employment, as

well as money economy: “The white man had indeed brought a lunatic religion, but he had also brought a trading store and for the first time palm-oil and palm kernel became things of great price and much money followed into Umuofia” (Achebe, 1958/1996, p. 126). Clearly, the new cultural system is an enigma wrapped in a puzzle. While on the one hand, like a virus, it seeks to destroy its host, on the other hand, it brings about socio-economic improvements the locals find appealing.

So why can Achebe not take a clear stand against the cultures he critiques? Why is he critical and complementary of both cultures at the same time? Why the ambivalence? To answer these questions, one must ground Achebe’s cultural critique in the Schutzian theories of intersubjectivity and literary criticism.

Schutz’s Concept of Intersubjectivity

According to Schutz (1967), the world of experience is a social world in which the subjective-self, endowed with a stream of consciousness, lives with other selves (or the Other/alter ego/Thou) also endowed with a stream of consciousness. Thus, the facticity of the sociality of the natural world of experience, a world in which conscious beings share their experiences with each other, makes intersubjectivity the foundation of human existence (Schutz, 1967; see also Ho, 2008, p. 328; Dreher, 2003, p. 147; Augier, 1999, p. 148; Lewis, 1993; Perinbanayagam, 1975; Zaner, 1967). As Reich (2010) explains, intersubjectivity refers to “a situation in which two or more persons share knowledge reflexively, that is, all know X and know that all others know this, too” (p. 41).

In this social world, the subjective-self experiences the alter ego as being conscious of him or her and vice versa in simultaneity, a phenomenon Schutz (1967) describes as “*growing old together*” (p. 10; emphasis in original). Yet, although there exists between the subjective-self and alter ego perspective reciprocity, the two differ from each other. Schutz (1967) explains:

You and I differ from each other not merely with respect to how much of each other’s lived experience we can observe. We also differ in this: When I become aware of a segment of your lived experience, I arrange what I see within my own meaning-context. But meanwhile you have arranged it in yours. Thus I am always

interpreting your lived experiences from my own standpoint...if I look at my whole stock of knowledge of your lived experiences and ask about the structure of this knowledge, one thing becomes clear: *This is that everything I know about your conscious life is really based on my knowledge of my own experiences.* (p. 106)

Biography is thus key in the interpretation of the Other's acts, acts that are always intentional and hence meaningful (Schutz, 1967, pp. 100-102; Tibbetts, 1980, p. 359).

These intentional acts engaged in by both the subjective-self and the alter ego have two kinds of motives: "the because-motive" and "the in-order-to motive" (Schutz, 1967, p. 91; see also Reich, 2010). While the former refers to reasons related to past experiences, the latter has to do with reasons that anticipate the future: "The difference, then, between the two kinds of motive...is that in-order-to motive explains the act in terms of the project, while the genuine because-motive explains the project in terms of the actor's past experiences." In other words, as Zaner (1961) points out, while the in-order-to motive refers to an ongoing action, the because-motive refers to an act already completed (pp. 74-75). The meaning of intentional acts must always, therefore, be located at the nexus of the because-motive and the in-order-to motive, a view Lewis and Weigert (1993) agree with: "Meaning construction involves reflecting on past actions and projecting future action. ...The extent to which meaning is the focus of attention is affected by the efficaciousness of socially typified and biographically relevant pragmatic motives" (p. 84). To typifications and biography must be added reflexivity and social contexts (Schutz, 1967; Lewis & Weigert, 1993, p. 84; see also Watson, 1976).

Schutz (1967) distinguishes between three kinds of our social world of experience or intersubjectivity: the social world of contemporaries; social world of predecessors; and the social world of successors (Schutz, 1967, pp. 142-143). "The social world of contemporaries coexists with me and is simultaneous with my duration," Schutz (1967, p. 142) explains. Yet, although existing with other selves in the social world of contemporaries, the subjective-self does not have direct experience with all of them. Those that the subjective-self has direct experience with, Schutz (1967, p. 143) characterizes as "consociates," while those he or she has only indirect experience with he refers to as "contemporaries" (p. 143). Unlike the social world of contemporaries, the social world of predecessors existed before the subjective-self was born and hence can only be observed

from afar by the self (p. 143). As for the social world of successors, it refers to that which will exist and be inhabited after the passing of the subjective-self (p. 143). Schutz (1967) goes on to explain that one way or the other, the subjective-self experiences these social worlds at different levels of intensity: the world of predecessors through history, the world of successors through what will be bequeathed to them, and the world of contemporaries, through both the direct experience with consociates and indirect experience with contemporaries.

The highest form of intersubjective relationship, according to Schutz (1967), takes place within the context of face-to-face interactions between the subjective-self and the Other, a context in which the subjective-self and the alter ego establish a “we-relationship” (Schutz, 1967, pp. 163-173; Zaner, 1961). This we-relationship consists in both the subjective-self and the Other being aware of each other and mutually “tuning-in” to the each other, taking the other’s perspective and subjectivizing it to make meaning of it (Schutz, 1951/1977, p. 115). Schutz (1951/1977) explains: “This sharing of the other’s flux of experiences in inner time, this living through a living present in common constitutes...the mutual tuning-in relationship, the experience of the ‘We,’ which is at the foundation of all possible communication” (p. 115). In other words, the intersubjective relationship between the subjective-self and the Thou consists in both caring for each other and seeing the world from each other’s subjectivized existential perspective. Schutz (1967) expresses this relationship in the first person thus:

When interacting with you within this realm [i.e., the realm of we-relationship] I witness how you react to my behavior, how you interpret my meaning, how my in-order-to motives trigger corresponding because-motives of your behavior. In between my expectation of your reaction and that reaction itself I have ‘grown older and perhaps wiser, taking into account the realities of the situation, as well as my own hopes of what you would do. (p. 172)

Hence, to know another person well enough, one must be ready to enter into a deeper intersubjective relationship with that person.

Schutz’s Theory of the Novel

Schutz’s views on literary works are extensions of his phenomenology of

the social world. Accordingly, Schutz (1967) notes that the perspective that an author brings to his or her work is influenced by his or her biography. He points out, “For the speaker, the act of positioning meaning is typical. Through it, he executes the subjectivation of the word” (Schutz, 2013, p. 154). Yet, because the novelist does not have an I-Thou relationship with his or her reader, he or she conveys meaning to the latter from an objective point of view. As Prendergast (2004) explains, “the novelist uses only objective meanings to communicate with readers—the type of meaning readers exercise everyday in their relations with anonymous others” (p. 459). Having been communicated to in an objective fashion, the reader or listener, nevertheless, interprets what is heard according to the rules of the language of his or her society. Thus, as Schutz (2013) explains, the reader

relates to the objective material of the language what has been communicated to him. This means that, first, he executes a process of meaning interpretation according to the scheme of language which he has attitudinally adopted and which is familiar to him. (p. 154)

The success of this endeavor, Schutz (2013) points out, depends on how successful the speaker was “in establishing the ‘right’ connection between the objective meaning context of the language and the elements which he selected, on the one hand, and between these ‘appropriated’ and ‘communicated’ elements, on the other” (p. 154). The meaning of literary work is, therefore, subjective, largely contingent on the writer, whose subjectivity in meaning-making the interpreter must be attentive to. As well articulated by Schutz (2013),

only when the speaker spoke ‘correctly’ (and posited the correct meaning context) and the listener heard correctly (and correctly interpreted the meaning context which was set by the speaker), there exists a chance that that which was meant will be subjectively interpreted by the listener as thus and nothing else. (pp. 154-155)

Thus in the view of Schutz, both writer and reader play different roles in the construction of meaning.

As the originator of the written text, the writer posits subjective meaning; however, the reader or listener interprets this subjective meaning by situating the text within the objective meaning contexts of the social

world:

The positing of meaning on the part of the listener which occurs in the act of meaning interpretation, is completely different from the positing of meaning by the speaker which occurs in the act positing meaning. The listener does mean nothing; he does not want to provide a new meaning. Thus, he is not aware that his meaning interpretation implicitly comprises subjectification, because only from the point of view of the third observer—this is essential for the whole investigation which follows—is the act of listening a subjectification of the objective meaning context of language. For the listener himself, the word heard is and remains an objective meaning which is integrated into the objective meaning context of language, and vice versa. Not the listener, only the speaker *means* something with the word; not the speaker, only the listener interprets it. However, the listener interprets it at first as he would interpret it if it had not been spoken by the speaker, namely, the speaker in this context. For the third observer, this kind of understanding may also represent a subjective positing of meaning on the part of the listener. For him, the listener, the word keeps its objective meaning, that is: a meaning not to be posited but to be interpreted by him. (Schutz, 2013, p. 155)

If the interpreter's work depends on what is spoken by the speaker, a text mediated by the lived experience of the latter, then no meaning of any literary work can be said to be adequate if it ignores the biography of the writer. Moreover, because meaning is borne out of the confluence of subjective intentionality and objective interpretivity, "understanding remains an approximation, between subjective and objective meaning, between intended and interpreted meaning" (Schutz, 2013, p. 155).

As far as the novel is concerned, there is no direct relationship between the writer and the reader (Schutz, 2013, p. 159). The writer only "directs himself to a listener whose existence he presupposes as much as the chance to be understood by him. But he does not expect social conduct from his listener. His story is not purposive-rational; he does not 'want' to achieve an immediate effect through it—except the aesthetic effect produced by any work of art" (Schutz, 2013, p. 161). Precisely because the novel is not purposive-rational, its addressee lacks specific identity. For Schutz (2013) then, the novel's distinctive character is one of "representation" (p. 161), a concept explained by Bensman and Lilienfeld

(1968) as referring to an artist's attempt "to create an image of a world in such a way that it can be experienced directly, intuitively, emotionally, and naively" (p. 358).

Finally, because of the anonymity of the novel's addressee, the writer has the freedom to make artistic choices in terms of story content (Schutz, 2013, p. 161; Ruthrof, 1974, p. 87). Schutz (2013) articulates this point thus:

He alone selects from all possible contents those which appear to him worthwhile to be told. The person of the listener does not influence the decision. Therefore, the unity of the narration is consistently preserved: The narrator always pays attention to the existence of the listener but never to his orientation. (p. 161)

Such a view makes the writer of the novel and his or her lived experience crucial in any hermeneutic endeavor directed toward his or her work.

Achebe's Biography: A Confluence of Two Cultures

As noted above, the choices a novelist has to make in the presentation of his or her story are grounded in his or her lived experience. Hence, the meaning he or she intends is always subjective, mediated by his or her biography. Thus, one cannot appreciate Achebe's ambivalence without recourse to his life story. From his own utterances, he seems to suggest that any analysis of his cultural critique must be situated within the context of his lived experience. He himself makes the following statement:

I was brought up in a village where the old ways were still active and alive, so I could see the remains of our tradition actually operating. At the same time I brought a certain amount of detachment to it too, because my father was Christian missionary, and we were not fully part of the 'heathen' life of the village. (as cited. in Snyder, "Possibilities and pitfalls")

Unquestionably, Achebe grew up with his heart torn between the two cultures.

As his biographer Ezenwa-Ohaeto (1997) reports, Achebe would visit the houses of neighbors to share their food with them during festivals

(p. 9). He also admitted to Odinga (2005) in an interview that it was his interest in finding out what goes on in traditional society that makes him appreciate it in spite of his Christian upbringing:

The story of my life is really the story of the village, Ogidi, to which my parents brought us, the children, at the end of their career as evangelists. My father retired having put in thirty years in the Anglican Church, the Church of England, spreading the gospel in our part of Igboland. And I was able to see some of the things that made the lives of Igbos distinct from the lives of other people. As well as things that were similar, I was able to ask why we went to church every Sunday, why we read the Bible morning and night in our home and some of my friends in the village did not. So these two lives that had been created by the European presence in Africa were played out in front of me without my awareness of what was going on. It was just life and I was not resistant. I was simply curious. There were some things that I wished I had been allowed to do; some aspects of the culture like becoming initiated into the cult of the masquerade, the cult of the mask, which is a symbol of Igbo religion. But as Christians we were not supposed to touch that. Sometimes there were festivals that Christians could not celebrate. We celebrated Christmas, Easter ... but these others were more mysterious and we were not supposed to touch them at all. Even though I did rebelliously embrace them at a certain distance. As a child with my younger sister, I would cross to my neighbors, and even eat their food, which we were told was dangerous because it had been offered to idols. (p. 40)

Thus, though African, Achebe initially encounters the Ibo culture as the Other. In fact, he confesses that while growing up he and his fellow Christians used “to look down on the *others*,” referring to them as “the heathen or even the people of nothing” (Achebe, 1975, p. 115; emphasis added). But as he enters into a deeper intersubjective relationship with this esoteric culture, he is able to tune in to it, thereby subjectivizing the existential reality of this African culture. He is able therefore to represent it in a holistic manner in his narrativity. His biography clearly illustrates that, as he matured through college, Achebe would see the lie in the distorted account of Africa by Europeans and gradually gravitate toward his own Ibo culture. Then to demonstrate his pride in his African heritage, he would drop his Christian name, Albert, but keep his African Chinualumogu Achebe.

Nonetheless, Achebe could not alter the English mentality his colonial education foisted on him. The facility with which he employs both the Ibo and English languages is proof of his dual personality, that is, half-Igbo and half-English. In an interview with Bostein and Morrison, for instance, Achebe in answer to why he writes his novels in English, tells them that having used the language throughout his life, he both loves it and finds it natural to use it (Bostein, Achebe, & Morrison, 2001). He goes on to explain: "Of course, nothing is ever as simple as that. In learning English for most of my life, I also fell in love with it. You see language is not an enemy—language is a tool. And I discovered that what I was doing was bringing the Igbo language into communication with English" (Bostein, Achebe, Morrison, 2001, p. 152). Thus conscious that the English language is an integral part of his existential reality, denouncing it as an imperialist imposition is not a proposition Achebe would entertain. Moreover, Achebe (1997) recognizes the political significance of the English language in unifying the disparate ethnic groupings of Africa into nation-states: "Let us give the devil his due: colonialism in Africa disrupted many things, but it did create big political units where there were small, scattered ones before. Nigeria had hundreds of autonomous communities. ... Today, it is one country" (p. 344).

A Christian and Western-educated, Achebe is too much a part of the colonial establishment. Both in the course of his academic career and later as a broadcaster, Achebe intersubjectivizes with the European, making it impossible for him to not have a much more complex view of the European Other than most African scholars. A son of a Christian catechist, Achebe had the best of colonial education from grade school to college (Achebe, 2009). Understandably, he speaks fondly of his religious studies professor James Welch, who tried unsuccessfully to get him to do his master's degree at Trinity College, Cambridge. According to Ezenwa (1997), Achebe left his job as a teacher at Merchant of Light School at Oba when he had the opportunity to work with the Nigerian Broadcasting Service (NBS), a propaganda tool of the colonial administration (pp. 52-56). As a broadcaster, Achebe developed a very warm working relationship with his British bosses, resulting in his meteoric rise through the ranks. The relationship, indeed, helped complicate his perception of the colonial enterprise. The fact was that, as a beneficiary of the selective generosity of the repressive colonial hegemony, Achebe was under considerable pressure to balance his portrait of European cultural hegemony in his first novel. As Ezenwa (1997) has noted, without the support of his colonial masters, Achebe could

not publish his first novel, which quickly brought him into the literary limelight.

According to Ezenwa (1997), Achebe went to London in 1956 to attend the British Broadcasting Staff School. While in London, he gave the manuscript of *Things Fall Apart* to Gilbert Phelps, a British novelist and literary critic, who at the time was teaching at the BBC school. Phelps immediately recognized the unique quality of the novel and recommended it for publication, but Achebe would not agree because he had not quite reached the finishing point. At the time, the manuscript carried the combined stories of Okonkwo, his son Nwoye, and grandson Obi Okonkwo. When he returned to Nigeria, Achebe began the revision of the manuscript in earnest. He excised the second and third parts from the first, the story of Okonkwo, restructuring it and adding new chapters and fresh details until he obtained what he considered a respectable novel. Later, he sent the manuscript to a London-based typing agency, which had advertised in an issue of London's *Spectator* that was lying in his office. Although he paid for the work, he never heard back from the company for several months. Therefore, when his British boss Angela Beatie was going to London on her annual leave, Achebe asked her to ascertain the fate of the manuscript for him. In London, Ms. Beatie found to her utter consternation that the agency had left the script to gather dust in a corner of their office. Her intervention led to the agency's typing the script and mailing it back to Achebe in Lagos (Ezenwa, 1997, p. 63).

On receiving the typescript, Achebe sent it to the literary agent Gilbert Phelps in 1958 in hopes that he would get an interested publisher for the novel. After some initial hitches, the script finally reached William Heinemann's desk. Heinemann gave it to James Michie, who in turn showed it to Allan Hill, "a publishing innovator" (Ezenwa, 1997, p. 65). Initially, Allan Hill doubted the economic viability of a novel by an unknown author from Africa, but, following the recommendation of Professor Donald MacRee who had then just returned from a tour of West Africa, he decided to take a chance with it. Thus, *Things Fall Apart* was born with an initial print run of 2,000 copies (Ezenwa, 1997, p. 65).

Conclusion

From his biography, then, one could identify four key phases that

resulted in deep intersubjective relationships between Achebe and his consociates in the social world of colonial Nigeria, a situation which explains the ambivalence in his cultural critique, namely, his life at Ogidi, his academic career, his professional career, and the story behind the publication of *Things Fall Apart*. Living at Ogidi where he interacted with people who practiced African traditional culture, Achebe had the chance to see the world from their perspective. Then, in the course of his education, he encountered European culture both in the texts he read and in his social interactions with his White teachers. Through education, therefore, Achebe entered into an intersubjective relationship with the European other, resulting in his empathizing with his or her perspective. The European worldview his education foists on him is further deepened when he is employed by the NBS, where he becomes part of the colonial establishment.

Moreover, the role played by the European other gives him a whole new understanding of the European other. As pointed out above, without such white people as Angela Beatie, Gilbert Phelps, and the owners of Heinemann Publishing Company, there was no way Achebe could publish that early so effortlessly. Indeed, Achebe himself admitted that he did not have to struggle as much as most people about to launch their writing careers usually do. He told Ezenwa (1997) that but for the timely intervention of his boss Ms. Beatie, he could not publish *Things Fall Apart* at the time he did. Indeed, his warm relationship with his boss most probably influenced his balanced portrayal of colonialism in his novel. This claim becomes more plausible when one considers the fact that Achebe did the final revision of his manuscript upon his return from England, where he had enjoyed British generosity and hospitality. Considering the fact that at the time of the writing the novel Nigerians were agitating for independence, the natural thing for Achebe would have been to denounce Western colonialist imperialism as completely evil. Yet, Achebe does not do that because his own personal experiences in the social world were different. A beneficiary of British generosity and hospitality, Achebe had subjectivized the European worldview leading to his representing it with ambivalence and ambiguity in his debut novel.

Certainly, Achebe does not deny the arrogance and greed of the colonialists. Mincing no words, he charges that Africa “has been the most insulted continent in the world. African’s very claim to humanity has been questioned at various times, their persons abused, their intelligence insulted,” (1975, p. 138). Still, he is realistic enough to acknowledge that Africa made significant gains when she collided with Europe. Having

been brought up as a Christian and yet being a person who takes pride in his African heritage, he owes it to his sense of fairness to paint in his novel what he knows to be the true image of Africa when it came into contact with Europe by giving a balanced account. In the process, he appears more conflicted than he cares to admit. He insists, however, that "One thing which is not permissible is to stereotype and dehumanize your fellows. That is not permissible in our art. You celebrate them, their good and their bad. You celebrate even rascals, because they abound in the world and are part of its richness" (Rowell, 1990, p. 88). This interpretation becomes clear once the novel is viewed through the prism of Schutz's phenomenology.

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Lawrence R. Harvey originally trained as a classical wood and stone carver, studying at Kennington Art School, London. Subsequently, he went on to study Philosophy and English Literature, gaining a first-class Joint Honours degree. Following an interval working backstage in a national theatre, he completed a postgraduate study of Postmodern Fiction at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth. Having passed his MA with a distinction, he studied for a PhD in postmodern literature, aesthetics and ethics, successfully sitting his viva in 2006. His dissertation interrogated modernist and postmodernist aesthetics through the aperture of Emmanuel Levinas' ethics. Alongside his core subjects, Lawrence studied Creative Writing under the tutelage of the feminist critic and author Patricia Dunker. His short stories and poetry have appeared alongside the work of Patricia Dunker and the literary critics Peter Barry and Tim Woods. His poetry has also featured in *Literature Matters: Newsletter of the British Council's Literature Department*. Currently, Lawrence is Head of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Barton Peveril College, Hampshire.

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