

Janus Head

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The Look on Their Faces: Transcending Lack in Christopher Nolan's *The Prestige*

Stuart Joy

Abstract

This essay offers a psychoanalytical reading of Christopher Nolan's *The Prestige* (2006) by principally focusing on the discourse of lack. I argue that the visual, structural and thematic composition of the film provides a means to confront the fundamental sense of lack – a central tenant of Lacanian psychoanalysis – at the heart of being. In particular, I contend that Nolan foregrounds lack by using reflexive techniques that call attention to the film's production processes which in turn, highlight the spectator's desire for a sense of (unattainable) unity.

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In the past decade there has been a renewed scholarly interest in the work of the French poststructuralist and psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan. (see Badiou 2009 [2006]; Shepherdson 2009; Eysers 2012) In particular, several philosophers and academics have sought to engage with the Lacanian concept of the Real and the apparent unknowability of the unconscious through an exploration of the cinematic medium. (see McGowan and Kunkle 2004; McGowan 2012; Jagodzinski 2012; Žižek 2013) This resurgence of interest follows a sustained and damning critique of early Lacanian film theory, perhaps nowhere more evident than in David Bordwell and Noël Carroll's *Post-Theory* collection of essays.¹ In their anthology, they sought to challenge the prevailing hegemony of Lacanian film scholarship during the 1970s and 1980s by promoting a cognitivist and empirical alternative.² The continued use of Lacanian psychoanalysis in the fields of contemporary cultural and film studies may seem somewhat surprising then given the apparent dismissal of Lacan's influence during the mid-nineties. However, more recent attempts to engage with Lacan's work have sought to reconsider the apparent misconceptions outlined by cognitive film theory through an engagement with the third register of existence in Lacan's tripartite model of the unconscious – the Real, or that which lies beyond signification.

(Zizek 1989) In addition, there has also been a sustained critical effort to readdress a number of apparent misunderstandings based on Lacan's work focussing in particular on the gaze, desire, fantasy and subjectivity.³ (see Copjec 1989; 1994) Rather than offering a complete departure from the previous incarnations of Lacanian film theory, this essay will attempt to bridge the perceived divide between the earlier efforts made by film theorists who sought to adapt Lacan's work, and more recent applications of Lacanian psychoanalysis within film studies by principally focussing on the discourse of lack.

For Lacan. (1982 [1953]), the fundamental structure of the unconscious is a three-way confluence of what he called the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. According to Clayton Crockett, much of Lacan's earlier psychoanalytic contributions focused on the registers of the Imaginary and the Symbolic whilst placing a limited amount of importance on the Real. (148) However, Lacan's later work is marked by a distinct change in emphasis as his account of the Real evolves to become a more central part of his theory alongside other concepts such as the gaze, the Thing (*das Ding*), the *objet petit a*, and *jouissance* (enjoyment). In their anthology *Lacan and Contemporary Film*, Todd McGowan and Sheila Kunkle note that despite Lacan's own movement away from his initial discourse surrounding the registers of the Imaginary and the Symbolic, at the same time many Lacanian film theorists were rather ironically engaged in a systematic appropriation of those earlier elements. (xvii) What follows is a brief overview of early Lacanian film theory which in its very essence emphasised the process of spectator identification understood through the importance of the mirror stage and the register of the Imaginary.

Contrary to the collective use of the term *imaginary*, in Lacanian psychoanalysis the Imaginary does not refer to the realm of fantasy, but rather to how the ego is formed in relation to an Other during the "mirror stage". (*Ecrits*, 1) In his concept of the mirror stage, Lacan describes the experience of an infant observing itself for the first time in a mirror or equivalent. (*Ibid.*, 1-6) In this moment, according to Elizabeth Grosz the child (mis)identifies with or (mis)recognises an image of itself as a whole autonomous being and thus begins to acquire a sense of identity through (mis)identification with an external image "independent of the mother". (32) This process of (mis)recognition, Lacan writes, "situates the agency known as the ego, prior to its social determination, in a fictional direction". (*Ecrits* 2) In other words, the child is deceived by the illusion of unity which produces an imagined sense of agency. This is followed by a state of "paranoic alienation" as the subject's apparent

wholeness begins to dissolve in opposition to an Other.⁴ (Ibid., 4) What this means is that from the moment the child first experiences itself as a whole, a conflict emerges between the retrospective Imaginary ideal, or “Ideal-I” that the unified self represents and the experience of lack inflicted by the organising structures outside of the self, or what Lacan called the Symbolic. (Ibid., 2)⁵ As such, the child forthwith exists in a state of lack which Lacan refers to as the *manque à être*, or the “want to be”. (II 223) According to Grosz, “[f]rom this time on, lack, gap, splitting will be its mode of being.” She goes on to say that, “[t]his gap will propel it into seeking an identificatory [sic] image of its own stability and permanence (the imaginary), and eventually language (the symbolic) by which it hopes to fill the lack”.⁶ (35) Psychoanalytic film theorists quickly appropriated the idea of lack as being central to being but also to the spectator’s experience of the cinema. (see Baudry 1974; 1975; Metz 1982).

According to a number of early Lacanian film theorists such as Jean-Louis Baudry and Christian Metz, the analogy between Lacan’s infant and the cinematic spectator is clear: like the child, the spectator obtains a false sense of mastery relative to the on-screen events which serve as a mirror through which the subject constructs a sense of self as a result of what Metz calls the process of “primary” or “secondary identification”.⁷ (56) Simply put, the analogy comparing the mirror stage to the filmic image is based on the perceptual mastery experienced by the individual when in front of both. In the context of the cinema, the imaginary dimension of the screened image allows the spectator to temporarily overcome the experience of lack through the provision of a complete (imaginary) world in which they are afforded a sense of unmitigated power.⁸ As Metz puts it in *The Imaginary Signifier*, whilst watching a film:

It is always the other who is on the screen; as for me, I am there to look at him. I take no part in the perceived, on the contrary, I am all-perceiving. All-perceiving as one says all powerful (this is the famous gift of “ubiquity” the film makes its spectator); all-perceiving, too, because I am entirely on the side of the perceiving instance; absent from the screen, but certainly present in the auditorium, a great eye and a great ear without which the perceived would have no one to perceive I, the instance, in other words, which constitutes the cinema signifier (it is I who make the film).⁹ (Ibid., 48)

Metz furthers this by adding that “when I say ‘I see’ the film, I mean

thereby a unique mixture of two contrary currents: the film is what I receive and it is also what I release since it does not pre-exist my entering the auditorium.” He continues, “I need only close my eyes to suppress it. Releasing it, I am the projector, receiving it, I am the screen; in both these figures together, I am the camera, which points and yet records”. (Ibid., 51) By constituting the spectator as an “all-seeing” subject who is simultaneously both the spectator *and* the producer of the film, the cinema provides the temporary false experience of mastery over the fictional world within the filmic discourse. (Ibid., 53)

In appropriating the Lacanian notion of the Imaginary and the mirror stage, Metz frames his discussion of the cinema around the “play of presence-absence” between the act of perception which takes place in the spatial and temporal present, and the pre-recorded object which by nature is always absent and past. (Ibid., 40) He states that, “[m]ore than the other arts...the cinema involves us in the imaginary: it drums up all perception, but to switch it immediately over into its own absence, which is none the less the only signifier present”. (Ibid., 45) On the basis of the separation between the image and the spectator and also between the presence and absence of the filmed object, the spectator identifies with the technological systems of representation including the omnipotent camera movements and the seamless continuity editing of shots. These elements combine to establish a regime of visibility that reinforces the spectator’s false sense of power. However, this paradigm will only function if the spectator is limited to an unconscious awareness of the cinematic apparatus and as such, continues to maintain a sense of voyeurism and unauthorized scopophilic power.¹⁰ (Ibid., 97) If the spectator becomes consciously aware of the systems of representation that usually operate to conceal the technical-mechanical nature of film production, the illusion of power disintegrates. (Ibid., 57) When this happens, the spectator is reminded that the film is not a window into a private world but rather a product of labour created for mass consumption. This is why, according to Metz the classical narrative “obliterates all traces of enunciation, and masquerades as story” by seeking to minimise the camera’s presence preferring instead that it functions as an absent yet structuring point of view. (Ibid., 91)

Drawing on the work of Baudry and Metz, Noël Carroll argues that the proposed spectator/screen relationship taking place in classical narrative cinema ostensibly relies on the apparent conflation of the screened image with the real world. He writes, “[w]e shall see that there is a general tendency in contemporary film theory to maintain that film

spectators are rapt in the illusion that what is represented – the cinematic referents – are really present”. (*Mystifying* 43) Carroll reiterates this point elsewhere by means of an example: “No-one thinks that the Empire State Building is in the screening room during *King Kong*: How could it be?”. (“Conspiracy” 399) However, Carroll’s emphasis on this division between realism and formalism appears somewhat reductive given Metz’s own comments to the contrary. He states, “the audience is not duped by the diegetic illusion, it “knows” that the screen presents no more than a fiction. And yet, it is of vital importance for the correct unfolding of the spectacle that this make-believe be scrupulously respected”. (70) Simply put, the spectator is aware that the film is a fiction but is willing to disavow this truth for the sake of maintaining the cinematic illusion, a sentiment similarly echoed in the final moments of *The Prestige* (2006), a period film centred on the conflict between two competing magicians. In what are perhaps the most important lines of the film and more generally a defining example of Christopher Nolan’s auteurism, Angier (Hugh Jackman) says to his rival, “you never understood why we did this. The audience knows the truth. The world is simple, miserable, solid all the way through. But if you can fool them, even for a second, then you can make them wonder.” Todd McGowan has also acknowledged the importance of this scene by drawing attention to the spectator’s temporary experience of transcendence caused by the work of art. He notes, “[a]s Angier (and Nolan) conceive it, this is precisely what the deception of the magic act or the work of art does.” He continues, “It lifts us out of the situation in order to create a new present in which we transcend our natural being”. (*The Fictional* 107) Of course, given that *being* is according to Lacan defined by lack, the work of art allows the spectator to experience a feeling that the lack can be temporary filled. (*II* 223) The appeal of the cinema thus depends on an unconscious awareness of the fundamental lack in relation to the mirror image through which subjectivity is obtained.¹¹

French psychoanalyst Jacques-Alain Miller developed a theory of suture to account for the structuring function of the lack to Lacanian psychoanalysis. “Suture”, he writes “names the subject’s relation to the chain of its discourse. One will see that it figures there as the lacking element, in the form of a placeholder”. (41) In essence, suture not only implies the stitching together of Lacan’s divided subject akin to the surgical closing of a wound, but also a temporary displacement of the lack at the heart of existence illustrated by Lacan in the allegory of the Fort-Da game.¹² As applied to film, the notion of suture has been appropriated by French theorist and critic Jean-Pierre Oudart in an article originally

published in *Cahiers du cinema*. In his article “Cinema and Suture,” Oudart’s, basic contention is that classical narrative cinema produces a temporary subject-position for the spectator via the arrangement of interlocking shots that negotiate their understanding of a coherent, unified “filmic space”. (“Cinema and” 37) This system, as Oudart notes, is primarily composed of the “shot/reverse shot”. (Ibid) The first shot in the series implies a space off-screen, behind the camera, “the fourth side, a pure field of absence”. (Ibid., 39) The following shot reveals that something occupies that off-screen space.¹³ Thus, according to Oudart the spectator comprehends the organisation of the filmic space and becomes stitched into the film.

Oudart argues that this system of shot/reverse shot evident in classical narrative cinema produces a “pure expanse of *jouissance*” in the subject comparable to that of the child’s (mis)identification of itself in the mirror stage. (Ibid., 41) Like the child, the spectator is momentarily absorbed in an instant of illusory (mis)identification when presented with what appears to be a complete or unified image. However, this imaginary relationship with the image is threatened by the spectator’s recognition of the film’s frame and therefore of off-screen space and crucially of absence in general. For Oudart, the issue of absence, or lack is central to an understanding of the spectator/screen relationship as it represents a threat to the unified filmic space. He writes, “The revelation of this absence is the key moment in the fate of the image, since it introduces the image into the order of the signifier and the cinema into the order of discourse”. (Ibid., 42) This is to say that the absence reveals the film as a signifying practice, as a constructed and enunciated operation thus exposing it as a system of signs, symbols and codes. However, since classical narrative cinema generally seeks to avoid soliciting the spectator’s attention, the subsequent reverse shot seeks to neutralise the threat of absence by restoring the spectator’s imaginary unity with the image.¹⁴ According to Oudart, in this moment “the appearance of a lack perceived as a Some One (the Absent One) is followed by its abolition by someone (or something) placed within the same field”. (Ibid., 37) In this way, the organisation of images produces a signifying chain that transcends the spectator’s subject-position within the cinema by diverting attention away from the mechanisms of the film’s production processes. Simply put, off-screen space becomes on-screen space and the play between presence and absence is temporarily resolved thus masking the film as a product of industrial capitalism. At this basic level, suture accounts for the way in which the spectator is able to remain focused across conventional edits without losing the narrative, intellectual, or emotional connection with

the film.

Figure 4



Figure 5



I will now take a rudimentary example from *The Prestige* in order to illustrate this concept. The scene begins with a shot of Angier's feet as the sound of a bouncing ball approaches (Shot 1/Figure 4). The auditory and visual information are subsequently aligned as the ball, which is associated with his rival throughout the film, emerges from the bottom of the frame. The spectator takes a moment to consider the possible connection between the ball and its unidentified owner before realising that they have become aware of the film's framing by imagining the unseen space, and in turn the identity of the person that they cannot see, both of which are absent and hidden by the camera. It is in this moment that the spectator is alerted to the meaning(s) of the filmed event and in turn, the limitations of the enframed image. This produces the effect of anxiety in the spectator as they experience the "haunting presence" of the Absent One within the unseen, hidden space in relation to the

image. (Ibid., 41) Daniel Dayan offers a particularly clear overview of this process in “The Tutor Code of Classical Cinema.” He writes:

When the viewer discovers the frame - the first step in reading the film - the triumph of his former *possession* of the image fades out. The viewer discovers that the camera is hiding things, and therefore distrusts it and the frame itself which he now understands to be arbitrary. He wonders why the frame is what it is. This radically transforms his mode of participation - the unreal space between characters and/or objects is no longer perceived as pleasurable. It is now the space which separates the camera from the characters. The latter have lost their quality of presence. The spectator discovers that his possession of space was only partial, illusory. He feels dispossessed of what he is prevented from seeing. He discovers that he is only authorized to see what happens to be in the axis of the gaze of another spectator, who is ghostly or absent. (29 emphasis in original)

Continuing my analysis, the subsequent reverse-shot reveals what is absent (the Absent One) which in this case is the imagined space and the approaching assailant (Shot 2/Figure 5). This shot provides the suture that closes the gap with the previous shot through what Oudart refers to as “the abolition of the Absent One and its resurrection in someone”. (“Cinema and” 37) In other words, the reverse shot showing the previously unseen space and the character neutralises the potential threat to the security and coherence of the filmic space and as such, the unity of the diegetic world is continuously stressed at the expense of the effacement of film as a formative construction.¹⁵

According to David Bordwell, Oudart’s argument is suggestive for reasons that are inadvertently foregrounded in his account of suture such as the question of agency – that is, who is staging the events and for whom? (111) Bordwell contradicts several other accounts of suture by suggesting that Oudart does not consider the Absent One to be a diegetic character that is momentarily hidden from view.¹⁶ Instead, Bordwell suggests that Oudart believes it is the author or narrator who can be identified with the Absent One. (Ibid) In particular, Bordwell emphasises the implied off-screen “*field or zone*” highlighted during the first shot as a register of the author’s absent yet structuring presence. (Ibid emphasis in original) Specifically, whilst the off-screen presence is constructed by the viewer, it must be first implied by the author. What this means is that whilst the system of suture intrinsically functions to mask the mechanisms of

film production, it simultaneously cannot help but point towards the role of a phantom creator whose presence is continually felt albeit at the level of the filmic space. However, a director can *overtly* call attention to the system of suture and therefore their own creative presence by, for instance, “slowing the rhythm of shot/reverse shot cutting”, displaying the “oblique camera angle” or the complete denial of the reverse shot. (Ibid) In doing so, they disrupt the process and draw attention to the artificial nature of what is presented thus producing in the spectator an active engagement with the text.

In *The Prestige*, Nolan’s thematic focus on magic permits a broader examination of the artist’s role within the process of creation through the analogy of the magician and the illusion. According to Todd McGowan, the narrative of the film foregrounds the relationship between the magician and the audience as an analogous parallel to the director and the spectators of the film itself. (*The Fictional* 118) He writes, “Nolan’s exploration of magic in *The Prestige* is also an exploration of cinema.... Like the magic act, the film creates through sacrifice and then hides the sacrifice – the labor [sic] that goes into making the film”. However, McGowan also goes on to state that “[w]hile cinema hides the sacrifice of labor [sic], it also creates transcendence through its fiction. But Nolan’s film seeks to connect the moment of transcendence with the necessity of sacrifice”. (Ibid., 113) For McGowan, what is significant about *The Prestige* is that unlike other mainstream films, the role of sacrifice in the process of creation is not marginalised at the expense of the effacement of film as a formative construction. Even more than this, McGowan contends that Nolan seems to desire that the sacrifice be acknowledged as being essential to a *whole* transcendental experience otherwise inaccessible. However, McGowan later reminds us that whilst film can *attempt* to expose the cinematic illusion, it ultimately cannot succeed as it will always remain part of the forgery that it documents. (Ibid., 117) How then, can film attempt to articulate the sacrifice involved in the process of creation? McGowan offers one possible answer that resides in an understanding of the film’s patterns of shot-to-shot editing. He writes:

The film must deceive the spectator in a way that draws attention to the deception – not to deconstruct it or debunk it, but rather to reveal what it produces. Through editing, the chief tool of deception that the cinema offers, Nolan creates the illusion that a truth exists beyond what appears on the screen. He does this most often by cutting from a scene before the action concludes. The cut allows the spectator to think that the conclusion follows

evidently from what has already transpired – that the elided events would not significantly change our impression of the scene – but this is entirely deceptive.¹⁷ (Ibid., 117)

For example, during Borden's first performance of his signature trick: "The Transported Man", in which a person disappears into an empty doorway and re-appears instantaneously through another unconnected to the first, Nolan deliberately conceals the trick's final conclusion. The scene begins with a shot of Borden on-stage (Figure 5) followed by a reverse shot taken from behind his body which highlights a disguised Angier arriving at the show.

Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



The subsequent shot/reverse shot exchange confirms the filmic space with Angier on the one side staring rightward (Shot 1/Figure 6) immediately followed by an eye-line match representing his perspective of Borden's performance (Shot 2/Figure 7).¹⁸ Of particular interest, though, are the closing shots of this sequence in which the final shot of Borden's act (Shot 3/Figure 8) precedes a sudden cut to a different member of the audience known to Angier as Cutter (Michael Caine).¹⁹ In this final shot of Cutter (Shot 4/Figure 9), the traditional shot/reverse shot dynamic is ruptured as the spectator is denied the subsequent reverse shot of the trick's finale implied by Cutter's glance off-screen. The decision to omit the trick's prestige performs two primary functions. The first, and perhaps most obvious, is that by doing so the spectator does not witness the physical double that the trick produces (as a later extended repetition of the sequence reveals).²⁰ However, more importantly, the decision to deny the spectator a visual representation of the final act confronts their natural awareness of the traditional shot/reverse pattern of editing thus foregrounding the author as a creative source. In this regard, Borden's first performance of "The Transported Man" is particularly significant as unlike other examples where Nolan cuts from a scene prior to its formal conclusion, in this instance the spectator is clearly aware of what is deliberately absent and as such, is *overtly* alerted to the system of suture and in turn, the cinematic apparatus.

Figure 8



Figure 9



Nolan has said that what interests him about the medium of film is the prospect of character subjectivity. He notes, “Film, it seems to me, is this fantastic medium for drawing the audience into somebody else’s point of view, more so than books, in a funny sort of way”. (Kaufman, 2014) Elsewhere on the DVD commentary for *Insomnia* (2002) he also remarks, “A big part of my interest in filmmaking is an interest in showing the audience a story through a character’s point of view. It’s interesting to try and do that and maintain a relatively natural look”.²¹ As a general rule, in *The Prestige* the anchor of axis or 180-degree line is principally focused around Angier and the eye-lines are largely consistent with his position (see Figure 7). It is perhaps surprising, then, given this apparent emphasis that we are provided with a momentary glimpse of Cutter in the previous sequence when a cut to Angier’s reaction would have been more logical given the prior shot/reverse shot dynamic. As it stands, the glimpse of Cutter seemingly functions to simply engineer the subsequent discussion that takes place between the Angier and Cutter in the next scene. In their book, *Christopher Nolan: A Labyrinth of Linkages* David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson suggest that such a decision to repeat the same camera

setup with a different character functions to combine narrative coherence and production efficiency.²² They write:

Nolan's stylistic choices [...] are tidily traditional in their efforts to create clarity and their quiet channeling of narrative information. And as in the old studio days, those choices answer to two pressures: favouring narrative coherence and comprehension on the one hand, and favouring production efficiency on the other. It's cheaper and easier to repeat camera setups when you can. (27)

Certainly, in this instance the sequence's aesthetic construction serves to further the narrative by principally negating the necessity for superfluous exposition, which would in this instance involve the visualisation of an altogether separate performance in order to facilitate the subsequent conversation between Angier and Cutter. However, if the glimpse of Cutter merely functions to enable the following exchange between the two men, then it is worth questioning why Cutter is shown at all when an addition of a piece of dialogue would have performed the same function. The reason for this line of examination is that Cutter's placement at what appears to be on first viewing the same performance not only ruptures the previous shot/reverse shot setup but also complicates the narrative flow when it is revealed that he is in fact watching an altogether separate performance.²³ Such a subtle manipulation of time and space may in most cases go unnoticed as in general, for realistic purposes, a filmmaker will maintain adequate spatial and temporal orientation to provide continuity across different shots. However, in this instance the decision to include Cutter's appearance in the audience not only foregrounds the system of suture through denial but also the discrepancy between the visual and auditory display of information thus highlighting the author as the central creative source. In essence, the diegetic sound of the ball bouncing across two distinct spatiotemporal dimensions combined with Cutter's look directed off-screen constitutes not only a denial of the frame as a limit but also a breach in linear time demonstrating Nolan's authorial position as the creator of meaning.

By not only precluding the operation of suture, but by also denying the logic that would enable it, at times Nolan provides a means to confront the fundamental sense of lack – a central tenant of Lacanian psychoanalysis – at the heart of being. Specifically, if we consider that suture provides a sense of (false) unity, albeit temporarily, the lack inherent in the subject then a rupture in the suturing process foregrounds

the lack, resulting in an active engagement with the text. This type of spectatorship is largely incompatible with classical narrative cinema which aims to convince the spectator of the legitimacy of certain subjectivities by continually stressing their consumption, and passive acceptance of the traditional hierarchical structure of Western societies.²⁴ However, Nolan does not simply expose the suturing process in the manner of an avant-garde filmmaker such as Chantal Akerman or Jean-Luc Godard.²⁵ Whereas their reflexive techniques are designed to distance the spectator from the diegetic action and therefore generate a sense of self-awareness, Nolan opts instead to challenge the classical mode of spectatorship by invoking reflexive techniques to involve the spectator in a re-consideration of the relationship between the film and the viewer. For an appropriate example, consider the opening sequence from *The Prestige* which offers us an insight into the director's approach.

The film opens on a vista of black top hats scattered in a glade as Borden's accompanying voiceover poses the question, "Are you watching closely?" before an immediate cut to black. This brazen challenge confronts the viewer with what appears to be an open acknowledgement of the cinematic apparatus. The question posed seems to be directed towards the audience as opposed to anyone within the diegesis as there is no-one else in the frame for the disembodied voice to address.²⁶ And yet, the supporting evidence that would suggest this is a reflexive moment in which the constructedness and illusory quality of the narrative is overtly highlighted, is seemingly masked by its brevity and ambiguous position as part of a diegetic credit sequence.²⁷ What I mean by this is that given the duration of the opening shot and the context in which it is presented, it is potentially easy for the spectator to miss the scene entirely or view it differently from the rest of the film due to the explicit fusion of fiction, commerce and industry. Therefore, whilst the scene ostensibly detracts from the fictional integrity of the work, it does so in a way that can be accounted for given the relative self-contained nature of the sequence. This seemingly irreconcilable difference between on the one hand, an awareness of the true nature of the cinematic reality which is hidden in the text, and on the other, the general cognitive and perceptual processes used to understand the image continues in the following scene.

The sequence begins as Cutter appears to be narrating the three constitutive parts of every magic trick to a young girl, whom we later identify as being Borden's daughter.²⁸ Although the passage is rather lengthy, it is worth including in its entirety as part of what follows is derived from a linguistic analysis of the language used within it. He says:

Every great magic trick consists of three parts or acts. The first part is called “The Pledge”. The magician shows you something ordinary: a deck of cards, a bird or a man. He shows *you* this object. Perhaps he asks *you* to inspect it to see if it is indeed real, unaltered, normal. But of course it probably isn’t. The second act is called “The Turn”. The magician takes the ordinary something and makes it do something extraordinary. Now *you’re* looking for the secret but *you* won’t find it, because of course *you’re* not really looking. *You* don’t really want to know. *You* want to be fooled. But you wouldn’t clap yet. Because making something disappear isn’t enough; *you* have to bring it back. That’s why every magic trick has a third act, the hardest part, the part we call “The Prestige”. (emphasis added)

During this monologue, Nolan intersperses several shots of Borden watching Angier’s version of “The Transported Man”, which when combined within the context of the narration prompts the spectator to perceive a fundamental link between the two separate events.²⁹ At the end of his narration, Cutter is revealed to be speaking to a courtroom in a third sequence which had, up to this point, remained hidden from the spectator. Throughout the sequence, it would be natural to assume that the spectator’s presence is openly acknowledged due to a combination of the actor’s direct look at the camera (Figure 10) and several explicit references in the narration to an implied spectator as “you.”³⁰ The omniscient style of editing that privileges a number of spatiotemporal layers and Cutter’s voice as the bearer of knowledge also seems to indicate a distinct awareness of a spectator whose presence is not only implied but explicitly addressed.³¹ However, by concealing the third diegetic space Nolan succeeds in manipulating the conventional expectations associated with voice-over narration by linking the non-diegetic and the diegetic world by means of a dialogue sound bridge.³² Specifically, it is the transition to a piece of synchronous dialogue that neutralises the threat posed by the voice-over narration, which precisely because of its non-diegetic status insinuates the spectator’s presence.³³ In other words, the shift on the soundtrack from voice-over to off-screen dialogue, or what Mary Ann Doane calls “voice-off” dialogue, reaffirms the aesthetic structures of the cinematic apparatus that are traditionally organised around the heterogeneity of the cinema as a disavowal of the spectator’s presence. (34)

Figure 10



Whilst all filmmakers anticipate the spectator's gaze or presence given that they have created the film for the purpose of being seen, such an acknowledgement within the diegesis would inevitably expose the relationship between the spectator and the screen as one of an overt denial of the cinematic imaginary.³⁴ The disclosure that Cutter's narration is not *directly* intended for the spectator alongside a revised understanding of the voice-over as voice-off dialogue combines to re-establish the illusion of unity that is central to the cinematic apparatus. In short, despite the temporary absence of the actor on-screen, the movement between voice-off dialogue and synchronous on-screen dialogue is experienced as a reassertion of the diegetic space and thus, the film world. As Doane argues, "The voice-off deepens the diegesis, gives it an extent which exceeds that of the image, and thus supports the claim that there is a space in the fictional word which the camera does not register." She continues, "In its own way, it accounts for lost space". (Ibid., 40) Kaja Silverman points out that although voice-off dialogue could be considered to be a challenge to the centrality of the image, by introducing the "threat of absence" it commonly supports the unity of the cinematic text by "carving out a space beyond the frame of one shot for the next to recover". (*The Acoustic* 48) Thus, in much the same way that the process of suture produces a coherent visual filmic space, the emphasis on diegetic speech in classical narrative cinema also contributes to the illusion of reality. The combination of sound and editing in the opening sequence from *The Prestige* illustrates as much via the *impression* of reality that is constituted and sustained by the temporal arrangement of individual images combined with the auditory supply of information. However, the crucial point remains that whilst the overall construction of this sequence conceals the methods of cinematic production, it does so in such a way that highlights the reflexive strategies that Nolan employs to complicate what would otherwise be a straightforward reading if it were

organised in line with the principles of classical narrative cinema. What this opening sequence amounts to then is an indication of Nolan's central filmmaking project which accounts for the complex bond between the spectator and the diegetic world by refusing to deny the sacrifice involved in the process of creation. In this example, it is Nolan's willingness to address the spectator both directly and indirectly that poses a threat to the fictional integrity of the work. At the same time, Nolan chooses to do so in a way that requires the spectator to become an active participant in the construction of the film text, thus furthering their investment in the significance of the images on the screen. What Nolan is emphasising then is a revised perspective on the nature of art that acknowledges the value of sacrifice as a path to a more transcendent experience.

At a basic level, Nolan constructs the discourse of *The Prestige* in a way that emphasises an elemental connection between the magician and the artist. In the magician's performance, making objects or people disappear and reappear produces irreparable gaps in existence. These acts remind us of our infinite fallibility and capacity for escapist transcendence beyond the realms of human knowledge and traditional explanation. Similarly, the essence of a work of art is imbued with the capability of mitigating the subject's experience of being by transcending the limited and finite material world. The idea of art as transcendent is encapsulated by Angier's belief that works of art can generate a transcendent belief evident in the spectator's look. This notion is supported by McGowan. He says:

Angier recognizes that there are no naturally occurring miracles, that there is no transcendence in the given world. The world is banal and mundane; it offers us nothing to believe in. But the work of art introduces a cut into this mundane world and suggests that something exists beyond it. Through the deception that they create, magic and art break through the solidity of the world and allow audiences to see a fissure where none naturally exist. Without the lie, without the magician's conjuring trick, we would remain stuck in the monotony of being. (*The Fictional* 106-107)

As a work of fiction, *The Prestige* allows us to bear witness to the dialectical relationship between the act of sacrifice and the experience of transcendence that emerges from the artist's creation. In this way, the film explores cinema's transcendent capacity to temporarily liberate the spectator from the experience of lack inherent in being. However,

it should be noted that just as for Lacan, the sense of lack can never be filled, so the film ultimately also fails to offer the sense of (false) wholeness that the subject desires. This being said, unlike classical narrative cinema the filmmaker's motive is not to perpetuate the continued cloaking of the cinematic apparatus in order to provide such unity, but rather to generate a more active awareness on the part of the spectator, one which involves acknowledging the lack inherent in being. As such, the experience of watching the film is deliberately saturated with lack as it continually calls attention to its own production processes. Given that the spectator is aware, on some level, that the images on the screen are constructed and controlled by an absent yet structuring presence, if the author becomes increasingly visible, as is the case with *The Prestige*, the viewing subject cannot help but re-consider their own relationship to the cinematic image. However, providing that Nolan's use of reflexive strategies continues to effectively draw the spectator into the film rather than distance them from the text, he is able to continually reiterate the value of the connection between the act of creation and the act of sacrifice. McGowan comments that:

Nolan always shows the cost of this transcendence, a cost that Hollywood most often takes great pains to hide. By submitting to the artistic fiction, we enter into a beyond, but it is a beyond that always brings us back to the repetition of sacrifice. The new that emerges through deception is not what we have lost but our loss itself. (Ibid., 122)

Perhaps nowhere is this more evident than in the film's closing narration, a partial repeat of Cutter's opening monologue that reminds the audience they will not discover the real secret of the film. He says, "Now you're looking for the secret but you won't find it, because of course you're not really looking. You don't really want to know. You want to be fooled."³⁵ Not only does this statement point towards the impossibility of narrative closure thus affirming the overall structure of lack that supports the film's construction, it also reveals the fundamental deception of cinema that the film highlights. Specifically, cinema deceives its spectators by tempting them to "enter into a beyond" - a beyond that exists because of their investment in the images onscreen - that accounts for their willingness to debate the nature the images in all their minutiae on blogs, web forums, and in academic volumes. (Ibid) For example, in classical narrative cinema the viewer perceives the diegetic world in such a way that allows them to reconcile the gaps between the real world and the filmed events by seeking an imaginary conclusion which satisfies the

need for a persuasive and comprehensible narrative. In doing so, the film thus provides a (false) sense of wholeness. Such investment in *The Prestige* will inevitably lead viewers to speculate about the ending in a manner that points towards the existence of a truth that extends beyond what is presented onscreen.³⁶ However, as the film expressly seeks to undermine the traditional focus on the screen opting instead to highlight the work that goes into constructing the fiction, such (false) wholeness is unobtainable. By the same token, this is why, according to McGowan those who merely disregard the film on the basis of their ability to decipher the simplicity behind Borden's illusion are inherently misguided. He comments, "one of the chief complaints of the film was that they [viewers] saw the end coming from very early on." He states, "But trying to figure out a film like *The Prestige* indicates precisely the kind of investment in the idea of truth that the film works to overturn. Those who solve the film's riddle simultaneously miss the film's point". (Ibid., 199) To put it another way, dismissing the film because of the apparent rudimentary nature of its plot is to do so at the expense of the labour involved in the process of its creation. Rather than hide the techniques that call attention to the cinematic apparatus, the film foregrounds its own narrative and visual composition through reflexive strategies that expose the sacrifice. In doing so, it is the discerning viewer who is able to transcend the relative prosaic of everyday life through an enriched experience of the work of art which encapsulates both the spectacle of the story and a recognition of the sacrifice integral to the process. As such, *The Prestige* makes clear that the film's source of meaning is derived from the overall narration, not in the end towards which we are always arriving.

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Notes

- 1 See also Thomas Doherty's *After Theory* (1990), Paul Bové's *In the Wake of Theory* (1992), Martin McQuillan's *Post Theory* (1999) and Terry Eagleton's *After Theory* (2003).
- 2 For a further discussion of the debate between Theory and post-Theory see Matthew Flisfeder. (67–95)
- 3 Lacanian theory was particularly relevant to screen theorists during the 1970s and 1980s who drew upon his work in order to develop new conceptions of film ideology and spectatorship. French theorists such as Jean-Pierre Oudart (1969), Jean-Louis Baudry (1974; 1975), Jean-Louis Commolli (1980) and Christian Metz (1982) alongside British theorists writing for *Screen* including Peter Wollen (1972), Laura Mulvey (1975), Colin McCabe (1976) and Stephen Heath (1976; 1977/78) are central to the development of a psychoanalytic theory of film rooted in Lacan's re-reading of Freud.
- 4 According to Dylan Evans Lacan draws a distinction between the "little other" and "the big Other" that would remain central throughout the rest of his work. (132) According to Evans, "The little other is the other who but a reflection and projection of the Ego. He is simultaneously the counterpart and the specular image". (Ibid., 132–133) In contrast, the big Other transcends the specular image because it cannot be assimilated through

identification. (Ibid., 133) It is therefore inscribed into the Symbolic with language and the law, “The other is thus both another subject, in his radical alterity and unassimilable uniqueness, and also the symbolic order which mediates the relationship with that other subject”. (Ibid)

5 Lacan’s account of the Symbolic order primarily refers to the social and linguistic realm according to the law of the father, also designated as the “name of the father”. (XI 230) Accordingly, the notion of the Symbolic constitutes the subject’s relations to itself, culture and wider social and family networks. (Ibid) From a Lacanian perspective, it is the subject’s acquisition of language which involves the passage from the Imaginary order to the Symbolic that provides the means for individuation and identity or, as Lacan puts it, “it is the symbolic order which is constitutive for the subject”. (Ibid., 7)

6 For Lacan, the individual is subject to a permanent and irreversible lack that can be traced to the physical birth in terms of the separation from the mother, as well as the child’s symbolic birth into language and culture. (*Ecrits* 2) As a consequence, the child remains divided or split as a result of the trauma that occurs during when the infant moves from a state of perfect harmony and union with the mother into an agonizing state of separation as it is expelled from the womb.

7 According to Metz, primary identification principally refers to the spectator’s identification with the apparatus, specifically the camera and projector. Secondary identification on the other hand refers to the on-screen characters. (96)

8 The notion of the mirror can perhaps be best understood then as a metaphor for how the ego forms from that which is reflected back to them in society and culture including media such as film.

9 It should be noted that Metz accounts purely for the fictional film.

10 A useful comparison is Ronald Langacker’s analogy of a pair of glasses which are examined at arm’s length to account for adjustments in perception between the perceiver and the perceived. He says, “[the glasses] function solely and prominently as the object of perception and not at all as part of the perceptual apparatus itself”. The glasses, however, used to examine another object then, “function exclusively as part of the subject of perception – they are one component of the perceiving apparatus, but are not themselves perceived”. (316) Similarly, whilst in the cinema, the spectator is aware of the presence of the frame but through the systems of representation, the immediate perceptual environment fades from consciousness. We can conclude then that one measure of a film’s success derives from the spectator’s willingness to embrace the fictional reality at the expense of a conscious awareness of the process that produces the events on the screen.

11 Various contemporary theories of spectatorship developed from the apparatus theory have similarly argued that the spectator does not mistake the fictional impression of reality for an actual reality, but rather actively adopts a position of conscious disavowal. (see Allen 1995; Currie 1996). Richard Allen’s description of “projective illusion” which implies that the spectator voluntarily invests belief in the reality presented despite an awareness of the fictitious nature of the text is particularly insightful in this regard. Whilst watching a film, he argues: You do not mistake a staged event for actuality...rather, you lose awareness of

the fact that you are seeing a film, that is, watching a recorded event that is staged before the camera. Instead of looking “from the outside” upon something staged in this world, you perceive the events of the film directly or “from within.” You perceive a fully realized though fictional world that has all the perceptual immediacy of our own; you experience the film as a projective illusion. When you imagine that you look upon the events of the film “from within,” the frame of the image circumscribes the limits of your visual field rather than signalling to you that what you see is the projection of a recorded image...In projective illusion, the spectator occupies the perceptual point of view of the camera upon the events of the film. (107)

12 For Kaja Silverman, the way in which Miller describes suture is reminiscent of the Fort-Da game outlined by Sigmund Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1955 [1920]). (*The Subject of 200*) For Freud, the Fort-Da game represents the child attempt to overcome its mother’s disappearance and reappearance by repeatedly throwing a wooden reel on a string over the edge of his cot and subsequently retrieving it.

13 The system of suture has been extensively criticised by film historian Barry Salt (1976) in his article “Film Style and Technology in the Forties” and by other theorists such as William Rothman (1975), David Bordwell (1985), Noel Carroll (1988) and George Butte (2008). However, the combined weight of these academic criticisms has not damaged suture as a concept substantially but rather expanded its definition to encompass a broader range of applications. For example, whilst respectfully acknowledging the criticisms of Salt and Rothman, in two important essays Stephen Heath (1976; 1981) has revised the concept of suture, arguing that it cannot be merely reduced to the central function of the shot/reverse shot. Instead, he contends that the process of suture can be extended to the effect of cutting in general by describing the process as the continual oscillation between presence and absence. He states, “In its process, its framings, its cuts, its intermittences, the film ceaselessly poses an absence, a lack, which is ceaselessly bound up in and into the relation of the subject, is, as it were, ceaselessly recaptured *for* the film”. (“Notes on” 13 emphasis in original) The process of suturing the spectator to the text still remains principally focused on embracing the illusory nature of the images presented. However, for Heath suture rests upon the flow and unity of the images within the broader context of new and unique structural and stylistic techniques. For example, in his analysis of a sequence from *News from Home* (Akerman, 1977) Heath suggests that whilst the closing montage lacks the distinctive look of ownership ascribed to previous versions of suture, the combination of “image, voice, noise, duration, rhythm” provide the moment of reconciliation with the diegesis. (Ibid., 99)

14 This being said, in accordance with Lacan’s notion that lack is central to being and so subject to constant deferral, similarly the spectator cannot fully resolve the play between presence and absence on-screen because the new image, while suturing one gap, repeatedly creates a new one. Thus for Oudart, a sense of loss is permanently inscribed into the nature of the image.

15 Daniel Dayan, after Oudart, explains how suture serves to nullify the spectator’s experience of film as a material object by constructing them as an integrated subject. He

writes, “when I occupy the place of the subject, the codes which led me to occupy this place become invisible to me. The signifiers of the presence of the subject disappear from my consciousness because they are signifiers of my presence”. (112) It is this capacity to produce a coherent filmic space through the relationship of various gazes (the spectator’s directed at the screen, the cameras at the characters, and the characters’ at each other) that establishes a foundational framework for suture in cinema.

16 For example Edward Branigan suggests that, “The Absent One seems to be conceived as a diegetic *character* who is temporarily out of sight but who has been put into an unseen space by a spectator’s imagination (unconscious)?”. (137)

17 The film contains a number of examples where Nolan cuts away from a scene before the action concludes only to return to it later to reveal the remaining portion of the scene. For instance, Nolan cuts away after Angier tests the teleportation machine for the first time, during Olivia’s (Scarlett Johansson) confession to Borden and during the film’s opening montage of Angier’s death and Cutter’s description of the three stages of a magic trick (the pledge, the turn, and the prestige). However, crucially all of these sequences can be viewed as being self-contained as the spectator is unaware of the remaining part of the sequence until it is revealed later in the film.

18 This sequence analysis offered here is drastically simplified as it is somewhat complicated by a flash forward to a series of shots of Angier at home recalling Alfred’s illusion. However given that that the flash forward consists of a single shot framed with Angier looking rightward off screen as he recalls the trick in memory, it can be considered to be an effective stand in for scenes set in the present where his look is not visible as part of the shot/reverse shot continuum. However, for the purposes of the following analysis I want to focus specifically on the omission of the magic trick’s final act.

19 The central positioning of the final shot of Borden’s performance returns us to the opening image of the sequence whereby the camera is an invisible-observer only now placed in closer proximity to the stage.

20 During the film’s climax it is revealed that Borden is one of a pair of identical twins who have concealed their duality in order to perform the trick.

21 *Insomnia* UK DVD commentary 00:05:33

22 This particular comment is written in relation to Bordwell and Thompson’s analysis of the opening sequence where a similar pattern of repeated shots and set ups occur.

23 The placement of Cutter on screen right in a position where Angier was similarly sat at the start of the sequence, combined with the diegetic sound of the ball bouncing continuously across two separate shots, indicates a causality that reflects a linear set of events placing Cutter at the same performance (see Figures 6 & 9). However, Angier’s enquiry as to whether the audience applauded after the trick, remarked upon in the subsequent scene, indicates a distinct time difference between the two performances.

24 According to Kaja Silverman, the Israeli theoretician Daniel Dayan was the first writer on film to attempt to apply the suture argument within the context of “ideological coercion”. (*The Subject of 215*) For Dayan, suture functions to persuade the viewer to accept certain images as an accurate reflection of their subjectivity.

25 In general, avant-garde cinema or to use the phrase coined by Peter Wollen in his essay on *Le Vent d'est* (1970), “counter cinema” is characterised by an opposition to commercial, mainstream cinema as well as a commitment to radical politics and formal experimentation. Along these lines, “counter cinema” is defined according to two principle goals. The first is to promote a position of critical awareness and thereby reveal to spectator the inherent illusionism of the cinematic apparatus. The second is to involve the audience member in a political struggle by making them conscious of his interpellation by standard cinematic institutions. (Wheatley 35)

26 In her article “The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space,” Mary Ann Doane discusses the use of voice in cinematic presentation remarking that the voiceover’s position within the dynamic of the cinematic apparatus is complicated by the voyeurism inherent in the construction of the cinematic image. According to Doane, the voiceover and the interior monologue “speak more or less *directly* to the spectator”. (43 emphasis in original) If this is the case, the voiceover presupposes a spectator who is actively acknowledged as part of an on-going dialogue between the spectator and screen. However, this notion is difficult to reconcile with the underlying principle of the cinematic apparatus that desires the deliberate disavowal of the fiction presented.

27 If we agree that one of the principle aims of classical narrative cinema is to divert attention away from the work necessary to produce it, then the use of title sequences in feature films are somewhat paradoxical. Whilst most films attempt to mask the necessary extra-diegetic level by intercutting it with shots of the diegetic world, the on-screen words and images continue to highlight the fictiveness of the narrative thus rupturing the desired suture. An additional complication is suggested by Lesley Stern who has highlighted the problems associated with establishing the *accepted* beginning of a film due to the difficulties aroused by the vague distinctions between a pre-credit sequence, a diegetic credit sequence and an autonomous non-diegetic segment. (128-9) In this instance, the title sequence can be considered a cross between the latter two variations as whilst it contains diegetic material it is also autonomous insofar as the dialogue and visual information are not repeated later in their current form.

28 Of course this claim in itself is rather misleading as the notion of narrating the trick to an individual who is present in the frame at the time of the narration represents a contradiction of the linear timeframe given that voice-over narration is invariably considered to be experience recollected resulting in a temporal disjuncture between the sound and image.

29 For example, when Cutter’s narration mentions “a man,” the camera picks out Alfred in the crowd.

30 According to Karen Hollinger, there is a documented history detailing the role of voice-over narration in cinema. She remarks, “voice-over narration has a long cinematic history, much of which is associated with its use for granting power and authority to a single perspective and for implicating the spectator strongly in that perspective”. (131)

31 By virtue of its construction the voice-over cannot help but invokes the formal property of the medium.

32 In this example, an unknown character begins a line of questioning about Angier's death whilst images of him drowning continue to occur on-screen before fading to black.

33 The problematic paradigm of the (active) cognitive mechanisms used in the processing of voice-over narration and the (passive) voyeuristic pleasure desired as part of classical narrative cinema can be overcome by reconfiguring Cutter's voice-over narration as "voice-off". (Doane, 34) Unlike a voice-over narration, which often belongs to a disembodied voice outside of the diegetic space, the *voice-off* is a temporarily off-screen voice. For Mary Anne Doane, the voice-off can be defined as spoken dialogue which emanates from a spatial dimension that exists beyond what is presented on-screen. In contrast to the voice-over, the voice-off speaks not over the image, but rather from its margins. In Doane's analysis, "He/she is "just over there," just beyond the frameline, in a space which "exists" but which the camera does not choose to show". (Ibid., 37) *The Prestige* establishes this space through the combination of synchronized sound in conjunction with editing and other cinematic conventions that manufacture a sense of *vraisemblance* regarding the diegetic space.

34 Todd McGowan points out that even the filmmaker who produces a film just for her/himself nonetheless posits the "nonexistent spectator in the making of the film". (*The Impossible* 226) He compares the filmmaker to a diarist whose decision to render their inner thoughts into an exterior format necessitates a structure of communication that betrays the notion that the author writes only for her/himself. He writes, "If one were simply making a film for oneself or writing for oneself, there would be no need for the detour through a form that others are able to comprehend. This detour testifies to the presence of the public at the heart of the most private production". (Ibid)

35 Erin Hill Parks points out that the repeated monologue also functions to add another level of interaction between the director and the audience, "with Nolan, through the characters, speaking to the audience about the structure of the film". ("Discourses" 81)

36 It is possible to position Nolan's enigmatic endings as an overt indication of the director's authorial position (see Hill-Parks, "Identity" 7) but it is perhaps more beneficial to associate it with a range of strategies already noted that point towards the creation of a sustained reality whilst simultaneously denying the spectator access to it. For this reason, audiences continue to speculate about the final moments of *Inception* to determine whether or not the top falls or whether, in *Memento*, Leonard's wife was intentionally or accidentally murdered.

The Cinematic Chiasm: Evoking Societal Empathy through the Phenomenological Language of Film

Nisha Gupta

Abstract

This paper is a recommendation for phenomenologists to use film as a perceptually-faithful language with which to disseminate research and insights about lived experience. I use Merleau-Ponty's philosophy to illustrate how film can evoke a state of profound, embodied empathy between self-and-other, which I refer to as "the cinematic chiasm". I incorporate a case study of my experience as audience member becoming intertwined with the flesh of the film "The Diving Bell and the Butterfly." I discuss four aesthetic techniques of this film through which I became enveloped in a state of visceral empathy towards the "other" on-screen. The cinematic chiasm offers exciting, creative possibilities for phenomenologists, particularly those who are interested in evoking widespread empathy for social justice purposes.

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Merleau-Ponty used the term "chiasm" to describe the fundamental reversibility between subject and object, self and world. He suggested that we are all part of a much larger intercorporeal unity—a universal flesh that we breathe, feel, and co-constitute. If our bodies are variations of one universal flesh, then there is no actual separation between self-and-other. Though we are unique in our differences, all beings are nevertheless still intimately intertwined with one another. As such, the chiasm entails a "criss-crossing" between the perceptual experiences of myself and others, so that the other's lifeworld can viscerally become my own, and vice versa (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). Unfortunately, today's world remains painfully ignorant of this fundamental entwinement between self-and-other. Most societal problems involve an utter breakdown in human empathy, as alienation, discrimination, and violence dominate our current affairs. The ability to *share* in the lived experience of the other's body—this is what Merleau-Ponty calls the chiasm, and what we can also conceive of as empathy. In the pursuit of social justice, it is essential to

infuse society with a universal feeling of entwinement with others, across the spectrum of race, gender, religiosity, economic status, sexual orientation, and disability.

Phenomenological researchers have the potential to be not only producers of knowledge but also social activists. We produce creative artifacts that serve as glimpses into the experiences of those we learn about. There is opportunity here to cultivate societal empathy through our research, particularly when pursued in the spirit of Merleau-Ponty. How might phenomenologists conduct research in a way that renders his notion of the chiasm explicit and functional, so that our products evoke empathy among the public? Film offers an exciting solution. In this paper I will use Merleau-Ponty's philosophy to demonstrate how film can be a viable and effective end-product for phenomenological research. First, I will argue that film serves as an ideal language for phenomenological research, because it can express our participants' experiences in a perceptually faithful way. Second, I will explore how certain aesthetic techniques of film can evoke a profound state of embodied empathy among audience members—which I will call the “cinematic chiasm,” in honor of Merleau-Ponty. I will also propose how these techniques can be applied by phenomenological researchers to evoke empathy towards our participants.

Film as an Ideal Language for Phenomenological Research

Merleau-Ponty encourages researchers to forgo thinking of ourselves as separate from the phenomena we study. Rather than being subjects who hover over objects from above, we are deeply intertwined with all we seek to learn about: “we are caught up in the world and we do not succeed in extricating ourselves from it in order to achieve consciousness of the world” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 5). Thus we cannot rely on empiricism or intellectualism to guide our understandings, because they create a false dichotomy between subject-and-object and self-and-world. As such, Merleau-Ponty posits perception to be the only route through which we can faithfully understand the world, because we are of-it and for-it. His philosophy urges researchers to pursue our understandings of the world via our immediate senses, and by opening our eyes to “the things themselves.”

But as researchers, how can we account for that which we perceive? Merleau-Ponty criticized reflection as a cognitive process which obscures perception, creating an abstraction that distances us from that which we

experience: “the world is what I perceive, but as soon as we examine it and express its absolute proximity, it also becomes inexplicably, irremediable distance” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 8). Yet it is the researcher’s job to share our insights with others somehow. As such, Merleau-Ponty suggests that we share our lived experience through a hyper-reflexive, descriptive language which avoids abstraction or explanation and remains faithful to our sensual perception. Furthermore, this hyper-reflexive description must “plunge into the world instead of surveying it,” in order to make visible the inextricable bond between ourselves and that which we perceive (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 38). Finally, this hyper-reflexive description must strive to use language in a way that is not representative or symbolic, but rather expressive, in the closest way possible, of our direct contact with the things of the world that have not yet been languaged.

Merleau-Ponty praised art as an exceptional form of such hyper-reflexive language, because it retains the sensuality, openness, and wonder of our nascent perception. He conceived of art as an *amplification* of our nascent perception, and wrote that artists possess a heightened visual acuity of their landscape which they can extend to others through their creative artifacts. Therefore, rather than being representations of lived experience, Merleau-Ponty considered artworks to be *extensions* of our perceptual field (Quinn, 2009). Merleau-Ponty was particularly enchanted by cinema’s unique ability to express the world in a way that is more precise than our ordinary perception of it. In an essay entitled “Film and the New Psychology,” he wrote:

It is true that in our ordinary lives, we lose sight of this aesthetic value of the tiniest perceived thing...cinematic drama is finer-grained than real-life dramas; it takes place in a world that is more exact than the real world...This is why the movies can be so gripping in their presentation of man...they directly present us with that special way of being in the world. (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 58)

Thus, film’s power lies in its ability to offer a slice of the world that is perceptually heightened compared with our typical experience of it. Through the aesthetics of film, we are able to achieve an even closer contact with being-in-the-world than ordinary perception could unveil.

Evoking Empathy through the Cinematic Chiasm

Alas, if phenomenological researchers seek a language through which

to faithfully convey perceptual experience, Merleau-Ponty would likely agree that film is an ideal vehicle. But how can it evoke empathy among those who view it? This is where the chiasm can become functional for social justice purposes. For just as film has the power to express a more heightened perception than ordinary reality, so does film have the power to make the fundamental intertwining between self-and-other more luminous than we would usually perceive it.

To illustrate film's ability to heighten our experience of the chiasm, I will use the example of the movie *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*. This film tells the true story of a 43-year old man named Jean-Do, the French editor of *Elle* magazine, who was renowned for his party-loving, active lifestyle in Paris. One day he suffered a stroke which left him with Locked-in Syndrome, a condition whereby the person experiences full-body paralysis and is unable to move nearly all voluntary muscles, yet his or her mind remains consciously aware. The film situates itself in the first-person perspective of Jean-Do, after he awakens from a three-week coma and finds himself in a hospital bed experiencing utter paralysis, save for the ability to blink his left eye. In real life, Jean-Do worked with a speech therapist to create an innovative method of communication in which he could blink his left eye during recitations of the alphabet. In this manner, he dictated a poignant memoir about his lived experience of Locked-in Syndrome—of being trapped in a body which weighs him down like a diving bell, while his mind soars like a butterfly. Ten days before he died, Jean-Do's book was published and became a bestseller. In 2007 a movie version of his memoir was released, which is the focal point of our discussion here.

Let us imagine this film to be the end-product of a phenomenological research project about the lived experience of Locked-in Syndrome. How does the cinematic language of *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* allow audience members to entwine with Jean-Do in an experience of empathic identification, through which our own bodies experience what it is like to be newly disabled and paralyzed? Throughout the rest of the paper I will demonstrate how *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* brings the cinematic chiasm to life, by providing phenomenological descriptions of my own experience as an audience member viewing four different clips of the film (these movie clips are available to watch online). I will also explicate the unique techniques of cinematography that are used throughout the film, incorporating Merleau-Ponty's philosophy and other theoretical literature to help us understand the phenomenological language through which this film evokes embodied empathy towards the lived experience of Locked-in

Syndrome. Finally, I will suggest how phenomenological researchers can be inspired by the cinematic chiasm in our own efforts to pursue societal empathy on behalf of research participants' lived experiences.

1. *Film as Lived Body*

(Please view the first movie clip here: "Good for a Wheelchair" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vjkkbQy9fLA>)

The screen immediately pulls my vision into action, and I greet it effortlessly. The room in which I view this film rapidly falls away, and my senses are transported into Jean-Do's world. A Locked-In world.

My vision can only see what lies directly in front of him: the hospital bed, his naked chest, and IVs coming out of it. A flash of irritation beats up my flesh as I witness so many doctors' hands man-handling his arms and chest like puppeteers. My neck strains to obtain a broader perspective, but it is useless: our chin refuses to turn upwards. His neck remains stiffly frozen in place, staring bleakly in one direction. His limbs passively droop and poke out of the shirt that the doctors are trying to dress us in. I suddenly feel a heaviness in my own arms, like they are pinning my whole body down. My torso feels as if it is an enormous weight, an oppressive diving bell—as Jean-Do's must feel right now. A wave of humiliation chokes up my throat, as I feel what it might be like for a 43-year old man to suddenly feel helpless, infantile, a propped-up doll to be dressed by someone else. I don't know if he can cry, but witnessing his newly lifeless limbs certainly triggers my grief. A tear wells up in my eye and I do not bother to wipe it away, knowing that Jean-Do would not be able to.

Now I see his body being lifted and positioned into a wheelchair. I hear the doctors celebrate with merry voices: "you are good for a wheelchair!" As they cheer, he diverts his eyes upwards to the lights on the ceiling. We focus on the lights instead of the limbs, a much safer sight. It is too painful to view the inertness of his body, a reminder of what has been forever lost. So we fixate on the light, and I release a silent sigh.

It is clear from the above description of the cinematic chiasm that my body was pulled into action by Jean-Do's paralyzed body onscreen, inviting me into a visceral conversation about the felt experience of Locked-in Syndrome. To discuss the empathic power of this embodied cinematic experience, we must refer back to the basis of Merleau-Ponty's philoso-

phy—which is that the body is the pivot-point around which we experience, interact with, and understand the world. Our body is always solicited by the sensible—all the things that we perceive immediately animate our bodily sensations. Our body is especially summoned into action when we perceive other vital bodies, which spurs a sense of “communion” in which both bodies intermingle with one another: “It is precisely my body which perceives the body of another... Just as the parts of my body together form a system, so the other’s body and mine are henceforth a unitary whole, merely the back and the front of one and the same phenomenon” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 311). As such, it is through the activation of our bodily senses that we can truly experience empathy towards others in the world. As two different bodies converse and respond to one another, the fundamental entwinement between self-and-other becomes tangibly and deeply felt.

The cinematography of *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* positions Jean-Do’s body at the front and center of the film’s perceptual field. Consequently, as my own perception encountered the fleshy, moving images onscreen, I certainly experienced my own body being solicited by the body of Jean-Do. The agility of my own limbs was called into action as I perceived the stiffness of his limbs onscreen. My arms felt heavy and foreboding, sinking to the sides of my body, as I watched his limp limbs being arranged by doctors to fit into a sweater. My own neck tightened and strained itself as Jean-Do’s neck remained frozen by the camera angle. While the doctors celebrated their ability to position Jean-Do into a wheelchair, I could feel his anguish as the camera diverted his vision to stare at anything but his lifeless limbs. This onscreen perceptual diversion summoned tears to well up in my eye. I found myself sighing several times, responding to Jean-Do’s despair with my own release of breath. As such, throughout the duration of this short piece of film, my body actively experienced what it might be like to be enclosed in a body that is newly paralyzed, helpless, and fussed over by doctors. This evoked in me a profound, visceral sense of grief about the loss of mobility that Jean-Do once had. Our bodies intermingled and merged in cinematic spaces of sorrow and loss, co-constituting a unique meaning of “Locked-in Syndrome” within the meeting-place between us.

We can better understand the embodied experience of communion that I just described, if we also consider the film itself to be a body in its own right. Film scholar Vivian Sobchack proposed the idea of “film as lived body,” wherein just as the human body transcends our physiological anatomy, so does the film-body transcend its mechanical structures to become

its own embodied existence, its own being-in-the-world (Bacon, 2007). A film behaves, acts, perceives and expresses, just like any other vital body. In fact, film's expression is more embodied than other forms of communication, for it uses the language of seeing, hearing, movement, and temporality to express its perceptual field, which simulates human perception (Bacon, 2007). As such, Sobchack informs us that when we view a film's projection on-screen, we are actually viewing the expressed perception of an "other" who is experienced as a present, living, breathing entity to us: "The film experience not only reflects upon the perceptual experience of the filmmaker...but also presents the direct experience of a perceptual existence as the film itself" (Sobchack, 1992; in Bacon, 2007, p. 3). This notion that the film itself is a unique, present, living other became evident in my viewing of *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*. In my experience of the film, I did not perceive the filmmaker behind the camera, but rather the film as an embodied *other*—"an other who is with us and for us and in itself as an object-subject," and for whom my own body is solicited into action (Sobchack, 1992; in Bacon, 2007, p. 3). The notion that I am passively viewing a film on a screen faded away, and was replaced by the sense that my body was actively participating in a dynamic encounter with the vital body of Jean-Do.

The idea of film as lived-body presents a great opportunity for phenomenological researchers. We might ask ourselves: how can our research product itself become a vital, embodied other? How can our research be experienced as seeing, hearing, moving, and even breathing? If our research is a lived body in its own right, it can elicit bodily sensations in the audience that evoke a sense of communion with our participants. To brainstorm how we might create such an animate product, we can continue to examine the cinematic techniques of *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* that evoke a sense of embodied empathy so profoundly.

2. Film's Intertwining Perspectives

(Please view the second movie clip here: "Sewing Up the Eye" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vjkkbQy9fLA>)

I have climbed inside Jean-Do's skull, and I am gazing at the world directly through his eyes. I am hearing his inner monologue, a voice that no one else can hear but him and me. The doctor is boasting about a fabulous ski trip he just took, the wind flapping upon his face while he whizzed down the mountain. Our voice scoffs "Screw that," overriding the volume of the doctor's

voice and reacting to his oblivious insensitivity in light of the trauma that Jean-Do has endured. Yet this arrogant doctor pays no heed to our retort. I am reminded that we are mute, we are trapped, and no one will ever hear us. Despair and powerlessness sink in again.

Now the doctor is nonchalantly telling us he must sew one eye shut. “No, no, no!” our internal monologue screams, with a silent desperation that only the two of us will ever know. Eyelashes clump together, and from beneath these eyelids we watch as our world begins to go black, then red, then black. Our voice is bellowing as loudly as possible to keep the light—“You will NOT sew my eye shut!”—but to no avail, and half of the world suddenly goes dark.

The loss of our eye feels like lifelong imprisonment; it feels like eternal darkness. The loss of our eye feels like the loss of hope.

I could never have understood this from the outside.

As demonstrated in my description above, one of the most effective cinematic techniques that *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* uses to induce a sense of entwinement between self-and-other is to create the perception of a shared set of eyes between Jean-Do and audience members. In the language of cinematography, this is known as the “subjective camera angle”. With this technique, the camera stands in for the character’s vision, showing the audience the scene from their point-of-view. Thus we become pulled into the direct vantage point of Jean-Do, gazing at the world from a first-person perspective as if we were inside his locked-in body. The possibilities of evoking empathy through this technique cannot be underestimated, as the subjective camera angle allowing us to partake in another person’s subjective experience that we would likely never have privy to otherwise.

We can better appreciate the power of the subjective camera angle if we refer back to the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, who wrote that all organisms co-exist in the world as *perspectival* beings. This means that in ordinary life, we can only perceive other things and people through the vantage point of our own milieu. In our daily encounters with others, we are only ever perceiving *one* particular perspective of that person, out of a vast array of possibilities of the other’s being. Likewise, the other always retains hidden aspects that transcend our perceptual access. Merleau-Ponty explains:

The ‘things’ in naive experience are evident as perspectival beings:

it is essential to them, both to offer themselves without interposed milieu and to reveal themselves only gradually and never completely; they are mediated by their perspectival appearances... I grasp in a perspectival appearance, which I know is only one of its possible aspects, the thing itself which transcends it. (Merleau-Ponty, 1942, p. 187)

Accordingly, we can never fully know the subjectivity of an other, as their hidden perspectives remain a mystery to us. Yet Merleau-Ponty also asserts that others can disclose their hidden perspectives to us through gesture and language. Language can reveal mysteries and invite us into new vantage points that we could never before perceive from where we stand. Furthermore, through language, the other's perspective does not only open itself to us, but it can *become* our own perspective as well:

It suffices that I look at a landscape, that I speak of it with someone. Then, through the concordant operation of his body and my own, what I see passes into him, this individual green of the meadow under my eyes invades his vision without quitting my own... It is not I who sees, not he who sees, because an anonymous visibility inhabits both of us, a vision in general, in virtue of that primordial property that belongs to the flesh. (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 142)

Thus, language can envelop self and other into a greater set of eyes, a universal Visibility of the "flesh" through which our individual visual fields become entwined.

The Diving Bell and the Butterfly reveals the mysterious, hidden perspectives of someone with Locked-In Syndrome through its unique cinematic language. In ordinary life, I could never have known the vantage point of a person in full-body paralysis such as Jean-Do, and the extent of despair he would experience during the seemingly minor medical procedure of getting one eye sewn shut. Yet the subjective camera technique allowed me to experience Jean-Do's world firsthand: looking out from inside a paralyzed body with Locked-in Syndrome as if I inhabited those eyes myself. The subjective camera angle bridges the supposed distance between myself and a person with Locked-In syndrome—a distance I would have felt in ordinary life, if I happened to be in a hospital room with Jean-Do and peering at his immobile body from my external lens. Perhaps I too might have insensitively discussed my skiing adventures to make small talk, as the doctor had done. Yet the cinematic language of *The Diving*

Bell and the Butterfly merges the perceptual fields of self-and-other, compelling me to switch perspectives and develop much-needed empathy.

Accordingly, the subjective camera angle technique also makes Merleau-Ponty's notion of the "shared flesh" explicit. While viewing this film, I perceptually climbed inside the body of Jean-Do. With the camera serving as our shared flesh, I felt his eye being sewn shut as if it were my own. I experienced our world growing darker and scarier as the needle wove the thread back and forth, frequently coming close to poking our eyeball out. I heard Jean-Do's inner monologue screaming in protest—a voice that I would never have heard from any other vantage point but his. But thanks to the subjective camera angle technique, I was privy to this hidden, desperate voice, which made me feel like I was inside Jean-Do's skull alongside him. As the movie clip went on, I stopped distinguishing whose body is whose. In my reflection I used the pronoun "us" and "our" without a thought while describing Jean-Do's lived experience. This indicates that I organically experienced myself and this person with Locked-In Syndrome to inhabit the same flesh. The cinematic chiasm of *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* demonstrated that I am part of a much greater body than just myself; Jean-Do's eyes became my eyes—his Locked-In world became *our* Locked-In world.

The subjective camera angle technique presents an exquisite vehicle for phenomenological researchers who seek to evoke embodied empathy on behalf of our participants. We can use it to reveal the hidden perspectives of our participants, and to express their perceptual field as it is experienced through their very own eyes. Consequently, our participants' and audience's visual fields can intertwine to explicitly illustrate the presence of a greater, anonymous visibility, a shared flesh that envelops them both. Then, audience members may experience the suffering of the other as if it were their own subjective pain, just as I felt in regards to Jean-Do's despair.

3. *Film's Haptic Visuality*

(Please view the third movie clip here: "Am I in Heaven?": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6up-uz7Q9k&list=PL4C6867488775AE40&index=1>)

Her touch feels soft and hazy. The lightness of her fingertips dances with the shadows of my body as she massages me, and I am soothed into a state of wak-

ing slumber. The door opens and two beautiful women walk through the misty light, a halo softening the edges of their bodies as if they are angels, and we are in heaven. My perception feels the graze of fabric hanging over their soft breasts. Their faces come so close to mine, each pore and dip and curve visible, and it's as if I can feel the warmth of their breath caressing my face. Desire embraces all my senses, and I drink in this moment for a second before recalling my condition. My inner monologue sighs, "Just my luck. Two beauties and I'm stuck."

The Diving Bell and the Butterfly further entwines the audience member's perceptual field with Jean-Do's through a cinematic technique known as "haptic visuality". Haptic visuality refers to a film's attempt to appeal to the senses that it cannot technically represent, such as touch (Marks, 2000). This movie uses a number of different visual techniques to evoke the sensations of touch, and accordingly, to help us better understand the lived experience of Jean-Do. For instance, this movie clip displayed unfocused, blurry images, which were meant to be understood by going beyond the audience's vision to harness our tactile responses. In the beginning of this clip, as Jean-Do is receiving a massage, the camera shows fuzzy pastel imagery of fabric and flesh. As an audience member, my understanding of what was happening onscreen did not simply occur through sight alone, for at times my vision simply saw blurry flickers of color, light, and pattern. Yet the haziness onscreen expressed a soft and gentle texture, which made it feel like my body itself was being soothed by a sensual massage.

Furthermore, the film incorporates haptic visuality through its use of close-up shots, such as when Jean-Do is being hovered over by his speech therapist and physiotherapist. In this shot, the camera zoomed up close to these women's faces so that I could detect even the subtlest glistens of sweat from their pores. This camera angle made me feel as if their flesh was brushing up against my own, and their breath was warming up my face. The camera also sometimes used a slow-panning movement across these close-up images, slowly skimming across these women's skin and lips and breasts to make it seem like I was grazing over and embracing these body parts on-screen, as Jean-Do yearned to do. As such, through the vehicle of haptic visuality, I became enveloped in an extremely intimate understanding of Jean-Do's experience as a man with Locked-In Syndrome. I became viscerally attuned to the fact that disability does not kill desire. I simultaneously experienced the joys of his thriving libido alongside the frustration of not being able to express his sexuality, which may be so core to his identity. After all, Jean-Do was notorious

as a “playboy” prior to his accident, and the film makes this part of his identity crystal clear in scenes such as this. Through haptic visuality, his lust bursts forth—a life force that even full-body paralysis could never extinguish.

The cinematic technique of haptic visuality coincides with Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of the chiasm, in which he suggested vision’s reversibility with touch. He wrote that “there is an inscription of the touching in the visible, of the seeing in the tangible...and there is finally a propagation of these exchanges to all the bodies of the same type and of the same style which I see and touch” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 143). Merleau-Ponty said that our eyes “palpate” the world through sight; likewise, all visual experiences pull us into an intimate embrace with that which we perceive. This is the magic of haptic visuality—its ability to put all our bodily senses to work, beyond merely sight. As phenomenological researchers, perhaps we can use the haptic visual techniques of film to make our participants’ experiences literally touch the audience’s bodies: grazing over their flesh, encircling them in an embrace, and evoking the sensuality of their lived experience enough to give them goose bumps.

4. *Film’s Rhythmic Gestalt*

(Please view the fourth movie clip here: “The Butterfly Escapes”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mFxm9Q6E4M&index=6&list=PL4C6867488775AE40>)

I see Jean-Do as the world sees him—bundled in a wheelchair, seemingly mute—and I sigh with sympathy again. Yet Jean-Do’s inner monologue tells us he’s tired of pitying himself: “Two things are not paralyzed: my imagination and my memory. I can imagine anything, anybody, anywhere!” With gusto, he invites me into his freewheeling and vivid imagination. His mind flutters and soars like a butterfly through enchanting meadows and wide-open skies. With a thrill, we jump off a cliff into the thrashing waters below. We march onwards like heroic cowboys in our own western film. There are no limits to the adventures of Jean-Do’s mind.

Finally, the empathic power of *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* is achieved through its multi-sensory editing techniques—the special way it gathers together image, sound and movement across time in order to evoke the essence of being-in-the-world as someone with Locked-in Syndrome. Merleau-Ponty wrote:

Beauty, when it manifests itself in cinematography, lies not in the story itself, which could quite easily be recounted in prose... what matters is the selection of episodes to be represented and, in each one, the choice of shots that will be featured, the length of time, allotted to these elements, the order in which they are able to be presented, the sound or words with which they are or are not to be accompanied. Taken together, all these factors contribute to form a particular overall cinematography rhythm. (Merleau-Ponty, 1948, p. 98)

Thus the beauty of “The Diving Bell and the Butterfly” lies not in its story but in its aesthetic montage of sensory experiences that opens up a world for us. Each moment is made meaningful by the moment that came before it; and by the way the sound and visual effects intermingle with one another. In this particular clip, the film blends various aspects of cinematography together to open up the world of Jean-Do’s wondrous mind. All elements co-exist and intermingle to create a unity of his adventurous imagination, which cannot be held down by Locked-In Syndrome. The imagery and music and editing stitch together to depict a lively mind which weaves through meadows and soars through skies and longs for thrills and plays like a child. The film’s poignancy is made possible by its careful temporal and spatial arrangement: I experienced the exciting flight of Jean-Do’s imagination only because I witnessed his paralyzed body seconds earlier. I savored the beauty of the human mind, and felt profound gratitude for its elemental freedom, only because I have felt the perils of being locked in the diving bell of his body prior to this scene. *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, particular in moments like this one, demonstrates that the true poignancy of cinema lies in the rhythmic gestalt, not in its particular storyline. Merleau-Ponty’s insight about the rhythmic gestalt of film is crucial for the way researchers reflect upon our participants’ experiences. We must challenge ourselves to creatively express the *rhythm* of our participants’ lifeworlds, rather than merely trying to relay narrative information about their lives.

The Diving Bell and the Butterfly is an exemplary demonstration of how to package phenomenological research within the format of film, in order to evoke empathy on behalf of our participants. If Jean-Do were a research participant about the lived experience of Locked-In Syndrome, we would walk away from this cinematic product with an intuitive, visceral, and highly nuanced understanding of his lifeworld, as if we shared it with our own flesh. Alongside Jean-Do, we would experience the grief and

frustration of the loss of a once-able body, while simultaneously savoring the delights of the human libido, memory, and imagination that full-body paralysis could never extinguish. Perhaps this ability for audience members to *share in the embodied experiences of our participants* is precisely the effect that phenomenological researchers should strive for in the work that we do. Merleau-Ponty himself said that the project of phenomenology “consists not in stringing concepts together but in describing the mingling of consciousness with the world, its involvement in a body, and its coexistence with others...and this is movie material par excellence” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 59). Yet even for researchers who hesitate to engage in filmmaking, there is much to learn from the cinematic chiasm that we can apply to social justice efforts. How can we create research products, no matter the format, that behave as vital, embodied “others” in their own right? How can our research use a point-of-view that enables people to share in the flesh of our participants? How can our research activate people’s tactile sensations and invite them into an intimate embrace? And finally, how can we render our participants’ lives poignant through a poetic temporal rhythm to which no narrative explanation could ever do justice? The creative possibilities are exhilarating, as is the possibility to someday live in a world that feels truly intertwined.

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Différance and Paranoia

Kevin Love

Abstract

This exploratory essay aims to open *différance* to a form of enquiry it has not seen coming. A consideration of the complex temporality that attends its historical emergence leads to a specifically *différential* articulation of spatio-temporality. A residual element of spacing before/behind spatio-temporality provokes further consideration. The notion of *verbality* is introduced to provide analytical purchase. Analysis identifies a *fundamental mannerism* in *différance*; a participative and orchestrative *spacance*. *Différance* participates too determinately in this spacing, as this spacing. The paper thus urges *différance* to rewrite this element quasimetaphorically. In the ensuing drama, *différance* can rewrite the metaphor of spacing only by relying again on the spacing of metaphor. Unable to rewrite itself quickly enough, nonetheless compelled, an unexpected dimension opens.

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(In)deference.

If one can forgive the conceit of a paper that presumes to begin with time,¹ specifically with what time is or was before or after Derrida, then I will take as an initial coordinate that *point* in time, somewhere between late Heidegger and early Derrida, where the notion of *différance* first emerges. Of course this point, this time, these proper names, arriving late and clumsy, we use only as crude approximations; heuristic devices that allow us to continue to write amidst the painful complexity of it all. We are now mostly well-versed in all of this, rhetoric or otherwise. Largely adept, if never entirely rigorous, in interpreting the flood of points, names, notions, words, as mere secondary effects. Effects, that is to say, of that which emerges from them in supplementary fashion. Just as *différance* emerged, so late in Western thought; the reclusive writer stepping reticently from the wings. All that remains for us, the doubly late children of a lesser age, is to simply deal with this emergence. To get on with it or over it, trying somehow to live up to these texts that have provoked us.

But what writing! What could possibly pass for a fitting response in the face of this call? How can one hope to meet with the summons issued, albeit inadvertently, by the very stature of the work that precedes us? If intentions any longer mattered ours would have been entirely good. Systemically unsure of ourselves, unconvinced by the various emergent directions suggested for 'post-continental' thought, one should not confuse hesitancy for nonchalance. We have barely begun to understand what just happened, but already we are being asked to move along; barely have we begun to read these texts and already it is suggested that the time has come to write about other matters – as though we still knew how. All our words come too quickly; being spent so easily. Breaking tiredly against the flanks of an aposiopesis that implacably demands more, we are persuaded we should never have begun, and thereby fated to continue. One can go no further and do no other than press-on. There is no effort that will not entangle us more, no penance that will expiate nor respite to be won in quietism and restraint, and even in saying this little we have said too much, though none of it new. Such is our luck: a hollow calling; an impotent and unremarkable responsibility. Still one persists. As though this logorrhoealism were itself meaningful, as though notwithstanding everything we have been taught, yet meaning will out; and that this meaning and this 'as though' are not also *only* meaning. It is already too late again; too late for our stumbling prose to recover itself. And so under the impassive weight of this heavy sky we struggle to write without affect or polemic, fearing that few words are left to us.

A Beginning

Of course *différance* did not really emerge, not as such. It was already there, more or less, in Plato and only ever there more or less in Derrida, as his series of prolific iterations are intended to demonstrate. One might even go so far as to suggest that Derrida's unwavering pursuit (so determinedly playful) across all manner of intellectual and cultural terrain, served only to *betray* *différance*. Argue, if only for strategic reasons, that Plato, harboring *différance* unthought in his work, was a better Derrida than Derrida. Betraying *différance* by portraying *différance* (to employ for a moment the Levinasian motif), was Derrida's work perhaps less responsible, less true to *différance* than Plato's? But maybe in this strange philosophical environ that's more or less proper, or is that improper? And so on...

None of this will surprise you. Comfortable with the economic logic²

of the ‘more-or-less’ that rigorously orchestrates this *pas de deux*, we now urbanely traverse the hyphenic between arising amidst Heidegger-Derrida—somewhere between *Seyn* with a ‘y’ and *différance* with an ‘a’. This logic would give us to understand the nonappearance of *différance* in Plato as being orchestrated by the trace of its appearance in Derrida. Plato, that is to say, was only able to write by not *writing*. On the other hand (for as we well know *différance* is always at a minimum ambidextrous) its appearance in Derrida is only the trace of its nonappearance elsewhere, which is perhaps why early Derrida could *only* have proceeded by systematically *rewriting* the works of Western philosophy. Truthfully, then, neither Plato nor Derrida are the better Derrida because there is no Derrida, only Plato-Derrida. How, then, are we to interpret this hyphen between Plato and Derrida, which like that troublesome ‘a’ will not have been heard throughout the course of this epoch? Obviously it cannot be the hyphen of a simple temporal transition, *from Plato to Derrida*; philosophical poles along the course of a linear history of ideas. And yet *différance* still emerges, at a certain point in time, from a certain place, *relative to Plato* – a time/place called Derrida. We cannot represent this emergence teleologically or consequentially; *différance* cannot be called to account by time, but rather accounts *for* time (as we will shortly reemphasize). This hyphenic between, then, is not governed by temporal progression. Whatever divides and unites Plato and Derrida in our example, whatever *spaces* them, it is not first and foremost time. These effects of time, just like those of the name, ought not to mislead us. The form of the between instituted by the trace “would not be the mixture, the transition between form and the amorphous, presence and absence, [Plato and Derrida] etc, but that which, by eluding this opposition, makes it possible in the irreducibility of its excess.” (Derrida, 1982:172 n16. My addition). More precisely, then, there is nothing plenitudinous that unites the more-or-less of the appearance-nonappearance of *différance*, but an excess that orchestrates this economy, and which is once again and ‘more originally’ *différance*. Or, more properly, *différance* in *différance*.

This hyphenic space, devoid of time, God, Being or desire, lacking purchase, form or foothold, will not yield to philosophy. A meta-aposiopesis; a silencing evocation that leaves us lost for words though mouths still moving; a ‘Just because!’ that blankly curtails our every *Why?* Having so brilliantly, so busily, and yet so self-effacingly orchestrated all things (now and then and here and there and all points in between) *différance* has certainly secured for us space to read and write. Is there, though, no longer a question one could put *to différence* that is not already formulated from within its own sphere of orchestration – a question that would unsettle

rather than reiterate? For whatever we say we seem to say only *différance*, whether indeed we speak or not. With every word, no more nor less, with every offbeat, gap or pause, there *différance* resonates. Could one presume to bring this obdurate aposiopesis to the brink of a question it has not already imagined?

As a preliminary gesture, intended to help articulate the course and character of a certain philosophical ‘project,’ I have grown accustomed to juxtaposing two passages: the first of these from Heidegger’s *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, where he in turn quotes Aristotle:

That which has been sought for from of old and now
and in the future and constantly, and that on which
inquiry founders over and over again, is the problem
What is being?

(Aristotle-Heidegger, 1982:15)

The second from *Of Grammatology*:

One must therefore go by way of the question of being
as it is directed by Heidegger and by him alone, at and
beyond onto-theology, in order to reach the rigorous
thought of that strange nondifference and in order to
determine it correctly.

(Derrida, 1976:23)

By way of the *question* of being, *Différance* emerges in this way, as this way and as the wayness of this way (meta-odos). As way and wayness, the emergence of *différance*, I suggest, marks the end of a distinctive questioning comportment, the particularity of which has yet to be foregrounded. Given what has been already said around the subject of time, it is important to clarify the status of this ‘emergence’ more precisely. For the question of being to which Aristotle-Heidegger refers—an inquiry that points toward the constitution of time even in the context of this simple repeated quotation (*fug-unfug*)—is less a question configured in time than it is, *de jure*, configuring *of* time. With its *historical* emergence, that is to say, *différance* repatterns time, realising time in a distribution of time that inaugurates the motif of the *re-*. Clearly, though, one cannot understand this repatterning as part of an unproblematic ‘history of ideas,’ without simply assuming those very ‘metaphysical’ formations Heidegger-Derrida calls into question. Thus, the historical repatterning that *takes place* somewhere in the midst of 20th Century continental philosophy, is also a *repat-*

terning of history that *gives place*; a transcendental *re-* realized via the supplement of an empirical *re-* which continually thwarts the ambitions of this, now quasi, transcendental. Accordingly, one cannot simply imagine that *différance* emerges *in* time; just in time for Heidegger-Derrida. Earliest of all, *différance* was never timely but remains ever late for itself. On the other hand, while no mere historical object, *différance* undoubtedly emerges in some measure as a response to the demands of this particular question, an answer (of sorts). One must of course be careful not to collapse back into crude, linear explanations here, temporal or otherwise, but equally neither can *différance* disown the traces that constitute its heritage. A more responsible prose would therefore attempt to respect the logic in play with this question-answer we call *différance*: neither strictly configured in time, nor configuring of time, neither passive nor active but middling in between, one might best regard the question of essence-difference as a question configured *over* time. Read this way and that, the ambivalence of this formulation gives to us a question-answer born in time, borne by time, born out of time and before time – configured and configuring, more-or-less. With formulations of this type contemporary thought is able to bear witness to the characteristic complexity of essence-difference across its various fields of possible enquiry.³

Clearly it would be no simple matter to extract from this questioning comportment its *essential* features, each interface with *différance* merely leaving a 'skim' of logic; the perception of a surface glinting in the perpetual withdrawal of *différance* itself. Neither critique nor deconstruction will prove equal to the demands of such an analysis therefore. This impasse (we do not say aporia) will require judicious negotiation of now familiar paths and, if *différance* is to surpass itself, will testify to the continuing glimmer of a certain non-*différential* waywardness. For if *différance* were indeed the outworking of a particular questioning comportment, then one immediately raises the possibility of other comportments, other logics and other outworkings that can no longer be considered merely *different* comportments, logics or outworkings: modalities of difference rather than modalities in *différance*. Rather than being the only question, is the enquiring comportment we know as ontology only a particular question? Being the question it is, being set in its ways, has it merely unfolded time and space in a predeterminedly characteristic manner? Undoubtedly this questioning comportment (*ti esti*, What is?) has exerted enormous influence, for so long orchestrating thought (not only as first philosophy, but in politics, ethics, and aesthetics alike). Might there be ways of thinking the political, though, that are not first onto-political?⁴ Might ethics or art be thought along a course irreducible to an ontological or quasi-onto-

logical mode of enquiry? A preparatory essay is not the place to engage in this level of detail. Nonetheless, my contention is that one might indeed preserve other regions of thought from immediate reduction to ontology, or indeed epistemology; that there are modalities of difference other than the play of essence-difference, and these axiomatically demarcate their own regions of thought.

The course of the question of essence concludes (perhaps unsurprisingly) with essence questioning '*itself*' '*as such*' – questioning the essence of essence. Thus distending the question in portentous ways essence itself never foresaw, yet this question continues in the way of its unfolding, albeit now under the auspices of *différer* rather than *Sein*. Although (late as we are) we failed to realize it for some considerable time, essence only ever was *différance*, just as *différance* is essence and nothing besides. The hyphenated term 'essence-difference' attempts to designate the domain of this questioning comportment. Elsewhere we unpack this formulation a little further and wonder whether there are perhaps comportments of another sort, with another history, another start – like a *Why?* irreducible in its demeanor to a 'What is?' A question that avoids the calmly measured gait of that form of thinking animated by an orchestrative spacing (announcing itself in philosophy's continuing allegiance to categories, dialectics, oppositions and the like). A more desperate, visceral *Why?* torn from Eve's lips and hurled at the darkening sky.⁵ To be sure, *différance* edges towards thinking this spacing as *mere* spacing, but in so doing posits spacing as an unsurpassable limit, which within the confines of its particular comportment it surely is. If, therefore, we are correct in suggesting that *différance* is pre-structured or even pre-ordained (such a properly improper suggestion) by a particular questioning comportment, then to evince this it is necessary to demonstrate more adequately and precisely the necessary relationship between *différance* and spacing. The remainder of this essay accordingly attempts to respond, with a writing otherwise than *différance*.

To be clear, we are suggesting that the hyphenic space of the *différential* between, devoid of plenitude, mere excess, is nonetheless *contoured* by certain 'mannerisms' peculiar to the question of essence as received. These bearings thus facilitate the orchestration of essence-difference in ways peculiar to this one questioning comportment. The essay will later exhort us to think further, harder or faster about the trajectories of this *différential* between. To progress to this moment, however, it is necessary to more adequately provoke the issue of the place of *différance*, or the space of *différance*. Better yet, how the place of *différance* as the consummative mo-

ment of a Western philosophical programme, is assured by the hyphenic, nonplenitudinous spacance of *différance*. An element of spacing *différance* cannot rewrite without also simply writing it again, this motif of spacing figures for us a *fundamental* catachresis (already properly improper) that both allows access to, and, in some sense, *authorizes* the entire quasi-metaphoric system.

Perhaps we are being overly provocative with our choice of words, and no doubt we ought to display more rigor in our crossing through (as though rigor could save us). Nonetheless, we hope to demonstrate that without this spacing there could be no *différance*, but that *différance* can never rest *with* this element of spacing. And perhaps this is what propels *différance*, lending impetus and allowing, despite everything, for the very directionality of time's dimensions; perhaps this is why *différance* is so edgy, always on the move, always looking for something different? Arguing that this catachresis is internally compelled to unfold out of itself, unfold other than itself, the paper marks the course of this unfolding as *différance* struggles to surpass itself. Gerundially pressing into each opening dimension in exponential fashion, sliding with *différance*, our analysis will chase (for we can no longer trace) the movement of a failed rewriting in a direction other than that of the *relève*.

Spatio-temporality and quasi-metaphoricity

We begin again, therefore, speaking of time, not directly or literally but textually, in order to rehearse in greater detail the important *différential* reconfiguration of spatio-temporality. Crudely put, one can identify different ways to enquire of essence *vis a vis* space-time. When asked 'vulgarly,' for instance, essence works out spatially (in terms of substantiality or extension, say), and spatiality subordinates temporality; when asked 'primordially' essence works out temporally (in terms of *Existenz*), and temporality subordinates spatiality—as for the Heidegger of *Being and Time* who famously argues that the priority given to "spatial representation" in the philosophical history of time, is attributable to the fact that "Temporality is essentially falling, and it loses itself in making present" (Heidegger 1962:421). Later, of course, he corrects himself, admitting that "[s]pace is fundamentally different to time. [...] There is no reason to trace it back to 'time,' because the re-presenting of space is a temporalizing. [...] only by virtue of this utmost difference do they refer to their origin, time-space [Zeit-Raum]" (Heidegger, 1999:263). With this hyphenic play of space and time, a proto-*différance*, we arrive, albeit before

time, at a much more Derridean conception of spatio-temporality, where again the silent hyphen bears the weight of a trace gesturing toward a *différential* constitution.⁶ When asked *textually*, therefore, essence works out (provisionally, before working itself out in essence-difference) in a spatio-temporal manner (and here, imperceptible, the emphatic hyphen already foregrounds the *différential* between). Hyphenic spatio-temporality neither subordinates spatiality to temporality nor visa versa. Textually, that is to say, spatiality and temporality are originally complicit, united by their differences: the spacing of temporality and the temporalising of spatiality. This reasonably well-rehearsed philosophical discussion regarding the nature of space-time, thus brings one to the quasi-metaphoric articulation of spatio-temporality.

For is it the case that with this spatio-temporal weave we are promised an understanding of what space and time literally *are*? By no means! That which we have always referred to as spatiality or temporality, is itself only a *metaphor* for the (finitely) infinite differing-deferring, without which not. The characteristic *mouvance* of the re-, if you will, given spatio-temporal clothes. Spatio-temporality does not give us this hyphenic *différencing in itself*. Rather, it is as though we merely 'felt its effect' in the plenitudinous metaphoric externalization we call spatio-temporality - an 'experience' (experience as such) that gives itself to us only through the remarkable concrescence of difference into effects of essence; simultaneously the dissemination of essence in difference. A metaphoric experience, therefore, neither giving itself properly, fully, literally, nor as such. As we know, such metaphoricity can no longer be conceptualized by a philosophy that has the metaphor unfailingly return to the concept. We do not literally 'feel the effect' of this differing-deferring as one would feel the warmth of the sensory sun; there is no *in itself* to difference; we effect we feel is only the effect of an effect, etc. This 'in itself' to which essence-difference turns and returns must, in itself, be understood quasi-metaphorically, as if all there were were metaphor.

In this way *différance* is figured as the (quasi-metaphoric) movement that assembles spatio-temporality, but which assembles it: i) disassemblingly (assembles it in such a way as to prevent there ever being things *in themselves* called 'time' or 'space'), and; ii) supplementarily (in such a way as to disallow the gesture that would return spatio-temporality to *différance* as its proper, literal meaning). The best we can hope for is a metaphoric understanding of this differing-deferring where, methodologically, our metaphors return metaphorically, not properly; *la différence - relève de la métaphore*, one might remark. The metaphoric return of the *relève*

preventing us from understanding this metaphoricity conceptually, our understanding of the *What is...?* is reorganized accordingly; that is, quasi-metaphorically. Should we find cause to resist the properly heliotropic return of a speculative *Aufhebung* (or, indeed, of a progressively more primordial hermeneutic disclosiveness), we can yet do no better than to hope for a metaphorical return, a *relève* of the heliotrope that gives us space and time only on the basis of a catachrestic improperly proper meaning (a metaphoric metaphor), and potentially unfolds time and any discourse on time metaphorically without limit.

Two related issues arise, the first concerning a largely untapped quasi-phenomenology of time that the *différential élan* frees-up in releasing depictions of time from the dominant spatio-structural proclivities of an overly formalistic philosophy. Repeating Heidegger's complaint regarding spatial representation in philosophical accounts of time, but without accepting that one might yet speak of time directly or authentically, such a *différential* phenomenology would seek to distend time through a non-spatial quasi-metaphorics; a 'poetics of time' that in fact serves to challenge the traditional association of the question of being with interpretations of space-time. The spatial metaphor that philosophy has mined for so long in its explication of time would have no greater literal truth than any other metaphor: time *could* just as well grumble as circle, could just as much horror as go-by. Perhaps time really could heal, fly, or drowsy, without this being immediately reducible to a spatially-temporal description of the various *passages* of time; no longer an *articulation* of what time *is*, in essence (or, equally, in difference), but a celebration of the multiplicit verbal richness of time's timing. Being's explication of time, that is to argue, with its distinctive conjugation of temporality in the patterning of its verb, was ever and already supplementary—in as much as one never simply just 'was' or 'is,' etc., but only ever 'was...' or 'is....' To allow this one verb (*be*) a privileged explication of time, therefore, unduly favors the supplement. Although one may not wish to go as far as a Nietzschean inversion, which would almost wish to expunge this particular verb altogether, still it is possible to enquire of the interpretation of time educed by other verbs, as they engage with time in the peculiarity of their specific quasi-metaphoric ambiances. In this way a non-hierarchical, quasi-phenomenological poetics of time would lend itself to an appreciation of time beyond ontology.

In as much as *différance* provides space for a project of this sort, however, revealing the pretensions of presumed authentic singular depictions of time, it also lends space – the spacing of metaphoricity. Such a quasi-phe-

nomenology of time, intent on freeing itself from spatial representation while still relying on the orchestrative force of *différential* metaphors, would thus prove itself ultimately insincere. Owing to its methodological reliance on the continued spacing of the quasi-metaphor it would remain only adverbial in nature, modifying a master verb (whether *Sein* or *différer* seems unimportant) that remains *structurally uncontaminated* notwithstanding its supplementary status. The second issue, therefore, concerns not simply the implicit dependence upon spacing that would authorize a reinvigorated quasi-phenomenology, but more seriously already points toward the continuing role of the spatial metaphor in *différance* itself. On the face of it something quite rudimentary links ontology to spacing. So trivial the observation, one wonders whether any sort of thinking would be at all possible without spacing in some form. No doubt, as Heidegger indicates, the consideration of time is historically something of a privileged example, but in fact the dialectics of points, lines and planes, the horizontal and transverse intentionalities of Husserl, the thrown forethrow and horizontal circlings of primordial temporality, testify to a methodological necessity that underlies the ontological project more generally. Here, in the spacance of quasi-metaphoricity also, we suspect that this necessity continues to work itself out. Is it not the case that far from escaping the dominance of the spatial, quasi-metaphoricity in fact repeats this dominance (so traditional) in the spacing movement of metaphor. If quasi-metaphoricity figures the truth of spatio-temporality, and in this manner panics the concept, it also firmly *repeats* the traditional reliance upon the privileged spatial metaphor.

What is the status of this repetition, not straightforwardly a repetition? What is the relationship between this repetition and the *relève*? How are we to understand the spacing movement of metaphor? Without wishing to labor an analysis with which most are familiar, it is not just the *concept* of metaphor as properly understood by philosophy that relies on such thematics. Even quasi-metaphoricity, even that differing-deferring, neither active nor passive, seemingly rests upon some form of movement tied up in turn with the dominance of a spatial articulation. Can quasi-metaphoricity metaphorize this reliance? Can it re-write the element of spacing that continues unperturbed through each articulation of *différance*? Or is it the case that quasi-metaphoricity, whilst seeking to disturb the order of the proper, reaffirms that order in its insistent reliance upon not just any metaphor but the dominant philosophical metaphor, *the non-metaphoric ground of metaphor*? If one could show the spacing and accordant movement of quasi-metaphoricity to be in some sense proper or essential *to* quasi-metaphoricity,⁷ would one have then confirmed such

a *reliance*, no longer a *reliance*?

To disturb the dominance of this catachrestic metaphor, therefore, how carefully one would have to choose one's metaphors! To avoid any reliance upon the spacing of metaphor these metaphors ought not even to be metaphoric; not different metaphors, but different *than* metaphor. Differing and deferring to the *brink of their own expulsion* from the *différential* order, they would struggle to be other than metaphoric in order to metaphorize their reliance upon the element of spacing. Sliding ever faster, these metaphors would feel themselves compelled to found an entirely new catachresis: a *way of meaning*, that is to say, that could no longer be understood from a quasi-metaphoric vantage. At this point, where fractious *différance* struggles to differentiate itself, is never fast enough and can no longer keep up with itself, we believe it prepares for a paratactical interjection.⁸ If, however, we intend to expose possibilities for meaning beyond both the semantical and the syntactical, beyond essence-difference, it will be necessary to develop a form of analysis appropriate to the task: an analysis that will keep pace with *différance*; exponential rather than existential. Reconfiguring the question of essence for purposes of alignment, we here introduce, as a first step in this exponential analysis, the term *verbality*.

Verbality

We do not deploy this term to denote the *use* of verbs; this is not a linguistic analysis, if indeed there remains any point in marking a distinction. Still quasi-ontological in character, verbality is intended, if you will, to bring us to the 'verbing' of the verb.⁹ Verbality allows one to think that verbing whilst avoiding, for instance, the temporalizations particular to any one verb. From the previous consideration we recognize that space and time work out quasi-metaphorically; a metaphoricity that then disallows any privilege or authorial status to be granted to one particular verb (the verb *be*, say) and opens the field to metaphors of all sorts. Verbs, that is to say, unfold or explicate time in and of themselves, without reliance upon an orchestrating master verb. Far from recognizing its supplementarity, however, philosophy has typically favored the verb *be* in its understanding of time, such that time might well *seem* to fly, drag, or drowsy, *but only on the basis of time's essential connection with being*. On such an account temporalization, whether vulgar or primordial, is what the *be* does, and all other verbs only become operative through participation in this verb; no one would argue this point more earnestly than early Hei-

degger. Accordingly, the peculiar appreciations of time suggested by other verbs are only conceivable as *adverbial modifications* of this primordial verb 'be' that in *its* verbing makes all other verbs possible.

With early Heidegger, moreover, the temporal character of the verb *be*, and thus the *true* temporal character of time, is to be discovered in this verb's dealing with a nullity that remains more or less external (rather than an internal differentiation/alterity, for example). By contrast, that which opens the *spatial* dimension of the verb *be*, distending the nominal realm of the object in the present of the *Gegenwart*, aligns itself with the motif of *Verfallen* and the untruth of time. Thus, maintaining the priority of the verb *be* while expanding its explication across its entire verbal range on the one hand, and authentically articulating this verb in purview of its negative on the other hand, it will have been predictable that Heidegger would be led toward a congruent and horizontal temporality (mobilized in its entire possibility through running-up against the 'never' of the nothing); the infinitive 'to be' is explicated to the limit of its tenses under the watch of the finite 'not to be,' and together this produces the orchestrative whole of *Sein und Zeit*.

If one were simply to repeat the analysis of Being and Time (i.e. restrict ourselves to the explication of this one master verb) verballity would of course amount to nothing more than another name for Being; a synonym for the orchestrative verbing typical of this particular, but primordial, verb *be*. Following the lead others have made,¹⁰ though, if primordial temporality is taken *less* 'primordially' (i.e. considered merely an *instance* of temporalisation, reflecting the congruence of time) and if its opposition to vulgar temporality (the *fall* from utterly congruent time to a more disjointed time) is negotiated in a less metaphysical way (which may arguably have been early Heidegger's intention anyway), then one might indeed agree that prior to the *congruent-disjointedness* of time there remains a *différance* of time. The point is that although one is no longer dealing with a plenitudinous phenomena here, nor with a word nor a concept, one might yet address the *verballity*, or verb-nouning, of this new verb-noun; namely, the characteristic orchestrative tendencies of *différance*. Thus, to reiterate for the sake of clarity, spatio-temporality (distinguished from primordial temporality) is structured non-horizontally and non-congruently, there remaining an excess of time between *fug* and *unfug* that can never be reduced to time, or resolved in time. This excess is not something other than time. It is only in differing-ly-deferring from itself that time gives rise to *différance*, as *différance* gives rise to time. One cannot separate them out. Non-plenitudinous 'in itself,' there remains

a co-dependency between *différance* and plenitudinous space-time that undermines any traditional opposition and thus any ‘in itself.’¹¹ Supplementarity demands this thoroughly complex co-dependent weave of plenitude and non-plenitude that serves to renegotiate even this first or final opposition. Hence, the apparent structuring of spatio-temporality as congruent incongruence is merely characteristic of this complexity, and reflects (as does the apparent structuring of all things) this complexity in its complexity.

With the emphatically hyphenated term “spatio-temporality” denying early Heidegger the privilege he arguably assigns to the truth of time, the complexity of the *différential* system declares itself characteristically in the clamor of the verb *be* and the silence of its offbeat. Clearly there can be no prior performance, or plenitudinous point of simplicity, that serves to structure this complexity in the manner declared. Notwithstanding, in view of this reconfiguration of the question of essence one already begins to notice a surprising conjunction of verb and noun attending these two most influential words of 20th Century philosophy: the verbal substantive *Sein* and the deverbal noun *différance*. Is this mere coincidence; an accident of history; of marginal significance?¹² Verbality is not intended metaphysically – identifying some hidden plenitude behind plenitude, an ethereal potential of the verb that enlivens the body of the noun, for instance. Nonetheless, as an analytical tool it does possess the facility of extension beyond the phenomenal, beyond plenitudinous space-time. For it seems important today to find a way to enquire responsibly of *différance*; to understand better the peculiar characteristics of the verb and its deverbal suffix, and of what (in the language of essence-difference) would properly be considered the pre-pre-originary interaction of the two. Obviously such an analysis does not attempt to identify what *différance* is or what it is made of. Rather, it is a case of asking ‘how goes it with *différance*? How does *différance* peculiarly resolve the aporia of time? Without doubt, the excess of this “re-” must be given due regard if our question is to be heard correctly. The *re-* and the *-solve* inaugurate a complexity that can never be resolved in time, for the “re-” is that which solves the aporia; *it is the way of the aporia, the way of having no way*. So it is that with this perhaps ungainly neologism, ‘verbality,’ we nonetheless believe one finds space to inquire of the characteristics of the root verb and of the role played by its deverbal, middle voiced suffixation; the first stage of the exponential analysis of *différance*.

How goes it with *différance*? How is it that, *différer* ‘ances,’ and in so doing orchestrates even plenitude and non-plenitude as their excess? *Verbality*

figures an attempt to distil from the hyphenic complexity of the participial between, that which does not seemingly succumb to such complexity: verbality as the *structure* of this complexity. An analytical device extending beyond plenitudinous space-time to embrace even time's excess, at first *verbality* merely reiterates the mechanisms of *différance*. But by examining how verbal and nominal effects issue in a participative explication, one is able to eventually 'get a handle' on *différance*; one is able to observe the characteristic spacance of the *différential* system. No matter how middle-voiced it may be (for the middle-voice is not nothing), the 'ance' of *différance* is as participial as its more active and passive cousins. Indeed, given the form of participation proper to the middle-voice one might regard it as the participative par excellence. This participial "ance," in the smooth spreadliness of its middle-voice, lends to the deverbal noun its element of orchestrative spacing, as the verb lends its peculiar complexity, impetus and paths. In the simplest terms, we ask whether *différance*, so busy, so brilliant, is yet safe in assuming this spacing, or whether – notwithstanding its undeniable complexity, its escape from plenitude and its middling-voice – it still ought rather to attempt to *rewrite* such spacing.

Différer 'ances.' With this description we do not presume any apriority for the verb and the suffix, and say nothing more than '*différance*.' The participative moment does not precede *différance*, in such a way as to suggest that one might uncover a more originary opposition that would thus set deconstruction on its way once more. *Différance* is not simply a noun. Neither can it be simply a verb, a pure becoming, which is why there is no pure *différance* either way, no "difference in itself."¹³ Nonetheless, the orchestrated spacing that exemplifies the order of the verb-noun testifies to, and is demanding of, the particular 'ancing' of *différance*'s peculiar verb. So emerges the choreography characteristic of the nonidentical same, a choreography with which, in the way that it goes, we express only agreement and respect; a thoroughly complex 'ancing' (a '*différer*-ancing') structuring the question of essence received from the tradition in its particular way. We do not attempt to distend this question further, acknowledging the brilliance of its delimitation.

The axiomatic realization of the participial is an inauguration, the inauguration a regional orchestration. Do our descriptions here attempt to account for *différance*? By no means. One cannot *account* for this deverbal noun: as though we might uncover an unlimited profit, an essence behind essence-difference, laid-up in some ontotheological vault where moth and rust do not corrupt. Such accounting remains within the limits of the question of essence. The participial is neither empirical

nor transcendental but precisely that which organizes this difference. The question of being is neither temporal nor metaphysical but accounts for these parameters, and the challenge is to think the question accordingly. One cannot 'crack-open' *différance* to reveal another *What is?* behind the scenes. Situated at the very limits of the ontological, implacable *différance* will not succumb to such a mode of enquiry and if we wish to press this element of spacing further we cannot simply repeat our question over and over. If *différance* describes the limits of the question of essence then any question aimed at *différance* from within those limits will break harmlessly against its flanks.

Accordingly, it is not my intention to account for *différance* but rather to spur *différance* to account. If with the notion of verblativity one is able to acquire a certain analytical purchase on *différance*, therefore, it is still important to develop forms of 'critique' suitable to the continuation of the analysis. Although initially adopting a deconstructive stance, the enquiry must explore other ways in which to press this unaccountable element of spacing; a *spacance* that, despite everything, returns each time the same. We urge *différance* to engage with this portentous metaphoric spacing (both the spacing of metaphor and the metaphor of space), in an exponential self-analysis; to ask itself whether its spacing *comes too soon*. If so, then the potency of its own issue will be at issue, threatening a suspension of the movement of the orchestrative 're-.' For certainly this could not be any sort of plenitudinous spacing, it could not be spacing *as such*. So presumably *différance* will be able to rewrite its quasi-dependency. Like the circling logic of addiction, however, in rewriting this spacing *différance* only catches itself again, relying on that very same element.

Paranoia

Spacing comes too soon. *Différance* participates too readily, too determinately, in this spacing *as* this spacing. The economies that characterize the *différential* system cannot account for such a moment, for its necessity or its persistence. The *relève* does not give rise to this element of spacing but relies on it before ever the complex dimensionality of the 're-' is augured. This realization, in no way a realization, a reliance before any reliance, preludes and institutes all balancing of profit and loss. Beyond all play of proper and improper, beyond all rhetorical flourishes, scare-quotes and caveats, this internal, middle-voiced spacing appears in some sense *proper to the différential system*. Of course this 'properly' could never be a proper 'proper.' Or, rather, we must strive to understand this propriety beyond

the play of proper and improper proper to quasiontology. Indeed, we must constantly maintain the highest regard for *différance* in all of our dealings, and if we oppose verb and suffix it is not in an attempt to illustrate what remains metaphysical in the grammatical system in which this deverbal noun is undeniably inscribed. To avoid the repetitive banality of such a demonstration, however, it will be necessary to develop a method (of sorts) suitable to the task. *One's analysis must slide with différence*, applying itself to the between just *as différence* differentiates between; an 'as' more acute than any plenitudinous 'now'; the 'as' of the hyphenic dimension of *différer's* 'ancing.' In this way the analysis applies itself to *différance in différence*: before *différance* is able to issue in space and time; before the 'ance' is able to accomplish the non-plenitudinous spacance upon which the 're-' of the *relève* relies. Pursuing *différance différencially*, pressed up against *différance's* hyphenic 'ancing.' Imposing itself on the between at that very moment when *différance* tries to 'give us the slip,' the analysis applies itself to *différance* just as *différance* secretes itself from plenitude.

It is in this aspect that verbality does not simply reiterate but will start, by way of the exponential analysis, toward a paraphrastic account of *différance*. For, if *différance* is constrained to rewrite itself other than itself, if this element of spacing is to unfold quasi-metaphorically, *and if this very quasi-metaphoric unfolding unavoidably ascribes to this elemental spacing in its spacing*, then mere rewriting will prove inadequate to itself. Differing and deferring faster and faster without ever quite coming to the issue, breathless *différance* will be constrained to an internal dimension. Through the paranoia of a compulsive re-writing it can never write off, *différance's* self-affliction will mark the curve of an exponential textual slippage; a parataxis *différance* cannot contextualize, not even via the motif of the 're-'. This transversal curve (*sinus*) marking a dimension of exponential slippage in the interstices of *différance*, insinuates a parallelism. Ontologically this insinuation makes no sense at all. If formally one can speak of a para-noia that panics even quasi-ontological concepts, empirically one would refer to the startle as the delimitation of all empiricism, phenomenological or otherwise (Love, 2008). If, however, one is able to find a way to paraphrase this insinuation, then one raises the possibility of non-ontological modalities of meaning that remain irreducible to the hither and thither of onto-logics.

Within *différance* one begins to witness the distension of an irresolvable direction, an *indifference* that nonetheless troubles *différance*, a resonant modulation that does not direct itself along the path of the *relève*. *Différance* sets about the task of rewriting with consummate tenacity; a speed

and rigor unmatched by plenitudinous forms of analysis, only *différance* could be this fast. But harrying the *relève*, interrupting its moment of issue, the analysis directs the dissolute wayward trace into a nonplenitudinous interstice torn in the fabric of the text. Never resolving the matter, never coming to the point, *différance* subjects itself to a spur that even the future perfect fails to reach or gloss (a dimensionality it will not have assumed via *repetition*). The exponential exposition thus slices through the ligamentatious traces and chases *différance* into a narrow, internal dimension. Along the coursing of this resonant trajectory there is insinuated a certain parallelism of regions. Despite its constantly being-on-the-go, *différance* cannot straddle the indifference of paranoia, and so a non-*différential* relation emerges between *différance* and that which is 'beyond the text'. The para-noia that afflicts *différance* thus points toward a potential set of conditions of possibility of meaning that are irreducible to essence-difference; conditions of possibility that avoid syntactical (and thus semantical) classification.

A resonant trajectory, then, imploding along the course of exponential slippage that marks the disruption of the trace in its movement of tracing, the analysis takes the form of a compulsive re-writing of the element of spacing – a compulsion that seeks something different to writing, but that can only ever succeed in writing differently. This indifference denies *différance* the relief of the *relève*. Unable to disseminate its element of spacing, *différance* plays with itself, putting itself on hold. Constraining itself for fear of coming too quickly, an internal drama arrests the issue of spacing – *différance* being unable to make its spacing an issue. For it is this element that inoculates *différance* against the imperative and absolute “*Différer!*” Without this participial spreadliness, all would collapse into absolute presence and death. Like some mysterious quintessence, as ephemeral as *différance*, nothing apart from *différance*, this element stubbornly remains, striating its own failed rewriting. The trace thrown off the scent, *différance* thus loses its way, engrossed in an internal audit it can never ‘sign off;’ struggling to balance an unaccountable profit, a debt it can neither renegotiate nor write off. With this, *différance* forbids itself any orchestrative return. Held back from the *relève*, just going through the motions yet for all that unable to resist the spur, fractious *différance* presses into this strange spaceless place.

Différance simply cannot rewrite itself fast enough to rewrite itself. Scratching away in irritation, a form of textual para-noia¹⁴ interjects in the busy orchestrations of *différance*. There will be no time for etymology or difference here; the equivocal senses of the ‘para-’ can no longer

be figured *différentially* – our context destroys context. The paranoia that afflicts *différance* is not governed by the *relève*. On the contrary, paranoia is the inability of the *relève* to relieve. Paranoia is utterly indifferent to our paranoia. It has no reason, no illumination, no end in sight: there is no aposiopesis for the paranoid. Progeny of the question ‘Why?’, there is no ‘What?’ to appease paranoia. Collapsingly maintaining itself, maintaining spacing in rewriting spacing, like Oedipus fleeing fate, *différance* unravels in the paragraphia of a writing without difference. There is no deferment here, no delay: *différance* startled; thought thinking everything together and at once. Paranoia does not move us on in an orderly orchestration, giving one time and space for *reflection*. Nothing comes since nothing ‘comes’; everything crowding in, jostling, preventing progression or *différentiation*. Tumbling gerundially, *différance* collapses toward an acuity opened in the domain of the verb-noun. And yet this curve insinuates other potentialities for meaning. Cutting across the threads of syntactical sense, paranoia alludes to a meaning that *différance* will never get. This allusion, occurring at the point at which the exponential analysis converges with its insinuation, the point at which the parallel meet and *différance* surpasses itself, suggests not only the delimitation of the (quasi)ontological comportment but, with its utter indifference to *différance*, promises also other modulations and other questions.

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Notes

1 Most acutely, perhaps, the conceit that time might give itself to writing at all. That it might bend this way or that before our prose; that one might have time, when in fact for so very long we have all been had by time.

2 A difficult word, 'logic,' but then all words are difficult. Better yet, all words are (im)possible, there no longer being such things as words. A mere glimmering skin of meaning made possible by the unending reflective play of *différance*, words fail us when faced with this aposiopesis. Whilst this essay is littered with all sorts of impossible words ('logic,' 'element,' 'structure') most of all there is no such thing as the word *différance*, which fact would seem to challenge the very basis of our later analysis. Notwithstanding, while reason might not be able to encapsulate *différance*, it can nonetheless travel its traces; the traces, for instance, that connect the word *différance* to its conditions of (im)possibility. Thus although on the one hand there are no words, and while on the other hand every word more or less says *différance*, yet there is still a propriety to words, an improperly proper way to speak of *différance*, a propriety the word 'word,' for instance, more or less lacks. The ensuing analysis of *différance* is accordingly concerned less with the word *différance* than it is with the traces that slip away in constituting this word, and yet do so *différentially*. Said differently, in as much as the word *différance* can be considered an empirical supplement that completes the quasi-transcendentality of *différance*, one is compelled to shift the analysis, more or less, to the latter word *différance*, now rewritten. Whichever way it goes, our analysis attempts to keep pace, pursuing *différance* this way and that way and once more in between, pressing *différance* to surpass itself.

3 If *différance* is indeed on its way toward a consummate modality of ontological difference, it is precisely because it does justice to this complexity, spreading itself impartially and equanimously 'between' in a way that difference *qua* contradiction and 'difference in itself' do not. This tendency toward utter description (description to the point of nihilism) characterizes both the ontological and, to a lesser degree, the epistemological trajectories of philosophical inquiry, but it is the questioning comportment specific to ontology that remains our primary focus in relation to Derrida; not to ontologize being, after all, still to ontologize (c.f. Derrida, 1978, p. 152).

4 Despite the proscription of the naturalistic fallacy, ontopolitics persists with the belief that essence-difference can somehow produce a properly aligned and ontologically founded political ethic—a description of prescription. The ontological question thus remains the determining question for political philosophy, and both metaethics and politics only seem thinkable from out of this (quasi)ontology. What we elsewhere attempt to think is a way of formulating an alternate question (of sorts), a non-ontological question, which for this reason could not simply be a different question. Levinas encourages us in this respect when he broaches, perhaps for the first time in the history of Western thought, a question of *quisnity* not thought from the basis of *quiddity* (Levinas, 1998, p23ff; Levinas 1978, p. 43ff). To this point, to read Levinas seriously has been to read him ontologically; which is already to say, *différentially*. *Autrement q'être* notwithstanding, this is because Levinas writes ontologically,

at least in the extended sense we now wish to ascribe to that word (a question of essence that also questions essence). This said, the possibility of a non-ontological reading remains.

5 We have in mind Masaccio's Eve (*Expulsion from Paradise*). Beyond the (un)concealing play of her hands – which simple gestures establish the economies of essence-difference across ethics, politics, theology, demanding a reading longer than we can provide here – it is her face that sets another trajectory for enquiry. Hollowed by the desperation of a question that history has been unable to satisfy, surely this is a face that exceeds the play of essence-difference, if not for the reasons preferred by obvious others.

6 This is not simply to note the importance of Heidegger's ontological difference for Derrida's development of *différance*, although obviously this fact is not merely incidental. Rather, this multivocal formulation attempts to capture the demands supplementarity places on *différance*.

7 Essential to *différance*! It is hard to imagine a more properly inappropriate expression (unless perhaps it is the equally telling phrase 'difference in itself,' which also more than adequately articulates the parameters of the comportment 'essence-difference'). Such 'essentiality,' then, could no longer be thought in opposition to difference, it will not be the *essence* of *différance* in this sense, all of which demands that we rigorously negotiate the complexity of non-identical sameness in our efforts to appreciate the orchestration of plenitude and non-plenitude through the verb *différer*. In order to appear less abruptly antagonistic, however, one might favor the phrase '*structurally indispensable*,' but truthfully the difference will prove inconsequential. From out of the negotiation will arise certain corollaries we believe to be applicable to any *différential* system.

8 A forthcoming work will explain how one might employ the notion of parataxis in an attempt to step axiomatically beyond the orchestrations of essence-difference. Taken in a certain way, this instance of acute parataxis will assist in an exposition of the surpassing of metaphor in indifference and the appellation of other modalities of meaning.

9 We use this term for the sake of accessibility. To be rigorous one would have to complicate this formulation a little, referring more precisely to the 'verb-nouning' of the verb-noun. For there is no pure verb. The verb – we argue in familiar terms – can only verb, is only able to *participate*, through explication and explication requires the nominal in some affixation or another. Verbality as orchestration implicates both verb and noun. Nouns verb as space times, and even that most verbal of verbs (should such a designation now remain appropriate) was given to us substantively with *Sein*. Ontologically, that is to say, the verb already nouns, establishing the participial between of essence-difference. This introductory piece attempts to set course toward an appreciation of the explication of the noun-verb *différance*. The term *verbality* will first find a degree of precision for itself in relation to this suffixial explication; an explication which is simultaneously an orchestration; an explicative orchestration that inaugurates the irreducibly complex spacing of the *différential* in the participial spreadliness characteristic of the 'ance.' In truth, if one could contrive to read the root noun of this term *verbality* (i.e. the noun 'verb') verbally, or, by comparison, if one were able to summon with the adjective of this de-adjectival noun a sense of the verbing of the verb, then the complicity of, and necessity of both, verb and noun becomes apparent enough in this more convenient term. Verbality, that is to say less painfully, refers to neither the verb nor the noun in a

straightforward way, but to the deconstruction this opposition invites (and here one might compare the opposition/deconstruction Heidegger establishes/invites with his *Existenz* and *Realität*), but to a deconstruction that is itself once again orchestrated by this verbality. Why, in an already overdetermined field, do we insist on redrawing this opposition between *Existenz* and *Realität* in terms of verb and noun? It may well be that, notwithstanding the potential misunderstandings we risk, our two terms do reconfigure the Heideggerian opposition in an interesting manner, but why not simply proceed to a deconstruction of this opposition (in such a way as to reaffirm the irreducibly aporetic nature of time)? Why take the time, why take the risk? Precisely because we believe that this aporia, whilst no doubt avoiding the temporalisation of the excess of time, nonetheless *orchestrates* time, and that this orchestration is performed by the explication of the verb *différer* in the deverbal noun *différance*. Our reconfiguration of this opposition provides a way to examine the orchestration of this verb, which as supplemental is only every other verb in *différance*. Hence, the verbality of the verb. Thus, whilst initially merely repeating these well-known motifs, we will not rest with them. Neither verb nor noun, neither *Existenz* nor *Realität*, but more than this, *neither either nor both* – neither either nor the difference between the two – the tumbling of the *gerund* will aspire to dramatize (without orchestrating) an *occurrence* elsewhere.

10 See in particular Derrida's (1982) *White Mythology*.

11 That plenitudinous thing we refer to as time, just as for any plenitude, is, one might say, "the trace of the erasure of the trace" of *différance* (Derrida, 1982:66). As we know, these traces cannot bear the weight of metaphysics, they do not refer to any presence, and yet they do bear the weight of reason, more or less. Thought *travels* these hyphenic traces that link essence and *différance* in *différance*.

12 There is perhaps no longer any such thing as the purely accidental, at least not for essence-difference, where every path has already been broken before ever it is traversed.

13 Here of course we gesture again toward the Deleuzian formulation, a pure becoming that nonetheless requires nodes of being, a deterritorialisation that can seemingly only live with itself in reterritorialisation. A forthcoming work deals more respectfully and sensitively with the specific modality of difference proper to both Nietzsche and Deleuze, but concludes nonetheless that ontologically speaking difference is definitive. Political ontologies such as these result in metaphysics, precisely owing to their prescriptive tendency disguised as a descriptive function.

14 Resembling thought but not quite a thought, a thought too fast for ontology, as a philosophical practice, to apprehend. Somehow alongside or parallel to received ontological thought. An abnormal or defective philosophical ontology, a para-dox, opposed to thought or beyond (*para*) thought; opposed to thought beyond any opposition to thought. Perhaps even a preparation (*parare*) for thought. A preparation and defence (*parare*) against ontology's tendency to run up against predetermined axiomatic limits.

Performing Philosophy: Beauvoir's Methodology and its Ethical and Political Implications

Dr. Christine Daigle and Dr. Louise Renée

Abstract

Simone de Beauvoir's contribution to ethics and politics is articulated through a methodology that successfully renders philosophy as literary and literature as philosophical. Her existential-phenomenological stance permeates her corpus and dictates a philosophical approach that avoids theoretical treatises in favour of philosophy as a way of life which is communicated in a variety of modes of expression. The *Ethics of Ambiguity* furnishes us with an example of said philosophy insofar as it performs the philosophy it offers and thereby appeals to the reader to engage in ethical and political action in her own life.

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Simone de Beauvoir's works have had a tremendous impact in feminist theory and beyond. *The Second Sex*, arguably her best-known essay, gave feminist thinkers much to ponder and furthermore, the sex/gender distinction it implicitly introduced renewed debates about women's oppression. What is less appreciated is the degree to which the Beauvoirian corpus in every shape and form is deeply philosophical. This may have to do with Beauvoir's own lack of appreciation for her work as philosophical. Indeed, she famously said in an interview with Margaret A. Simons, "[...] for me, a philosopher is someone like Spinoza, Hegel, or like Sartre: someone who builds a great system [...] it is someone who truly constructs a philosophy."¹ Indeed, Beauvoir is not a philosopher in this narrow sense of the word nor is she interested in doing philosophy in this way. Rather, she is a philosopher in a broader, more interesting, sense in which her project resembles that of Renaissance Humanist thinkers and Enlightenment philosophers. Like them she did not engage in the elaboration of a systematic treatise but rather she used many different forms of writing including philosophical essays, novels, letters, autobiographical writings, diaries, political articles, and even one play. Further, she shared the views of Renaissance Humanists regarding the role of the writer as

social critic as well as about the importance of civic involvement.²

In this essay, we will explore Beauvoir's writings as forming a body of work that presents and performs an existential and phenomenological philosophy. We will begin by explaining her philosophical point of view and the methodology that she favours in light of that philosophical stance. We will discuss her view on the ethical and political role of writing and in so doing we will provide an analysis of *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. What our essay will show is that Beauvoir's works perform the philosophy they present and thus successfully communicate with their readers and trigger an ethical and political response in them.

An existential-phenomenological point of view

In her writings and in interviews, Beauvoir offers two different ways of conceiving of philosophy: philosophy as system building and philosophy as a way of life. The latter definition of philosophy is broader and is present early on in her writings. We only need to consider her view in the essay "Existentialism and Popular Wisdom" from 1945 to see an early evidence of this notion of philosophy as a way of life. There she is defending existentialism as a philosophical stance and concludes the essay by saying, "In truth, there is no divorce between philosophy and life. Every living step is a philosophical choice and the ambition of a philosophy worthy of the name is to be a way of life that brings its justification with itself."³ She is taking a clear stand in this statement, namely there is a philosophy that constitutes itself as system building presented in grandiloquent treatises and then there is philosophy as a way of life. Beauvoir is incisive: it is the latter that is more valuable. Despite the support she showed Sartre and his *Being and Nothingness* and despite all of her interest in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, she is sceptical of the potential of these treatises to explain our human reality in full.

She shares Nietzsche's distrust of those he calls "Systematizers." She might want to issue the same warning as Nietzsche in *Dawn*: "Beware of Systematizers!— Systematizers practise a kind of play-acting: in as much as they want to fill out a system and round off its horizon..." (§318) and again later in *Twilight of the Idols* he says, "I mistrust all systematizers and avoid them. The will to a system is a lack of integrity" ("Maxims and Arrows," §26). In his notebooks, Nietzsche goes even further and refers to systematizers as counterfeiters. Given that Beauvoir's endeavour in *The Second Sex* constitutes an exploration and exposé of various erroneous

narratives that have been constructed about man and woman, such as that of biology, psychoanalysis, historical materialism, and more, she is really exposing these systems as counterfeits.

According to Beauvoir the existentialist-phenomenologist, when one philosophizes, one must be able to tackle human existence in all its complexities and ambiguities. She is forthcoming about her position; thus, in the introduction to *The Second Sex*, she claims, “The perspective we have adopted is one of existentialist morality”⁴ and again in the chapter on “Biological Data”, she explains that the perspective she adopts is that of Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty.⁵ Her review of Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* testifies to her enthusiasm with his phenomenology, one which emphasizes embodiment and ambiguity. Therefore, the perspective she is embracing is that of existential phenomenology. That perspective, however, requires a mode of philosophizing that expands beyond the narrow confines of the philosophical treatise. This explains why Beauvoir, along with many other existentialist thinkers, opted to write essays, novels, plays, autobiographies, etc. Even a more systematic phenomenologist like Merleau-Ponty used literary accounts and first person narratives to better circumscribe the notions he was tackling in *Phenomenology of Perception*. Likewise, *Being and Nothingness* and *The Second Sex* are permeated by literary accounts. One feature that definitely makes *The Second Sex* a phenomenological work is the use of multiple narratives. What contributes to making the work so long is the quantity of quotes that Beauvoir provides from women writing about their experiences as women. The quantity and variety of quotes is astounding, but it is what allows her to describe the lived experience of women.

It is clear that for Beauvoir there is no strict dividing line between philosophy and literature just as there is no separation between philosophy and life. Reflecting on Beauvoir’s methodology, Penelope Deutscher writes, “Beauvoir made the literary philosophical... What if she had allowed the philosophy to be more literary?”⁶ However, this implies that Beauvoir’s philosophical essays were not literary which, as we will show, is a misreading and a misunderstanding of Beauvoir’s methodological stance. Nevertheless, Deutscher argues that a text on ambiguity must be written in an ambiguous style: “If there is a necessary ambiguity in seeking to grasp the thickness of things, can there really be clear and unambiguous statements about this ambiguity in philosophy, any more than there can be in literature – particularly if the former has turned to the latter because faced with that very dilemma?”⁷

Indeed, a narrow type of philosophizing might be problematic because it cannot hope to address ambiguity. However, there are methodological strategies that Beauvoir adopts and which allow her to address ambiguity without writing ambiguously. Philosophy that is literary and literature that is philosophical (literature in Beauvoir's case encompasses fiction as well as autobiographical writings) is the most apt approach to the ambiguous nature of human beings and of existence in general. The use of different modes of expression is at the heart of such an endeavour.

In this context, it is important to consider Beauvoir's views on literature and its role. She has theorized quite extensively on the social and political role of literature, fiction, and non-fiction alike. She conceives of literature as a metaphysical adventure. Its task is to uncover truth(s) about the world, and this truth, being constituted by the intentional consciousness the human being is, is necessarily subjective. In her "Literature and Metaphysics," she says, "A metaphysical novel that is honestly read, and honestly written, provides a disclosure of existence in a way unequalled by any other mode of expression. [...] insofar as it is successful, it strives to grasp man and human events in relation to the totality of the world, and since it alone can succeed where pure literature and pure philosophy fail, i.e., in evoking in its living unity and its fundamental living ambiguity, this destiny that is ours and that is inscribed both in time and in eternity."⁸ As we have suggested earlier, even at her philosophical best, Beauvoir does not offer what she qualifies as "pure philosophy," nor is she interested in doing so. Because her philosophy is existential and phenomenological, it avoids the traps that "pure philosophy" inevitably encounters – the philosophy that attempts to establish a systematic understanding of human reality. Beauvoir's works do not systematize human experience and do not dwell in the realm of abstract principles. Instead they focus on the concrete ambiguous experiences of human beings. Beauvoir's works – literary, philosophical, and otherwise – all provide the "disclosure of existence" she is seeking. Further, this disclosure entails an appeal to the reader to think, be critical and, as a result, act. One is always speaking from one's own perspective and this is also necessarily true of the writer. By unveiling reality from her own perspective, the writer plays an important role that renders literature a political commitment.⁹

Another important aspect of Beauvoir's writings is the manner in which she philosophizes in the various modes of expression she chooses. As Sara Heinämaa argues, Beauvoir is more interested in questioning than in constructing a world. Thus, Heinämaa understands Beauvoir's writings as an unveiling that questions the reader.¹⁰ This unveiling and questioning

is done in a non-systematic fashion, thus allowing for ambiguity to be unveiled. Similarly, Ulrika Björk sees this unveiling in the work of Beauvoir, although under a Kierkegaardian light. She explains that systematic philosophy and its conceptual abstract language “is capable of expressing only what is universal in character. It therefore fails to account for human existence in its pregnant sense, that is, as a universal *and* singular reality.”¹¹ Therefore, like Kierkegaard, Beauvoir is critical of “pure philosophy” and explores different modes of expression and philosophizing.

For both Kierkegaard and Beauvoir, it is a matter of adopting indirect communication. Björk explains, “While direct communication ‘speaks’ its meaning abstractly and by means of conceptual language, indirect communication does not speak. Rather, it ‘shows’ or makes meaning manifest by the presence of contingent details and the use of different narrative voices.”¹² This is the disclosure of existence, which is the task of meta-physical literature as identified by Beauvoir. Beauvoir’s writings indeed aim to “show” rather than “speak.” This showing is an appeal to the reader to act.

In *Pyrrhus and Cineas*, Beauvoir had explained that one’s free project stands in need of validation by the freedom of the Other. According to her, one always appeals to the Other to validate one’s own projects. The act of writing is one form that the appeal to the Other may take. By disclosing existence in writing, the writer appeals to the reader to validate her project of disclosure of existence, but she also appeals to the freedom of the reader to undertake to act. Writing is thus a political gesture since it discloses to the reader a world in need of changing and appeals to the reader to act in order to change the world. When communication is successful between author and reader, an act of liberation may take place, conditions for the flourishing of freedom may be put in place. This is the way in which literature is committed and can serve an ethical and political function.

Beauvoir appeals to her readers by making use of different modes of expression. It thus appears that she is trying to maximize the impact of her appeal by communicating through these various modes. It is interesting to ponder whether there is an advantage to literary writing as opposed to more phenomenological writings – keeping in mind that no strict distinction is to be drawn between them for Beauvoir.

If, as Erika Ruonakoski suggests, “The role of literature is to facilitate communication within separation, or, in other words, grant us access to

the other's world, to the first-person perspective of the other,"¹³ than it seems that literature may have a privileged stance after all especially if the aim of literature is to communicate and incite action in the reader. Ruonakoski points out, "all literary works are essentially a search, which – in opposition to scientific writing – operates on the level of non-knowledge and communicates the meaning of lived experience to the readers."¹⁴ The successful work of literature offers its insights in a non-didactic, non-dogmatic way. Phenomenology is a type of philosophy that explores the meaning of lived experience in a way in which traditional systematic, what Beauvoir calls "pure," philosophy is unable. For example, *The Second Sex*, replete as it is with first-person accounts, certainly serves the same function as literature as described here, i.e., it unveils a world and multiple perspectives to a reader while constituting an appeal to the reader.

According to some commentators, literary writing holds an advantage over other modes of expression. Ulrika Björk considers novels and autobiographies and their focus on singular experience to be "privileged places of intersubjectivity."¹⁵ To her, the novel is advantageous in that it provides a multiplicity of perspectives while the autobiography provides merely one. If she is correct, one would have to claim that phenomenological writings such as *The Second Sex* are at the same level as novels since they too provide a multiplicity of perspectives. We would argue however, that to try to establish a hierarchy among the different modes of expression used by Beauvoir is unhelpful. As we said earlier, there is no sharp distinction in Beauvoir between literary and philosophical writing. All of her writings are philosophical and literary at the same time and in different degrees. What is important for us to highlight is how these different modes of writing all constitute a performance of the philosophy of ambiguity. That being said, while novels may not be more advantageous in Björk's sense, they are more evidently providing us with an "ambiguous" account of ambiguity. Further, it is our contention that all of Beauvoir's writings accomplish this task. For example, autobiographical writing allows the writer to make the case that it is possible to perform one's philosophy and incorporate it in one's life project or rather to make it one's life project. Beauvoir's memoirs are an integral part of her self-creation as both a writer and a philosopher. They serve to explore the life of single individuals from her own subjective point of view and this is done as a means to test the applicability of her own philosophy of ambiguity. As our analysis is about to show, philosophical writings such as *The Ethics of Ambiguity* also perform philosophy, albeit in a different way.

The Example of The Ethics of Ambiguity

Going back to Deutscher's question and regarding *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, one may ask whether a text on ambiguity can be anything other than ambiguous. While Deutscher makes an interesting point, we are suggesting something different; the text is not ambiguous in the ordinary sense of the term; rather, it actually *performs an ethics of ambiguity*. Both author and reader experience the metaphysical adventure—*l'aventure spirituelle*—that Beauvoir discussed in "Literature and Metaphysics." *The Ethics of Ambiguity* is obviously not a novel, but we contend that it employs certain literary devices that have the same effect on us as if we *were* reading a metaphysical novel. What if the style that Beauvoir used makes us *feel* ambiguity in a visceral and meaningful way, so much so that we are shaken at our very core and even possibly transformed?

Regardless, the overt purpose of *The Ethics of Ambiguity* is to defend existentialism and to show how an ethics can be derived from its key ideas. As many scholars have pointed out,¹⁶ Beauvoir develops an original ethics that she herself had probably not foreseen before she started writing. From this point of view, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* proves to be a spiritual adventure for her as well as for the reader. In "Literature and Metaphysics," she writes, "as the story unfolds, [the writer] sees truths appear that were previously unknown to him, questions whose solutions he does not possess" ("LM" 272). Beauvoir composed her ethical essay in precisely the same way given that it is *not* a "rigid theory," a "preconstructed ideological framework," nor a "fully constituted, self-sufficient system" ("LM" 272). On the contrary, the way that it was written reminds us more of a "novelistic experiment" where the author "takes sides, runs risks" ("LM" 272) and attempts to grasp reality not by intelligence alone, but as a metaphysical experience. We grasp it in "its subjective, singular, and dramatic character, as well as its ambiguity" ("LM" 275). *The Ethics of Ambiguity* discloses ambiguity as a "living relation that is action and feeling before making itself thought" ("LM" 275). And just as with a metaphysical novel, this essay requires us to participate in the adventure because it appeals to our freedom ("LM" 276). In other words, this essay *performs* the very thing that it urges us to feel for ourselves – ambiguity.

In particular, three stylistic choices destabilize the text so that it never offers us a safe resting-place: paradoxes, porous profiles, and perpetual permutations. Beauvoir does not explain philosophical ideas: she *suggests* them by using paradoxes.¹⁷ She divides inauthentic attitudes into five porous profiles that flow in and out of one another. All the while her key

notion of ambiguity continuously sustains multiple permutations. This may lead us to question whether this is a philosophically “immature” text or whether Beauvoir is performing a different kind of philosophy, offering us a blueprint or rather a musical score that we may interpret as we see fit. Back in 1989, in her *L'Étude et le rouet*, Michèle Le Doeuff astutely noted that Beauvoir never claimed to have adopted an existentialist *philosophy* but rather, an existentialist *ethics*. Her aim is not to *convince* us of anything, but rather to be the catalyst of an inner transformation within each reader.

Paradox is the rhetorical figure of ambiguity and is the means Beauvoir uses to circumscribe her notion of ambiguity. A paradox proposes two apparently contradictory ideas and maintains a constant tension between the two terms, never offering the possibility of a synthesis. Beauvoir delights in using paradoxes in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. At the very beginning of the text, she points out the dichotomies of our human condition and calls them paradoxes because they cannot be dismissed nor can they be synthesized. She explains, “A new paradox is thereby introduced into his destiny. ‘Rational animal,’ ‘thinking reed,’ he escapes from his natural condition without, however, freeing himself from it.”¹⁸ She uses paradoxes throughout her text; for example she writes, “by taking the world away from me, others also give it to me, since a thing is given to me only by the movement which snatches it from me” (EA 71). “its being immediately generated against men” (EA 99).

The most difficult paradox appears at the beginning of the text when, quoting Sartre, she says that man makes himself a lack of being in order to be: “His being is a lack of being, but this lack has a way of being which is precisely existence” (EA 13). Near the end of the text, she claims, “it is by making himself a lack of being that man exists, and positive existence is this lack assumed but not eliminated” (EA 118). This paradox is never explained, but Beauvoir seems to be suggesting that our very being *is* a paradox. Given her phrasing, it appears that “being” stands for immanence while “existence” stands for transcendence. This distinction would be similar to Sartre’s distinction between being in-itself and being for-itself. However, while these are in opposition and radically distinguished in Sartre the distinction Beauvoir provides is not that clear. The binaries of the paradox remain intertwined and there is movement back and forth between them. This movement entails that Beauvoir does not decidedly claim that either term is good or bad. Thus, the paradox quoted above is the very image of our ambiguity. In other words, this paradox is the rhetorical figure that best encapsulates the idea of ambiguity because mean-

ing can never settle comfortably into a fixed interpretation.

This particular paradox allows us to understand how ambiguity relates to freedom. According to Beauvoir, there are three kinds of freedom: ontological freedom which amounts to a natural spontaneity that is implicit to our being, moral freedom which is the decision to do something with our ontological freedom, and concrete freedom, the conditions that allow us to act on these decisions.¹⁹ She implores us to choose an intentional and purposeful project that originates from our freedom and then to wholeheartedly take it up. However, one must do so without losing one's freedom completely. She explains, "though engaged in his undertaking, [an individual] is at the same time detached from the goal" (*EA* 59). In other words, we have to be fully engaged in a specific project as if our life depended on it while maintaining the crucial distance from it that prevents us from conferring unconditional value upon it. If we do lose ourselves in our project our freedom becomes absorbed in it and we settle comfortably into security. One may wonder whether there is anything wrong with such a security. However, if freedom rests it disappears and we forget that it must be in a forward motion, constantly striving. If we lose ourselves in a project, we betray the truth of our metaphysical ambiguity and belie our situation as transcendent beings. Thus, freedom and ambiguity go hand in hand: we cannot fall into dogmatism or even certainty because if we come to a safe resting-place we are refusing to acknowledge the constant tension of our multiple dichotomies. Ambiguity, as expressed in the various paradoxes presented by Beauvoir, is the threshold to this important insight. Because ambiguity maintains the tension between two terms, it prevents us from falling into certainty. Constant questioning is the very spirit of freedom: just like the endless dialogue between Pyrrhus and Cinéas; we move forward, carried by the movement of our actions, but we also pause to reflect on our actions, enjoying the temporary respite of ataraxia. This never-ending alternating motion, between action and reflection, is the way ambiguity works and it entails that meaning is never fixed once and for all. This is the very essence of freedom according to Beauvoir.

Beauvoir develops this idea further by giving examples of various ways in which we try to avoid the ambiguity of our condition. She organizes general attitudes into five types or profiles: the sub-man, the serious man, the nihilist, the adventurer, and the passionate man. She carefully explains how each attitude can easily slip into an other; this is how each attitude relates to and overlaps with other attitudes. The categories are not rigid, thus the same person may hesitate between several attitudes at once or

even combine them. The reader would like to think that these are neat subdivisions of lived freedom, but on the contrary, they are porous profiles that merge into one another. However, each type is judged according to two key factors: 1) one's attitude towards freedom and 2) one's attitude towards others. Freedom is making choices in the absence of all external value-based authority while being conscious of the impact those actions have on others. Therefore, the ethical person will be constantly on guard, in a state of internal tension to ensure that she is always making decisions based on her own values, and that her decisions help others attain their own freedom.

Each of the five attitudes can be seen as varying in degree, not content. The sub-man does not employ his freedom and does not consider others at all. The serious man sinks his freedom into a cause and does not consider the impact of his actions on others. The nihilist sees the lie of the absolute cause but does not use his freedom to create value or to value others. The adventurer uses his freedom to choose projects arbitrarily—others are only a means to his ends. The passionate man freely chooses a cause based on his own values, but is indifferent to others unrelated to his cause. The ideal type would be the creator such as a scientist, writer, or artist who throws himself into each project as if it were an absolute, but who refrains from losing himself in it; his freedom prevents him from identifying too closely with any of his creations. These creations act as springboards for others to become more transcendent themselves.

It appears that the five types serve as gradients that respond to Beauvoir's ethics of intersubjective freedom.²⁰ However, in the course of her description of each type, she insists on how each may morph into the other. For example: "Nihilism is disappointed seriousness which has turned back upon itself" (*EA* 52) or "an adventurer is a nihilist who takes delight in living" (*EA* 57). She also explains how each of the types except for the sub-human is on the right track. For example: "It is obvious that this choice is very close to a genuinely moral attitude" (*EA* 59).²¹ But most importantly and problematically, all five types have the potential to become oppressors. Beauvoir explains, "Thus, though we have defined him as a denial and a flight, the sub-man is not a harmless creature. He realizes himself in the world as a blind uncontrolled force which anybody can get control of" (*EA* 44); "The serious man can become a tyrant: the inhuman idols are more important than people" (*EA* 49); "If [the nihilist's] rejection [of the world] ends up in a positive desire for destruction, it then establishes a tyranny which freedom must stand up against" (*EA* 57); "Favorable circumstances are enough to transform the adventurer

into a dictator" (*EA* 62); and "The passionate man is on the way to tyranny. He knows that his will emanates only from him, but he can nevertheless attempt to impose it upon others" (*EA* 65). The porous profiles of the five types dissolve into the threatening figure of the person who has not come to terms with his ambiguity and who thinks he has the right to oppress others.

This brings us to a third rhetorical strategy that destabilizes the text, namely perpetual permutations of the main theme of the essay—ambiguity. Throughout the text, Beauvoir keeps modifying, adding nuances, giving different examples, and basically rendering a stable definition of ambiguity virtually impossible. Traditionally, philosophy has valued clarity and certainty above all else. At least this is what "pure philosophy" aims to achieve. Normally, by "ambiguous" we mean "obscure, dark, wavering, changeable, doubtful, uncertain, disputed, unreliable, and untrustworthy."²² However, Beauvoir means something entirely different. She explains, "... to say that [existence] is ambiguous is to assert that its meaning is never fixed" (*EA* 129). Ambiguity is the notion that the *meaning of existence* is never fixed. It refers less to uncertainty than to a constant tension between two equal but opposite forces that prevent us from ever settling into certainty. Awareness of this tension allows the flow and flexibility of both meaning and movement.

Many scholars have summarized Beauvoir's concept of ambiguity by focusing on only one set of binary opposites, namely the fact that we are both subject and object. However, at the very beginning of *The Ethics of Ambiguity* Beauvoir refers to many more dichotomies that are meant to flesh out the notion of ambiguity: life comes with death, we are a pure interiority and a thing crushed by exterior forces, we are solitary yet in relation with others, we are free and yet exist in servitude, indispensable and insignificant, spirit and matter, and both the ends and the means of action. Beauvoir rejects philosophies that attempt to privilege any one term over the other or philosophies that try to synthesize binary opposites. Instead, she operates what she calls a "conversion" such that the terms in opposition to one another are maintained and are irreducible. One way of interpreting this is to say that Beauvoir wants us to keep these dichotomies in balance at all times to respect the opposites that are a real part of the human condition. In other words, we should not end up privileging one of the terms, even though this would definitely be the easy way out. Maintaining dichotomies in constant tension is difficult and moreover, it prevents us from falling into the comfort of certainty and thus betraying the opposing forces of our condition—living in bad faith.

How does this description of the human condition translate into an ethics? It is because every action or project that we choose is always already in a human situation, that is, our decisions necessarily affect others. She says, "He must disclose the world with the purpose of further disclosure and by the same movement try to free men, by means of whom the world takes on meaning" (EA 74). If everyone has the same constitution, that is if everyone experiences oneself in terms of ambiguity, experiencing these dichotomies in living tension, then we must recognize one another's need to maintain them in tension as well. In this sense, the existentialist "conversion" would entail keeping both terms of a dichotomy in balance, in tension, and therefore, never slipping into dogmatism. Moral freedom makes us constantly question our decisions and keeps us on our toes.

This ethical exercise ties in perfectly with Beauvoir's thesis in *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*. Although Beauvoir claims that Pyrrhus is the one who is right, wanting to push on and continue in his life project, engaging in action, she nevertheless says that their dialogue continues without end. The dialogue between Pyrrhus and Cinéas represents another important dichotomy in our ambiguous condition namely, we reflect and ask why, such as in the case of Cinéas, and we make decisions and act, such as in the case of Pyrrhus. We are ambiguous such that we are always already going back and forth and thus, it is impossible to settle into pure action or pure reflection. This movement enables us to maintain our freedom and to defend others' freedom from oppressors.

It ought to be specified that an ethics of ambiguity does not advocate moral ambiguity in the sense of uncertainty or indecisiveness. There is no ambiguity whatsoever in Beauvoir's unequivocal condemnation of all types of oppression. When she talks about ambiguity, she is referring to the opposites that make up our condition and that they must be maintained in a constant state of tension if we are to be faithful to our reality. Such a state of constant tension resonates with moral freedom which is the idea of constantly making decisions based on our own values and yet sensitive to others' freedom. The most important feature of ambiguity is its connection to freedom and our relationship with others. Beauvoir writes, "An ethics of ambiguity will be one which will refuse to deny *a priori* that separate existents can, at the same time, be bound to each other, that their individual freedoms can forge laws valid for all" (EA 18). Thus, ambiguity puts us squarely in relation with others; we are not separate beings, on the contrary, we are all interconnected and therefore, have no right to oppress others unless they are themselves oppressors. Beauvoir

claims, “A freedom which is interested only in denying freedom must be denied. And it is not true that the freedom of others limits my own freedom: to be free is not to have the power to do anything you like; it is to be able to surpass the given toward an open future; the existence of others as a freedom defines my situation and is even the condition of my own freedom” (*EA* 90).

We may ask why Beauvoir chooses to *perform* an ethics of ambiguity rather than just claim that we must reject oppression at all costs and be done with it? Kristana Arp claims that there is no philosophical argument that can decisively convince people to be moral.²³ There is thus a need to appeal to readers through indirect speech, a philosophy that resists systematizing and metaphysical literature that unveils and appeals. Or one may appeal to readers with an essay such as *The Ethics of Ambiguity* and do so through unveiling and performing ambiguity. Beauvoir has said in “Literature and Metaphysics” that we have to be moved to our inner core such that we have to work our way through an experience in order to truly understand what being moral is all about. The appeal effected by philosophy, literature, and an essay such as *The Ethics of Ambiguity* may achieve that.

As we mentioned above, an ethics of ambiguity does not dwell in or champion uncertainty; rather, it is “the painfulness of an indefinite questioning” (*EA* 133). If an essay such as *The Ethics of Ambiguity* uses techniques to destabilize the text, to make it slippery, confusing, and opaque, then it makes us *feel* the impossibility of ever being sure once and for all. In other words, the text bypasses the brain, makes us experience complexity, and stimulates a kind of awakening. Dogmatism is what leads to oppression, and that is precisely what an ethics of ambiguity vigorously combats. Does this not contradict Beauvoir’s certainty about the evil of oppression?

By breaking down conceptual and verbal boundaries with the help of paradoxes, porous profiles, and perpetual permutations, Beauvoir operates on a textual level what she hopes we will feel deep within us: our interconnection with each other and the impossibility of ever settling into certitude. The most important paradox of *The Ethics of Ambiguity* is that Beauvoir unambiguously attacks oppression by advocating an ethics of ambiguity. Ambiguity is meant to be felt and not understood rationally. We question, we revise, and we never truly stop wondering what she is really trying to say. The text does not mean to leave us with a feeling of uncertainty, but rather to destabilize the hardened attitudes within us that

turn us into bullies and oppressors. This destabilization is meant to bring about a profound change of consciousness that provides hope of effecting a real transformation in society. Therefore, its impact is not only ethical but also political.

Our analysis of Beauvoir's *The Ethics of Ambiguity* illustrates how non-systematic philosophizing appeals to its readers. We have claimed that Beauvoir wishes to distantiate herself from what she qualifies as "pure philosophy" and wishes instead to explore and expose her existential phenomenology while achieving an act of communication with the reader; such an act amounts to an appeal to value freedom and act accordingly. Beauvoir achieves this by using alternate modes of expression and applying the method she identifies as that of the metaphysical novel in her philosophical writing as well. In Beauvoir the literary is truly philosophical and the philosophical is truly literary. Given that this is the case, Beauvoir's appeal to her readers is wider, more encompassing, and potentially more impactful. Her methodological approach has ethical implications in that it provides an experience of uncovering one's own ambiguity as well as that of others. It also has political implications in the way that it places freedom at the heart of this experience of ambiguity. Beauvoir unveils a human being and a world that revolves around freedom and that requires freedom to thrive. The appeal is thus both ethical and political.

Notes

1 Margaret A. Simons, *Beauvoir and The Second Sex: Feminism, Race, and the Origins of Existentialism*, (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), 11.

2 For a detailed argument about this, see Christine Daigle, "Making the Humanities Meaningful: Beauvoir's Philosophy and Literature of the Appeal" (17-28) in *Simone de Beauvoir – A Humanist Thinker*, eds. Annlaug Bjørnø and Tove Pettersen (Leiden: Brill/Rodopi, 2015).

3 Simone de Beauvoir, «Existentialism and Popular Wisdom» (195-220) in *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Margaret A. Simons (Urbana and Chicago: Illinois University Press, 2004), 217-218.

4 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), 16.

5 Beauvoir 2011, 46. For her review see Simone de Beauvoir, "Review of Phenomenology of Perception" (151-164) in *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Margaret A. Simons (Urbana and Chicago: Illinois University Press, 2004), 159-164.

6 Penelope Deutscher, *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Ambiguity, Conversion, Resistance*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 57.

7 Deutscher, 54.

8 Simone de Beauvoir, "Literature and Metaphysics" (261-278) in *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Margaret A. Simons (Urbana and Chicago: Illinois University Press, 2004), 276; hereafter "LM."

9 This view is shared by Sartre. In his *What Is Literature?*, he explains that literature is committed insofar as there is an act of communication between writer and reader that binds the freedom of the reader and commits her to action. For Sartre literature is also ethical and political.

10 Sara Heinämaa, *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference*. Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 4-6.

11 Ulrika Björk, "Reconstituting Experience: Beauvoir's Philosophical Conception of Literature", *Sapere Aude* 3, no. 6 (2012), 74. Heinämaa also sees Kierkegaard's questioning as well as his critique of Hegel as influential on Beauvoir. See Heinämaa, 14-15.

12 Björk, 85.

13 Erika Ruonakoski "Literature as a Means of Communication: A Beauvoirian Interpretation of an Ancient Greek Poem", *Sapere Aude* 3, no. 6 (2012), 254. Ruonakoski focuses on Beauvoir's later talk "My Experience as a Writer" from 1965. While it is a much later expression of her views, we contend that they amount to the same as those presented in "Literature and Metaphysics." What differs is the vocabulary Beauvoir uses; she leaves out "metaphysical."

14 Ruonakoski, 255-6.

15 Björk, 88.

16 See for example Michèle LeDoeuff, *L'étude et le rouet. Des femmes, de la philosophie, etc.*, (Paris: Seuil, 1989) and Margaret A. Simons, "Introduction" to *Simone de Beauvoir. Philosophical Writings*, ed. Margaret A. Simons (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 1-12.

17 This is similar to Kierkegaard's strategy in his writings. The philosophy of paradoxes constitutes indirect communication that is more effective on the reader than direct communication. See our discussion above of Kierkegaard's possible influence on Beauvoir.

18 Simone de Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Citadel Press, 1976), 7; hereafter *EA*.

19 There is quite a lot of extant literature on the notion of freedom in Beauvoir. Of foremost importance are: Sonia Kruks, "Simone de Beauvoir: Teaching Sartre About Freedom" in *Feminist Interpretations of Simone de Beauvoir*, ed. Margaret A. Simons (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1995), 79-95; and Kristana Arp, *The Bonds of Freedom: Simone de Beauvoir's Existential Ethics* (Chicago: Open Court, 2001).

20 As discussed above, *Pyrrhus and Cineas* explores the notion of the appeal to the Other. Beauvoir explains that human beings must undertake to make their life a project and in order for these projects to not be absurd, they must appeal to the Other to validate them using their freedom. *Pyrrhus and Cineas* thus establishes the basis for an intersubjective ethics in which freedom can truly be free only in relation to another freedom.

21 The French reads «une attitude authentiquement morale.» A better translation, that is

one that would have allowed for the emphasis on the importance of authenticity in Beauvoir's ethics, would have read an «authentically moral attitude.»

22 Monika M. Langer, *Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception: A Guide and Commentary*. (Gainesville: Florida State University Press, 1989), 89.

23 Arp, 95.

The Spectacles of Pain and Their Contemporary Forms of Representation¹

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Abstract

This essay offers a phenomenological interpretation of symbolic violence. According to my thesis, the craving for violent imagery derives from the audience's unconscious desire to liberate itself from pain's destructive effects. I argue that this unrealizable project of liberation can take three forms: it can aim to *express the inexpressible, escape the inescapable, or transfer the non-transferrable*. I further contend that the audience's approach to contemporary representations of violence is paradoxical: its irresistible craving for pain's *virtual* manifestations is no greater than its incapacity to tolerate pain's *actual* manifestations. After addressing some objections that my interpretation is bound to provoke, I conclude with some reflections regarding the possibility of an ethical engagement in symbolic violence.

The spectacles of pain of which I will speak in the following investigation concern the symbolic representations of violence in visual culture. We come across such spectacles in news reports, documentaries and fictional movies, in cartoons, computer games and comic books, in magazines and newspapers, as well as in galleries and museums. Although it is undeniable that violent imagery in significant ways shapes the personal, cultural, historical and political spaces of contemporary existence, critical investigations of this ubiquitous phenomenon still remain in their embryonic form.

My central goal is to counteract this deficiency by offering a phenomenological interpretation of the appeal of symbolic violence, which will rely upon the principles of genetic phenomenology. I will focus on the representations of symbolic violence and subject these representations to the phenomenological reduction. Once reduced, the representations of symbolic violence appear as peculiar unities of sense, which are constituted through specific intentional accomplishments. The new task that emerges within such a methodological framework is that

of interpreting these accomplishments and establishing a correlation between the appeal of symbolic violence and specific conscious as well as unconscious dispositions, that underlie the craving for violent imagery. According to my thesis, the appeal of violent imagery feeds on the desire to liberate oneself from the effect of actual pain experience. This project of liberation is essentially unrealizable, and it can take three forms: it can manifest itself as the desire to *express the inexpressible*, *escape the inescapable*, and *transfer the non-transferable*.

Before providing this thesis with phenomenological support, I will first offer a survey of the dominant approaches to symbolic violence in philosophy and psychology. This critical review will make clear that the available accounts leave the phenomenon in question largely undetermined. Having reached this realization, I will spell out my methodological approach in greater detail and then turn to the phenomenology of symbolic violence. Afterwards, I will address the unique characteristics of contemporary forms of symbolic violence and I will conclude by addressing some objections one could raise against this investigation.

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Philosophical Explanations

The question concerning the origins, function, and significance of symbolic violence plays an important role in Plato's and Aristotle's reflections. In subsequent philosophical discussions, this question withdraws from the field of philosophical concerns. To the best of my knowledge, Plato's story of Leontius, which we come across in Book IV of the *Republic*, represents the first *philosophical* inquiry into the attraction of violence and death.² Plato treats this strange attraction as a highly effective clue, which can help us understand the constitution of human nature. While the fascination with death and violence derives from *appetites*, the resistance towards this fascination springs from *reason*. The resolution of this existential conflict depends on the *will*, on whether it will side with appetites or reason. And thus, for Plato, a philosophical account of morbid curiosity can generate nothing less than an answer to the question concerning human nature itself. According to Plato, this nature is composed of three parts: appetites, will, and reason.

Without denying the groundbreaking significance of Plato's reflections, I would nonetheless contend that the story of Leontius is not without

its shortcomings. This account does not bring to light that even when *considered apart from the moral conflicts it gives rise to*, morbid curiosity is a distinctly *human* phenomenon. It would seem that in the framework of Plato's account, animal nature, which is exclusively ruled by appetites and does not encounter any resistance from reason, would have to represent morbid curiosity in its most pure form, without any amalgamations or limitations. Yet the truth is just the reverse: *the fascination with the gruesome has no place in the world of non-human animals; this unsettling fascination is a uniquely human phenomenon.*

From Aristotle's theory of *mimesis*, as developed in the *Poetics*, one can derive a more precise understanding of symbolic violence. According to Aristotle, it is not only reason, but also the *unique instinct for mimesis* that marks the difference between the human and the animal worlds.³ It thereby becomes understandable why morbid curiosity has no place in the non-human world: this curiosity derives from an instinct that animals lack: the instinct for *mimesis*, i.e., the desire to understand the world through imitation and representation. The evidence Aristotle brings forth to corroborate this view is indeed telling: 'Though the objects themselves may be painful to see, we delight to view the most realistic representations of them in art, the forms for example of the lowest animals and of dead bodies' (Aristotle 2001: 1448b). In short, morbid curiosity serves a 'cognitive function' and therefore, it is a distinctly *human* phenomenon.

Yet can the phenomenon of morbid curiosity be circumscribed within the horizon of understanding? Consider the overwhelming power that car accidents have to slow down traffic or the whole genre of action flicks and horror films: in these actual and virtual frameworks, morbid curiosity is undeniably present, yet just as undeniably it serves no cognitive function. What sense is one to make of this fascination with the gruesome, which so often escapes the confines of *mimesis*?

Aristotle's theory of *catharsis* provides a further model of explanation. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle employs this notion to explain the impact that tragedy has upon its audience. According to Aristotle, tragedy is 'an imitation of an action ... with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions' (Aristotle 2001: 1449b). *Catharsis* is the purification, cleansing or purgation of unpleasant emotions that the audience experiences when confronted with the representations of human actions and the pain and suffering they give

rise to. Such a conception of emotional discharge, built as it is upon one's exposure to the Other's pain and suffering, provides further means to clarify the appeal of death and violence. Morbid curiosity serves not only a mimetic, but also a cathartic function: besides enriching understanding, it can also purge one of unpleasant emotions and thereby 'cure' the audience by restoring psychic health.

Yet the cathartic interpretation has its own problems. Morbid curiosity can serve a cathartic function only if it purges the audience of negative emotions. However, as George Gerbner has demonstrated in his well-known studies of television audience, the exposure to images of death and violence does not relieve the spectators of fear and anxiety, but on the contrary, it gives rise to 'an epidemic of fear' (Gerbner 1994) — a sense of intense anxiety the majority of spectators come to experience as they start (consciously or unconsciously) anticipating similar events to unfold in their surroundings to the ones they have witnessed in the media.

In short, neither the mimetic, nor the cathartic interpretations suffice; they contradict the evidence of experience and leave too much unexplained.

Dominant Accounts in Psychology

The available psychological literature brings to light a mosaic of complementary and competing explanations. Intellectually, the most stimulating answers come from classical psychological resources, in particular from Freud's and Jung's works.

For Freud, the pertinent anxieties provoked by the representations of pain in the media concern not the collective, but the personal unconscious; they are determined not phylogenetically, but ontogenetically. The anxieties in question derive from experiences undergone in childhood, especially those experiences which accompany sexual development. The representations of pain revive repressed infantile complexes; they restore the primitive beliefs one might think one has long overcome.

Dolf Zillmann has convincingly shown that, as far as the appeal of violent imagery is concerned, out of all the concepts employed by Freud,

'it is the sex-transcending concept of *identification* that proved more influential than any other single concept' (Zillmann 1998: 189). A critical appropriation of this concept, which Freud developed in connection with Oedipus complex, provides one with the basis to contend that the spectator has the means to identify himself both with fictitious heroes and anti-heroes and thereby vicariously experience all the gratifications that the protagonists live through. Identification with fictitious Others enables the spectator to transcend the limits of personal experience and to gain access to the pleasures experienced by Others — pleasures, which the spectator had always wanted to, although never could, live through. The spectator — that 'poor soul to whom nothing of importance seems to happen ... and who longs to feel and to act and to arrange things according to his desires' (Freud 1987: 656-657)⁴ — shares the euphoric as well as dysphoric experiences of his heroes and thereby attains the fulfillment of his thwarted wishes.

The spectators have the freedom to pick and choose the heroes or anti-heroes they want to identify with. The freedom to enter and exit the lives of Others enables the spectators to identify themselves either with the aggressors or with the victims and thereby consider the displays of violence either as desolate or entertaining. The concept of identification leads the analysts of the Freudian bent to proclaim that the exposure to symbolic violence keeps societal violence in check by enabling the spectators to live through violent dramas in the fictional realm (Buruma 1984).

By contrast, for Jung the appeal of violent imagery concerns not the personal, but the collective unconscious; this appeal has phylogenetic, rather than ontogenetic origins. Building one's case on Jung's distinction between the personal and the collective unconscious (Jung 2014: 55-69), one is motivated to contend that the spectacles of pain provide the subject of experience with indirect access to its own collective instincts. Insofar as they are collective, the instincts in question are *pre-human* and *pre-moral*. Our fascination with symbolic violence serves the function of exposing us to *animal* instincts, which we all share yet which we all want to cover up, since they pose a threat to the specifically moral dimension of human life. In its own turn, this disclosure of animal instincts serves a *therapeutic function*: presumably, it enables one to become a better person.

As seen from the perspective of present-day psychology, the Freudian and Jungian accounts of the appeal of symbolic violence are instances of

sweeping claims and pseudo-explanations.⁵ This is because the accounts in question cannot be verified using established psychological means of verification. Yet what are the more recent answers, which have surpassed the Freudian and Jungian perspectives? In comparison with the Freudian and Jungian accounts, the more recent approaches are lamentably fractional. Without any pretenses to do more than they accomplish, these accounts single out a few characteristics that belong to the phenomenon under scrutiny, thereby leaving the whole phenomenon unaccounted for.⁶

Nowadays, the most popular answer is of an *economic* nature. This answer suggests that our fascination with the representations of the gruesome is 'not a reflection of freedom or preference', but rather is 'the product of a complex manufacturing and marketing machine. Mergers, consolidation, conglomeratization and globalization fuel the machine' (Gerbner 1994: 393). Pain sells; in fact, it appears to overcome all the cultural, geographical, historical and linguistic boundaries, and for this reason, it sells anywhere, anytime.

Besides pointing their fingers at economic interests, psychologists also suggest that the craving for the spectacles of pain derives from what Marvin Zuckerman has called *sensation seeking*, or what one could also call a *pursuit of excitement* on the part of the audience. Psychologists also point out that the audience's willingness to assure itself that it has *control* over visualized events constitutes an irreducible component of the enjoyment that accompanies the depictions of violence.⁷ We are also reminded of the significance of the *plot*, i.e., the significance of the *awareness that good will prevail over evil*.⁸ The audience's willingness to witness the protagonist's *passionate commitment* to his goals constitutes yet another reason that underlies the fascination with symbolic violence. Finally, as Jeffrey Goldstein has put it, the leap into *imaginary worlds*, be these worlds created by literature, film, television, play, or sports, also 'help explain the tolerance for, if not the attraction of, violent imagery' (Goldstein 1999: 275).⁹

These recent psychological findings do not pretend to lift the last veil that covers the human fascination with symbolic violence. This reticence is exactly what underlies the positivistic optimism of psychological research, for it enables one to claim that 'future research will undoubtedly achieve a better understanding of the conditions that control the appeal of portrayals of violence' (Zillmann 1998: 210). This optimism relies on the assumption that future research will follow the same methodological guidelines that characterize the dominant trends in contemporary

psychology. Yet if it is true that the whole is not reducible to the sum of its parts, then the positivistic orientation of current psychological research will never enable one to grasp the phenomenon under scrutiny in terms of its unity and wholeness. The *partes extra partes* approach might very well bring to light the so-far unnoticed features of our fascination with the gruesome, yet the question concerning what binds these features with each other will nonetheless remain missing.

Although Freud's and Jung's accounts were incomparably more comprehensive than the more recent studies, they nonetheless share a different weakness. The problem with these classical accounts is not so much their irreducibility to the level of positivistic methodology, but their incompatibility with the evidence of experience. Both the Jungian and the Freudian accounts suggest that our exposure to the representations of pain serves a therapeutic function in that it curtails the human desire for *actual* violence. This view appears to be unjustifiable.¹⁰

We are thus in need of an alternative. In what follows, I will aim to defend a position that could significantly supplement available interpretations by providing them with what they currently lack, viz., with a comprehensive account of the craving for the spectacles of pain, an account, moreover, which does not contradict either psychological findings, or the evidence of experience.

Methodological Considerations

My goal here is to build a phenomenological interpretation by using the resources of genetic phenomenology. Methodologically, I will follow Husserl's genetic path to the reduction that leads through psychology. I will especially rely on the method of *intentional implications*, which I will interpret as consisting of three consecutive steps.

The first step relies upon the commitment to initiate one's analysis with the performance of the phenomenological (rather than transcendental) reduction. Instead of beginning with the suspension of the world-thesis, one should begin more modestly, by turning to specific phenomena and by subjecting these and only these phenomena to the *epoché* and the phenomenological reduction.¹¹ While before this step is taken, phenomena are understood as *natural entities*, the methods of *epoché* and the reduction transform them into *unities of sense*. The first step is thus a transition from (naturalistically preconceived) beings to

(phenomenologically interpreted) meanings.

The second step relies upon the realization that insofar as phenomena are unities of sense, they must be intentional accomplishments of subjectivity. At the beginning of one's analysis, the exact nature of these accomplishments cannot be determined. Thus the new task becomes that of identifying these accomplishments. These accomplishments cannot be described intuitively; they need to be *discovered*. This is because the correlation that binds unities of sense and the life of subjectivity does not lend itself to an immediate intuitive description. What must the life of subjectivity be like if it is to intend such and such unities of sense? To take the first step is to offer object-oriented descriptions of the phenomena under scrutiny. To take the second step is to turn from the phenomena to the subjective life in which they are constituted.

The third step is meant to bridge the gap that remains open between the first two steps of analysis. While the first step was object-oriented and the second one subject-oriented, to take the third step is to draw further intentional implications that concern the correlation between the phenomena in question and the conscious as well as unconscious life of subjectivity.

How exactly would one apply this methodological orientation while analyzing representations of symbolic violence? To take the first step is to ask: what is the phenomenon under scrutiny? The appeal of symbolic violence, conceived as an effect of motivation, rather than causation, is the phenomenon under consideration. Secondly, what are the conscious or unconscious intentional orientations that render this phenomenon possible? Although I have already sketched a number of possible answers, not a single one is without difficulties, and thus, at least at the beginning, one must place these answers within brackets.

At the start, one can only say: the appeal of symbolic violence must be correlated with a particular craving, desire, or striving. However, when it comes to a more precise determination of this striving, no answer is self-evident. The correlation between the appeal of symbolic violence and the craving, desire, or striving that lie at its basis cannot be established intuitively. Not being able to rely on pure intuition, one must turn to the method of intentional implications. In this regard, my thesis will be as follows: our irresistible craving for the spectacles of pain derives from a desire that is deeply ingrained in human nature itself, i.e., the *desire to liberate ourselves from the ineluctable grip that pain has upon us*.

As far as the third methodological step is concerned, one needs to ask: what exactly is the correlation that binds the subjective strivings and the appeal of symbolic violence? In this regard, I will argue that the appeal of symbolic violence is correlated with the desire to *express the inexpressible, escape the inescapable, and transfer the non-transferable*.

The second and the third points call for a more elaborate clarification. In the next section, I would like to begin with the second issue.

Phenomenology of Symbolic Violence

According to my central thesis, the craving for representations of symbolic violence derives from a desire to liberate oneself from the ineluctable grip of pain. So as to provide this claim with phenomenological support, I would like to address a peculiar kind of senselessness humans are bound to experience when confronted with severe long-lasting pain. In this regard, F.J.J. Buytendijk's distinction between pain and suffering, which he draws in his *Pain: Its Modes and Functions*, will enable us to qualify the senselessness in question with greater precision.

In contrast to the established view, Buytendijk argues that the senselessness that pain gives rise to is more radical than the senselessness derived from suffering, for while suffering is tied to images, pain announces the breakdown of all images. Why does a human being suffer? He suffers because he has lost someone he loves, or because of guilt that stems from the mistakes he has made, or because of the unfortunate conditions he finds himself in — in short, because he cannot liberate himself from images that haunt him, images that oppose his plans, desires, or aspirations. By contrast, the senselessness of pain does not derive from images that resist the sense one has infused one's world with. While suffering is accompanied with senseless images, the experience of severe pain announces the breakdown of all images. While suffering is always about something, or because of something, pain is not about anything. Pain intrudes upon one's life as the experience of sheer negativity accompanied with the breakdown of all images, and it forces one to ask: Why me, why now? So as to answer these questions, one would need to discover at the heart of pain precisely what it does not seem to have, viz., to discover that the breakdown of all images is not as radical as it seems to be, that there is a sense hidden behind the apparent

senselessness of pain. However, being free from all images, pain lies on the other side of all reasonable explanations, and thus, the experience of pain turns out to be an experience of what Buytendijk describes as a 'conflict with the fundamental reasonableness of life' (Buytendijk 1962: 26).

One could argue that Buytendijk's distinction is too rough in that it does not take into account diverse forms of suffering. Consider severe cases of anxiety, melancholia, or depression: much like severe pain, they expose the subject of experience to the senseless world that is emptied of all images — a world of pure sensibility that is filled with sheer negativity in the absence of any apprehension or interpretation. Yet even if one concedes that Buytendijk's distinction calls for some significant modifications, it nonetheless remains true that his phenomenological description brings to light one of the most disturbing consequences of severe pain, viz., *radical senselessness* that derives from the breakdown of all images.

From this phenomenological description one can draw an important intentional implication. If it is indeed true that the experience of pain marks our exposure to the radical senselessness of life, then there seems to be no better way to counteract pain's seemingly ineluctable hold than by transforming pain itself into an image, thereby reasserting one's freedom from its terrifying effects. It thereby becomes understandable why, as Ernst Jünger puts it, 'the individual has a desire to situate pain in the realm of chance, in a zone one can avoid and evade or at the very least need not be subject to according to the laws of necessity' (Jünger 2008: 2). The desire to escape pain's ineluctable grip is what underlies the attempt to transpose pain into the virtual domain. Against such a background, the proliferation of the spectacles of pain are to be conceived as expressions of a concerted effort to name the unnamable, describe the non-describable, disclose in images precisely what escapes all images. In short, the spectacles of pain mark the attempt to proclaim victory over pain's destructive effects and thereby resolve 'the conflict with the fundamental reasonableness of life'.

Yet how exactly is this resolution to be effected? The implications I just drew call for a further clarification. With this in mind, I would like to proceed from the second to the third step and turn to the three different forms that the attempts to liberate oneself from the senselessness of pain can give rise to.

(1) How am I to liberate myself from the hold that the senselessness of pain has upon me? While it might be hardly credible to deny pain's actuality, it is more promising to reject its senselessness. We thereby come across the first form of liberation, the project to *express the inexpressible*. The representations of pain can become resolute attempts to understand what lies at the limits of understanding. They can be triggered by the hypothesis that pain has something important to tell us just as surely as we do not want to find out what it is. They can be motivated by the belief that there is a sense hidden behind the apparent senselessness of pain and that this sense can be disclosed only if pain finds appropriate modes of representation. In short, one can address pain as a *disclosive phenomenon* and aim to give expression to what lies at the limits of expressibility.

(2) Besides being triggered by the desire to express the inexpressible, the representations of pain can be also motivated by the aim to *escape the inescapable*. This is the second form that qualifies representations of pain, conceived as projects of liberation. In this regard, representations of pain become embodiments of *bad faith*. They become forms of escapism that constitute a false sense of distance and security, which provide the basis to delude oneself that pain is neither ineluctable nor necessary. To borrow a metaphor from Ernst Jünger, this bad faith enables one to feast and stroll like Sinbad the Sailor on the back of an enormous fish one mistakes for an island, for one's desires and aspirations notwithstanding, *nothing is more certain and unavoidable than pain*. Like the swing of a pendulum, the representations of pain oscillate between these two possibilities of either expressing the inexpressible, or escaping the inescapable.

(3) The attempt to *transfer the non-transferable* constitutes the third direction that is opened by the irresistible desire to escape the grip of pain. This third direction derives from the same logic that underlies *sadism*. The logic of sadism suggests: either others, or me; there is no third alternative. It is either I who must suffer, or it is my victim, whose suffering I myself must cause and control. If I fail to inflict pain in others, I will have to bear it myself. The only way I can alleviate my pain is by transferring it to someone else.

We commit a vital error when we think that the sadist's attitude toward Others is marked by indifference. Quite on the contrary, as C. Fred Alford and, following him, Arne Johan Vetlesen have argued, the sadist,

far from being indifferent to Others, identifies himself with his victims and 'lives their pain'. Without such identification, which entails a peculiar kind of 'co-feeling' of the pain of the Other, the sadistic act would be pointless, for it is driven by the need to find the Other to whom the sadist could transfer his own pain. In such a way, sadism turns out to be sadomasochism.

The logic that underlies the craving for the spectacles of pain is in principle no different. Just as the sadist, the spectator does not dehumanize virtual others who are now in pain. Quite on the contrary, he identifies himself with them as he suffers their pain, without, however, feeling any pain. The spectator thereby experiences the impossible: pain that does not hurt and suffering that does not distress. Just as the sadist, the spectator is fully aware that the virtual Others are in pain, and it is this very awareness that gives rise to his comfort, pleasure, and satisfaction, which are filled with the delusion that, supposedly, the spectator is free from pain. Thus the experience of pain that colors the face of the virtual Other reassure the spectator of his own freedom from pain. Just like the sadist, the spectator was also faced with only two alternatives — either Others or him. Symbolic violence enables the spectator to transfer the non-transferrable and thereby liberate himself from his own pain.

Contemporary Forms of Symbolic Violence

It seems that this account is too general to capture the specific features characteristic of contemporary representations of pain in the media. After all, what are Francisco Goya's *Disasters of War* — eighty-three etchings made between 1810 and 1820 — if not attempts to express the inexpressible? And could one not say the same about Hieronymus Bosch's paintings describing hell or earthly delights, Pieter Bruegel's oil-panel describing beggars, or Hans Ulrich Franck's etchings that depict soldiers killing peasants? Or consider Baudelaire's descriptions of the bourgeois of the mid-nineteenth-century sitting down for breakfast with newspapers in their hands, which describe 'wars, crimes, thefts, lecheries, tortures, the evil deeds of princes, of nations, of private individuals'¹²: what is this desire to wash down one's breakfast with 'an orgy of universal atrocity' if not an attempt to *escape the inescapable and transfer the non-transferrable*? In short, is there anything that makes contemporary forms of symbolic violence *distinctive*? Is there anything that makes them *stand out* from other modes of pain's representations? We are in need of

further intentional implications, which I would like to draw by turning back to Ernst Jünger's analysis.

To the best of my knowledge, Jünger's *On Pain*, having been completed in 1934, is an unprecedented attempt in print to reflect on how the technological changes in Europe of the twentieth century derive from a transformed relation to pain. According to Jünger, our technical capacity to represent pain in films or photographs is itself expressive of a more radical tendency to objectify life — a tendency, which itself marks a radical attempt to transfer the non-transferrable, i.e., to liberate oneself from pain.

This is something that calls for a strong emphasis: *the objectification of life is not reducible to symbolic representations*. Most importantly, the objectification of life marks a transformed relation to one's actual body, i.e., the ever-increasing capacity to objectify one's body. This is what Ernst Jünger calls *the birth of the second consciousness*, i.e., a 'cold' and 'indubitably cruel' (Jünger 2008: 38, 45) consciousness of a non-participating observer, who in a curious way has succeeded in unfastening all ties to the body. According to Jünger, photography, films, sports, work, the erotic, and finally, medicine, are all direct expressions of the objectification of life, they are all consequences that stem from a novel approach to the body, an approach that is indicative of a fundamentally novel relation to pain.

This means that what I have identified as the logic of sadism, i.e., the transference of pain to the Other, is not reducible to the diffusion of pain into the virtual domain. It is as though the consciousness of the 1930s is fully aware of what we seem to have forgotten, viz., that *the project of transferring pain to the virtual Other cannot deliver what it aims to deliver: it cannot alleviate one's pain*. With this realization, we come to confront the possibility that was pursued in 'the last and indeed quite remarkable phase of nihilism' (Jünger 2008: 46), i.e., the totalitarian age. This nihilistic possibility invites one to radicalize the project of pain's transference by no longer limiting it to the virtual domain. The possibility of such a prospect underlies Jünger's disturbing predictions and the no-less disturbingly accurate implications he draws from them: as he puts it in 1934, 'we see the valleys and plains full of armies, military deployments, and exercises. We see states more hostile and ready for war than ever before ... their essential aim is no longer in doubt..... The practical consequence for the individual is ... the necessity to commit oneself to the preparation for war' (Jünger 2008: 45, 47).

Jünger interpreted the early signs of the approaching war as necessary consequences that followed life's self-objectification, i.e., that followed the birth of the second consciousness, which in its own turn was a consequence that followed the need to liberate oneself from pain by transferring it not only to virtual, but also to actual Others. Everything in Jünger is built upon the realization that 'man is able to resist the assault of pain to the degree that he is capable of self-detachment' (Jünger, 2008: 46). Given such a central role assigned to pain, it becomes understandable why Jünger would proclaim: "Tell me your relation to pain and I will tell you who you are!" (Jünger 2008: 1)

Our times have changed. At least in the affluent corners of the globe, humanity once again inhabits the values of a world, which Jünger believed the children who would live to experience the year 2000 would not even remember. Humanity inhabits the *world of security*, thereby disproving one of Jünger's central predictions. In direct contrast to Jünger's central expectation, the age of security was not superseded by a totalitarian age, which combines the values of technology with a 'cold consciousness', which sees its own body as an object and therefore manifests a soulless indifference to its own pain. Rather, if one were to characterize our attitude to pain in one word, one could state that *this attitude is profoundly and irreducibly paradoxical*. Our irresistible craving for the spectacle of pain, which has only intensified over the last eighty years, now walks hand-in-hand with the incapacity to tolerate pain around us. While in the virtual domain we cannot live without pain, in our actual surroundings we find it hard to stomach even its most basic manifestations.

Thus on the one hand, we are engaged in a project of creating a world in which pain can manifest itself only behind closed doors. The explosion of hospitals, nursing homes, hospices, and pain centers in cities on all corners of the globe is indicative of the growing tendency in the present-day world to exclude, at least as much as possible, the manifestation of pain and suffering from our normally functioning social lives. Yet on the other hand, our ongoing battle to render public spaces 'pain free' contrasts sharply with the booming spectacles of pain. The excruciations of war, civil unrest, torturous lives in inner cities, and various other forms physical and psychological pain have become for us a daily banality, so much so that according to a common sentiment, in the present-day world the so-called secondary experiences are taking over and marginalizing primary experiences. In the words of Susan Sontag

(which she subsequently qualified as a merely conservative critique), we are losing the capacity to react.

Thus along with Jünger, one can say: 'Our relation to pain has indeed changed' (Jünger 2008: 45). Yet in contrast to Jünger, one could not say that the new spirit that has emerged among us is 'indubitably cruel,' in that it 'dispenses with the soft spots and hardens the points of resistance' (Jünger 2008: 45). Rather, what makes our relation to pain unique is this very contrast between our unprecedented sensitivity to the manifestation of pain in the actual surroundings and our unmatched craving for the virtual spectacles of pain. For Jünger, the cruelty of his age was based on the realization that the project of transferring one's pain to the virtual domain could not reach fulfillment. By contrast, we appear to be convinced of the futility and illegitimacy of transferring our pain to those who find themselves in our actual world, who live their lives just as we do ours. When the unprecedented explosion of pain's representation in the media is juxtaposed to its elimination in our actual lifeworlds, the following conclusion appears irresistible: we are engaged in a process of transferring the experience of pain into the virtual domain with its distinctive spatiotemporality, which in principle remains disconnected from the actual space and actual time that characterize our actual lives in our actual lifeworlds. It is therefore only to be expected that for us, the goal of *escaping the inescapable* and *transferring the non-transferrable* would take precedence over the goal of *expressing the inexpressible*. For this very reason, it is hard to overlook the striking superficiality of the contemporary representations of pain in the media, especially when these modes of representation are compared with the classical representations of pain in art, literature, philosophy or religion.

Some Objections

So as to avoid some misunderstandings, I would like to consider three objections. (1) The first of them derives from Susan Sontag's *Regarding the Pain of Others*:

To speak of reality becoming a spectacle is a breathtaking provincialism. It universalizes the viewing habits of a small, educated population, living in the rich part of the world, where news has been converted into entertainment.... It assumes that everyone is a spectator. It suggests, perversely, unseriously, that there is no real suffering in the world. (Sontag 2003: 110)

Is the position I have just presented not subject to this criticism? Not at all. I do not argue that reality has become a spectacle, just as I do not suggest that there is no real suffering in the world. My thesis does not deny the reality of suffering but rather addresses the audience's *desires* and *aspirations*, which underlie the craving for the spectacles of pain. According to my thesis, in its contemporary form, the seemingly irresistible appeal of violent imagery is to be understood as an ongoing endeavor, which aims to deny the undeniable and convert pain into an illusion. My claim would be subject to Sontag's critique only if I argued that we have successfully turned our dreams into reality. Yet this is not the view that I hold. As I have suggested above, we hold that pain has upon us is ineliminable, and it is so not only among those who 'do not have the luxury of patronizing reality', but also among the 'consumers of violence as spectacle' (Sontag 2003: 111).

Yet just as the reality of pain and suffering cannot be denied, so also one cannot ignore the startling contrast between the declining visibility of pain in our actual surroundings and its mounting representations in the media. Anthropological and historical research corroborates the claim that the decline of pain is accompanied by the ascent of its image. As Geoffrey Gorer noted in his seminal essay 'The Pornography of Death', 'While natural death became more and more smothered in prudery, violent death has played an ever-growing part in the fantasies offered to mass audiences' (Gorer 1955: 51). More recently, Vicki Goldberg, one of the leading voices in photography history and criticism, has corroborated and broadened Gorer's claim by suggesting that the project of irrealizing death is a historical process, which is at least a few hundred years old. Her research highlights the overwhelming contrast that marks the human exposure to pain, suffering, and death in the eighteenth-century Europe and North America, on the one hand, and the age of mechanical reproduction, on the other (Goldberg 1998). The declining child mortality rates, the steadily ascending life expectancy, the abolition of public executions, the remarkable medical discoveries, such as the anti-bacterial drugs, penicillin, treatment of tuberculosis, or the polio vaccine, the relocation of death from homes to hospitals as well as the relocation of cemeteries from town centers to the countryside — all these striking phenomena seem to leave no doubt that in the course of the last few hundred years, pain, suffering and death have been gradually withdrawing from our everyday surroundings. Yet as Goldberg has it, 'as actual death was toned down by every means available, *depicted* death swaggered violently onto the stage, and the new means and forms were found to

keep it before the public eye' (Goldberg 1998: 40). It is this very contrast, as I have suggested above, that marks the unique characteristic of our relation to the spectacles of pain, a characteristic which becomes more understandable when seen as a *tendency* to irrealize pain, as a willingness to transform it into an illusion.

(2) Yet how could one ignore the plain fact that the technological discoveries of the last century have led not only to the rapid withdrawal of pain, suffering, and death from our surroundings, but also to their unprecedented proliferation? Never before has humanity faced the possibility of its own extinction and thus never before has it been confronted with the ethical task to act so that the effects of its actions would be compatible with the furtherance of human life (Jonas 1984: 11). Clearly, if Goldberg's thesis is to retain its credibility, it must be accompanied with some important qualifications. Instead of speaking of the withdrawal of death and dying from view, one should rather speak of their overwhelming presence during the times of war and their *deceptive* withdrawal during the times of peace. Or rather, instead of speaking of the toning of actual death 'by every means available' (Goldberg 1998: 40), it appears more reasonable to appropriate another of Goldberg's expressions and speak of the waxing and waning of death in our actual lifeworlds.

Yet does this critique and subsequent qualification of Goldberg's thesis not compel me to retract one of my own central claims, viz., *the claim concerning the marked contrast between the overwhelming presence of irreal pain and its surprising absence in our surroundings*? The devastating and continuously rising overpopulation as well as the inevitable shortage of food and water, the effects of human action on the environment as well as the problem of energy, the continuous presence of war as well as other forms of violent unrest all leave us in no doubt with regard to the reality of pain, suffering, and death. In the face of these phenomena, does it make sense to speak of a contrast between the steady waning of actual pain and the waxing of its irreal representations?

I would still argue that it does, and for three reasons. (i) Despite the obvious severity of the outlined problems, it nonetheless remains the case that the actual visibility of pain, suffering, and death has severely diminished over the last few hundred years. Suffice it to note that the general life expectancy in Europe and North America has grown more than twofold during the last two centuries and that this growth was

accompanied with the discovery of the cure for numerous diseases (polio, smallpox, typhoid, yellow fever, tuberculosis, influenza, and pneumonia, to name the most common), whose regular presence marked pain's constant presence and life's daily unpredictability. The severity of the global problems we now confront cannot cover up the undeniable fact that in the course of the last few centuries, our *daily* exposure to pain has undergone an unprecedented reduction. (ii) One cannot ignore that the outlined problems obtain their full-fledged visibility precisely in the virtual domain. In the absence of the media, we would hardly be aware of them. Thus paradoxically, at least in the times of peace, they mark not so much the presence of pain in our surroundings but contribute to the overwhelming presence of the imagery of pain. (iii) To be sure, the outlined problems are pending. They do not lie in the distant and unreachable future, but are experienced here and now. Nonetheless, there remains an overwhelming and undeniable contrast between how the outlined problems are represented in the media and how they are experienced in our surrounding worlds. The global problems that haunt us nowadays are of course real, yet their reality is just as undeniable as the fact that they appear with a flavor of unreality.¹³ With these three reasons in mind, I would contend that *in the times of peace*, the outlined problems reaffirm the contrast between the sterility of our environments and the overwhelming profusion of the imagery of pain. Of course, the sterility in question is *deceptive*, just as the wish to liberate life from pain is *unrealizable*.

(3) The third set of objections derives from a peculiar ethical tension that the spectators are prone to experience in the face of symbolic violence. Sharon Sliwinski has recently addressed the main contours of this tension. In what follows, I will build on her analysis, while at the same time suggesting that the tension in question calls for a more nuanced set of distinctions and for a somewhat different resolution.

(i) Let us begin with dismay and aversion one is bound to experience when exposed to symbolic violence. As Sliwinski puts it, there is 'the moment of recognition, the wounding paralysis, the horror and revulsion one feels when struck by an image of suffering' (Sliwinski 2004: 154). With a reference to Freud, one could characterize this experience as an instance of *identification*, of an emotional bond that ties different persons, a bond that can even take the form of an ego-confusion, which enables one to access the targeted Other's pleasures or pains. Alternatively, with a reference to Max Scheler, one could further characterize this emotional

tie as an instance of *emotional infection*, comparable to what a football fan experiences in the stadium, or what a loyalist experiences in a political rally.

(ii) Secondly, let us admit that this moment of identification can serve as a motive for the awakening of moral sentiments. I am referring here to the emergence of a sense of a moral obligation towards Others, an obligation, which derives from the realization that when it comes to photographs, documentaries, or news reports, even though one has witnessed the pain of Others in the virtual realm, the pain one has witness is by no means virtual. It therefore seems that one carries the same kind of obligations towards such virtual manifestations of pain as one does to its actual manifestations. In short, one cannot rest content with the mere identification of the Others' pain; one needs to do all one can to alleviate the Other's suffering.

(iii) At this stage, it might seem that moral considerations oppose one of my central points of contention, viz., the claim that symbolic violence is representative of a drive that strives to transform pain into an illusion. This contention now appears questionable: insofar as we are capable of *morally* relating to the Other in pain, we interpret virtual manifestations of pain through the lens of *actuality*. In response to this objection, I would maintain that the outlined emergence of moral sentiments is soon surpassed by a growing sense of disillusionment. This dawning sense of disenchantment derives from the realization that there is very little one can do to alleviate the Other's suffering. Or as Sliwinski puts it, "The helplessness and horror of bearing witness to suffering brings with it the demand for a *response*, and yet one's response to photographs can do nothing to alleviate the suffering depicted" (Sliwinski 2004: 154). Such is the case for two closely related reasons.

The first reason pertains to the unique spatiotemporality that qualifies symbolic violence. The scenes and images unfold in a virtual domain, i.e., in a domain that remains cut off from the spatiotemporality of our actual lifeworlds. It is this very distance that renders our ethical obligation unrealizable. The moral obligations call for an *urgent* response. They demand that I respond to the Other not some day in the future, but *here* and *now*. Yet the distance that separates the virtual from the actual blocks the possibility of an *immediate* response. My response can only come too late; it cannot accomplish what it strives to accomplish.

The second reason concerns the unrelenting proliferation of symbolic

violence. The media robs us of the capacity to respond to the pain of Others precisely because it generates a non-stop feed of the pain and suffering of Others. For instance, thanks to research undertaken by George Gerbner, we know that an average American child will have watched 8,000 murders on television by the age of twelve. To which of the 8,000 murders is the child supposed to respond? If he has the ethical responsibility to respond to some of these acts of cruelty and injustice, should he not also be obliged to respond to others? What are the criteria in accordance with which he will pick and choose? And will he ever be in the position to ethically justify his indifference to those he has chosen to ignore? In short, while the sight of the Other in pain calls for an ethical response, the very fact that one is exposed to a nonstop feed of Others in pain renders an ethical response embarrassingly unfair and insubstantial.

(iv) Yet fourthly, the recognition of the limits that circumscribe the possibilities of a response need not lead one to the conclusion that all responses are in vain. This disconcerting realization need not signify the fruitlessness of all action, but could be conceived as a possibility to rethink the limits and significance of ethical responsibility. By this I mean that even though a response can never be adequate to the initial call, it is nonetheless better than no response at all. Moreover, despite the disconcerting limits that affect the response, it nonetheless is an ethical response. It is at this stage that we come to face Sliwinski's conclusion: 'this painful labour of *attending* to other's suffering might be the very beginning of responsibility itself' (Sliwinski 2004: 162).

(v) This conclusion once again brings into question the validity of my contention concerning the illusory nature of the representations of pain. It once again seems that moral consciousness breaks through the virtual limits that circumscribe the spectacles of pain. Nonetheless, I would suggest that Sliwinski's thesis (notwithstanding all the caution in its formulation) calls for some significant modifications and extrapolations. First and foremost, one has to admit that the spectator's exposure to the spectacles of pain *need not* give rise to moral obligations. Clearly, one can continue to enjoy symbolic violence in the absence of any sense of moral responsibility. Secondly, even if violent imagery gives rise to moral sentiments, all too often these sentiments either cover up the Other's singularity, or turn away from the Other altogether despite the pretense entailed in the language of moral responsibility. While the first of these points appears to be self-evident, the second one calls for a further clarification.

What exactly is ‘this painful labour of attending to the (virtual) Other’s suffering?’ What are the exact forms that it takes? All too often, by initiating a transition from the virtual to the actual domain, moral consciousness empties the Other of all interiority by interpreting the Other as an instance that represents a particular cause of suffering. As Feldman has insightfully put it, after placing the suffering of the Other back into the actual world, we encounter ‘generalities of bodies – dead, wounded, starving, diseased, and homeless In their pervasive depersonalization, [they appear as] anonymous corporeality’ (cited in Malkki 1996: 388). Elizabeth Dauphinee confirms this insight when she argues that the attempt to morally respond to the suffering of those we have encountered in the virtual realm follows an ‘iconography of symbols that stand in for pain and thus become the representational alibis for actual pain: images of starvation, of emaciated concentration-camp victims, of hooded prisoners, of broken and bleeding skins, of blood-stained floors in prison cells, and so on’ (Dauphinee 2007: 142).

This process of anonymization of the Other’s pain and suffering and the iconography of symbols it gives rise to does not only cover up the Other’s singularity. In fact, all too often it simply turns away from the Other altogether. As Frank Möller has recently argued while addressing the notorious Abu Ghraib photographs, ‘regarding the general Western debate in newspapers, articles, and books, the focus was largely ‘on ourselves’, not on the victims. The Abu Ghraib photographs thus ... did not help the viewers to grasp how what had happened at Abu Ghraib was experienced and felt by the inmates’ (Möller 2009: 185). On the one hand, no photograph could fill the gap between the viewer’s perception and the actual experience of the inmates. On the other hand, even the attempt to fill this gap was missing: ‘the debate did not focus on the victims and their pain’ (Möller 2009: 185).

Thus alongside Sliwinski’s contention that attending to the virtual Other’s suffering *might* signal the birth of moral responsibility, one should also stress that all too often moral consciousness does not overcome, but only reinforces the distance of the virtual representations of pain. This consciousness robs the Other-in-pain of singularity, flattens his suffering by transforming it into a ‘piece of evidence’, ‘which can be read and re-read in different ways toward the achievement of different narratives and projects’ (Dauphinee 2007: 146). All too often moral consciousness takes pain hostage and categorizes it in accordance with the established

iconography of pain. In its own roundabout way, it provides one with the means needed to *escape the inescapable* and *transfer the nontransferable* — although this time, the camera lens works as a sort of ‘hooding’ not of my own, but rather of the Other’s inescapable vulnerability, the Other’s exposure to what Buytendijk has so elegantly called ‘the conflict with the fundamental reasonableness of life’.

Concluding Remarks

In place of a conclusion, I would like to turn to one more possible misunderstanding of the position I am here defending. My critique of the powers of moral consciousness to overcome the growing gap between actual pain and its symbolic representations can be misunderstood as a more or less concealed defense of iconoclasm. This is not the view that I hold. I do not suggest that moral consciousness is *in principle* incapable of reawakening the sense of moral responsibility. I would rather stress that the spectacles of pain are *irreducibly ambiguous* and for this reason, the claim that these spectacles can be safely subsumed by moral consciousness can never find convincing justification.

As Susan Sontag maintained in her *Regarding the Pain of Others*, during the war between the Serbs and the Croats in the early 1990s, the same photographs of killed children were passed around at both Serb and Croat propaganda briefings (Sonntag 2003: 10). More recently, in the context of her analysis of Abu Ghraib photographs, Elizabeth Dauphinee maintained that the same photographs have been used to both condemn and excuse the politics that caused the suffering of the prisoners (Dauphinee 2007: 148). The spectacles of pain can play such diverse roles because their socio-political sense is in principle *underdetermined* and for this reason, their meaning up to a large degree depends on the texts that accompany them. Yet the spectacles of pain are ambiguous not only because they can be used for different ends and purposes. *They are ambiguous not only in terms of how they are read, but also in terms of how they are seen.* This deeper sense of ambiguity lies at the heart of what I have characterized above as the desire for violent imagery, a desire, which can be conceived either as an attempt to *express the inexpressible*, or to *escape the inescapable*.

I would like to conclude with a suggestion, which in the present context I cannot carry out in all the necessary detail. I would contend that the possibility of violent images to awaken a sense of moral responsibility

up to a large degree rests upon the spectator's capacity to engage in these images as attempts to express the Other's inimitable pain and suffering. This capacity to see the imagery of pain in such a fashion does not merely rest upon the 'painful labour of attending to the Other's suffering'. Rather, it also presupposes *the spectator's awareness of his own vulnerability* and is built upon what following Albert Schweitzer one could call *the fraternity of those in pain*.¹⁴ It seems to me that in the absence of such a sense of shared destiny, which goes along with the recognition of the inimitable nature of one's own and Other's experience, one is left merely with the generalities of bodies and iconography of symbols that empty the Other of all singularity and thereby increase the distance between the spectacles of pain and our actual lifeworlds. For this very reason, the phenomenological emphasis on the primacy of experience does not stand in the way of a responsible approach to the Other's suffering. Quite on the contrary, this attentiveness on the first-person experience on the part of the spectator proves indispensable if the 'painful labour of attending to the other's suffering' is to become 'the beginning of responsibility itself'.

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Notes

- 1 The work described in this paper was supported by a grant from the Research Grants Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China (CUHK 443013).
- 2 'But, I said, I once heard a story which I believe, that Leontius the son of Aglaion, on his way up from the Piraeus under the outer side of the northern wall, becoming aware of dead bodies that lay at the place of public execution at the same time felt a desire to see them and a repugnance and aversion, and that for a time he resisted and veiled his head, but overpowered in despite of all by his desire, with wide staring eyes he rushed up to the corpses and cried, There, ye wretches, take your fill of the fine spectacle!' (Plato 1961: 439e-440a)
- 3 'Imitation is natural to man from childhood, one of his advantages over the lower animals being this, that he is the most imitative creature in the world, and learns at first by imitation' (Aristotle 2001: 1448b).
- 4 The translation from German into English is Dolf Zillmann's, not my own (see Zillmann 1998: 190).
- 5 See Zillmann 1998: 182.

6 Jeffrey Goldstein's edited volume *Why We Watch* is a good case in point. On the one hand, one cannot ignore the pioneering nature of this work: it is the first book in print to raise the question concerning the attraction of symbolic violence. Yet what exactly are the conclusions that this book establishes? In his brief summary of the book's accomplishments, Goldstein writes: 'it is obvious that the attractions of violent imagery are many.... Some viewers seek excitement, others companionship or social acceptance through shared experience, and still others wish to see justice enacted. For some, the immersion in a fantasy world is its primary appeal' (Goldstein 1999: 222). Clearly, these answers leave the phenomenon up to a large degree unexplained: they clarify our tolerance for violent imagery, yet not its attraction. This is something that Goldstein himself acknowledges: 'What we don't know about the attractions of violent entertainment could fill a book' (223).

7 Some psychological case studies have shown that it suffices to place a remote control in a volunteer's hands to increase his capacity to both tolerate and enjoy violent imagery (See Goldstein 1999).

8 As Zillmann puts it, 'there can be little doubt, then, that righteous violence, however brutal but justified by the ends, will prompt gloriously intense euphoric reactions the more it is preceded by patently unjust and similarly brutal violence' (Zillmann 1998: 208).

9 To corroborate this thesis, Goldstein refers to McCauley's psychological test, which placed a group of university students in a room where they were supposed to watch three video tapes: of a slaughterhouse, of a monkey being killed and then served fresh to connoisseurs in China, and of a girl, whose face had been sliced open and the skin pulled off the skull. Most students found the videos unbearable and did not watch them to the end, although, according to McCauley and Goldstein, they would have more than likely watched them had the videos were not representative of real animals and real people. In short, what the students were disturbed by were not the images themselves, but the realization that they witnessed the representations of real events.

10 Our exposure to the representations of pain has practical repercussions: close to 3,000 studies have been conducted before 1971 alone and they all suggest a strong connection between representations of violence in the media and aggression. Countless studies over the last forty years have confirmed these findings. Nor should one ignore the less disturbing (although a more widespread) consequence, which concerns the 'epidemic of fear' — an issue I have already dealt with above.

11 Here I understand the *epoché* in the general way as a suspension of those judgments and pre-judgments that underlie one's unreflective commitments. Following this initial procedure, phenomenological reduction enables one lead the phenomena back (*reducere*) to their constitutive origins in the life of subjectivity.

12 Here is Baudelaire's journal entry from the early 1860s: 'It is impossible to glance through any newspaper, no matter what the day, the month of the year, without finding on every line the most frightful traces of human perversity... Every newspaper ... is nothing but a tissue of horrors.... And it is with this loathsome appetizer that civilized

man daily washes down his morning repast'. (Quoted from Susan Sontag 2003: 107)

13 As Vicki Goldberg has put it in a somewhat different context, 'since everyone dies only once, watching the same people die over and over tends to erect one poor barricade against the reality of death' (Goldberg1998: 39).

14 'All through the world, there is a special league of those who have known anxiety and physical suffering. A mysterious bond connects those marked by pain. They know the terrible things that man can undergo; they know the longing to be free of pain. Those who have been liberated from pain must not now think they are now completely free again and can calmly return to life as it was before. With their experience of pain and anxiety, they must help alleviate the pain and anxiety of others, insofar as that lies within human powers. They must bring release to others as they received release. (Schweitzer 1965: 7).

“Oh, a friend!” Psychotherapy and the Other in the Light of Montaigne’s *Essays*

Rachel Starr

Abstract

The irrepressible 16th century humanist and essayist, Michel de Montaigne, wrote a self-portrait with such unprecedented candour and conversational flair, that he all but jumps from the page and shakes your hand. At Montaigne’s invitation, I bring together psychotherapists and the *Essays* in a conversation that revives the notion of friendship, and evokes the pleasure of mutual revelation in the search for understanding. In the light of the *Essays*’ “gay and sociable wisdom”, I see essaying and therapy as discrete yet closely intertwined cultural tasks. Each is an openhearted work of being together, of making room for alterity rather than conquering it with theory. Only in a world made coherent through the practices of friendship and hospitality can we come to cultivate the otherness of painful separations, tolerate the strangeness of our ordinary foibles, and draw closer to life.

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I’d like to introduce you somebody that I have come to think of as a good friend: Michel de Montaigne, the celebrated writer of the *Essays* of Michel Eyquem de Montaigne. Montaigne wrote, “I have not made my book any more than it has made me – a book of one substance with its author, proper to me and a limb of my life”¹². He is “the matter of [his] book”³. Thus, our visit is also a conversation with the *Essays* themselves as a body of work. In fact, Montaigne invented the essay genre: small, disarmingly intimate, and open-minded, conversational pieces of prose. He even coined the term *essai*, a French word which meant attempt, try, test, or even taste. Montaigne asked the age-old Socratic question “What do I know?”, and his *Essays* are 107 attempts at an answer. But attempt is the operative word here, because early on in the 20-year period during which he wrote, – which, by the way, was from 1572 until the day he died in 1592– Montaigne cheerfully gave up searching for any sort of grand or fixed truths from authoritative sources. In the 16th century, the fashion was to write either systematic philosophical treatises, or commonplace books. The latter were in effect scrapbooks of

information, a way of compiling and remembering facts and ideas. In stark contrast, Montaigne's innovative project was a festive medley of continually renewed attempts – essays – to draw closer to more fleeting and fallible truths:

If my mind could gain a firm footing, I would not make essays, I would make decisions; but it is always in apprenticeship and on trial.⁴

Montaigne tests or weighs his own and other people's thoughts about Socrates, opinions about cannibals, and comments on history and current events. He throws in Latin aphorisms, musings about his cat, philosophical ideas, endless personal observations about his body, snippets of gorgeous classical poetry, anecdotes about his unusual childhood - whatever comes into his head as the words tumble onto the page in front of him. He is constantly at play with otherness. Instead of synthesizing these strange fragments into a sturdy argument, our convivial host juxtaposes, making room for alterity. He places the unruly pieces, which he describes as "chimeras and fantastic monsters"⁵, alongside each other so that they become voices in a conversation, "lead[ing] to moments of [shared] revelation though not necessarily to any final synthesis." (Hall, 1989, p. 82)

Like any good friend, Montaigne doesn't impose. His words leave room for you to weigh your own judgements, to come to new understandings, and to learn anew about your world. His wondering stance and his sidelong glances ask for a response from the other: from the reader, from himself, and from the text. Our companion discovered that the light of understanding comes from exchange, not from authoritative wisdom, or from private subjectivity. Montaigne finds himself "born for company and friendship"⁶ and it is this way of being with and towards others that grants us access to a particular world. We can see this world clearly not only because of our own intelligence or Montaigne's unique experience, but because he stands beside us: "essaying requires an exchange of lives" (O'Neill, 1982, p. 191). Pen in hand, Montaigne arrived at the profound intuition that the world becomes coherent through hospitality and friendship, rather than systematic knowledge.

The Wine-Maker from Bordeaux

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Let me give you a bit of background about this Renaissance man, our wine-maker from Bordeaux. Michel de Montaigne was born into recent nobility near the end of the Renaissance in

1533. His grandfather, a wealthy fish merchant by the name of Raymond Eyquem, bought the Chateau Montaigne and its profitable vineyards in 1477. At the time, Bordeaux red wine, also known as claret, enjoyed great popularity across the channel and was being imported in vast quantities by the English. Along with the house, which stands on the top of a mountain (or hill, really), came the noble title, Lord of Montaigne.

As a child, in order to be fluent with the wisdom of classical texts, Montaigne was spoken to exclusively in Latin. This experimental and “natural” approach meant that he had only his German tutor for company as nobody in his family could actually speak Latin. It wasn’t until the age of six that he was permitted to learn French. And yes, this was rather odd, even at that time. Latin had not been spoken colloquially in at least a millennium. Actually, no one is quite sure about how true this story is, but what we do know, is that luckily for us, Montaigne’s early Latin immersion afforded him a rare intimacy with the recently rediscovered classical texts. His colloquial rather than scholarly ease allowed him to set the table for a uniquely lively and fertile conversation with the great thinkers of antiquity.

After a solid humanist education, Montaigne worked as a magistrate in the court system- a somewhat lacklustre career by his own account – and served time both in the army and as a gentleman at court. It was at the parliament of Bordeaux, in 1558, that he met the great friend of his life: poet and fellow humanist, Etienne de la Boétie. Sadly, their friendship was cut short after only six years by la Boétie’s untimely death. Ten years later, at the ripe old age of 38, (which was considered a little long in the tooth), Montaigne retired from public life to the tower on his estate to write. Incidentally, I was 38 when I began to read and write about the *Essays* – a detail that has always made me feel slightly better about starting my PhD at such a geriatric age.

Books One and Two of his *Essays* were first published to great success in 1580. They went through five editions before Book Three was added in 1588. Three years after his death in 1592, a complete edition was published which integrated his abundant marginalia, and came to be known as the Bordeaux Copy. Interestingly, the *Essays* were quickly translated into English by John Florio in 1603, and had an immediate impact on English writing and thinking, even more so than in France. When you consider that the *Essays* are about a 1000 pages, this swift translation speaks to the enthusiasm of the public response. News of what Friedrich (1991) called “the most personal book that had appeared to date in world literature” (p. 208) travelled very quickly indeed. To this day, Florio’s translation is considered an important version. The influence of the *Essays* on Western thinkers and writers is extensive al-

beit often overlooked. But to give you an idea, consider Montaigne's young contemporary, Shakespeare. Obviously, Shakespeare did not write essays, but the themes and rhythms of many of his passages, as well as his pioneering use of metaphor⁷, owe a deep debt to Montaigne. For example, "To be or not to be", is considered by many to be Shakespeare's response to the *Essays*. The Renaissance humanists were in the midst of a love affair with ancient philosophy, in particular with the scepticism⁸. Montaigne, being a man of his time, was a sceptic⁹, not in the hardnosed way that we view scepticism now, but rather with a sceptic ease, buoyed on the rolling waves of doubt. It could be, maybe so, maybe not, perhaps to be, or perhaps not to be. The *Essays* and Hamlet share this reflexivity- that of a sceptical mind thinking. Atwan (1995) points out that Hamlet, like Montaigne, juxtaposes his own judgement processes with more authoritative thinking. "Shakespeare, [...] was essaying the essay within his tragedy, and in so doing he provided one of the earliest commentaries on Montaigne's literary creation." (p. 8) Melville was known to have scribbled in the margins of his copy of Hamlet: "Here is forcibly shown the great Montaigneism of Hamlet." (p. 7)

Then, of course, there are the parts that Shakespeare simply copied directly from the *Essays*. But that's another story.

The Unity of Presence

The open-endedness of his mind's sceptical rhythms leaves room for all sorts of possibilities to spontaneously emerge in the *Essays*. At times, like a wild horse, Montaigne careens off on unexpected tangents. The beauty is that despite, or perhaps by virtue, of these "disciplined digression[s]" (Kauffmann, 1989, p. 238) there is a sense of unity, a powerful sense of the *Essays* as a whole. In the margins of his manuscript, Montaigne scribbled: "My book is always one." (Compagnon & Freccero, 1983, p. 48) This unity is presence: an intimate, genuine and surprising revelation. Through all of the wise and the humorous, the familiar and the strange, a palpable presence emerges.

[P]erhaps the greatest feat that he achieved was to reconcile these conflicting strands, crossing and rercrossing one another ; to make them into an active force possessing a unity – not a unity of expression, but of life. (Sichel, 1911, p. 249)

I've always been struck by the sway of Montaigne's presence; even just hearing or reading about him through others is captivating. When I speak about the *Essays* and Montaigne to friends and colleagues, I am continu-

ally surprised by the keenness of their interest. They always want to know more: where can they find the book, which essay should they read, which edition, etc. In other words, they want to talk about him. “And so the ‘*Essays*’ find readers who find readers like friends seeking one another. By word of mouth.” (O’Neill, 1982, p. 7) The astonishing gift of the *Essays* is that they are continually reborn in conversation with each reader, and it is through these infinite ordinary relationships, as opposed to, say, a biography, that Montaigne’s presence emerges so vividly. Through essaying, Montaigne comes to evoke what Saul Frampton (2011) calls a sense of “betweenness”, “an awareness of others as integral to ourselves.” (p. 273)

All relationships start by renouncing complete knowledge of the self, other and world. In light of *full* presence, we wouldn’t need words. But the self and other always escape us – we only have moments of presence, and thus conversation and essaying are infinite attempts to be together.

We are beginning to see that the *Essays* lead us on another route to knowledge, a more lively and accidental route to a different kind of knowledge, what Frampton (2011) would call “a form of meeting” (p. 205), or what we might call understanding. It is in this conversational context that presence and friendship manifest themselves. We therapists are fellow travellers with Montaigne on this road. But it’s not an easy way to travel. He shared our anxiety about the itinerary. He too worried about knowledge and its institutions. Is what I’m writing going to be acceptable? Am I using a valid methodology? We share this the same struggle as thinkers.

“He who lives not at all unto others, hardly lives unto himself.”¹⁰

Montaigne came to see writing and thinking as unifying movements. Rather than an assembly of fragments, the *Essays* are “the site of a social event” (p. 275): a conversation that unifies the textual self and the thinking self, and creates the whole of a couple. In this cosmological perspective, humanity, or what makes us human, points to alterity – to what arises between couples: “god and man, man and woman, child and adult, neighbour and neighbour, friend and friend, soul and body, native and foreigner,” reader and writer, speaker and listener. (Jager, 1991, p. 64) Our humanity can be lost if not continually cultivated through tentative reaches, or essays, across mysterious thresholds that at once demarcate and unite lived worlds. In contrast to the metaphorical unity of the cosmos, modern unity finds humanity already there within a self-enclosed individual: one who is subject to the same indifferent laws as everything else in the material universe. In

this monolithic view, it's impossible to see how the evocation of presence involves leaving room for the revelation of the other, how the question of oneself is inseparable from the question of the other.

The cosmological or mythical perspective is timeless, but was particularly salient during the Renaissance. The humanists' flourishing Christian civilization was founded on the idea that they were symbolically united with the other: the newly rediscovered Roman culture, which in turn was founded on an encounter with the Greeks. Rather than assimilating this strange culture into some sort of neat synthesis about human nature, or tossing away what they feared as too foreign or pagan, the humanists worked extremely hard to maintain a cultural conversation through translation, transcription, reading, writing, education, love and friendship. Such relationships were the source of Montaigne's culture, of his understanding about himself, the world, and his position in it.

It is interesting to consider that not only are the *Essays* engaged in an intimate conversation with the world of Antiquity, they are one of the first European writings to consider the "cultural and epistemological consequences of the discovery and exploration of the New World." (Langer, 2005, p. 4) As a matter of fact, Conley (2005) says, given that the New World is no longer new, the *Essays* are both "[t]he first and last places where we encounter the New Worlds." (p. 93) Surprisingly, even though classical and biblical views of geography had only recently been thrown into question, the initial response to the New World was generally muted. People regarded it as "simply 'there'" (p. 75), as having little impact on their lives. Even in the 16th century, there were only a few travel journals and a handful of political tracts about the American Indians. Montaigne was the first writer to really grapple with the meaning of the New World to the Europeans' sense of self, most notably in the chapters, "On the cannibals" and "On coaches". Montaigne's "imaginative and reasoned" (p. 74) reflections on both the otherness and common humanity of the peoples of the New World, serve as a mirror to his non-transparent relationship with himself. Radical alterity makes his self-portrait come to life. On the very first page of the *Essays*, otherness comes into play:

I want to be seen here in my simple, natural, ordinary fashion, without straining or artifice; for it is myself that I portray. My defects will be read to the life, and also my natural form, as far as respect for the public has allowed. Had I been placed among those nations which are said to live still in the sweet freedom of nature's first laws, I assure you I should very gladly have portrayed myself here entire and wholly naked.¹¹

Swept up in a spirit of discovery, Montaigne was able to see the lay of the land of both inner and outer worlds through new eyes, so to speak. He needed the other to know himself. With an élan typical of the Renaissance, Montaigne embodied the message that the world is a lot bigger than we know.

The Presence Within Absence

So now you know a little bit about Montaigne's life and *Essays*. I've introduced the idea that the unity of this "[t]his bundle of so many disparate pieces"¹² stems from Montaigne's remarkably visceral presence. We have also seen that the *Essays*' compelling "unity of life" is best understood within the Renaissance humanists' relational perspective, as distinguished from our modern view. Perhaps, you have the feeling that that essaying and psychotherapy share some common ground. It's clearly time to get to know our friend a little better. Let me tell you a story about friendship and loss, about how Montaigne came to appreciate the dual nature of his humanity.

Montaigne began his project in part as a way of dealing with the loss of his best friend, Étienne la Boétie. Theirs was a wonderful meeting of two erudite young humanists in their 20's, each probably a little bored in their jobs, each bursting with ideas and questions about books, philosophy and the meaning of a good life. They had heard of each other before they met. Montaigne had already read a circulating manuscript of la Boétie's well-known treatise against tyranny, *On Voluntary Servitude*.

We sought each other before we met, because of the reports we heard of each other, which had more effect on our affection than such reports would reasonably have; I think it was by some ordinance from heaven, We embraced each other by our names. And at our first meeting, which by chance came at a great feast and gathering in the city, we found ourselves so taken with each other, so well acquainted, so bound together, that from that time on nothing was so close to us as each other.¹³

And so it began. Of the two, la Boétie was more well-regarded, already a writer, married, and a little more advanced in his career even though he was only two years older. Together, they were inspired by the exalted and highly rational models of classical friendship, often likening themselves to Socrates and his young friend Alcibiades (p. 92). But in time, their friendship escaped the confines of idealism, and flourished into something unique

and invented anew: “Our friendship has no other model than itself, and can be compared only with itself.”¹⁴ Just before tragically succumbing to a brief illness, (probably the plague), with Montaigne at his bedside, la Boétie bequeathed his library of about 1000 books to his great friend.

Ten years later, Montaigne undertook the writing of the *Essays*, in particular, the 28th chapter, “On friendship”, as a monument to his friend, as well as in an effort to continue their dialogue, to restore their connection: “In the friendship I speak of, our souls mingle and blend with each other so completely that they efface the seam that joined them, and cannot find it again.”¹⁵ However, Montaigne’s book, which “built itself up with diverse interruptions and intervals”¹⁶, was founded on a fundamental gap, a profound absence at its core. The “effaced seam” had come undone. Montaigne’s self-portrait was not built up around a nucleus of the self, but around the painful absence of his friend. It’s worth recalling that in Montaigne’s time, the French language did not even have a word for the self¹⁷, for that nugget of solidity. There was no *cogito*.

In keeping with humanist tradition, Montaigne committed to posthumously publishing la Boétie’s writings. However, instead of simply printing them, he decided that *On Voluntary Servitude* should have the place of honour as the centrepiece of his own book, lovingly incorporated into the *Essays*’ embrace. The first book of the *Essays* was made up of 57 chapters, and the treatise would constitute the middle, or 29th chapter. But just as Book I was going to print, the Huegenots claimed la Boétie’s manuscript as their own revolutionary text. The outraged Catholic Parliament ordered it burned. So, early on in the writing of the *Essays*, to avoid political difficulties, and also fearing that la Boétie’s ideas would be distorted, Montaigne decided to replace the treatise with 29 of his beloved friend’s unpublished sonnets. He did not edit or reconfigure the surrounding text when he made the substitution. Montaigne generally avoided any corrections to his *Essays* because he wanted to paint as real a portrait as possible, one that included “the imperfections that are ordinary and constant in me”¹⁸.

Michael Butor (1968, as cited in Compagnon & Freccero, 1983, p. 26) provides a thought-provoking interpretation of the centrality of Montaigne’s great friend to the unity of the *Essays*. Butor sees the 29 sonnets, preceded by 28 chapters, and followed by 28 chapters, as forming a triptych typical of a Renaissance painting. In Chapter 28, “On friendship”, Montaigne wrote:

As I was considering the way a painter I employ went about his work, I had a mind to imitate him. He chooses the best spot,

the middle of each wall, to put a picture labored over with all his skill, and the empty space all around it he fills with grotesques, which are fantastic paintings whose only charm lies in their variety and strangeness. And what are these things of mine, in truth, but grotesques and monstrous bodies, pieced together of divers members, without definite shape, having no order, sequence, or proportion other than accidental?¹⁹

Originally, Montaigne conceived of his project as “chimeras and fantastic monsters”²⁰ surrounding the still beauty of la Boétie’s free-standing work. His *Essays* had no body, only random limbs. He hoped that the stillness of the centre would hold both himself and his book together. But what is remarkable is that he crossed out even the 29 sonnets in his final manuscript, leaving only the dispassionate note, “These verses may be seen elsewhere”²¹. Bakewell (2010) describes the double deletion in Chapter 29 as “a ragged stub or hole which Montaigne deliberately refused to disguise. He even drew attention to its frayed edges.” (p. 99)

Through essaying, Montaigne transformed absence into a threshold at which he could maintain a symbolic connection with la Boétie. The absence that is death became an infinite source of renewal as the *Essays* accumulated. It is at the “frayed edges” between presence and absence that we, the readers, catch such powerful glimpses of our friend. There is no stable self at the centre of this book. Instead, Montaigne said, “I am over the entrance”²², at the threshold between past and present, self and other, reader and writer. With the “tolerated absence” (Jager, 1999, p. 93), or cultivated difference at its heart, the *Essays* were no longer disjointed body parts; they became a metaphorically unified body, “essays in flesh and bone”²³.

If we follow this train of thought and move closer into the symbolic unity at the heart of the *Essays*, we come to one moment in 1000 pages where our garrulous companion comes to sudden halt, at a complete loss for words. He doesn’t even bother to digress. You have the sense that Montaigne pulls up short at the edge of the chasm between himself and la Boétie, stunned by grief:

If you press me to tell why I loved him, I feel that this cannot be expressed, except by answering: Because it was he, because it was I.²⁴

In this famous passage, Montaigne tries and fails to put their relationship into words. He comes up against the limits of language. Not only can he not

translate his lived experience of their friendship into the universal language of humanism (Zalloua, 2003, p. iii), he cannot find the right words to reach out to la Boétie across the abyss. The sentence is yet another trace of the wound. But it is also a point where he accepts the separation and offers the work of his imagination up to the public to contemplate. In this moment of transcendence, we feel Montaigne very near.

If we look at the differences between publications, as well as at the differences in ink used in his copious marginalia, we can find out a little more about Montaigne's grappling with absence, his work of creating an ephemeral order out of the chaos of grief. Frampton (2011) charts Montaigne's search for consolation in the material world. For example, at one point later in the *Essays*, Montaigne tries to look at his separation from la Boétie as absolute and literal: "They are dead. So, indeed is my father, as absolutely dead as they are, and as distant from me and from life in 18 years as they are in 1600."²⁵ Perhaps seeking further comfort, he continues his objective investigation with a mathematician named Peletier:

Now these are things that often clash; and I have been told that in geometry (which thinks it has reached the high point of certainty among the sciences) there are irrefutable demonstrations that controvert the truth of experience. For instance, Jacques Peletier was telling me at my house that he had found two lines travelling toward each other so as to meet, which nevertheless he proved could never come to touch even at infinity.²⁶

But he's still lost. The objective view seems to peter out, and the life of the *Essays*, like la Boétie's verses, is found elsewhere. Montaigne returns to the abyss in Chapter 28. (Remember, Montaigne was constantly adding to all of the *Essays*.) In the first edition of the *Essays*, "On friendship" contained only the phrase:

If you press me to tell why I loved him, I feel that this cannot be expressed.

It is as though he does not have the heart to even try. Several years of essaying later, in the marginalia that became part of the posthumous Bordeaux copy, he was able to add, "except by answering: Because it was I." Essaying the abyss involves drawing close and stepping back, speaking and listening. Montaigne found that there is no "I" without a "he". With new technology, it has recently been discovered that the first part of the sentence was added later still, giving us the final phrase, "Because it was he, because it was I." (Phillippe Desan, 2004) In this dance of absence and presence, Montaigne

was better able to tolerate the abyss and see himself in a new light. Rather than fusing with la Boétie into an idealized union, or remaining radically separate, like geometric lines in a material universe, the possibility of a new conversation arose:

Besides this profit that I derive from writing about myself, I hope for this other advantage, that if my humors happen to please and suit some worthy man before I die, he will try to meet me. [...] If by such good signs I knew of a man who was suited to me, truly I would go very far to find him for the sweetness of harmonious and agreeable company cannot be bought too dearly, in my opinion. Oh, a friend!²⁷

There is a discontinuity at his core: a Montaigne before the death of la Boétie, and a Montaigne after. Clearly, we are not in the paradigm of progress. He did not attempt to smooth over the gap to make the book more uniform, or nor did he stand paralyzed in defeat before it. Instead, Montaigne essayed. The *Essays* are a work of continual partings and returns, and this is enough. Montaigne becomes human by transforming absence into a source of culture, a vital source and resource for human life.

Incidentally, the etymology of the word “heritage” sheds light on this conception of humanity and on the significance of La Boétie’s deathbed bequest of his personal library to Montaigne. Jager (personal communication, August, 2012) reminds us that “heritage” stems from the Indo-European roots: “ghe” and “do”. “Ghe” indicates an absence, a gap left by something that has disappeared. The next element, “do”, gives rise to the word “donation”, or “don” in French, which means “gift”. Together, these elements create a metaphor that leads us from the crisis of losing what was once there, to the appearance of an unbearable absence, which is then transformed into a gift. In this sense, our cultural heritage allows what has disappeared to be reborn in a new way, from one generation to another, from one mode of being to another, from utter despair to the grace of a new conversation.

The aim of psychotherapy, like essaying, is to learn to cultivate or live with absences, with the opaqueness of the other. We learn to live with what escapes us. Our starting point is loss. Rather than seeking truth as an ultimate haven so that you don’t lack anything, you let someone in on your thought. You give up on your own truth in favour of presence. Psychotherapy is always about giving up the dream of being sufficient to yourself.

The *Essays* shed light on the inverse also. Being sick means that you can’t

meet the other. You may be paralyzed by your yearning for fusion with a loved one, or running as far away as you can. In both situations, you close yourself off to dialogue. As J.H. van den Berg (1975) says, all psychological symptoms call out for the healing presence of the other (p. 182). What frees us from lonely paralysis or the alienating mechanical repetition of unsatisfying behaviour or thinking, is the presence of another. This blind circle of reflection only opens up if there is someone to talk to.

*"The Initiator of Psychology"*²⁸

The *Essays* were "born in the [...] goodness of being loved and understood." (O'Neill, 1982, p. 19) Montaigne drew on his friendship with la Boétie to have the courage to come forward with, as Spears (1988) puts it, unprecedented "candor and honesty" (p. 312). He was the first writer to speak so frankly about the most ordinary details of his life.

For Montaigne may be said to have been the initiator of psychology- of a subtle personal note in his study of life and men that was unknown before him, a study made at closer quarters with his kind than any ventured by his predecessors. (Sichel, 1911, p. 175)

Our *honnête homme*²⁹ confides that that he actually knows nothing about the fermentation of grapes, even though wine is the primary product of his estate. And he only recently found out that bread was made from yeast. We learn that the only fruit he likes are melons, and that he often eats so quickly that he bites his fingers. He's a middling runner unlike his father who was very sprightly and could run and jump well into old age. He's unfortunately on the short side. He has a round but not fat face. He has terrible singing voice, stiff and clumsy hands, and a "heavy and lazy disposition"³⁰ As for the faculty of memory, he confesses that "it is entirely lacking in me."³¹

My library [...] is sited at one of the corners of my house. If an idea occurs to me which I want to go and look up or write down, I have to tell someone else about it in case it slips out of my mind as I merely cross my courtyard.³²

His "study made at closer quarters" is not presented in the form of an autobiography nor as a "regimented self-interrogation" (Brush, 1994, p. 174). Montaigne, the psychologist, is "seeking acquaintance, not science." (p. 174) The ordinary details are offered in conversation with larger shared questions,

literally juxtaposed with questions about how to live, truth, experience, the body, friendship, love, language, death, and education. Intimate details bring him closer to the lived world, while knitting him into the wider human fabric.

Montaigne's enterprise of transforming loss into a source of creativity led to what he called his brain children³³. He saw his love for la Boétie in the truth of their progeny, the *Essays*. Put another way, his intimate conversations with his lost friend led to surprising moments of connection to the larger world of truth. All of the humanities – understood broadly to be an approach that seeks the revelations of the arts, myth, religion, history, literature, and philosophy– flow out of loving conversational practices, like friendship. These relationships are our sources of understanding about the human condition, our psychology.

Today, in psychotherapy, our ideals or exemplars are not personal works, but rather theories about the self, statistical means, positions on curves of normality. They lead us to mischaracterize and loathe ourselves (de Botton, 2012, July 13, 12:25). By painting such a frank portrait of a very ordinary human being rather than an exemplary person, Montaigne “makes our human follies less shameful” (9:49). When we feel less alone, it's possible to be serious and ridiculous: we are all steeped in just as much “inanity and nonsense”³⁴. Montaigne, (whom the Vatican referred to as the French Socrates), admired Socrates for his rigour, but he cut himself a lot more slack and had more fun (Spears, 1988, p. 315) than his hemlock-drinking forefather: “I have not, like Socrates, by the force of reason, corrected my natural propensities, and have not in the least interfered with my inclinations by art. I let myself go as I have come. I combat nothing.”³⁵

Psychotherapy is also about articulating and learning to live with the otherness of our faults, the strangeness of our weaknesses and insecurities, not necessarily about doing anything with them. To a certain extent, we learn to give them space and let them be. We meet our problems and let them speak rather than solve them. Like Montaigne, we come to the idea that reality is messy, but that a good life involves a “more or less gracious accommodation [...] with reality” (de Botton, 2012, July 13, 15:02), all while keeping our intellectual confidence in check. “[W]e try to be fully human, but not more than human” (Spears, 1988, p. 318).

It's fascinating to consider that the friendship between Montaigne and la Boétie has continued to be spoken and written about in vaunted tones since the 16th century, even though we actually have few verifiable facts about its

existence. For unlike many other celebrated friendships between writers, there exists no correspondence between Montaigne and La Boetie. The only documentary evidence that we have that the two ever saw one another is a will witnessed by them on June 2, 1563 for Montaigne's uncle (Gray, 1961, p. 205). Now we do have a letter that Montaigne wrote to his father describing the impressively Stoic death of La Boetie, but here, Montaigne admits that his friend did go on and on a little at the end. Come to think of it, Montaigne's comments about their friendship are often a little dry, in my opinion.

The great friendship that has touched so many readers does not emerge through facts, or direct observations about the relationship. Instead, it is reborn through the practice of essaying. Montaigne transformed the symbolic wound that is the very heart of the *Essays*, into a living work that must be eternally renewed between reader and writer. This living work shows us - among many things - that what matters in life is a relationship like Montaigne's friendship with La Boetie: a relationship in which you can talk freely and candidly about everything and anything, where what matters to them is most important to you,

Montaigne discovered that what counts was not "laying down [truth]"³⁶, but learning to relate to someone while continually revising his view of himself, the other and the world. What is important is learning to talk together. Things start to appear when you relate to other people. The thrilling discovery of both the *Essays* and psychotherapy is that you can speak as freely as you can and be listened to! This may be taken for granted these days, but for Montaigne as for Freud, this idea was quite radical. Montaigne creates an intimate space where he can receive his friends and address his readers, where you can talk about cannibalism, farting, kings, or sex, and no one gets upset. Bernd Jager says that this idea is the background for a civilization: you can consider everything without necessarily acting upon it. You make decisions with friends and those around you about what to do. Montaigne, as a Renaissance man, is highly aware that civilization, with its cultures and customs, lies behind him, bolstering him in times of great loss and uncertainty.

Psychotherapy is really about coming to the understanding that our life is not governed by our consciousness, but by our friends and loves. It is about creating a relationship in which we can come to understand the world and how to live well within it. Together can we be confident that it is not necessary to know everything. Such a relationship in which we stand together to

face life has become very precious in modern times.

"Oh, a friend!"

I propose Michel de Montaigne as a patron of psychotherapy, a mentor, but most importantly, a friend for lonely therapists working away behind closed doors. Just as Montaigne was intrigued upon hearing about la Boétie through mutual friends, I want to inspire this same feeling: the delightful possibility of a world of friendship waiting to be discovered. Rather than introducing a substantive self, a factual or objective Montaigne, I hope to invite you into a world that is opened up through Montaigne's innovative way of practicing friendship. In the lived world of the essay, unlike in the material uni-verse, "personhood necessarily implies a relationship to other persons." (Jager, 2013) Thus, I am encouraging a meeting in the intersubjective sense, by trying to convey some of the vivid interpersonal quality that comes through Montaigne's writing. In this realm, seeing is also being seen, speaking is also being heard, and writing is also being read. When I refer to Montaigne as a person, I approach him, not as an individual consciousness, but as a body of work – a book – a manifestation of his presence that reveals a world.

It is highly fitting that our essayistic friend is a man of the Renaissance, since therapy helps us to enlarge our culture, in a sense to become Renaissance men and women. Culture gives us resources to face the groundlessness of our existence, to create order through conversation. As "Montaigne's latent and pervasive smile" (Tetel, 1979, p. 79) suggests, there is a positivity that comes from access to culture. I like André Gide's (1964) comment that the pleasure we take in reading the *Essays* is the pleasure that Montaigne took in writing them (p. 8). This suggestion of pleasure is remarkable considering the particularly dark and bloody times during which Montaigne lived, not to mention his recent and lingering bereavement. In addition to the loss of la Boétie, he was mourning the deaths his beloved father, five infant daughters, and an unlucky brother felled by a tennis ball.

Ideally, a therapist is a cultured person who has the ability to introduce the patient to the wider world. Such a therapist has access to poetry, literature, film, history, religion and art, as well as the sciences. He or she is someone who can dwell comfortably in and pivot between multiple worlds, perhaps between private lives and public worlds, or between utilitarian and cosmological realms. In the therapeutic conversation, there is a rhythm between lived experience in the here and now, and reflection on this experience. We

distinguish and pivot between these views. As Donna Orange (2009, November 10) says, “We engage and notice that we engage with our patients, [we do] not just observe them.” (34:13)

A Humanist Psychotherapy

I want to introduce Montaigne and his *Essays* to fellow psychotherapy students, to pique the interest of those students, including myself, who feel like something is missing in our increasingly depersonalized education. I propose that our discipline of psychotherapy, which is based on particular conversations with particular people, may also be fruitfully explored through a relationship with one such particular, personal world. With a friend we are better able to do two things: to say who we are and to see where we belong. We need a friend to stand by us to better articulate our particular creative work, and to help us to see where we stand in conversation with the other: with books, ideas, our ancestors, other disciplines, our patients, and ourselves. Montaigne is our man.

Like Montaigne’s “restless inquiry” (Hampshire, 2003, p. xx), therapy flows from a particular disciplined relationship, an attempt to be together in a world made coherent by the practices of friendship and hospitality. Together, therapist and patient find the heart to engage with their subject matter and follow it closely, which paradoxically allows us to become aware of other things, to inscribe our experience within a larger story. Therapy and essaying share this central aim: to draw people out into the light of relationships, to live more intensely, in richer colour and finer detail.

Our common attitude is one of humility, for ultimately all we can do is essay, and that is enough. (This is in contrast to the natural sciences, in which you cannot speak until you know.) Like Montaigne, we accept that we cannot make pronouncements that will reverberate throughout the ages: “How many things were articles of faith to us yesterday that are fables to us today?”³⁷ Instead of uncovering timeless anonymous facts about human nature, we renew the question of how to think our humanity. We continue to essay our beginnings and revisit our creative works. Such is the work and imagination required to maintain relationships.

Montaigne’s immediate presence imbues us with the Renaissance spirit of discovery, a sense that we are beckoned by something more. The *Essays* sensitize us to the experience of presence and to the question inherent in presence which asks us to step forward and be candid ourselves. It is tragic

that in our modern time we get to truth by making ourselves absent in an indifferent world. Montaigne shows us that hospitality and friendship are fundamental moves that open a human world to self and other. The *Essays* began in wonder about his own humanity and that of others. Montaigne wondered about how to be good neighbours, how to leave space for the other, how to cultivate difference. The question that arises for therapists is how do we create an atmosphere in which people can stop being scared, and start talking with confidence in a benevolent world, instead of clamming up? (Jager, personal communication, May, 2011) How do we lay the table for such a vital conversation? This cultural exercise is the basis for a humanist psychotherapy.

“And then, for whom do you write?”³⁸

In our modern world we don't really have room for the idea of friendship. We see it as biological, or as some sort of economics of self-interest, or as repressed homosexuality, or at best as something sentimental. Its original primacy, as felt during Antiquity and the Renaissance, is completely lost. Montaigne reminds us that letting our guard down and seeing something together leads to discovery. He reminds us of the pleasure of being together in the search for understanding. The *Essays* shows us that friendship is the very condition for clarity. Whether we are approaching a friend, a patient, a text, or a work of art, we are seeking a mutual revelation of presence, which allows us to see. (Jager, personal communication, December, 2012)

Reviving the old fashioned notion of friendship takes us out of a purely theoretical paradigm and into the lived world. Essaying friendship shows otherness or difference to be an experience that comes to life in a particular conversation, structured by the symbolic bond between listener and speaker. To literalize or universalize any conception of the “other” is, paradoxically, to become indifferent. Thinking and friendship cease when we try to fit our scholarship into an ambitious frame, when we adopt the pretence that a theory gives you the key to some special, ultimate knowledge. The other disappears in the authoritarian regime of this kind of theorizing.

I think that the idea of friendship is an interesting place to dwell for therapists; it draws our attention to a different stance than we may be used to, and perhaps to a different, yet recognizable notion of what we do. What we are doing in friendship is building a common world and giving ourselves a place in it. In the modest realm of friendship, we have to depend on words and gestures that can only hint at meaning. But there is someone there to

receive our thoughts, to *alter* and renew our conceptions. Therapy is by and large convincing people, (often both therapist and patient), that conversations are how we learn to manoeuvre in life.

The other day, my ever-eloquent director, Bernd Jager, sent me this email:

The “presences” that guide our life are mostly of this symbolic variety. [...] the parting words of a good friend, the reactions of an old teacher to what we said on a particular occasion, all stay with us in a durable way so we see and hear them again at the right time when we have to make a particular decision or find ourselves at the crossroads for some other reason. [...] Come to think of it, Montaigne was accompanied in his explorations, not only by memories of his old friend, La Boétie, but also by a great number of ancient authors who “stood by him” and who are everywhere present in his work. The old Cartesian and modernist project of “thinking entirely on our own” appears in this light as a harmful, scientific fiction. Maybe the voice of the muse of artist and writer is actually the sound of a choir made up of people we have known and loved and who have known and loved us and continue to support and encourage us on our way. Stripped of these voices we fall mute. (Jager, personal communication, January, 2013).

As once la Boétie bequeathed his beloved library to his great friend, Montaigne bequeaths the *Essays* and the essay form to modernity in an act of friendship. We receive this heritage not as information, but as a symbol of the humanist transfer of knowledge, turning his absence into a gift. Montaigne’s gift reminds us of our lost vision of humanity, and suggests other possibilities of courageously responding to its absence. The discipline of psychotherapy is one such response.

Montaigne encouraged mixing with all sorts of people, not to learn facts or “measurements”, but to learn of their “characters and ways [...], to rub and polish our brains by contact with those of others”³⁹. Now that I’ve introduced you, fellow therapists, to our friend from Bordeaux, I hope that you will open a bottle of wine together, (preferably a Montaigne wine, which, by the way, is still in production), enjoy and marvel at each other as you “rub and polish” each other’s minds.

To communicate is our chief business; society and friendship our chief delights; and reading, not to acquire knowledge, not to earn a living, but to extend our

intercourse beyond our own time and province. (Woolf, 1925)

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Notes

- 1 For ease of reading, I have placed all of the citations from the *Essays* using the following format: (TRANSLATOR INITIAL, BOOK:chapter, page). I mainly refer to Donald Frame (Montaigne, 2003), M.A. Screech (Montaigne, 1991), and Charles Cotton's (Montaigne, 1877) English translations of the *Essays*.
- 2 (S, 11:18, 755)
- 3 (F, preface, 2)
- 4 (F, III:2, 740)
- 5 (F, I:9, 25)
- 6 (F, III:3, 758)

7 Montaigne was the first writer to use visual metaphor so extensively. He explored the “poetic gait” (F, III:9, 925) of familiar words to “enrich their own, give more weight and depth to their meaning and use; they [good writers] teach the language unaccustomed movements, but prudently and shrewdly.” (F, III:5, 807)

8 Montaigne was particularly interested in the pragmatic schools of thought, which also include Stoicism and Epicureanism.

9 Today, one might view a sceptic as one who doubts things, and requires proof about knowledge. In the Hellenistic era (when it was born) and during the Renaissance, scepticism, especially Pyrrhonian scepticism, was almost a form of therapy. Pyrrhonism, which comes to us from the Greek philosopher Pyrrho (ca. 360 BC - ca. 270 BC) and was later elaborated by Sextus Empiricus in the second century AD, says that we need take nothing seriously in life, including Pyrrhonism itself. Bakewell (2010) sums up ordinary (Academic) scepticism in Socrates’ remark “All I know is that I know nothing.” (p. 124) The Pyrrhonian sceptic would go one step further and say that they are not even sure that they know nothing! The resultant absurdity may have the effect of making you feel better, even laugh, because you are freed from the exasperating search for fixed truths. You still judge and look for answers, but you are content with drawing closer to phenomenological truths.

10 (F, III:10, 936)

11 (F, preface, 2)

12 (F, II:37, 696)

13 (F, I:28, 169)

14 (F, I:28, 169)

15 (F, I:28, 169)

16 (F, II:37, 696)

17 The term “*le moi*” only came into common usage in the 17th century. (Brush, 1994, p. 215)

18 (F, III:5, 809)

19 (F, I:28, 164)

20 (F, I:9, 25)

21 (F, I:29, 177)

22 (F, III:3, 762)

23 (F, III:5, 777)

24 (S, I:28, 169)

25 (passage from III:9 as translated by and cited in Frampton, 2011b, p. 39)

26 (F, II:12, 522)

27 (F, III:9, 911-912)

28 (Sichel, 1911, p. 175)

29 In 17th century France, the ideal man was an “honnête homme”. This term literally translates as “honest man”, but is more closely associated with the idea of honour than of honesty. Such a man was a cultured amateur whose worth was measured by conversational skill and manners rather than glory, by his broad general culture rather than specific ex-

pertise. He embodied social and moral values such as charm, wit, modesty, and moderation. Freidrich considers Montaigne to have been the first “honnête homme” (Philippe Desan, 1991, p. xxiii).

30 (C, II:17)

31 (F, II:17, 598)

32 (S, II:17, 739)

33 (S, II:8, 451)

34 (F, III:9, 931)

35 (F, III:12, 988)

36 (S, I:56, 355)

37 (F, I:27, 164)

38 (F, II:17, 605)

39 (F, I:26, 136)

Dead Tilt: Playing for Keeps at “The Blue Hotel,” the Prize and the Price.

Anthony Splendora

Abstract

Stephen Crane had not advanced beyond his teenage years before twelve of the sixteen original members of his immediate family had died, and by his early twenties he was becoming symptomatic with the tuberculosis that would kill him at twenty eight. Death, ever present, overshadowed his life and like a threatening eclipse looms, markedly, in his best work. “The Blue Hotel,” a crowning realization of the short story form, is a site for the expurgation of that relentless spectre, its alienated and adversarial Swede a personification of Crane’s own dissolution, forthwith to be ritualistically purged. Such sacrifice is shown to be psychosocially well founded, historical in long practice and supported by current theory as a means of restoring order to exigent chaos; here Crane in 1898, nearing his unruly end, implemented sacrificial victimization allegorically, with cardplaying rather than the casting of lots his aleatory selector, for the most vital personal reason.

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“Desire has its own logic, a logic of gambling. Once past a certain level of bad luck, the luckless player does not give up; as the odds get worse, he plays for higher stakes. Likewise, [he] will always manage to track down the obstacle that cannot be surmounted – which is perhaps nothing more than the world’s massive indifference to him, in the end – and he will destroy himself against it.”

--René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, (“TH”), p. 298

“I am buckling down and turning out stuff like a man. . . . [N]ow that I am in it, I must beat it.”

--Stephen Crane to Paul Revere Reynolds, Feb. 7, 1898

“This is a queer game.”
The Cowboy

Narrative

They are only five, but a handful: a natural pair of Scullys to which are drawn three more “cards” -- a heterogeneous twosome of easterners from New York and a knavish cowboy. The Scullys are a father and son, Pat and Johnnie, as different as a pair can be, while the easterners are an equally non-homogeneous but serviceable doublet¹ comprised of a diminutive Easterner (Mr. Blanc, a name-effaced Crane-surrogate observer-explainer) and a Swede or Dutchman, who gives his occupation as tailor (*suits*). Except for Pat Scully, the Palace Hotel’s impresario, the first chance they get they sit down in pairs of duos, knocking knees under an improvised table, and play cards. Troublesome Johnnie (*Jack*), fresh from two undercard quarrels with an anonymous farmer, partners the other knave (Cowboy) in this *card game within a card game*, as it were, in one of Stephen Crane’s perfect microcosmic isolations. “No island of the sea could be exempt to the degree of this little room with its humming stove,” he writes (Ch. II). But that warm front room of the Palace Hotel is soon in the players’ hands “hideous as a torture chamber” (Ch. V). They play “only for fun,” Cowboy later protests Johnnie’s gratuitous, sharpening deceit. *Fun or not*, the Easterner says, he and his partner-Swede are cheated. Cowboy is chagrined to learn that players in a game without a prize can get taken. The game does, however, have a price, which Crane will register mimetically through his jarring Swede, our little-man Easterner’s doomed, adventitious co-traveler.

Metaphor

Abstracting to sufficiency, Crane describes only gesturally how they play “High Five,” a madly randomized game of trumps and tricks – either silently or by slapping cards violently, “card-whacking,” he calls it – but the repeated way wind-blown placards fly against a wall and end face-up on a floor exactly as his Swede finally does, making five face-up occurrences, are unambiguous adverbial symbols of Crane’s external theme of randomness and annihilation. Historically, High-Five was in the late nineteenth century “the American gambler’s game *par excellence*,”² so taken from experience, High-Five *qua* game specifically as indiscriminate

particularizer readily supplied Crane a primary metaphor of macrocosmic conflict, a *mise en abîme* signifying life's interactivity stemming from systematic but chaotic initial conditions. It availed a figuration of rule-based yet randomized processes shuffling out win, loss and expenditure while also incorporating uniformly unpredictable personal conduct, how we play the game. The cards-gaming metaphor permeates as well internal aspects of the story. As a gamesman, Pat Scully, the Palace Hotel's little-god principal and principled rule giver – "A guest under my roof has sacred privileges," he says (Ch. IV) -- is described as "a master of strategy," his accumulation of customers at the Fort Romper train station a draw-pokeresque "marvel of catching three men." Related to cards, the Swede's initial fears are "silly" (Ch. I), as adjectival again in "the fat and painted kings and queens . . . gazed with their silly eyes" (Ch. V); further, "Upon the Swede's deathly pale cheeks were two spots brightly crimson and sharply edged, as if they had been carefully painted" (III); like bedecked kings, queens and jacks peeping from between others in a hand, during the snowstorm fistfight, "Occasionally a face, as if illuminated by a flash of light, would shine out, ghastly and marked with pink spots" (Ch. VI).

These reflections interpenetrate, from characters into cards and games and outward from them, signifying metaphorically "the transmutation from the microcosmic to the macrocosmic . . . game of Fate," James Ellis interpreted them, as the cards predominantly mirror directly the "the war that was raging above them" (Ch. V).³ Their four upsets by wind and turmoil increase in violence with rising action, then subside in sympathy, ebbing with its collapse. Conceived by Crane as a virtual *Tarot*, the card-upsets first provide adumbration, in Chapter V, just before the direful cheating allegation, when Scully exits to meet the 6:58 train and "a gust of polar wind whirled into the room . . . scattering the cards." Then, in concert with those "dreadful three words, 'You are cheating,'" "the board had been overturned and the whole company of cards was scattered over the floor, where the boots of the men trampled the fat and painted kings and queens"; in Chapter VI, when Scully's devolving sociality erupts into an overt "paroxysm of disorder" (*TH* 29) and crucial fisticuffs begin, "Some of the scarred and bedabbled cards were caught up from the floor and dashed helplessly against the farther wall," but finally, when fallen and beaten Johnnie is raised and carried back into the room, "As they entered, some cards again rose from the floor and beat against the wall." Crane thus presents a *recitative* to his visual opera, cards and cardplaying its music.

Foreshadowing events when his four players first take up the cards, Crane intimated his intention with, "A game with a board-whacker is sure to become intense" (Ch. II), referring not exclusively to his inflammatory-dolt Cowboy, the first who whacks enthusiastically his cards upon the board, but to his outsider Swede, whose mimicry in "having adopted the fashion of board whacking" (Ch. V) joins his other "game" peculiarities signaling a markedly ontological otherness. He is, we soon learn, as anomalous and sudden in this otherwise mundane amusement as the intimation of rash mortality is in routine Life. Crane's community of lively "Blue Hotel" characters continually address him as "Stranger" only, signifying a presence lastingly unacceptable; they don't even accept that he is a "Swede."

Allegory

Life is clichéd as a card game. Aphoristically, "We play the cards we are dealt"; aspirations attainable are "in the cards," those unreachable "not in the cards" and, in the worst case, "the cards were stacked against us" – sometimes "in spades." Forlorn hopes are "a house of cards." In support of allegory, card-playing was ideally suited to figuration by Crane, an expert player who said he wished he could write as well as he played poker. (He must have been a *killer* on the baize.) Both early on, in "Four Men in a Cave" (*The Sullivan County Sketches*), which features an otherworldly, priestly hermit who flourishes from a makeshift altar what seems a scriptural or satanic "small volume" that turns out to be a deck of cards, and late, in *The Third Violet*, Crane had depicted cardplaying prominently, in the latter as a normal part of bohemian life, as ordinary as breathing and eating (Ch. XXIV). Upon the playing out of the figures in that *Tarot*-weighted "little book" do the destinies of those "Four Men in a Cave" turn, moreover, and in *The Third Violet* his creative types are engrossed with the game, not a *passa tiempe*, but oneirically, as regular contretemps to productive reality. He figured "The Blue Hotel" -- his masterpiece in the opinion of Hemingway, Berryman and Mencken, who called it "superlative among short stories" – published little more than a year before his death but written three years after his western trip in 1895, on the unpredictability of the deal (his determined Swede in post-cards aleatory redux *by chance* puts his hands on the gambler who will skewer him), on the way we handle our cards, and the certainty, putatively in his case desirability, of every game's long-sought end: "To the Easterner there was a monotony of unchangeable fighting that was an abomination. This confused mingling was eternal to his sense, which was

concentrated in a longing for the end, the priceless end" (Ch. VI).

Crane probably chose "priceless" rather than "sweet" both to indicate an eventuality beyond the game of commerce, whether square or rigged, and to circumvent the colloquial "sweet end" for obvious homonymous reasons *vis á vis* his Swede. Unquestionably, the idiomatic "merciful end" was also rejected, *mercy* being granted and therefore teleological (see below, "Analysis"). As well, Crane perhaps for reasons related to the present identification thesis both avoided calling the card game "Double Pedro," one of its "aliases," the game's "Pedros" (Peters) its two trump-colored fives, while as "High Five" conflating it with Easterner's theory of quintuple complicity. Another alias demurred is "Cinch," as in *mortal locks* and secure saddles, a metaphor Crane was using effectively in "The Price of the Harness" (1898).

Based on these clues, John Berryman viewed "The Blue Hotel" as a localization of Crane's "thrust toward suicide," his Swede-end an autobiographical signification of that wish's discharge. Willa Cather recalled Crane, already "thin to emaciation" and "going to Mexico to . . . get rid of his cough," saying during his 1895 western trip that he hadn't even "time to learn how to spell"; a year later he wistfully wrote, "Dear me, how much am I getting to admire graveyards – the calm unfretting unhoping end of things – serene absence of passion – oblivious to sin – ignorant of the accursed golden hopes that flame at night and make a man run his legs off and then in the daylight of experience turn out to be ingenious traps for the imagination. If there is a joy of living I cant find it" (*sic*, Crane to Crouse, March 1, 1896). Central to Berryman's *thanatropos*, Crane's plaint for surcease, is High-Five, specified twice, "dealer's choice" for play at "The Blue Hotel" probably because trump for each hand is determined not by contract bidding, as in Hearts, Bridge or Pinochle, but by foolish chance, the first suit turned from the deck after cards are dealt. In retrospect, "A thousand things might have happened," Easterner sums the action, as if calculating deck (read experiential) combinatorics the way seasoned card players eventually do (Ch. IX). "The players play their own cards in 'The Blue Hotel,'" Ellis wrote, "to the macrocosmic game of chance in which the players themselves become cards played upon by Fate."⁴ Cardplay as amusement is doubled at the Palace, allegorized into a game of existential hazard.

Crane's mute kings, queens and jacks are indifferently tossed about and abused ("grubby, scarred and marked," Ch. III). Throughout his oeuvre

his personal changelings fare no better, his Swede a special case among them. *We don't know how it got started or where it will end, but we know the rules of the game we are engaged in making the best of, temporarily, right now,*⁵ is the script they are made to manifest. Except for his aberrant Swede, wrought to represent transcendent, importunate Death, outside the rules. Emotive personal conduct flouting conventions in Crane's tailored match-game between doubles is this anomalous Swede's willful and disastrous, game-ending suit. Unexpectedly emergent – out of the blue, as it were, monstrous Death arises, incarnated in his person determinedly, almost mechanistically.

After his transformative churching-baptism via Pat Scully's private bottle in a typically Cranean chapel of Death, this one a shrine to Scully's dead little daughter, Swede relates to Death as both its *simulacrum* and its *contaminatus*. Relieved of his fears and thus communed, he laughs nervously, "wildly," and embraces his destiny to represent it and to bear it. Thus freshly assimilated to Death in the Scully crypt, he menaces like a wildcard turned face-up in the allegorical game of Life. "The card" in "The Blue Hotel" (Ch. II) is therein equivalent to the ritual games, lotteries, short straws and Epiphanic cakes in René Girard anthropology: "the chance, . . . the aleatory processes . . . used to select a sacrificial victim." Of Crane's emotive characters, given his initial conditions this blameless, insane-with-fear Swede, imbued with bravado-juice and *turned up* in a card game, reveals as one plausibly motivated, both tragically and comically to be "The victim," Girard calls it, who "will be imbued with the emotions provoked by the crisis and its resolution" (TH 100-101). The crisis here, as almost always in Crane's dramatic actions, is a crisis of fear; his Swede bears the weight ("He was too heavy for me," Johnnie says) of its contradictions and chaos.

Crane's helpless and hapless Swede, now become imperviously boisterous and obnoxious, precipitates by that tone his demise, and by raising its specter takes on as its acolyte its mantle, the mantle of Death. Like other god-magnitude, monstrous pagan personae, he is Protean – doubly foreign as a Swede-Dutchman -American easterner out west (but only to Nebraska), timid and bold, taciturn and voluble, stabile and mobile, going from "scared" to "too fresh," from reluctant to insistent, at once fleeing violence and driving it. He is at first sympathetic ("Maybe you think I have been to nowheres" in Ch. II) and finally detestable ("You won't drink with me, you little dude? I'll make you, then! I'll make you!" in Ch. IX). "The victim," Girard wrote, "appears to be simultaneously good and evil, peaceable and violent" (TH 102). As a paradigmatic

Girardian perpetrator-victim *monstre sacre*, Swede personifies Crane's equation of violence with the sacred, as in the "godlike violence" with which a huge stove hums in Chapter I; Girard is equally explicit: "*The sacred is violence*" (TH 32). Allegorically, this Swede, suddenly realizing that he might die *today* ("I suppose I will be killed before I can leave this house" twice in Ch. II) conjures, by presciently declaiming a Delphic *logos phobou* ("expression of terror," VS 148), Crane's own imminent mortality. And after he spontaneously ignites ("fizzes like a firewheel") into dangerous, alienating and aggressively deadly clownishness, ignorant of and uncaring for his surroundings, he blusters with new-found bravado (i.e. bluffs) in the face of his former worst fears and, estranged from man and society, he tilts into the storm's teeth toward mortality: "It suits me," he says hauntingly, reiterating his pleasure with it *five times*, then, having come up empty-handed with these bad cards among new players, literally and metaphorically folds -- *Dead Tilt*, in cardplayer jargon. Even a lethal Nebraska blizzard, "the bugles of the tempest pealing" both a warning of and a welcome to oblivion, is misread by him, now a flipped wildcard, as agreeable.

Radiant with "the conceit of man" (Ch. IX) at the echoing center of the universe and having repeatedly cursed it blue, alienated from the bosom of humanity he tilts reeling into the storm's teeth, embracing conclusion: "The victim of this violence both adores and detests it," Girard noted (VS 148). Embodying life-game first as overly cautious ("I don't want to fight," unprovoked in II) and fearfully quiet, then in end-game as incautious, inept play, a contradictory incoherence outside the bounds of sane and decorous player conduct, the "rules," the Swede is positioned liminally to perform symbolically his precipitate, game-changing function. For his Protean nature and connection to violent Death, Swede as "victim does seem to constitute a universal signifier," one of two existential absolutes (TH 102). With Crane's ontological consciousness the other, his Swede presents functionally as a pre-emptive *dybbuk* amok in it.

Primitive cultures, Girard observed, live according to laws that free them "from subjection to the sacred, . . . that allow them to maintain a precarious independence from divine intervention," Death being the absolute *interruptus*. Foreigners by contrast "are considered something less and more than human because they fail to follow these rules. They may appear . . . maleficent or . . . beneficent, but in either case they are deeply imbued with the sacred" – the transmundane, the nonhuman,

i.e. (VS 267). As soon as Crane's Swede intrusively voices invasive Death, for example, allegorical havoc is visited upon the *Tarot*: Cowboy, reacting to his insinuation of murder "tumbled the deck down violently upon the board" (Ch. II). Twinned and twice partnered with the sober, contemplative Easterner – portrayed as cerebral and observing in that only he and the Swede are aware of Johnnie's unreasonable deceit, though he says nothing, shifting and shirking the responsibility for mayhem, Swede can be seen as shamanistically represents the impudently dying physical and unreliably emotional or reactive, vulnerable half of a "like" suit with Crane, a talismanic *doppelgänger* who, identified and differentiated, manifests as an externalized, inhuman enemy twin to be salutorily sacrificed. As is Girard's stereotypical ritualized victim invariably blamed for causing disorder, this Swede is isolated, the part that had betrayed Crane adversarially, not his mind, sensibility, creative talent, etc., vivified in his blasé Easterner. (Also feasible is the possibility of seeing Crane's entire cast of "Blue Hotel" characters as prismatic facets of his own macro personality, namely 1: Johnnie, the willful apostate son of a righteous father, 2: Cowboy, a hot-headed reactionary repeater of violent mimesis who, like Henry Fleming finally advancing wildly in *The Red Badge*, caught in "a holocaust of warlike desire" during the fistfight screams "Kill him, Johnnie! Kill him! Kill him!" 3: Scully, the ethical and judicial, commercial rule-giver, 4: Swede, his doomed, grotesque, outsider, savant-dupe and 5: a killer-instinct gambler.⁶) However, without specifying "external personification" or "objectified persona," *The Literary History of the United States* calls Swede's early premonition of violence ("I suppose a good many men have been killed in this room," his first line, rendered like a wagering ante) "the manifestation of Crane's own intense fear."⁷

Fear, chaotic and unsettling, can be *put to rest* both socially and personally by community acting ritualistically (as collective consciousness) or by the individual (particular consciousness) performing aesthetically-symbolically – in each instance via *mimesis*, a "crisis reproduced not for its own sake but for the sake of its resolution" (TH 24). Formally, in perfectly mirrored symmetry with Billie Higgins, the sole named character in "The Open Boat," also twinned with Crane-Correspondent as that story's only rowers, the Swede and his murdering "little" gambler are the only nameless main characters in "The Blue Hotel" (even Scully's departed girl-child is "Carrie," a son is "Michael," and an outside barkeep cylept "Henry"). Each is the one performatively distinguished by a naming or, equivalently, a disnaming speech act, the one who perishes or gets trumped, as Crane, nearing fearsome physical extinction, was about

to. Rounding his unholy trinity as Mr. Blanc (= “White” \approx pure) doubled with his nameless “little” gambler – as diminutive as the Easterner and as expert as Crane -- Crane through a “mimetic substitution of antagonists” (*TH* 26) extended the radii of his disnaming tropes protectively to encircle himself.⁸ By fronting surrogatively as alterities personae and names, Crane representatively erased his specific manifestation and sheltered his selfhood from stress conditioned to ephemerality, while simultaneously “anteing up” psychologically, multiplying his selfhood vicariously, mimetically through art: a “differentiation,” in Girard, “equivalent to the loss of previous identity” (*TH* 29). As author, Crane in surrendering his identity to skilled delegacy created in his fictions’ exemplary existential surrogates. In “The Blue Hotel” he dramatizes with his substituted Swede a manifold lesson in the practice of that symbolic authorial surrogacy. Whether such practice is for critical purposes deemed modern or postmodern (see below, “Two Supporting Theories”), especially compelling is Anthony Giddens’ summary regarding Jürgen Habermas relative to Crane’s moment, particularly “. . . the temporal self-destructiveness of the avant-garde which is constantly implicated in the moment of its own dissolution.”⁹ *The moment of its own dissolution*, as in the earnest decadence of fin-de-siècle art. Its “mauve decade” was Crane’s milieu.

They are also five at the unnamed saloon the Swede, by this time an all-in player, finds in exile after winning his fight with Johnnie – again four at table and one “guardian,” precisely as at the Palace with Scully surveilling. But the Swede intrudes, making from the perspective of hands a supernumerary, expendable sixth, soon to be played out. Again perceived as alien, as he was at Scully’s, among the last words he hears are the differentiating, “My friend, I don’t know you,” from the diminutive gambler who refuses to drink with him and shortly thereafter fatally punctures him in the fullness of his inflation. This sharp gambler’s agency, entirely disconnected from Johnnie’s cheating, which had escalated the previously psychological crisis into violent This sharp gambler’s agency, entirely disconnected from Johnnie’s cheating, which had escalated the previously psychological crisis into violent kinesis, is described, remarkably, in Girard’s psychoanalytically-based sociology: in finale “The rivals are apt to forget about whatever [is] . . . in principle the cause of the rivalry and instead become fascinated with one another. In effect the rivalry is purified of any external stake and becomes a matter of pure rivalry and *prestige*” (*TH* 26). As to Crane describing his gambler as “a slim little man”: that shrewd sharper who is adept at this game killing for reasons of personal honor or prestige the “burly” and emotionally

reactive, fear-mad Swede presents as a psychological metaphor of Crane's heightened artistic rationality observing and confronting his own bodily demise,¹⁰ a differentiation enacting transference – as all differentiations do -- but hopefully transposition as well as, reciprocally, release. In "The Blue Hotel," seemingly the only one surprised at the outcome of events, conclusively, the Swede, "pierced as easily as if he had been a melon,"¹¹ falls "with a cry of supreme astonishment," Crane's symbolic, purgative transfer and postponement of terrifying death to his designee thereby a *fait accompli*.

In denouement, Easterner sharingly metes out his guilt, explaining to Cowboy, "We five of us have collaborated in the murder of this Swede. . . only five men – you, I, Johnnie, old Scully and that fool of an unfortunate gambler" (Ch. IX), as if Crane had successfully marshaled his alter egos against personified dissolution. But we see the objectifying adjectives: Unfortunate. A foreign "Swede" of unspecified origin who behaves as any human might given his circumstances ("believed to have brought about his own death," even: *TH* 27). Alienated and differentiated. Astonished, then dead. Estranged by disease from living fully, cheated, a fool for believing that life has meaning in some ultimate prize, this is Crane in a purgatorial torture chamber ("right in the middle of hell," Ch. IV); his is an oppressive psychic-somatic situatedness as he nears the end of a lingering and tiresome illness, one noted for repeatedly raised and dashed hopes -- like unchanging cards merely reshuffled and redealt. He is signifying ruefully his cozened self mimetically.

Two Supporting Theories

Crane's "foremost trait," he self-identified his propensity for "vanishing and disappearing and dissolving," seems bespoken to post-structural criticism. John Berryman, integrating in 1962 his critical biography written early (1950) in the second revival of Crane appreciation, wrote that Crane "had remained . . . persistently invisible behind his creation," an observation that appears tailor-made for postmodernists. Michel Foucault's statements in "What is an Author?" that "the mark of the writer is reduced to nothing more than the singularity of his absence; [that] he must assume the role of the dead man in the game of writing" can be seen as literalized allegorically by physically deteriorating Crane's prismatic identification with both his ludicrous, doomed and estranged, frontier-tyro Swede and the gambler who kills him in "The Blue Hotel." On its façade only, and ideologically ignoring potential authorial

signification, Foucault equated such possibilities with the essence of authoring, “of creating a space into which the [author] constantly disappears,” a “voluntary effacement . . . brought about in the author’s very existence.” Crane’s plethora of name-effaced authorial surrogates, from the “little man” who first appears in *The Sullivan County Sketches* and *The Black Riders*, to Henry Fleming, Peza in “Death and the Child,” possibly the shunned outsider-hero Henry Johnson (literally *defaced*) in *The Monster*, and guilty but understandable ingrate George Kelcey in *George’s Mother*, as well as his Easterner and “slim little gambler” here and Correspondent in “The Open Boat,” were putatively originally designed by Crane psychologically to “ward off death” in Foucault’s words – or to confront the fear of death from behind dramatic masks, deflective functions into which narrative may have metamorphosed from its earliest forms, as in the *Scheherazade*. The “relationship between writing and death is . . . manifested in the effacement of the [author’s] individual characteristics,” according to Foucault, “to keep death outside the circle of [the author’s] life.”¹²

Characters such as Crane’s discarded Swede and objectified-aestheticized microcosms like that at Fort Romper are in Foucault’s terms “contrivances that [the author] sets up between himself and what he writes” for the specific purpose of “cancel[ing] out the signs of his particular personality” including therein latent individual ephemerality and perhaps perceived disaffection, especially those life-exigencies beyond control or outside of mentation. (They protect like small vulnerable boats tossed on steep oceans of swamping danger, only provisionally and barely effectively.) Ernst Cassirer agreed with this theory’s anthropological psychology, writing in *Language and Myth* that some tribal people “give children, and especially those whose elder brothers or sisters have died young, a name that has a frightful connotation, or attributes some non-human nature to them; the idea is that Death may be either frightened away, or deceived, and will pass them by as though they were not human at all. Similarly, the name of a *man laboring under disease* or bloodguilt is sometimes changed, on the same principle that Death may not find him.” Mimesis, René Girard revealed in his socio-analytic study of purgative ritual, is a formal shield of similar psychology: “Primitive societies abandon themselves, in their rituals, to what they fear most during normal periods: the dissolution of the community in the mimetic crisis . . . as if they believed that a simulated disintegration might ward off the real disintegration” and provide “miraculous deliverance” (*TH* 22, 28).

Such deflections, playing perfectly even when, as in the first case, they

are limned within a poststructuralist defection, an “infinitely deferred . . . authorial imitation,” provide one theoretical baseline for interpreting Crane’s psychological direction in “The Blue Hotel,” for at issue here is not a radically reductive reader rhetoric that sees merely the proximate circumferentia of a *sphaera intelligibilis* passing through critical flatland, but a comparatively volumetric, historicist possibility based on rationalist human interiorization. Deconstruction’s once-widely accepted circular logic, dispraised by Girard as “a unionization of failure” (TH 40), was based on the assumption of unknowable authorial intention. “As soon as a fact is *narrated* no longer with a view to acting on reality but intransitively, . . . outside any function other than the practice of the symbol itself,” Barthes wrote, “the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death.” Conversely, Crane may precisely through analogous identity effacements have been magically, mimetically, *transitively* “acting on reality,” conceded that “vanishing and disappearing” resonate in his momentary diversions and name-changed masks, like the hallucinatory functions of shamanism’s “ritual *masks*” (TH 35). Once this mimetic confrontation with “his own death” has been aestheticized narratively, for example, that ultimate, immanent historical inevitability is objectified irrepressibly as a functional actor in the artistic game in the same way that ritual functions communally. (Not ontological to Crane’s demystified universe and therefore unavailable to him for excoriation was traditional human-family villain Lucifer.) Having witnessed innumerable contemporaries succumb to tuberculosis, quantitatively for two centuries the grimmest reaper of all groups, Crane knew at the time of writing “The Blue Hotel” that he was immediately facing a player for the house (Swede identifies the hotel as a *house*) who in the long game never loses.

By proffering in acknowledgment a surrogate-victim, a sadly weird, multiply dislocated, otherworldly Swede mistaken for a Dutchman, Crane imagines not only his own dissolution, but reconstructs from it artistically a doubled alterity, a proxy for his – and ultimately everyone’s – inexorable, collapsing house-of-cards progress toward it.¹³ He thus plays out our existential hand mimetically on the page. At the deepest rhetorical level, his Nebraska tale becomes thereby a structure at once willfully anonymous and identifying, an aesthetic, objectified reproduction of a priceless end, which he tacitly feared and explicitly welcomed.

“The Blue Hotel,” a duality embraced dispassionately as doubling art albeit sympathetically as single psychology, is Crane somehow brilliantly intuiting structurally and depicting allegorically in ritualistic

circumstances a violent social rupture the violent negation of which ransoms peaceful continuity. Such doubles and doubling are always symbolic: in the duality of Easterner-Crane's monstrous, accidental fellow-traveler Swede, "the double and the monster [as] one and the same being, . . . the true structure of the experience is put in relief. . . . The decisive act of violence is directed against this awesome vision of evil and at the same time sponsored by it" (*VS* 160, 161). Projecting onto his secular experience the sacramental practice of sacrificial victimology – until Stephen's generation the hereditary Crane-Peck family business -- Crane figures masterfully his conflicted personal reality in ritualistic metaphor, mimetically, that is, by constructing artistically for *consumption* a straw-man surrogate sacrifice.¹⁴ It is a revelatory imaginative development, but not unparalleled: "Mythological elaboration is an unconscious process based on the surrogate victim and nourished by . . . violence"; "To say that the monstrous double is a god or that he is purely imaginary is to say the same thing in different terms" (*VS* 126, 161); "The fact that the metaphor applies both to the group and to the individual . . . demonstrates that much more is involved than an allusion to specific [death]" (*TH* 165). Cultural mythogenesis and personal aesthetic creation, both deployed for a single purpose, are thus in Girard isomorphic, identical within the terminology of mimetic reproduction.

Sacrificial authorship, whether objectifying, cathartic, conciliatory, mimetic, purgative, restorative, restitutive or otherwise, requires a substitute. In aesthetic-rhetorical replication of his personal demise, not even Moses, putative author of the Pentateuch, could have described therein his own death and burial (Deut. 34:5-6). Skilled with plenty in his role as an author of compulsively many veiled surrogates – a praxis of "symbolic individuality" undoubtedly developed professionally as required in *reportage*, thus "artificially isolated" (*TH* 37), Crane in his fictions routinely characterized himself and his situational psychic states vicariously, *a fortiori* in this case ceremonially through the surrender of his created anomalous Swede. Rhetorical distancing, it seems, provided space for dramatic figurative reification; as well it allows readers a glimpse of authorial psychology, an "inversion of [usual normative] roles in the relation between the collectivity and the individual," especially regarding the creation of his double, in Girardian terms a materialized sacrificial object-victim. By this means Crane dyadically reveals while concealing, emerges while hiding; his is a game played between unique individual Life and repetitive mechanistic Death, a sport of illuminating tropes and muffled cries in "The Blue Hotel," where he enacts a ritualistic "collective murder" (Mr. Blanc explains the collaboration) to resolve troublesome

Death through a personal “sacrificial mimetic crisis.” Precisely as in Girard’s anthropological studies (“Even when the sacrifice is performed by a single person, that person . . . acts in the name of everyone involved,” *TH* 24), Crane’s duplicate-prey is paradigmatically deployed communally, by a handful of Crane surrogates, identified and separated (differentiated¹⁵), scorned and mimetically victimized -- to create by his death release from chaotic violence and to restore psychic peace.

Crane’s narrative arrival at this salvific point is analogous to Girard’s buckling sociality, “Where previously there had been a chaotic ensemble of particular conflicts, there is now the simplicity of a single conflict” (*TH* 24), as he transitions from a generally percolating disunity, Johnnie *vs.* Farmer, Scully *vs.* Johnnie (who, accosted by his father, begins nervously “to shuffle the cards, fluttering them together with an angry snap”), Johnnie *vs.* Swede (“Why, this is the wildest loon I ever see”), Cowboy *vs.* Swede (“What’s wrong with you, Mister?”), Scully *vs.* Swede (“Man, you’re off your nut!” “This damned Swede”), to Swede in fisticuffs *vs.* Johnnie-community, whose members assemble in singular, “unanimous polarization” and cheer “like a chorus of triumphant soldiery” when the Swede falls (Ch. VI). Theirs is an all-against-one focus of antagonism that Swede recognized early (“Oh I see you are all against me,” Ch. II). It moves toward resolution with “the entire community on one side, and on the other, the victim” (“I don’t stand a chance against all of you . . . I know you’ll all pitch against me,” Swede perceives, Ch. VI). Pivotal and worst of all these insults, Easterner’s virtual, Pilate-like hand-washing, is as essential to Crane’s trope of sacrifice as Pilate’s was in advancing the sacramental, reparative New Testament sacrifice. Crane even echoes the three denials by Peter in Mark 14:68-72, here by Swede’s three fellow game-players: first Johnnie’s “I don’t cheat, and I won’t let no man say I do!” (Ch. V), then Easterner’s *crucial* betrayal of his “partner” (“I didn’t see anything wrong”), and finally fight-happy Cowboy’s story-ending words, “Well, I didn’t do anything, did I?” We are reminded by their murderous collaboration again of the Biblical singularity when, as described paradigmatically by Girard, “A hostile crowd denounces the misconduct of this miscreant, who is . . . nothing more than a criminal and a social outcast” (*VS* 105). In his well-known estrangement from family religion, Crane may have been parodying Christian precedents (cf. “Analysis,” below).

After the preclimactic snowstorm fight, “when division is most intense, . . . unity emerges [and] the community affirms its unity in the sacrifice,” no one at the Palace Hotel opposes the Swede’s *exit*, in effect his *excision*.

Girard's "abandonment of the endless cycle of vengeance" (*TH* 27) as community finally chooses an expiatory victim is figured in "The Blue Hotel" by the cessation of all card games, whether metaphorically conflictual or ironically "for fun." Girard marks this sacramental evolution as a decisive "passage from the aleatory to the specific," and at this juncture in the story, Scully's fuming wife and daughters, a "chorus of lamentation" (Ch.VI), make a classical, lustral appearance to comfort and purify survivor Johnnie for, games over at the Palace, peace is there restored. Victim designated and out the door, local problem solved. In *Violence and the Sacred*, moreover, Girard recounts the aftermath of such violence: "Two men come to blows; blood is spilt; both men are thus rendered impure. Their impurity is contagious, and anyone who remains in their presence risks becoming a party to their quarrel" (*VS*, 28). Fistfight concluded, no character at the Palace save its guide, old Pat Scully, has further *dealings* with the Swede. In Girard, "the community attempts to consolidate its fragile hold on things" by first "not repeat[ing] any action associated with the crisis" – cards, drinking, fighting and mimicry (postfight, in "reciprocal parody" Swede throws back in Cowboy's face, "Kill him, Kill him, Kill him!" Ch.VII) – and especially by "refrain[ing] from all mimicry and all contact with the former antagonists" (*TH* 20, 28). Crane abandons his site of violence with the alacrity of a primitive tribe fleeing contagious impurity: the Palace Hotel and Johnnie vanish from the tale, but awaiting Crane's Swede -- and humanity itself -- is Crane's painful depth, the inevitable, permanently blue home of the deep cosmos, one per each of those "unutterable midnights of the universe" ("The Veteran," last line) in which randomly tumbles our "space-lost bulb" of a reality.

We witness an alimentary conclusion to the ritual as two of its former game-opponents, Cowboy and Easterner, months later in springtime and far away on the Dakota line, having escaped romping purgatory, "return[ing] to life, . . . found a new community" (*VS* 28), digest what has happened and prepare to share a meal celebrating their renewal (as in Christian communion, sacrificial victims were often eaten ceremoniously in "anthropophagous" ritual finale "so that their power is absorbed," *TH* 79, 83).¹⁶

In retrospect, following the cathexis of ritualistic fireworks, like a symbolic god of disorder who has been ceremonially eliminated, stands Crane's heroic but ephemeral Swede, "more foreign than native, a *visitor* come from an unknown world, . . . a polluted object whose living presence contaminates everything that comes into contact with it

and whose death purges the community of its ills" (VS 95). He towers decisively above his alter-egos, all merely human, in a final complete characterization only once, and briefly, previously dramatized, when Crane's marquee fictional surrogate Henry Fleming perishes in "The Veteran" (with secular anagogic fanfare, noted). Crane's shamanistic transposition of destruction to this character "transforms the victim into something radically other than, and transcendent to, the community" (TH 78) – read *to Crane* through metaphoric dislocation. No major work followed "The Blue Hotel," certainly nothing of its stature. It seems to be Crane's ultimate, radiant deception, like resolutely though temporarily, satisfyingly playing the ace of trump at the game's final trick.¹⁷ Death as here personified and ritually excised, a personal, secular χριστός, is bibliographically Stephen Crane's outermost supranatural reach, and as far as we know his last.

Near the conclusion of *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard remarks the historicity of events akin to those depicted by Crane in "The Blue Hotel" and their relation to his thesis of mimetic ritual sacrifice. Paraphrasing Louis Gernet's *Anthropologie de la Grèce antique* (Paris, 1968, pp. 326-27), Girard distinguishes between religious and secular capital punishment: "The second type, secular, . . . was accomplished with a minimum of formalities and is devoid of religious connotations. Its . . . rough and ready character remind[s] us of the frontier 'justice' of American Westerns. . . . [I]t was usually visited on criminals who had been caught in the act, and it was always ratified by the common accord of the community. . . . [T]he public nature of these acts would not have been enough to make the execution of the criminals possible if these criminals had not usually been foreigners; that is, individuals whose death entailed no risk of endless revenge within the community" (VS 299).

When Easterner and Cowboy marvel at the "light" sentence meted to Swede's murderer, they reflect the community's virtual acceptance of how normal the killing of foreigners was. "I feel sorry for that gambler," Easterner says, to which Cowboy replies, "Oh, so do I. . . . He don't deserve none of it for killin' who he did" (Ch. IX). Theirs are comments by Crane regarding frontier "justice" that reveal his path to sacrifice. They reinforce Girard's three stages of ritual dynamism: 1) identification (all Americans connect unambiguously to immigrants), 2) differentiation based on those "absolute givens . . . incontestable facts" (TH 119), and 3) relieving elimination, with certainty -- of Indians, foreigners, criminals, infidels, the dispossessed and here, allegorically and strangest of all though most artfully, Death.

Analysis

Deep within the individual, as within the religious and cultural systems that fashion the individual, something is hidden, and this is not merely the individual “sin” of modern religiosity or the “complexes” of psychoanalysis. It is invariably a corpse that as it rots spreads its “uncleanness” everywhere.

--René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*,
165

Stephen Crane's generation, the first to come of age after God had been declared dead in “Nietzsche's deconstruction of transcendental subjectivity,” was an unprecedented, modern “social order not thought to be dominated by a supernatural being” (*TH* 3). Unmolested, in a statement undoubtedly integral to “Realism,” Crane's friend and mentor William Dean Howells deadpanned for *Harper's* in 1896, “We know for the present the force which could remove mountains is pretty much gone out of the world. Faith has ceased to be, but we have some lively hopes of electricity.”¹⁸ In this milieu, propelled by his *passé* familial religious experience, Crane formed a consistent body of work that contains no deity; it is an imperishable oeuvre focused exclusively on dramatic human representations. In it, no god is accessibly blamed for human failings, metaphysical lashing out not possible. Nor was recourse available for ameliorative succor or moralistic direction. In 1895, while still on palinodic speaking terms with god, Crane wrote an explicit, outraged response to the Biblical threat that “the sins of the fathers shall be visited on the heads of the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me” (Ex. 34:7):

Well, then, I hate Thee, unrighteous picture;
Wicked image, I hate Thee;
So, strike with Thy vengeance
The heads of those little men
Who come blindly.
It will be a brave thing.
The Black Riders XII (1895)

Like a shaman's, Crane's consequent performative artistic speech was participatory, not supplicative. Reflected glaringly by this antitheism, moreover, is Crane's narcissistic, momentarily enduring self. It appears

thereby a microcosm of sacred community, which justifies application of Girard's diachronous, vertical¹⁹ analysis of "ethnological cultures," especially those enacting for purgative purposes consecrated ritual immolation. In "The Blue Hotel" Crane, operating in his godless, non-hieratic or ethnological-seeming, shamanistic environment, created for his now personalized, localized resolution an analogously receptive and humanly vulnerable scapegoat, a dummy-hand alien both genetically and socially whose sacrifice could, for the purpose of resolving disorder, as "conciliatory sign" representatively balance the missing external God, King, Father, Adversarial Twin or Enemy Other to be ritually expunged. Toward that conclusion, it is not necessary to postulate a functional equivalence between social violence and individual death, for as psychoanalyst Girard specified in *Violence and the Sacred*, "Death is nothing more than the worst form of violence that can befall a man" (32). Crane's moribund double is dramatically pre-fixated on violence; his victim's increasingly brutal life and conciliatory death function fleetingly to remove or at least temporarily reprieve an unwanted end, life's ultimate cruelty particularly for a twenty-five year-old of vast creative genius who is "cheated" out of half his lifetime. Far from being a "malevolent transference," furthermore, Crane's secular "victim possesses a life that is death and a death that is life" to him, "a sacralized victim who represents less a loss of life than a return to life"; he is perhaps even a harbinger of "the first outlines of religious transcendence" (*TH* 39, 41). A saintly dedication to Art may, after all, have been Crane's creed, *caritas* its implicit practice. Resigned to his artistic "life of labor and sorrow," he wrote, "I have lost all appetite for victory, as victory is defined by the mob. I will be glad if I can feel on my death-bed that my life has been just and kind according to my ability and that every particle of my little ridiculous stock of eloquence and wisdom has been applied for the benefit of my kind. . . . I do not confront it blithely. I confront it with desperate resolution."²⁰

Crane always acknowledged the existence of larger albeit aleatory cosmic forces, and in the grand scheme of things, his was withal a comparatively "light sentence," as his finally manned-up Easterner philosophically weighs in this scenario of duplication Crane's three remaining years. Knowing the rotting outcome, however, his tortured wait, "The entire prelude," he calls it, may have been for him "a tragedy greater than the tragedy of action" (Ch. VI). Crane was living at Brede Place when "The Blue Hotel" was published, in *The Monster and Other Stories* (1899), at a time when he was *throwing down* manuscripts and picking up bank drafts with rapidity, like a card player who shows his cards and hopefully

collects tricks or rakes in pots (cf. epigraph, Crane to Reynolds, 1898). In 1926 H.L. Mencken spoke witness that Crane's phenomenal celebrity after the publication of his "unprecedented and irresistible" *Red Badge of Courage* caused him to be "bombarded with orders" and "beset by the newspaper syndicates," requests to which "more often than not he succumbed." The result, in Mencken's estimation, was "hurried and third-rate work," but contradicting Mencken's recollection and indicative of its salience, of all Crane's works "The Blue Hotel" as far as we know consumed the most time to completion, perhaps but probably not coincidentally exactly the duration of his murdering gambler's sentence, noted – this during a period when he was trying to pay down debts and support an overextended social lifestyle for himself and Cora, his common-law wife. (At one point near his tubercular finale, she had to be called home from shopping in *Paris* to attend to his health emergency.) Within about a year, penultimate photographs of emaciated Crane reveal obvious pain telegraphed by what can only be described as a grimace, and in the final one, identified so by Cora, he is sitting, rictus-mask for a face, legs crossed and supporting himself stiff-armed probably because of dire physical distress, the internal violence of metastatic tuberculosis emergent intestinally as a persistent rectal fistula. Conditions such as these can only have sharpened and darkened his "grim finality of mind," as Alfred Kazin characterized Crane's normal mental state, his anticipatory physical torment no doubt "greater than the tragedy of action," the action of June, 1900. He died suffering severely and more deeply in debt than when he began. During his year-plus at Brede Place, he wrote relentlessly in order to lessen it; a time of overdriven work and entertaining, constituting a personal "escalation of the crisis" (*TH* 25) that are surmised to have accelerated his somatic deterioration and precipitated the end, that sweet and priceless end of torture. Identifying that end with his doomed Swede's relieving plight is seen here to epitomize a temporary catharsis.

Acronymically, "The Blue Hotel" is TBH, or *TB* Hotel. Crane inarguably designed it so – teleologically or not (see note 7, below) -- as he did "The Black Riders" (*TB*-Riders), "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," "The Open Boat" and *The Badge of Courage* (*TB*-Courage), his original title for "the war book." These persistently recurrent titular irruptions of *TB*, all published within about five years of the end of Crane's life, when by 1897 he had already in writing informed William Crane how to go about settling his estate, may of course be coincidental or at least, as was once said, *Freudian*.²¹ We may no longer have to wonder about the origin of Crane's marvelous poetry in "the bugles of the tempest pealing": it sounds now even more operatic than before. ("Bugles" *sans* article suffices.)

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Notes

1 Crane understood the idea of valuable alignments or clusterings that cannot contain naturally “like” pairs – e.g. flushes, straights and straight flushes, poker’s highest hands. Nor could he have missed the facts that natural pairs, like Pat and Johnnie Scully, are alike only nominally, that other groupings and circumstances “trump” even four of a kind or flushes; the not coincidental presence of Scully’s wife and two daughters completes a flush of five Scullys, e.g., and Pat Scully’s political sense of social fairness and business ethics are an alignment or organizing principle that overpowers his familial obligation, his genetic “likeness” to Johnnie and the other Scullys at the Palace Hotel. It is not beyond imagining that Crane’s marvelous metaphor machine may even have conceived extraordinarily of Scully’s wife and daughters, completing a five-card “hand,” a quincunx of Scullys, as “hole cards.”

2 René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Stanford UP 1987), cited throughout as *TH*; Crane’s letter to Reynolds in R.W. Stallman, *Stephen Crane: an Omnibus* ([1947] London: Heinemann n.d.), pp. 677-78; High Five: R.F. Foster, *Foster’s Complete Hoyle* (Philadelphia: Lippincott 1953), p. 286.

3 James Ellis, “The Game of High-Five in ‘The Blue Hotel,’” *American Literature* Vol. 39, No. 3 (Nov. 1977) p. 440 (jstor.org/stable/2924995). So compelling thematically is the cards-gaming metaphor to “The Blue Hotel” that Ellis projects it, misconstruing the meeting of four men at Crane’s anonymous climactic saloon as a card game interrupted by his Swede, while is it only an informal assembly of unspecified content.

4 HHHH.L. Mencken, “Introduction,” *The Works of Stephen Crane*, ed. Wilson Follett ([1926] New York: Russell & Russell 1963), Vol. X, *xii*; John Berryman, *Stephen Crane: A Critical Biography* ([1950] London: Macmillan 1977), p. 214; Willa Cather: “When I knew Stephen Crane,” *The Library* (Pittsburgh, June 23, 1900) I:1718; Crane to Crouse: *Stephen Crane’s Love Letters to Nellie Crouse*, eds. Edwin H. Cady and Lester G. Wells (Syracuse University Press 1954), p. 52; Ellis, “The Game of High-Five in ‘The Blue Hotel,’” pp. 440-441. Quotes from “The Blue Hotel”: *Great Short Works of Stephen Crane*, Intro J. Colvert (New York: Harper & Row 1968), pp. 325-354; to facilitate reference, chapter headings rather than page numbers are used.

5 Crane’s existential immediacy prompted his identification with *le Symbolisme*, one of the icons of which is his contemporary Paul Gauguin’s naïve-seeming, thematic *What are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going?* (1895, Boston Museum of Fine Arts). Crane was as visually oriented and philosophical as Gauguin.

6 Beyond the scope of this paper is the possibility of viewing all of Crane’s name-effaced fictive main characters as faceted self-representations. In Crane’s phenomenological, demythified universe, such characterizations parallel Girard’s description of godless Shamanism: “a theatrical performance in which one actor plays all the roles at once. The lead role . . . clearly that of commander in chief of the forces of Good . . .” (VS 286). In his

brief studies at Syracuse and Lafayette, Crane may have been exposed to Shakespeare's metaphor of authorial characterization in Richard II: "I cannot do it. Yet I'll hammer it out. / My brain I'll prove the female of my soul, / My soul the father, and these two beget / A generation of still-breeding thoughts, / And these same thoughts people this little world / In humors like the people of this world, / For no thought is contented. . . . Thus play I in one person many people" (V.5.5-11, 31). *The Tragedy of King Richard II*, ed. R.T. Petersson, (Yale UP 1964), pp.119-120. At Lafayette, where Francis A. March, America's first professor of English Literature taught from 1855-1906, one of the two courses Crane passed was Elocution, which may have required such recitation. March believed in "dwelling line by line and word by word" on Shakespeare. Information provided by Diane W. Shaw, Lafayette College Archivist, in personal communication.

7 R.W. Stallman, "Stephen Crane: A Revaluation," *Critiques and Essays on Modern Fiction 1920-1951*, selected by John W. Aldridge (New York: Ronald Press 1952), p. 266.

8 For meanings ascribed to Crane's "idiosyncratic naming praxis" as performative speech acts, see Anthony Splendora, "Crane, the Train, and Pat Scully," *Stephen Crane Studies* Vol. 21, No. 3 (Spring-Fall 2012); and John Clendenning, "Prat Falls: A Revisionist Reading of 'The Clan of No-Name,'" *Stephen Crane Studies* Vol. 9, No. 1 (Spring 2000), pp. 2-8.

9 Anthony Giddens, "Modernism and Postmodernism," *New German Critique* Vol. 22 (1981), p. 15

10 Objectifying mind has historically viewed its somatic carrier, even its own workings, as foreign. Authorial alterity was personalized by Crane's contemporary Arthur Rimbaud, who confessed, "*Je est un autre*." Reflexive reification's pedigree begins in St. Francis reifying his materiality as "Brother Ass."

11 A rotten melon's insides look exactly like human lungs in the advanced stages of tuberculosis.

12 James B. Colvert viewed Crane's "little man" of *The Sullivan County Sketches* in precisely this light, as in effect an embryonic Swede: "The little man is fond of melodramatic, self-assertive postures and resounding oratory celebrating his courage and other virtues, a demeanor which masks an almost hysterical fear and dread of what he takes to be the dark powers of the [unknown]." Colvert, "Stephen Crane: Style as Invention" in *Stephen Crane in Transition: Centenary Essays*, ed. Joseph Katz (Northern Illinois UP 1972), p. 132.

13 In fullest articulation, Girard's theory of reparative mimetic sacrifice requires this extension, mapping Crane as surrogate victim – standing in diachronously for mankind not as a "little man" but as "little Man" -- while his Swede is a sacrificial victim, the one simultaneously dispatched. The surrogate victim (here Crane) "serves as a substitute for all the members of the community . . . protecting [them] from their respective violence" (VS 101-102). Caritas (nascent in Maggie as pathos or sympathy) is implicit in this universality; without it the "triumph of capitalism" America of Crane's late nineteenth century would have seemed merely a Darwinian gambling casino.

14 "Vanishing and disappearing": Crane to Ripley Hitchcock, 15 March 1896, in *The Correspondence of Stephen Crane*, eds. Stanley Wertheim and Paul Sorrentino (New York: Columbia UP 1988) 1: 213; Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" *The Foucault Reader*,

Paul Rabinow trans. and ed., (New York: Pantheon 1984), pp. 102–103; Berryman, *Stephen Crane*, p. 58; Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, trans. Susanne K. Langer ([1946] New York: Dover 1953), p. 52 (emphasis added); “infinitely deferred”: Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” p. 128, then “intransitively,” p. 125 in *Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern, A Reader*, ed. Seán Burke (Edinburgh University Press 1995). Crane’s prescience in constructing such a modern sociological-psychological formation should not startle: his world was post-Darwinian, Freudian, post-Nietzschean, and site of the golden age of Anthropology; his prodigal engagement with it produced at least two immortal novels and two matchless short stories, plus a mass of highly interesting lesser work. He cannot be gain-said. For biographical support of Crane’s aesthetic formations as alterities cf. Anthony Splendor, Book Review of Paul Sorrentino’s *Stephen Crane: A Life of Fire* (2014), in *The Humanist* Vol. 75, No. 4 (July-August 2015) pp. 66-67

15 Sacrifice and violence initiate with differentiation. In literature, cf. Claggert’s “choosing” Billy in Melville’s *Billy Budd*: “Jemmy Legs is down on you,” the Dansker matter-of-factly alerts innocent, Christ-like Billy; and Moby Dick’s monstrous Ahab, progressively differentiated from his crew and the *Pequod*’s Quaker owners, is not only motivated by one, but metaphorically redoubled with sundry forms of obsessive perversity/madness. In recent film, differentiation drives the plot of *Mystic River* (Warner Brothers 2003, from the novel by Dennis Lehane, 2000): Dave Boyle, estranged involuntarily from his mates when eleven years old, not only becomes in adulthood the focus of their suspicion and rage, but manifests the definitive arc of sacrificial victimology, even falsely, mortally confessing to their capital accusation.

16⁹ Stallman objected to this denouement, citing it as his reason for not including “The Blue Hotel” among Crane’s “best.” Short-focused formalistically on the victim of ironic, simple murder as an absolute sign, for Stallman the story ends with Swede’s final “grotesque” sensory registration. In semiotic terms, he mistook the ungrammatical (isolated) sign for the signified. But Crane obviously viewed narrative figuration itself as his signifier, meanings arising from it the signified, its facts sustaining extended analogy. R.W. Stallman, *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus*, pp 481-483. Another formalist, James T. Cox, saw “The Blue Hotel” composed “not as pieces” but “as connotatively associated parts of an elaborately contrived symbolic substructure” (i.e. allegory): Cox, “Stephen Crane as Symbolic Naturalist,” *Modern Fiction Studies*, 3, No. 2 (Summer 1957), p. 148. 17 René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, pp. 37, 21, 24, 49, 79. Unanswered is an epistemological question: was Crane somehow dancing to postmodernist music as we now hear it? An analogy: As an undergraduate, I once raised in Leo Steinberg’s forensic Art History class the possibility that someone might have asked Picasso directly what he was trying to accomplish with his revolutionary Modernist work, *Les Femmes d’Alger* in particular. Professor Steinberg patiently responded that Picasso would probably have said he was expressing himself using paint and canvas, but would certainly not have replied in terms of art-critical theory that arose *ex post facto*.

Quoted *infra* is René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP 1977), cited herein as VS.

18 Seán Burke, "Reconstructing the Author," *Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern, A Reader*, Seán Burke, ed., (Edinburgh University Press 1995), xxv; Howells, *My Mark Twain: Reminiscences and Criticisms*, ed. Marilyn Austin Baldwin (Louisiana State UP 1967), p. 134.

19 vertical = infra-sociological-psychological, not synchronically, interpersonally horizontal-structural.

20 Crane to Crouse, Jan., 1896, in *The Love Letters of Stephen Crane to Nellie Crouse*, eds. Edwin H. Cady and Lester G. Wells (Syracuse UP 1954), p. 43.

21 Mencken, "Introduction," *The Works of Stephen Crane*, Vol. X, x, xii; Alfred Kazin, "American Fin de Siècle," *On Native Grounds*, (Garden City: Doubleday 1955), p. 48; "settling his estate": Crane to William Crane, 29 October 1897, in Stallman, *Omnibus*, pp. 661-65.

“Misplaced Men: Aging and Change in Coetzee’s *Disgrace* and McCarthy’s *No Country for Old Men*”

Robert Scott Stewart and Michael Manson

Abstract

“That is no country for old men” is the famous first line of Yeats’s “Sailing to Byzantium,” which reflects upon aging, art, and immortality. Yeats suggests in his poem that the aged ought to move from the sensual, physical world of their youth to a world of intellect and timeless beauty. We employ this poem and that line to explore the aging male protagonists in two recent novels: Cormac McCarthy’s *No Country For Old Men*, and J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*. We suggest that though both of the novel’s protagonists have aspirations to ‘sail to Byzantium’, various factors ranging from their characters to the problematic realities of contemporary southwest America and South Africa make such a wholesale, successful journey impossible even though some progress is made.

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Introduction

At first blush, it may seem strange to begin a discussion of J. M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace* and Cormac McCarthy’s *No Country for Old Men* by looking at Yeats’s poem “Sailing to Byzantium.” There are, however, at least three reasons for exploring the connection between the poem, these two novelists, and these two novels. First, and most obviously, there is the use of the first line from Yeats’s poem in both works -- in the title of McCarthy’s book, and in a paraphrase of it late in *Disgrace* -- which invites the exploration. Second, as William Deresiewicz has remarked in his review of *No Country For Old Men*, “Among his contemporaries, McCarthy comes closest in sensibility to J.M. Coetzee, whose own ascetic refusal, equally sulphurous in its rejection of modernity, bespeaks the bleakness of the South African veld” (38). Finally, and most importantly, thinking about the Yeats poem in the context of the two novels, the poem seems to underscore the novels’ concerns, whatever the degree of the poem’s direct influence on the novels may be and however each novel turns to

the poem. We, therefore, begin with a brief comment about Yeats so as to provide a basis for our discussion of the two novels.¹

As Yeats's poem opens, the speaker tells us that he has left his homeland and is now living in Byzantium. The emigration, we quickly learn, was driven by the speaker's estrangement from society in his homeland. In his words, he is "an aged man," who is excluded from the "sensual music" that now dominates society with its devotion to sexuality, the reproductive urge and, indeed, the sheer physicality of the place he has left, a country in which "fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long / Whatever is begotten, born, and dies" (4-5). And because of that sensuality, his society has abandoned "Monuments of unageing intellect" (8). Contrary to that world, Byzantium is a place in which art is pre-eminent. Even though it may no longer be as it once was, the historical Byzantium resonates powerfully within the speaker's imagination because it signifies the possibility of transcending mortality through the individual's creative imagination and the power art has to embody the infinite. Although "desire" seems to be consuming him (21), it is not the desire that surrounded him in his native land. Rather, the speaker's desire is to escape the physical altogether, as in the Romantic urge, say the Keats of the Odes. He pleads with the figures in the mosaics on the walls in Byzantium to "gather me / Into the artifice of eternity. . . ." (23-4) and vows to become a self-creating artefact, dedicated to art: "Once out of nature I shall never take / My bodily form from any natural thing, / But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make" (25-7) and, thus, to creating the infinite. He will, therefore, "sing / To lords and ladies of Byzantium / Of what is past, or passing, or to come" (30-3).

Although Sheriff Bell's life in McCarthy's novel is intensely physical, this is due to his chosen profession rather than, say, a deep-seated character trait. And while Bell is unrelentingly, perhaps oppressively, too conservative for some readers, he comes to share with the poem's speaker disgust with what appears to be the all-consuming self-absorption of his society. McCarthy is a writer who resists publicity and making public statements about his work. However, the world that he depicts in *No Country for Old Men* suggests that he is not pleased with how society has abandoned its traditional values. Neither is his sheriff, for while society has changed, Bell's values have remained constant. Nor can he understand what has become of his world anymore than Yeats's speaker does. But rather than continuing to work within the new order of things, he has come to a decision that it is time to retire, for he is no longer a young and malleable man, capable of adapting to the new ways of his society, even if his beliefs

were to allow for that. Like the speaker in Yeats's poem, Bell sees himself as having reached a stage in life in which he is no longer willing to adopt a different set of values. In his own mind, then, he has withdrawn from that society into a smaller, more comfortable world of his own making:

These old people I talk to, if you could of told them that there would be people on the streets of our Texas towns with green hair and bones in their noses speakin a language they couldnt even understand, well they just flat out wouldn't of believed you. . . . Part of it was I always thought I could at least someway put things right and I guess I just don't feel that way no more. . . . I'm bein asked to stand for something that I don't have the same belief in it I once did. (295-6)

Like Yeats's speaker, Coetzee's protagonist, David Lurie, is engaged in art by trying to write an opera about Byron and his lover Teresa, *Byron in Italy*. But the connection to Yeats's speaker is mostly ironic, since David's art is a failure, at least in traditional terms. We shall say more about this below. For the moment, however, suffice to say that throughout almost the entire course of novel, David's perspective is turned inward, towards self-aggrandizement rather than on anything beyond himself, such as the beauty of art as it reaches to embody that which is permanent, or Truth as Keats has it.

Where the speaker in Yeats seeks to escape nature to achieve direct experience of the infinite, David has no such ambition. His desires, aesthetic and otherwise, find their voice in David's immersion in that which is natural, finite, and physical. There is, therefore, little, if any, difference between how he uses women for sexual gratification and the impetus for creating art. Believing that his refusal to succumb to society's practices and conventions lifts him above the small-minded pedestrianism at the core of a society that alienates him, David deludes himself by identifying with Byron and his heroic figures.

We would not want to be heard suggesting that Byron was without self-indulgence. Nonetheless, we would argue, his struggles against social constraints were motivated by a complex mixture of a desire to fulfil both his powerful physicality and his aspirations for a more just society that finds expression most especially in the Promethean defiance that characterizes some of his most notable poetry and plays. For Byron, politics, morality and poetry are often inseparable. For David, artistic creativity is motivated, in his words, by a desire "to be returned triumphant to society as the author of an eccentric little chamber opera" (214). What David

does, in fact, share with Byron, ironically, is the link between how they live and what they write. If he seems to be drawn to immortality in a way that resembles Byron, unlike the poet he is incapable of acting or thinking beyond the self and, thus, of understanding post-apartheid South Africa. His opera, therefore, becomes an escape but without the perspective of something beyond the self and society as it is towards which he can reach. It is saved from this fate only partially and very late in its writing (and in the novel) as David turns away from writing himself in the form of Byron, and attempts to write about someone truly different than him, Byron's lover Teresa. But, we will argue, the opera still fails to achieve the sort of transcendence the Romantics sought: its achievement, small though it is, is rather closer to the ground, although that may be what both David and South Africa need.

We shall argue as well that the self-absorbed David also learns to empathize with others through his work euthanizing dogs and taking care of their bodies afterwards during their cremation process. Once again, his steps are small and a long way from the luminous Byzantium. Still, it is a change that gives one some hope for him and indeed for us as we struggle in coming to grips with aging in a recalcitrant, cold, modern world.

A Sheriff Past His Time?

Though Sheriff Bell says, "*I'm not the man of an older time they say I am. I wish I was. I'm a man of this time*" (279), he in fact is not as insightful as his comment would indicate. His desires and his values are no longer in tune with contemporary society. That his assertion has any validity is only because his work as a sheriff entails his having to deal with the world as he finds it. Bell's age has a great deal to do with his decision, underpinning the other factor that the Sheriff assigns to his decision: "*It aint just bein older . . . it is more like what you are willin to become. And I think a man would have to put his soul at hazard. And I wont do that*" (4). McCarthy frames his novel with two sections of an on-going monologue delivered by Bell that periodically appears throughout the novel before each of the successive chapters that narrate the story. The framing monologue, then, is a recurring presence that provides us with a directive to read the story in the context of what Bell is saying. Bell is, therefore, put in a position where he must pursue and arrest Chigurh whom Bell describes as "*a true and living prophet of destruction*" (4). But Bell resigns before he completes his chase because, he admits, "*I dont want to confront him*" (4). Doubtless, this speaks to Bell's Christian belief in the transcendence that

occurs after death. As such he is reminiscent of Yeats's speaker, though without the Romantic desire that drives him to Byzantium. Nonetheless, like the speaker who seeks transcendence from the world into the permanence of art, Bell's withdrawal is a result of his desire for permanence in values that can resist contemporary life. His concern for his soul, then, is the consequence of having no basis for reassurance in society as it is now.

The dominance of violence that, early in the novel, indicates Bell's increasing separation from his society and that in the extreme accounts for Chigurh's rampage is visible from the novel's first page where Bell expresses his guilt at sending a nineteen year old to the gas chamber for killing a young girl. The violence is also a major symptom of how society has become transformed in such a way as to have alienated Bell. Ironically, though, Chigurh and Bell have both rejected society, thus making them in some sense two sides of the same coin. The amoral Chigurh believes that he is a force of sheer will who can live without any social constraints; Bell holds to a conservative world view in which family and community ought to be the engines that drive both the individual and society and in which good and evil are constantly at war and in which evil is now in the ascendance:

I think if you were Satan and you were settin around tryin to think up something that would just bring the human race to its knees what you would probably come up with is narcotics. . . . [S]atan explains a lot of things that otherwise dont have no explanation. Or not to me they dont. (217)

Like Bell, Chigurh claims that he has rejected society. He says to Wells, who has been hired to kill him: "You think I'm like you. That it's just greed. But I'm not like you. I live a simple life" (177). However, Chigurh has abandoned good and evil altogether and, so, is indifferent to the gratuitousness of the murders he commits, some of which have no basis in anything other than his having "promised" Moss he would, as in the murder of Carla Jean. In place of considerations of good and evil, because for him they are irrelevant, he bases decisions about whom to kill or spare on whatever has been set in motion by past acts that cannot be undone, often determined for him by a flip of a coin, thus allowing him to claim he is acting as an instrumental means to fulfilling the will of metaphysical forces that are beyond his control. In that, he embodies the disintegration of the order that, in a modern society, is held in place by a society's institutions, not the least important of which is its law enforcement. But the world that McCarthy depicts and deplores is not a modernist society. In

McCarthy's borderland, order has collapsed as forces of chaos have supplanted both individual and collective efforts to resist it. The will to order that characterizes modern society, sometimes to the benefit of its members but all too often to the detriment of many, has been overtaken by an invisible will to power² of which Chigurh is the agency.

On the other hand, clinging to a morality that is no longer relevant and frustrated by what society has become, Bell now regards himself as a failure: "*Part of it was I always thought I could at least someway put things right and I guess I dont feel that way no more*" (296). He has come to the view that the universe seems to be governed by a dark telos that includes the Manichean structure Bell advances as an explanation for what has happened to his society. And given his assertion that evil is now in the ascendancy, he is faced with the reality that the traditional moral categories that previously committed people to good have if not entirely collapsed, at least become so weakened by contemporary life that there is a danger that the evil in which he is immersed will soon entirely overcome the good if it hasn't already done so. The root of that evil, he believes, is a dangerous individualism that, in the extreme, allows greed and violence to dominate.

The greed and violence seem to Bell to be such violations of social norms because they are at odds with the modernist or humanist assumptions about good and evil at the heart of the Judeo-Christian underpinnings of modern society. In a conversation he once had with a lawyer, Bell recalls that the lawyer asserted the precedence of the law over considerations of morality. In response, Bell's thoughts turned to Mammon. Though Bell could not clarify for the lawyer exactly who Mammon is, he said he's "*goin to look it up. I got a feelin I ought to know who it is*" (298).³

If, however, we consider the violence as a now integral, albeit unwelcome, aspect of contemporary society that disrupts and threatens the social order to which Bell clings, similar in kind, if hyper-extreme in degree to the things Bell complains about, then we can grasp the opposition between Bell and Chigurh as a force of individual will that cannot co-exist with Bell in society.

The Sheriff's is the modernist world that no longer exists. His expectations, therefore, cannot be met, nor is he able to adapt to the postmodern world that is now so firmly entrenched that it is irreversible. It would seem, then, that McCarthy wants us to think about the manifestations of greed and acquisitiveness and their cousin selfishness as the perversions of

an earlier tradition that underlie the social chaos that has taken hold and in opposition to which Bell now feels powerless. David Cremean argues that when Bell claims he is not the man of an earlier time, quoted above, we ought to regard that statement as indicative of:

the changes that his hero's journey has wrought in him. He has grown uncertain, all but abandoned his truisms, his roclamations, his certainties, and seemingly found consolation in uncertainty itself: "*It [the total of the events of the story . . .] has done brought me to a place in my life I would not of thought I'd come to*" (4); "I don't know a damn thing" (213); "*And this [the drugs and violence of the border region] aint goin away. And that's about the only thing I do know*" (217). (Cremean 26-7)

Cremean's argument turns on his reading the novel, and in particular Bell, from within the context of Joseph Campbell's discussion of the hero. But Bell is not heroic, nor, as we have suggested above, is he as insightful as he might be. Rather, given his own account of his behaviour during the War and his belief that drugs are the devil's instrument, it seems more reasonable to take him at his word when he says that he does not want to have to face Chigurh. His decision to resign points to what John Vanderheide identifies as "the renunciation of the immanent for the sake of attaining the transcendent, the renunciation of the body for the sake of the soul." (Vanderheide 30)

In addition, because Bell is aging he cannot conceive of how he can adapt and continue to operate as an agent of the social order when that order has disappeared. He now exemplifies the condition in which Yeats's aged man finds himself, one who similarly feels alienated and inconsequential (9). As Bell leaves the courthouse for the last time, the narrator tells us, he felt more than just sadness: "he knew what it was. It was defeat" (306). In the face of that, Bell has decided to leave the community for a more peaceful existence. Although there is no possibility of transcendence in the natural world, his love for his wife Loretta will continue to centre him and provide him with the peace he seeks, an example of which the narrator describes in the discussion Bell and his wife have towards the end of the novel:

We'll be alright. I think I'm goin to like havin you home for dinner. I like being home any time. I remember when Daddy retired Mama told him: I said for better or worse but I didnt say nothing about lunch. Bell smiled. I'll bet she wishes he could

come home now. I'll bet she does too. I'll bet I do, for that matter. (301)

Of course, what Bell and Loretta are talking about is grounded in a modernist society the economic system of which is *laissez-faire* capitalism that very often has been implicitly and uncritically reproduced in popular culture. The excesses of the system, however, reveal the decadent decline into which the system has begun to fall, most notably perhaps in the greed that has all but overtaken whatever benefit some might see in a capitalist system. Two of the genres that speak to the benefits of that system are the thriller and the western. But, as Robert Jarrett correctly claims (36), McCarthy deconstructs the narrative and metaphysical assumptions of the thriller and, we would add, the western, and for similar reasons; both genres most often enact a metaphysics in that which society regards as the good triumphing over evil no longer pertains, much to the Sheriff's disgust, and, perhaps, McCarthy's as well. Bell, therefore, becomes alienated, abandons his job, and "transforms from hero to witness" (Jarrett 42). It seems, then, that McCarthy, consistent with his post-modernist view of society, finds a good versus evil, hero versus villain plot inadequate as a means of examining a society in decline.

Transcendence, Hope, and Despair

The Sheriff's monologue closes the novel. In it he thinks about a water trough behind the courthouse he has just left. Though it is not as beautiful as the mosaics in Byzantium, it does speak to Bell of similar qualities, for it signifies transcendence and an individual commitment to something other than self-involvement:

I don't know how long it has been there. A hundred years two hundred. You could see the chisel marks in the stone. It was hewed out of a solid rock . . . And I got to thinkin about the man that done that. . . . And I have to say that the only thing I can think is that there was some sort of promise in his heart. . . . I would like to be able to make that kind of promise. I think that's what I would like most of all. (308)

Bell's thoughts then turn to his father and to a dream he had after his father died. Following directly from his ruminations about the water trough, the dream, too, speaks of the importance of tradition and permanence: "*it was like we was both back in older times* (309). In it, he and his

father are riding through the mountains on a cold and snowy night. His father is carrying a horn with fire in it and rides on ahead of Bell which assured Bell that all would be alright when he caught up to his father. The fire is rich with interpretive possibilities ranging from the protection of tradition, to knowledge or insight, to purification or simply to warmth and security. What it does not justify, however, is David Creamean's claim that by the end of the novel the monologue illuminates a "progression that echoes obliquely a kind of *telos*, one that again connotes hope, possibility, and transcendence, taking place in a dream-vision of his father" (19). Since he's retreated from society, Bell cannot offer society anything, least of all hope. Creamean's argument rests on Bell having become the "possessor of that wisdom and the message the hero in full brings back to his or her corner of the world" (25). But Creamean's reading is far too optimistic. The end of Bell's dream vision bears out our claim. Just as Bell concludes that "*whenever I got there he [his father] would be there*" he awakens, leaving us with the final sentence in the novel: "*And then I woke up*" (309). Rather than asserting the lasting influence the dream will have on Bell and his rebirth as a heroic messenger for society, the awakening shatters the dream and thrusts Bell back into the reality of a world with which he can no longer cope. Just as there is no doubt that Bell longs for the traditional values signified by the dream-vision, we know that what centres Bell is his marriage, "*I reckon I thought that because I was older and the man that she would learn from me and in many respects she has. But I know where the debt lies*" (303). Nowhere in the narrative is there an indication that Bell has any interest in carrying his commitment to his marriage that marriage and the now bygone values it signifies. If he cannot help bring about an alternative to what the society has become, anymore than Yeats's speaker can, he can create a separate peace, thereby enacting another version of the turn to transcendence that the poem depicts. Regardless of whether "Bell does not shrink from the brutal realities of the world" as Stephen Frye claims, (19) or whether he retreats from the confrontation with Chigurh as we have suggested, Frye is correct when he argues that Bell "considers himself lucky, and that fortune he attributes to a love that is undeserved and a commitment that is foundational" (19). That love is also a means of finding something that is if not transcendence into infinitude as Yeats's speaker seems to achieve, nonetheless places him in the lineage of the Romantics as Yeats himself was, at least in "Byzantium" and some of his other poems. It also provides a link between Bell and David Lurie because of Lurie's incipient capacity for sympathy.

It is interesting to speculate on what this might mean politically. A number of reviewers of *No Country for Old Men* were disappointed at the

conservatism the novel, through Bell, seemed to endorse.⁴ And not just conservatism, but a banal and insipid variant of it: e.g., as Bell puts it, “It starts when you begin to overlook bad manners. Any time you quit hearin’ Sir and Mam, the end is pretty much in sight” (304). Ironically, however, in Bell’s turn away from society and to the lost communal values he thinks, at this time, are irretrievable, he abandons the conservative communitarian position he has endorsed, if only obliquely, in favour of a position much like Ettinger’s, the old Boer farmer in *Disgrace*, who sets up a guarded fence around his family and property in a futile effort to keep the modern world out.

Whatever the final answer to that issue is, we can say with certainty that Bell, like the traveller in “Sailing to Byzantium,” is alienated from his society and seeks some way to retreat from it. As we shall see, David, the protagonist of *Disgrace*, feels similarly alienated from his society in post-apartheid South Africa. And like Bell, David will retreat from society. But, oddly, in his retreat, David begins to learn something that Bell has always had: the ability to sympathize with others, and indeed to love them. But whereas Bell uses this sympathy and love for his wife to remove himself from society at large, David shows signs that his burgeoning sympathies may finally open society to him. Not to Byzantium, certainly, but in a society that has been as beleaguered as South Africa, hoping for transcendence, or for complete reconciliation is not just unlikely but perhaps even counterproductive. Rather, perhaps the best that can be achieved in contemporary South Africa is for older members of the current generation, like David, to realize that they themselves need to change, and this is what, we argue, David accomplishes, meagre though that accomplishment is.

Post-apartheid South Africa

Disgrace is the only Coetzee novel set in post-apartheid South Africa. As such, it is “fated to be read as a political portrait.” (Mars-Jones, par. 9). However, given Coetzee’s disdain for fiction based on what he has called “the procedures of history” (qtd. in Gorra, par.2), *Disgrace* deals with the contemporary political situation in South Africa only obliquely. Yet, as David Atwell says in his review of *Disgrace*, what Coetzee calls “post-ness” runs through the novel (qtd. in Atwell, 865).⁵ One of the myriad ways in which this is exemplified in the novel is the attempt by the protagonist, Professor David Lurie, to teach his students the perfective tense or aspect that is used to refer to actions that have been recently completed:

Two weeks ago he was in a classroom explaining to the bored youth of the country the distinction between *drink* and *drink up*, *burned* and *burnt*. The perfective, signifying an action carried through to its conclusion. How far away it all seems! I live, I have lived, I lived. (71)

The apartheid period in South Africa is now finished, but can it ever truly end, i.e., attain a state of completion? And if it can, how will this be accomplished, and for whom? In particular, can a middle aged white man like David who, whatever his political inclinations might have been during the apartheid period, benefited from it and will now have to suffer some fall in the new regime, come to such a state of completion and grace?⁶ David's particular fall from grace emanates from an affair with one of his students which leads to the loss of his job and which, in turn, precipitates his move from Cape Town to a small landholding in the eastern Cape where he can live with his daughter. But his disgrace is more complicated than this and raises the question, on a personal level, whether any of us can truly age gracefully. On a political level, the novel asks whether South Africa can do so. We shall argue that the novel suggests that to whatever extent it is possible in the new South Africa, a radical shift from a European based liberal conception of the self to one that is more community based and relational is required. And this, in turn, will necessitate that citizens shift from a focus on an atomized self to one concentrated on a self within a web of relationships with others, as for example, Bell does in *No Country for Old Men*, although ironically, since the circle of his relationships gets much smaller when he decides to retire and retreat from society.

This particular process of communal interaction requires that we truly come to understand and in fact to be 'the other'. Since David's literary expertise is in the field of nineteenth-century British poetry, it is worth noting that the Romantics and Victorians such as Browning understood this process in terms of sympathy and, ultimately, of love.⁷ As we shall argue, ironically, it is David's deficiency in both capacities during most of the novel that leads not only to his disgrace but all of his life's failures. However, we shall also argue that David ultimately does display, in however small a degree, an ability to sympathize with and to love both his daughter and the dogs he euthanizes at the novel's very end. This will involve what David refers to as "*lösung*," which he thinks of as a kind of sublimation of the self.

The 'Trial'

Although *Disgrace* is set in a turbulent political time and situation, significantly, it contains only one truly public event -- the hearing investigating David's actions with his young student, Melanie Isaacs. That Coetzee intends to draw a link between this hearing and the Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC) is fairly clear even if the conclusions we are meant to draw from these sets of hearings are not. Under the direction of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the TRC was set up "to establish the truth in relation to past events as well as the motives for and circumstances in which gross violations of human rights occurred, and to make the findings known in order to prevent a repetition of such acts in the future." (qtd. in Durant 430). This makes it quite distinct from the Nuremberg trials, which looked only toward the past and had the intent of achieving retributive justice against those who committed atrocities against human dignity. That is, the goal there was punishment, which, significantly, is exactly what David will wish for later in the novel with respect to the men who raped his daughter. As he puts it: "I want those men to be caught and brought before the law and punished. Am I wrong to want justice?" (119).

In contrast, the TRC hoped to use the past only as a means to move beyond it -- to complete it, as it were. Indeed, the TRC could not itself even impose any sanctions against individuals (although it could recommend such sanctions). It could, however, grant amnesty to those it thought were truly repentant. The committee established to examine the allegation against David operates in the same way. David is adamantly opposed to the committee's telos and, in addition, thinks it smacks of political correctness. There is a certain amount of truth to this. The committee does come replete with a student observer from the "Coalition Against Discrimination" (CAD) (48), and there are also protests by "Women Against Rape" (WAR) amidst what are by now banal discussions of the evils of "mixing power relations with sexual relations" (53) -- all of which are now firmly a part of contemporary politics. But David's complaints go further than that focusing on the committee's 'extra-legalistic' mandate, so to speak. As he says at the beginning of the hearing when appraised of the charges against him: I am "sure the members of the committee have better things to do with their time than rehash an old story over which there will be no dispute. I plead guilty to both charges. Pass sentence, and let us get on with our lives" (48).

Indeed, David becomes belligerent during the course of the hearings

when the committee refuses simply to accept his guilty plea and “get on with their lives.” Members of the committee clearly want him to show remorse and to apologize for his actions; in short, as one committee member puts it, not just “pleading guilty to a charge [but] admitting you were wrong,” (54) in the moral sense of that term. But, in an interesting parallel to PW Botha who, in 1997, refused to appear before the TRC saying that he had “nothing to apologize for. I will never ask for amnesty. Not now, not tomorrow, not after tomorrow,” (par. 6) ⁸ David refuses to admit any such thing saying that their demand goes “beyond the scope of the law” (55). This becomes all the more significant when, after Lucy is raped, David pushes her to keep after the officers of the law though she refuses. David is locked into a legalistic frame of reference, rather like the lawyer to whom Bell speaks in *No Country*. But the law and morality, as McCarthy notes in the incident, are not necessarily coincident.

Clash of culture and personality

The clash here between David and the committee cuts deep and crosses many paths – from ideology and culture to the personal. Despite living his entire life in South Africa, David is a child of Europe. We see this in many ways in the novel, perhaps most clearly in his tendency to frame things in European terms and in various European languages, typically taken from literature. Hence, to list just a few of many possible examples: he refers to his once a week meetings with the prostitute, Soraya, as “an oasis of *luxe et volupté*” (1); ⁹ he uses a line from a Shakespearean sonnet to woo his student, Melanie (16);¹⁰ and he utters a line from Vergil’s *Aeneid* to refer to Byron’s last voyage to Greece (162).¹¹ Indeed, David himself makes the point that while he doesn’t understand a word of Sotho or Xhosa (75), he can speak many European languages: “but Italian and French will not save him here in darkest Africa” (95). In fact, as David begins to acquire some consciousness of his problem, he begins to realize that European languages like English “are an unfit medium for the truth of South Africa. Stretches of English code whole sentences long have thickened, lost their articulation, their articulateness, their articulatedness” (117).

The language he draws on with such aplomb is, if he only knew it, tired, friable, eaten from the inside as if by termites. Only the monosyllables can still be relied on, and not even all of them. What is to be done? Nothing that he, the one-time teacher of communications, can see. Nothing short of starting all over

again with the ABC. By the time the big words come back reconstructed, purified, fit to be trusted once more, he will be long dead." (129)

Included in David's European heritage is his tendency to view the self in isolation from others. Indeed, we can view liberalism as an ideology set up to protect individuals from society as a whole. As stated by John Stuart Mill, the most important spokesman for classic liberalism, "Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign." (69).¹² The old Boer farmer, Ettinger, represents this view concretely (if excessively) by erecting a literal fortress around his farm, which he defends with firearms. On the other hand, despite what's been done to her, Lucy is committed to openness in the new South Africa. Rather than enclosing her farm with a fence, she leaves it open to the Black family living next to her and so breaks down the barriers between the Blacks and Whites, or seems to want to. Perhaps hers is as naïve a gesture as is Ettinger's belief that the two worlds will remain separated as they were under apartheid. Of course, liberalism does not accept that all actions are legitimate: those that 'harm' others (in the requisite sense) are open to public scrutiny and indeed to public prosecution including punishment through the state mechanism of the law. But the novel implies repeatedly that the state and its laws have very little effectiveness in contemporary South Africa, as in the Texas of McCarthy's novel. One of the white characters puts it to David as follows: "You people had it easier. I mean, whatever the rights and wrongs of the situation, at least you knew where you were.... Now people just pick and choose which laws they want to obey. It's anarchy. How can you bring up children when there's anarchy all around?" (9).

This view appears to be one shared by many whites in South Africa¹³ and perhaps by some Blacks too. Of course, the law during the apartheid period was far from neutral and operated, consciously and by design, in favor of Whites against Blacks and Coloureds. Hence, breaking laws, especially against property, may not seem to many contemporary South Africans as morally wrong: As David puts it shortly after the robbery and rape:

A risk to own anything: a car, a pair of shoes, a packet of cigarettes. Not enough to go around, not enough cars, shoes, cigarettes. Too many people, too few things. What there is must go into circulation, so that everyone can have a chance to be happy for a day. That is the theory; hold to the theory and to the comfort of theory. Not human evil, just a vast circulatory system, to whose workings pity and terror are ir-

relevant. (98)¹⁴

Lucy extends this idea to rape as well, thereby collapsing completely the liberal idea of a separation between private and public spheres and pointing to the naiveté of Ettinger's wall:

'You want to know why I have not laid a particular charge with the police. I will tell you, as long as you agree not to raise the subject again. The reason is that, as far as I am concerned, what happened to me was a purely private matter. In another time, in another place it might be held to be a public matter. But in this place, at this time, it is not. It is my business, mine alone.'
'This place being what?'
'This place being South Africa' (112).

At this point in the novel, however, David still believes in the sanctity of the law and the separation of private from public lives. He is willing to accept punishment for his public misbehaviour against Melanie: what he refuses to allow, however, is the committee to enter into what he thinks of as his private mental life through, e.g., psychological counseling. "No," David says at one point in the meeting, "I have not sought counseling nor do I intend to seek it. I am a grown man. I am not receptive to being counseled. I am beyond the reach of counseling" (49).

Misguided Romanticism

While we can feel some degree of sympathy for David here in his resistance to our age's tendency to see all our problems as psychological in nature, his own account and justification for his behaviour is misguided as well and stands in need of revision.

David rests his case on his having become "a servant of Eros" (52), and of "the rights of desire" (89). In thinking this way, David attempts to align himself with the Romantic tradition on which he is an expert, and in particular with the notion of a Romantic hero. Clearly, he sees an affinity between himself and Byron, both of whom he views as beings who choose their own, dangerous paths outside the norms of society (32-33). The position itself is of course problematic, as David must see when three black men rape his daughter, an action also out of step with societal norms and, typically, subject to legal sanction. Of course, David might argue that his actions point toward something transcendent whereas

theirs were purely base. But he can't really sustain that position since, as he recognizes, his actions with Melanie were "[n]ot rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core" (25).

David, in fact, has difficulty sustaining sexual relationships with women who are on an equal footing with him. That is why he preys upon young women such as Melanie, with her "little breasts," (17) and "hips... as slim as a twelve-year-old's" (19). Indeed, there is even an incestuous component to their relationship: he puts her in his daughter's room and, when consoling her, "almost he says, 'Tell Daddy what is wrong'" (26). This same deficiency also helps to explain why David looks upon his "relationship" with the prostitute, Soraya, as having "solved the matter of sex rather well" (1) for him and why he has come to accept that "ninety minutes a week of a woman's time are enough to make him happy, who used to think he needed a wife, a home, a marriage" (5). Hence, David's Romantic defense of his actions as being caught in the thrall of Eros and "the rights of desire" (89) are either disingenuous or self-deceptive (a character flaw mentioned explicitly by his ex wife) (188). For, while one could read David's actions in Byronic terms, as he likes to do, his behaviour, and in particular his sexual "deviance" is not driven by a desire to unshackle himself from societal norms.

Rather, it is based on his fear of getting old and of becoming a sexual non-entity, and this is about as stereotypical as it gets for middle aged men. As he puts it, one day he realized that his sexual attractiveness "had ended. Without warning, his powers fled. Glances that would once have responded to his slid over, past, through him. Overnight he became a ghost. If he wanted a woman he had to learn to pursue her; often, in one way or another, to buy her" (7). Indeed, even buying a woman isn't completely sufficient to quell David's fears since, he thinks, even prostitutes "tell stories, and ... they laugh" about their older customers. "[B]ut they shudder too, as one shudders at a cockroach in a washbasin in the middle of the night. Soon, daintily, maliciously, he will be shuddered over. It is a fate he cannot escape" (8). This leads David to think that "[h]e ought to give up, retire from the game. At what age, he wonders, did Origen castrate himself? Not the most graceful of solutions, but then ageing is not a graceful business. A clearing of the decks, at least, so that one can turn one's mind to the proper business of the old: preparing to die" (9).

That may seem overly dramatic for a 52 year-old man rather than an 82 year-old one. But if one is, and always has been, like David, a (self-con-

fessed) “womanizer,” (7) then the devolution of one’s sex life can be seen as central to one’s identity. Hence, rather than give up his sex life, “he existed in an anxious flurry of promiscuity. He had affairs with the wives of colleagues; he picked up tourists in bars on the waterfront or at the Club Italia; he slept with whores” (7). In essence, David has learned to compartmentalize his life in order not to fully engage his self in any **one** [OK] part. We can thus describe him as emotionally and developmentally stunted: indeed, he says that even sex – that most intimate of human activities – is not intimate or passionate for him. Rather, he says, his sex life is like “the copulation of snakes: lengthy, absorbed, but rather abstract, rather dry, even at its hottest (3).

David’s abstractness is commented on repeatedly throughout the novel, especially in connection with how to respond to Lucy’s rape. Upset that she is unwilling to go to the police and charge her attackers with rape, David thinks she may be operating from some misguided sense of guilt or shame, to which she responds: “You keep misreading me. Guilt and salvation are abstractions. I don’t act in terms of abstractions. Until you make an effort to see that, I can’t help you” (112). As Bev Shaw says, Lucy is more “adaptable” and “lives closer to the ground” than David (210). That is why she can accept the proposal of ‘marriage’ from Petrus in return for his protection. It is also why she will have her baby – a product of her rape – and come to love it, because, for her, the baby, ultimately, is just that – a new, separate, and concrete life of its own – and not a symbol of something else.

We can look at this abstractness in political terms within the context of the history of South Africa. . David abstracts in order to compartmentalize his life. His abstractness also allows to think that Soraya has a genuine affection for him, and, as he puts it, that she was even lucky to have found him (2). For David, South Africa has always been a place where others have seen to his needs and desires without his conscious knowledge of what that has truly done to them, and without his concrete realization of what their lives were like. It is just this abstractness, along with a lack of emotional commitment and sympathy that allowed for and indeed bolstered the apartheid regime. No one who truly empathized with non-white South Africans or who failed to think that the satisfaction of their own desires legitimated almost anything, could have supported, if only passively, the apartheid regime for more than 50 years. In that, David’s abstractness is part of a colonial paradigm where white colonizers and non-white ‘natives’ are completely separated as different kinds of being. Even David’s choices of sexual partners in the novel display that attitude.

By choosing the “exotic,” that is to say Coloured Soraya, and the indistinctly raced Melanie,¹⁵ there is a sense in which David is screwing the races that white Europeans have always ‘screwed’ in Africa. While we do not pursue this post-colonial reading of *Disgrace*, it is consistent, we believe, with our reading of David as suffering from a lack of sympathy.

David begins to realize what his problem is only very late in the novel. For example, in his apology to Melanie Isaac’s father: “It could have turned out differently, I believe, despite our ages. But there was something I failed to supply, something – he hunts for the word – ‘lyrical. I lack the lyrical. I manage love too well. Even when I burn I don’t sing’” (171). Another way of putting this is to say that he lacks emotional commitment, which is of course ironic given that the Romantic project aimed to give precedence to emotion and feeling over reason. At heart, then, though David wishes he were the Byronic hero who is “mad, bad, and dangerous to know,” as Lady Caroline Lamb said of Byron (Douglass, “Caro”) (and to which Lucy refers as well) (77), in reality his affair with Melanie was rather a “last leap of the flame of sense before it goes out” (27), a way to be “no longer a fifty-year-old divorcé” (52). And this, as we have said, is the epitome of a middle-aged man in crisis, not of a Romantic hero operating according to his own rules outside of societal concern.

The Possibility of Change

Can David change? He certainly says repeatedly that he cannot. When he speaks of his relationship with Soraya at the beginning of the novel, he says that “His temperament is not going to change, he is too old for that. His temperament is fixed, set. The skull, followed by the temperament: the two hardest parts of the body” (2). Towards its end, he tells Melanie’s father that “after a certain age one is too old to learn lessons. One can only be punished and punished (172)¹⁶. In the penultimate chapter, when he confesses to Lucy that “he is too old to heed, too old to change. Lucy may be able to bend to the tempest; he cannot, not with honour” (209). And, finally, in the last chapter, after Lucy has suggested that she will be try to be a good mother and a good person and suggests he try the same: “I suspect it’s too late for me. I’m just an old lag serving out my sentence” (216).

We would suggest, however, that David does show *some* capacity for change within the novel, even if that change proves ultimately to be insufficient for the purposes of contemporary South Africa. These changes

become visible when examining the two “projects” David works on after he loses his job at the university – his opera, *Byron In Italy*, and his work with Bev Shaw at the Animal Welfare Society.

David’s opera goes through a complete metamorphosis in the novel. He envisioned it originally as “a chamber play about love and death, with a passionate young woman and a once passionate but now less than passionate older man” (180) replete with “soaring arias” and music borrowed from European masters. But, since his move to Lucy’s farm, that “project failed to engage him to the core” because it did “not come from the heart” (181). Part of the reason for that surely is that his hope in writing the opera was always ego driven -- to have “returned triumphant to society as the author of an eccentric little chamber opera” (214).

Connected with that, however, is his fledgling concern for ‘the other’. Referring to his opera, David says that he has been able to “find words for Byron,” because (correctly or not) he sees himself in Byron. However, to that point, he has been unable to do the same for Byron’s mistress, Teresa, who has been completely foreign and, hence, opaque to him. Indeed, David takes this one step further: “he can, if he concentrates, if he loses himself, be there, be the men [who raped Lucy]... The question is, does he have it within him to be the woman” (160)? The first step in coming to sympathize with Teresa is his realization that there are some things, like the rape of his daughter and the very personalized hatred by men toward women even (or perhaps especially) in the act of sexual intercourse, that he just doesn’t understand (157). Acknowledging his ignorance, and concomitantly recognizing that he is not always the major player in the drama of others’ lives, is the beginning of his attempt to learn. He, therefore, radically revises the opera to focus on a middle aged Teresa with a view, in part, to understanding her pain: “*Come to me, mio Byron,*” she cries: *come to me, love me!*” only to have him reject her over and over: “*Leave me, leave me, leave me be!*” (185).

The opera is, however, ultimately a failure. As David realizes, “there is no action, no development, just a long, halting cantilena hurled by Teresa into the empty air, punctuated now and then with groans and sighs from Byron offstage” (214). Indeed, one could argue that it has not simply been transformed from an erotic or elegiac piece to a comic one, as David proclaims (184), its seriously curtailed tragic shape, the feebleness of Byron’s voice, and the central part to be played by the banjo and the additional part added for a dog all indicate that Coetzee means for us to see it as a mock opera. Surely this must give us pause in proclaiming that the

opera shows significant movement and change in David's character. And yet, David has at least given up the idea that the opera will allow him to return to Cape Town society, and that is at least indicative of a change, small as it is. In that, then, David's new opera is, at most, an instance of the ABCs of a new language that will acquire full signifiatory power and significance only in a future South Africa.

"In a country where dogs are bred to snarl at the mere smell of a black man," (110), animal rights can be a particularly sensitive topic, yet in *The Lives of Animals* (1999) and *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), Coetzee has written about it extensively since he published *Disgrace*. His theme is a radical kind of egalitarianism between humans and animals, a view at exact odds from the one David espouses early in the novel. When asked whether he likes animals, David responds by saying: "I eat them, so I suppose I must like them, some parts of them" (81). This glib, sarcastic response is founded on two beliefs: first, that animal lovers – like the politically correct people who objected to his affair with Melanie – have an air of moral superiority: "animal-welfare people," he says, "are a bit like Christians of a certain kind. Everyone is so cheerful and well-intentioned that after a while you itch to go off and do some raping and pillaging. Or kick a cat" (73). Second, in a passage eerily reminiscent of the rationale for apartheid, David says that "we are a different order of creation from the animals. Not higher, necessarily, just different" (74). We are different, he thinks, because we have souls and other animals do not.

Reassessing this view requires that David lose himself. "He remembers Bev Shaw nuzzling the old billy-goat with the ravaged testicles, stroking him, comforting him, entering into his life. How does she get it right, this communion with the animals? Some trick he does not have. One has to be a certain kind of person, perhaps, with fewer complications" (126). He begins to acquire it, however, by becoming completely enveloped in their lives, and perhaps more importantly, in their deaths. The Animal Welfare League, where he volunteers, has been mostly reduced, in light of funding cuts, to euthanizing animals, especially dogs, because there are simply far too many of them. Eventually, in a reversal of fortune, David becomes the "dog man," a job typically reserved for Blacks, and ensures that the dogs are not mistreated in the course of their extermination and cremation.

In doing this job, David comes to realize that whatever redemption he can achieve from his disgrace will come, as Lucy expresses it, at ground level. "With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards,

no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity.’ ‘Like a dog,’ he says, to which she replies, “‘Yes, like a dog’” (205). Once again, this process requires that he lose himself, a process that he refers to as “*lösung*,” i.e., a type of “sublimation, as alcohol is sublimed from water, leaving no residue, no aftertaste” (142). This concept is, interestingly, connected to the Romantic notion of imagination, which is a genuinely creative power where, e.g., two things can merge into new unified whole.¹⁷ Indeed, this is more clearly connected to the definition typically given to “*lösung*” as a kind of solvent (rather than a “sublimation” *per se*) that merges separate elements into a new, unified one. *Lösung*, then, can be thought of as a process by which two separate individuals merge into one.

Interestingly, the last scene in the novel describes David and Bev Shaw engaging “in one of their sessions of *Lösung*,” which is in fact a euthanasia session for animals “whose term has come” (218). Presumably, this means that David has managed – or is at least beginning – to see himself as connected with someone or something outside of himself. Indeed, he goes even farther than this: “He and Bev do not speak. He has learned by now, from her, to concentrate all his attention on the animal they are killing, giving it what he no longer has difficulty in calling by its proper name: love” (219). Ironically, then, David ultimately starts to become a true Romantic by euthanizing dogs, and not by (allegedly) falling under the thrall of Eros and seducing young students.

Sublimation is, of course, most closely connected to Freud and his belief that sublimating our sexual drive can lead to many positive outcomes, including the creation of art. To return for a moment to Yeats’s poem, the man sailing to Byzantium has come to realize that leaving behind the world of the young with its immersion in our senses, need not be considered a loss as one enters the transcendent world of art to re-create the self. David clearly has not traveled as far as that as his revised opera, his foray into art, demonstrates. Just thirty pages from the end of the novel, David still considers the possibility that his affair with Melanie is not yet over. It is at this point that “he sighs. The young in one another’s arms, heedless, engrossed in the sensual music. No country this, for old men. He seems to be spending a lot of time sighing: Regret, a regrettable note on which to go out” (190). That is, at this (late) point, David still desires his youth and the transient world of sense and sexual desire. Hence, he decides to attend a performance of *Sunset at the Globe Salon* to see Melanie and to hope for a special sign from her. He is, however, rudely awakened from his reverie by Melanie’s boyfriend who tells him to “stay with your own kind” (194), which, in terms of our argument, entails leaving

the young alone and moving on from selfish sexual desires – to sublimate those desires into something that allows him to get past himself and into a communication with others. As we have argued, he begins to do this by sympathizing with Byron's rejected lover and by comforting dogs during and just after their last living moments. In doing so, David is able to begin to overcome his disgrace and to begin the difficult task of aging gracefully.

Concluding Remarks

Clearly, then, Yeats's 'Sailing to Byzantium' provides insight into *No Country For Old Men* and *Disgrace*. The poem's treatment of aging, of dissatisfaction with the world surrounding the aging man, and the attempt to find an alternative to that world, are all explored in the two novels as well as in the poem, albeit with quite different results. Whereas the traveler in Yeats's poem is able to achieve transcendence of this world in timeless works of art, neither Sheriff Bell nor Professor David Lurie are capable of achieving such heights. Bell ultimately has to retreat into the insular world of his family in order to escape the violence of the contemporary world, and David has to suffer a great fall and relinquish any aspiration to create lasting works of art. Yet both men achieve some measure of consolation -- Bell's in the love of his family, and David's in his burgeoning capacity for sympathetic engagement.

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Notes

- 1 Other Yeats poems that have been mentioned in relationship to the novel include "The Second Coming" and "The Lake Isle of Innisfree." See Terrell Tebbets, "Sanctuary Redux: Faulkner's Logical Pattern of Evil in McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men*." *Philological Review* 32.1 (Spring 2006) 79.
- 2 Robert Jarrett uses this phrase when he discusses *No Country* as a deconstruction of the gothic. See Robert Jarrett, "Genre, Voice and Ethos: McCarthy's Perverse 'Thriller'." *The Cormac McCarthy Journal* 5 (2005): 36.
- 3 In *Paradise Lost*, though not in the Bible, Mammon is a fallen angel who, before the expulsion from Heaven, wandered around with his eyes always on the ground in awe of the golden floor of Heaven. In the poem, Mammon is also responsible for teaching humans to tear into the earth to look for "treasures better hid" (1. 688).
- 4 E.g., Michiko Kakutani's review in *The New York Times*, July 18, 2005 and William Deresiewicz, "It's a Man's Man's World," *The Nation*, September 12, 2005, 38-41
- 5 In saying this, Coetzee has been particularly interested to separate himself from the writing of contemporary South African novelist (and fellow Nobel prize winner) Nadine Gordimer. Given that, we can see that Coetzee's remark remains true even given his recent foray into political fiction writing in *Diary of a Bad Year* since that novel is far from the realism offered by Gordimer and, hence, not an example of "the procedures of history."
- 6 We are not speaking of "grace" in a theological sense. By using the term, we mean simply to signify a state where one's dignity is retained.
- 7 See, for example, Wordsworth's "The Old Cumberland" and "Resolution and Independence" and his comment in "Tintern Abbey" that heightened imagination leads to the sympathetic relationship with others and ultimately society's development, that "little, nameless unremembered, acts / Of kindness and of love" (34-5) develop from what he calls his "purer mind" (29). Browning's aesthetic inextricably links art and morality, regardless of the prevailing social standards. His painter poems, for example, clearly demonstrate that relationship. Browning celebrates Fra Lippo Lippi's art because it is grounded in his sympathetic response to those with whom he interacts. Andrea del Sarto's art, on the other hand, cannot achieve the quality of Raphael's despite its flawless technique because del Sarto's imagination is too limited by greed and, thus, he cannot engage sympa-

thetically with others.

8 "PW Botha The 'Great Crocodile," BBC News, Oct. 30, 1998. Retrieved Feb. 2, 2009 http://news.bbc.ca.uk/2/hi/special_report/1998/10/98/truth_and_reconciliation/202299.stm).

9 A reference to Charles Baudelaire's "L'invitation au voyage," in his collection *Fleurs de Mal*.

10 Shakespeare, Sonnet 1: "From fairest creatures we desire increase... that thereby beauty's rose might never die."

11 "*Sunt lacrimae rerum, et mentem mortalia tangunt*" ("These are tears for events and mortal things touch the soul.")

12 J.S. Mill, (1859/1974). *On Liberty*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin. 69.

13 Consider, e.g., the claim by one white woman at a rally in Constantia, the wealthy suburb of Cape Town: "Apartheid was immoral but now we are a society without morals." Smith, "Apartheid's Old Party Faces Doom" *The Independent* (**par. 10**), May 27, 1999. Retrieved from the internet on Feb. 24, 2009 at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/apartheids-old-party-faces-doom-1096175.html>.

14 Also see, e.g., 137-138 regarding Petrus' claims about insurance.

15 She is referred to as the "dark one" in the novel (164) and as her character in *Sunset at the Globe Salon*, she speaks Kaaps, the dialect of the Western cape and especially of Cape Town, spoken by the majority of Blacks there. This leaves her race far from settled but Coetzee certainly leaves open the possibility that Melanie is Black.

16 His line is followed, though, by his wondering, "But perhaps this is not true, not always. I wait to see" before going on to say that he is living in disgrace day to day.

17 See, e.g., Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, .W. Shawcross, ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1907, VI. 1, Ch. 13. and William Wordsworth, "Preface" to *Poems* (1815). Reprinted in John Spencer Hill, ed., *The Romantic Imagination: Casebook*. (London and Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1977), 59.

The Primordial Affirmations of Literature: Merleau-Ponty and Stephen Crane's "The Open Boat"

Arthur A. Brown

Abstract

Stephen Crane's short story "The Open Boat"—a tale "intended to be after the fact"—affirms Merleau-Ponty's conclusion that "The perceived world is the always presupposed foundation of all rationality, all value and all existence." The story dramatizes and reflects on the men's situation in the world, their inter-subjective experience against the background of non-human nature. In facing the imminent possibility of their own deaths as, for each of them, "the final phenomenon of nature," the men become "interpreters" of what is primary in the human condition. The line between the world of the reader and the world of the story, like the line between consciousness and being, is less a line than a horizon.

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"Matter is 'pregnant' with its form, which is to say that in the final analysis every perception takes place within a certain horizon and ultimately in 'the world.' We experience a perception and its horizon 'in action' rather than by 'posing' them or explicitly 'knowing' them."

--Maurice Merleau-Ponty¹

To the phenomenological philosopher, the primordial level of experience is perceptual. Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes that the problem of philosophy is "to make explicit our primordial knowledge of the 'real' and to describe the perception of the world as what establishes, once and for all, our idea of the truth" (*Phenomenology* lxxx). Perception is primary: "Thus, we must not wonder if we truly perceive a world; rather, we must say that the world is what we perceive" (*Phenomenology* lxxx). Perceptual experience gives us the "permanent data of the problem which culture attempts to resolve" (*Primacy* 25). The perceived world "comprises relations." It give us "the passage from one moment to the next," it gives us the field in which we experience depth, and it is "the foundation of all rationality, all

value and all existence" (*Primacy* 13).

Perceptual experience is more basic than knowledge, whether by knowledge we mean that of the mathematician, the biologist, the psychologist, the artist, the laborer, the lover, the philosopher, or the priest. Everything changes," Merleau-Ponty writes, "when a phenomenological or existential philosophy assigns itself the task, not of explaining the world or of discovering its 'conditions of possibility,' but rather of formulating an experience of the world, a contact with the world which precedes all thought *about* the world. After this, whatever is metaphysical in man cannot be credited to something outside his empirical being—to God, to Consciousness. Man is metaphysical in his very being, in his loves, in his hates, in his individual and collective history."² To the extent that an artist—a painter like Cézanne or a writer like Stephen Crane—establishes in his or her work "a contact with the world," that work fulfills the task of phenomenological philosophy. And in that case, we can speak of phenomenological philosophy through the work's prolonged existence right in front of us. Where does literature affirm the primacy of perception? What else does it affirm about human existence and the meaning of life? Does it show, for example, that man is "metaphysical in his very being"? "Philosophical expression assumes the same ambiguities as literary expression," Merleau-Ponty writes, "if the world is such that it cannot be expressed except in 'stories' and, as it were, pointed at" (*Sense* 28).

For Merleau-Ponty, the metaphysical requires nothing outside of time to make it so; in fact, it is metaphysical only *in* time, which can never be materialized into instantaneous states of being or idealized into eternity or a pure flow of inner life. Our awareness of time's passing, our sense of dimensions and of movement, our feelings toward one another, our freedom—none of which can be measured, all of which are continuously in life—are as real as the physical objects toward which our minds are directed. The perceived world is composed of relations and of overlapping totalities. Existence is "the perpetual taking up of fact and chance by a reason that neither exists in advance of this taking up, nor without it" (*Phenomenology* 129). In thinking, we think *things*, and in thinking things we catch ourselves thinking—a realization, "which remembers it began in time and then sovereignly recaptures itself and in which fact, reason, and freedom coincide" (*Primacy* 22). Consciousness and freedom are not things, yet they are not nothing and do not reduce the world to chaos. They are attached to our bodies and to other people as well as to things; they are incarnate. All meaning presupposes the world and there is no meaning outside of the world. Nothing before the fact of our being tells

us how to think or act. To “exist” is to “stand out”—to be aware of our being, to be a subject in and have a hold on the world. The *whole* world is metaphysical: the non-human world is the background for human subjectivity and inter-subjectivity. We see things in the world, we see ourselves in the world, and we see others in the world who see us as we see them—which is to say, incompletely. The world is partly hidden and it is inexhaustible. And yet *in it* appears “this marvel that is the connection of experience” (*Phenomenology* lxxxv).

According to its sub-title, Stephen Crane’s short story “The Open Boat” is “A tale intended to be after the fact. Being the experience of four men from the sunk steamer *Commodore*” (885). Before the story begins, Crane calls our attention to the fact, or facts, it presupposes—not only the event, the historical or empirical sinking of the steamer (which was on its way to Cuba to deliver arms for the insurrection against Spain), but also the personal experience of the four men immediately after this sinking, and, at the same time, the tale itself. To “intend” suggests action—our mind as it is directed toward things. To intend is “to stretch toward,” an attempt *to have* rather than *to be*. The tale itself is an action—“after the fact” chronologically but *in* time and in *pursuit* of the fact, looking forward, stretching toward the fact in the present act of telling, of writing or reading. The story is not metafiction—it is not *about* fiction. It is embodied fiction—fiction with a hold on the world.

The story’s opening sentence is full of mystery: “None of them knew the color of the sky” (885). There’s no “none of them” outside the mind because there’s no nothingness in nature. So we begin in a briefly suspended point of view, external to the world that contains “them”—the point of view of abstract reflection that contrasts with *their* perspective, whoever *they* are. We wonder *where* they are. Why don’t they know the color of the sky? Are they blind? And why should they care about the sky’s color anyhow? In short, we wonder about their situation, as if we didn’t have one of our own, only to reflect more consciously on it once we more fully imagine it.

Crane’s stories are full of color. His style is associated with “literary impressionism,” in that it often represents the sensation, or rather the sense, of life—what is actually perceived from a limited point of view rather than what is assumed or known. Cézanne said that color is the “place where our brain and the universe meet” (*Primacy* 180). In an essay called “Cézanne’s Doubt,” Merleau-Ponty shows where Cézanne, though linked to them in some ways, differed from the Impressionists. The Im-

pressionist tries “to capture, in painting, the very way in which objects strike our eyes and attack our senses,” to depict objects “as they appear to instantaneous perception, without fixed contours, bound together by light and air,” and in doing so “submerges the object and causes it to lose its proper weight.” Cézanne used more black than they did. He wanted “to represent the object, to find it again behind the atmosphere.” His technique consists of “a modulation of colors which stays close to the object’s form and to the light it receives.” “Doing away with exact contours in certain cases,” Merleau-Ponty continues, “giving color priority over the outline—these obviously mean different things for Cézanne and for the Impressionists. The object is no longer covered by reflections and lost in its relationships to the atmosphere and to other objects . . . and the result is an impression of solidity and material substance” (*Sense* 11-12).

Crane’s literary impressionism, if that’s what it is, is more like the paintings of Cézanne than those of Monet or Renoir: “Their eyes glanced level, and were fastened upon the waves that swept toward them. These waves were of the hue of slate, save for the tops, which were of foaming white, and all of the men knew the colors of the sea. The horizon narrowed and widened, and dipped and rose, and at all times its edge was jagged with waves that seemed thrust up in points like rocks” (885). There is no mistaking the material substance of these waves—or the men’s situation in regard to them. The men are not blind. The world is visible. It has form—and it also, seemingly, has intent: “These waves were most wrongfully and barbarously abrupt and tall, and each froth-top was a problem in small boat navigation” (885). The men are primarily in a world not of instantaneous sensation or stimuli and not of the intellect or psyche but of situated being, of time and extension. They discover that “after successfully surmounting one wave . . . there is another behind it just as important and just as nervously anxious to do something effective in the way of swamping boats” (886).

There is no “behind” in geometrical or purely physical space; there are just things in instantaneous juxtaposition. “Behind” is a fact of perceptual experience. From the point of view of the men in the boat, one wave is behind another, and only from this point of view can we get an idea “of the resources of the sea in the line of waves that is not probable to the average experience, which is never at sea in a dingey” (886). On the one hand, the most average experience—say, that of reading in a room—can give us the idea of height, breadth, and depth. All we need do is look up and down or across or up from the page or gaze at the bookcase. We need hardly turn the page, and if we close our eyes, our bodies will still,

for the most part, tell us where we are. On the other hand, only an extraordinary experience, say, that of these men at sea, can give us an idea of the inexhaustible resources of reality. It is one thing to reflect on the world in a small room and another to be threatened by the dimensions and movement of the waves in an open boat. The story continually mixes average with extraordinary experience.

Calling our attention again to a more distant perspective, Crane writes, "In the wan light, the faces of the men must have been gray. Their eyes must have glinted in strange ways as they gazed steadily astern. Viewed from a balcony, the whole thing would doubtlessly have been weirdly picturesque" (886). As readers, perhaps reluctantly, we identify with this detached point of view, yet we have already gotten too close to the waves to detach ourselves altogether. There are other points of view suggested in the tale as well—though these are not as fully taken up. The cook says, "There's a house of refuge just north of the Mosquito Inlet Light, and as soon as they see us, they'll come off in their boat and pick us up." "As soon as who see us?" the correspondent asks, adding that houses of refuge don't have crews. And then the oiler says, "We're not there yet" (887).

Several things make this scene "real": the psychology of the men, which we understand well enough, their imperfect knowledge of the coast, the familiarity of their dialogue, and their sense of being in the world. "We're not there yet" is a matter of fact. The men know the waves have other waves behind them because they are near to them and might be swamped. "The perceived thing," Merleau-Ponty writes, "is not an ideal unity in the possession of the intellect, like a geometrical notion, for example; it is rather a totality open to a horizon of an indefinite number of perspectival views which blend with one another according to a given style, which defines the object in question" (*Primacy* 16). On the one hand, the story's point of view is so near the men's that it describes their sensory impressions of objects that remain otherwise unidentifiable. It also has access to their reflections, their thoughts and feelings, particularly those of the correspondent. On the other hand, it is far enough from the men's point of view to call attention to the differences between their perspective, the presumed perspective of others in their world, and the perspective of the writer or reader outside of that world. For us the "object in question" is not exactly "The Open Boat." It is the world we see through "The Open Boat," or according to it.³ Its style makes us aware that this world is "a totality open to a horizon of an indefinite number of perspectival views" that may blend together or remain noticeably distinct.

Within the story, the men often see *themselves* as the object in question, for instance when the correspondent, “pulling at the other oar, watched the waves and wondered why he was there” (885). The men experience an uncanny and disturbing feeling when they see themselves reflected in the interest of non-human creatures, as in the “black beadlike eyes” of the canton flannel gulls (888), or the circling of the shark that we see first as “a long, loud swishing astern of the boat, and a gleaming trail of phosphorescence, like blue flame” and which “might have been made by a monstrous knife” (900-01). They are aware of their own and of each other’s bodies, that of the cook “whose sleeves were rolled over his fat fore-arms,” or “the injured captain, lying in the bow,” for example. But unlike the gulls and the shark, they are also aware of their own and each other’s subjectivity, of the captain’s being “at this time buried in that profound dejection and indifference which comes, temporarily at least, to even the bravest and most enduring when, willy nilly, the firm fails, the army loses, the ship goes down” (885).

Implied in Crane’s “willy nilly” is a recognition of the contingency of all human action. Morality rises out of this contingency. It presupposes an inter-subjective rather than an omniscient point of view and always appears in a world where intentions may prove futile or backfire:

It would be difficult to describe the subtle brotherhood of men that was here established on the seas. No one said that it was so. No one mentioned it. But it dwelt in the boat, and each man felt it warm him. They were a captain, an oiler, a cook, a correspondent, and they were friends, friends in a more curiously iron-bound degree than may be common. The hurt captain, lying against the water-jar in the bow, spoke always in a low voice and calmly, but he could never command a more ready and swiftly obedient crew than the motley three of the dingey. It was more than a mere recognition of what was best for the common safety. There was surely in it a quality that was personal and heartfelt. And after this devotion to the commander of the boat there was this comradeship that the correspondent, for instance, who had been taught to be cynical of men, knew even at the time was the best experience of his life. But no one said that it was so. No one mentioned it. (890)

The men may drown. They almost certainly will drown if they don’t cooperate—if the captain doesn’t keep his eye on the place toward which they should row and on the wind and the waves, if the cook doesn’t bail

the water from the boat, and if the oiler and the correspondent don't row until one can't anymore and the other takes over. The choice to cooperate, however, is not an intellectual or a moral choice, if by "moral" we mean according to any set of external principles, and it is no guarantee either. The correspondent knows it was not the most logical or religious experience of his life; it was only "the best."

But in what way was it the best? In an essay written in 1945 titled "The War Has Taken Place," Merleau-Ponty writes that

the Resistance offered the rare phenomenon of historical action which remained personal. The psychological and moral elements of political action were almost the only ones to appear here, which is why intellectuals least inclined to politics were to be seen in the Resistance. The Resistance was a unique experience for them, and they wanted to preserve its spirit in the new French politics because this experience broke away from the famous dilemma of being and doing, which confronts all intellectuals in the face of action. This was the source of that *happiness* through danger which we observed in some of our comrades, usually so tormented. (*Sense* 151)

The experience of the men in the boat is not historic, for, in a sense, the story begins where history ends—after the sinking of the *Commodore*. The fate of the men in the open boat does not comprise the fate of hundreds or thousands of people and it has very little to do with institutions. Yet it *is* historic in that the men are moving with one another in a certain direction toward an uncertain end that will be determined as much by their will, strength, and actions as by the contingencies of the environment and by accident.

In the open boat, politics consists of the relationship between four men—their dialogue and interactions against the background of non-human nature. There is a close alignment between being and doing. Yet this alignment does not preclude reflection, for not all reflection is analytical or intellectual, as if detached altogether from being. Reflection is part of the men's existence—it is one of the ways by which they take up of the facts of their unfortunate situation. "As for the reflections of the men," Crane writes, "there was a great deal of rage in them. Perchance they might be formulated thus: 'If I am going to be drowned—if I am going to be drowned—if I am going to be drowned, why, in the name of the seven mad gods who rule the sea, was I allowed to come thus far and

contemplate sand and trees? Was I brought here merely to have my nose dragged away as I was about to nibble the sacred cheese of life? It is preposterous. If this old ninny-woman, Fate, cannot do better than this, she should be deprived of the management of men's fortunes. . . . The whole affair is absurd" (894).

It is absurd to have questions that cannot be answered, while every instinct we have tells us to ask. These questions must come at first from answerable ones. Is this animal I face going to kill me? Should I fight it, run from it, make friends with it? Can I ignore it? Is the sky about to open up? Should I look for shelter? We look for answers in embodied signs: a snarl, a rearing up, a look of the eye, a streak of lightning or roll of thunder. But the questions become more abstract—and the signs more ambiguous. Why am I here? Why now? Why is no one coming to the rescue? Many of our answers become habitual. It is our fate. It is God's will—or the will of the gods. It is a matter of cause and effect. It is pure chance. The world is wicked, or meaningless. And none of these answers is altogether satisfactory. Merleau-Ponty writes that "a metaphysical literature will necessarily be amoral, in a certain sense, for there is no longer any human nature on which to rely. In every one of man's actions the invasion of metaphysics causes what was only an 'old habit' to explode" (*Sense* 28). And yet, in the face of this ambiguity, we have the freedom to act as if our actions matter.

There is a sequence in "The Open Boat" that recalls one of the great speeches in literature. The men row near enough to shore to see a man. He's walking along. He stops and faces them. He begins to wave. "Ah, now we're all right! Now we're all right! There'll be a boat out here for us in half an hour." However, these signs and interpretations continue without any development toward certainty. Another man appears. He's running. He's on a bicycle. He meets the first man. Now both are waving. Something comes up the beach. It's a boat. It's on wheels. It must be the life-boat. No, it's a bus. They must be collecting the life-crew. There's a fellow waving a black flag. Or is it his coat? "So it is. It's his coat. He's taken it off and is waving it around his head. But would you look at him swing it!" "Oh, say, there isn't any life-saving station there. That's just a winter resort hotel omnibus that has brought over some of the boarders to see us drown." "What's that idiot with the coat mean? What's he signaling, anyhow?" (895-97). And then we realize that the lines have rung a bell: "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage / And then is heard no more. It is a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing"

(Shakespeare 5.5.26-28). The trouble for the men in the open boat is not that the man waving to them is an idiot. He's not an idiot because he's not signaling. Only the idea that he might be communicating with them turns the man on shore into an idiot. As they realize soon enough, whatever is waving may not even be a man. Somewhere between things or others in the world and our reception of them, interference takes place.

For the men in the open boat, it is mostly hope. For Macbeth, it is something worse. He has given up his hold on human relationships—all but one, and now that one is gone as well. “The Queen, my lord, is dead” is the information that precedes Macbeth's reflections, which begin with the lines “She should have died hereafter: / There would have been a time for such a word” (5.5.16-18). His own actions, and the prophecies of the witches, have made time collapse and life appear meaningless. And yet he continues to reflect on the world—not only on his own world but on that of human beings generally. The men in the open boat face a nature that is no less equivocal than Macbeth's and that of his world. Through nobody's fault, the non-human world seems likely to do them harm, and the human world—outside of the open boat—seems to have betrayed or forgotten them. Yet they continue to act morally toward one another.

Again in “The War Has Taken Place,” Merleau-Ponty observes that the political task that lies ahead is to reintegrate men's political or social relations into their human relationships. “This political task is not incompatible,” he writes, “with any cultural value or literary task, if literature and culture are defined as the progressive awareness of our multiple relationships with other people and the world, rather than as extramundane techniques. . . . In man's co-existence with man, of which these years have made us aware, morals, doctrines, thoughts and customs, laws, works and words all express each other; everything signifies everything. And outside this unique fulguration of existence there is nothing” (*Sense* 152). Signification takes place in the world of human beings, and only human beings can make the world meaningful or meaningless. When they get done cursing the idiot with the coat, the men in the boat go back to rowing. They watch the darkness come. They wonder again if they are going to drown, and if so, why they have been allowed to come so far. “Keep her head up! Keep her head up!” the captain says, and the rower replies, “Keep her head up, sir.” Sometimes keeping our heads up—or on—is all we can do. But then the cook asks Billie, “what kind of pie do you like best?” (898-99).

In an essay called “Man, the Hero,” Merleau-Ponty writes that “The man

who is still alive has only one resource but a sovereign one: he must keep on acting like a living man" (*Sense* 186). He must keep moving toward things and other people, like the men in the boat. Human action and dialogue take place within indeterminate horizons under both given and changeable conditions. Morality is bound up in these conditions. The good we believe ourselves to be doing might in fact do harm. What's good for one person may be harmful for another. Morality is not given once and for all but consists, in a given situation, of considering other people's points of view and acting accordingly. In "Metaphysics and the Novel," Merleau-Ponty writes that "The fundamental contingency of our lives makes us feel like *strangers* at the *trial* to which others have brought us. . . . But that other miracle, the fact that, in an absurd world, language and behavior do have meaning for those who speak and act, remains to be understood." Between the self closed in on itself and an idealism that empties the self into eternity, there is "an effective existence which unfolds in patterns of behavior, is organized like a melody, and, by means of its projects, cuts across time without leaving it" (*Sense* 38-40). In "The War Has Taken Place" he writes that "A judgment without words is incomplete; a word to which there can be no reply is nonsense; my freedom is interwoven with that of others by way of the world." And he adds, "One cannot get beyond history and time; all one can do is manufacture a private eternity in their midst, as artificial as the eternity of a madman who believes he is God. There is no vital spirit in gloomy isolated dreams; spirit only appears in the full light of dialogue" (*Sense* 147).

And yet we wonder at certain times whether meaningful dialogue can take place between an individual and the non-speaking world. A vital spirit can appear in solitude, and the dialogue a person may have in darkness is not necessarily nonsense, though there may be more silence in it than words. Rowing while the others sleep, or seem to sleep, the correspondent has a long night: "The wind had a voice as it came over the waves, and it was sadder than the end." It is here that "the long, loud swishing" comes astern of the boat, followed by a stillness, "while the correspondent breathed with the open mouth and looked at the sea." And then he sees "an enormous fin speed like a shadow through the water, hurling the crystalline spray and leaving the long glowing trail." The other men seem certainly asleep. "So, bereft of sympathy, he leaned a little way to one side and swore softly into the sea" (900-01). While the correspondent swears, the narrator comments:

When it occurs to a man that nature does not regard him as important, and that she feels she would not maim the universe by

disposing of him, he at first wishes to throw bricks at the temple, and he hates deeply the fact that there are no bricks and no temples. Any visible expression of nature would surely be pelleted with jeers.

Then, if there be no tangible thing to hoot he feels, perhaps, the desire to confront a personification and indulge in pleas, bowed to one knee, and with hands suppliant, saying: "Yes, but I love myself."

A high cold star on a winter's night is the word he feels that she says to him. Thereafter he knows the pathos of his situation. (902)

We comprehend the correspondent's isolation, and yet Crane does not seem to be saying that a "high cold star" says nothing.

It is the word of the personification of nature, and it is also a real silence, as real as the silence in any dialogue and against which all dialogue takes place—the silence between speakers and enveloping their speech. In several poems, Crane provides words for these silences. The most famous one reads: "A man said to the universe: / 'Sir, I exist!' / 'However,' replied the universe, / 'The fact has not created in me / 'A sense of obligation'" (*War* 1335). Another reads, "I walked in a desert. / And I cried, 'Ah, God, take me from this place!' / A voice said, 'It is no desert.' / I cried, 'Well, but, the sand, the heat, the vacant horizon.' / A voice said, 'It is no desert'" (*Black* 1314). In "The Open Boat," where the men's situation is fully dramatized, we need only imagine the star to be aware of its meaning.

But what exactly is the meaning we get back from the universe—from the desert or the night sky? The sense of beauty? The perception of space or time? The feeling that the universe would be, if not maimed, at least different without the dimensions our looking out at the horizon or up at the star has given it? Something, anyhow, comes back to us from the unconscious world. We are not mad for feeling it, though perhaps we would become so if we were to stay out in it too long—if the verse about the soldier dying in Algiers had not "mysteriously entered the correspondent's head" and did not seem to him "a human, living thing" (902-03), if the captain did not say at last that he, too, had seen the shark, and if the oiler could not be woken. "'Billie! . . . Billie, will you spell me?' 'Sure,' said the oiler" (904). The sociability of this dialogue and the simplicity of the

men's actions constitute the only heroism they need. As for what's out of their hands, that's where belief comes in—but it need not be a belief that takes them out of the natural world. There is always something hidden in the perspectival world, something beyond what can be perceived. There is always the possibility of wonder.

After this long night, when the correspondent opens his eyes, “the sea and the sky were each of the gray hue of dawning.” Later still, “carmine and gold was painted upon the waters,” and finally morning appears “in its splendor, with a sky of pure blue, and the sunlight flamed on the tips of the waves” (905). These are the colors seen by a man who, like Cézanne, sees himself in the objects around him, whether or not they look back—a man who reflects on what he sees and comprehends that what he sees is there from only one of an infinite number of possible points of view. For none of these points of view are the flames of sunlight the same or complete. And for that very reason, they must really be there. They are the background against which vision takes place. The natural world is Crane's canvas. Its woven texture, and the fact of its being stretched out before him, appears through the painting.

According to Cézanne, “there are two things in a painter: the eye and the brain, and they need to help each other, you have to work on their mutual development, but in a painter's way: on the eye, by looking at things through nature; on the brain, by the logic of organized sensations which provides the means of expression. . . . There is, in an apple, in a head, a culminating point, and this point—in spite of the effect, the tremendous effect: shadow or light, sensations of colour—is always the one nearest our eyes. The edges of objects recede to another point placed on your horizon. . . . The eye must concentrate, grasp the subject, and the brain will find a means to express it.” He adds that “as soon as we're painters, we're swimming in real water, in actual colour, in full reality. We're grappling directly with objects. They lift us up” (Gasquet 221-23). Like a tale of the sea, the still life and the landscape are explorations of what it is for a human being to exist in the world. When the exploration is fully taken up, the ordinary and the extraordinary merge.

No help is coming, the men have little strength left, and though the surf will surely swamp the boat, they head for the beach. Seeing a windmill in the distance, the correspondent “wondered if none ever ascended the tall wind-tower, and if then they never looked seaward. This tower was a giant, standing with its back to the plight of the ants. It represented in a degree, to the correspondent, the serenity of nature amid the struggles

of the individual—nature in the wind, and nature in the vision of men. She did not seem cruel to him then, nor beneficent, nor treacherous, nor wise. But she was indifferent, flatly indifferent” (905). And yet this very indifference is personified; nature is aware of that to which she turns her back. The windmill stands out from the shore, with a front that can’t be seen. It is there in fact and there in reflection and there, strangely, in its own non-human relation to the background and the men behind her, to the correspondent’s own body as “the always implied third term of the figure-background structure.”⁴ “Objects enter into each other,” Cézanne says. “They never stop living, you understand. . . . Imperceptibly they extend beyond themselves through intimate reflections, as we do by looks and words” (Gasquet 220).

Billie backs the boat in to the rollers. They won’t get very close. Each man steals a glance from the rollers to the shore, and “in the expression of the eyes during this contemplation there was a singular quality. The correspondent, observing the others, knew that they were not afraid, but the full meaning of their glances was shrouded” (906). A third and final wave swallows the boat and the men tumble into the sea. The correspondent faces the fact that the water is colder than he expected: “The coldness of the water was sad; it was tragic. This fact was somehow so mixed and confused with his opinion of his own situation that it seemed almost a proper reason for tears. The water was cold” (907). The confusion is of subjectivity and objectivity at their moment of truth—of an abstract reasoning that is always incarnate; a consciousness that is first and foremost a body in the world. In a chapter from *Phenomenology of Perception* called “The Body as Expression, and Speech,” Merleau-Ponty writes, “let us see clearly all that is implied by the rediscovery of one’s own body. It is not merely one object among all others that resists reflection and remains, so to speak, glued to the subject. Obscurity spreads to the perceived world in its entirety” (205). Perceptual experience takes place in “the thickness of the world” and in “a living connection” between the sensing and the sensed.⁵ We learn to know the body and the world by taking them up, in a knowledge that is deeper than objective or subjective knowledge, but nonetheless unsettling and unresolved.

The correspondent sees the oiler swimming strongly. He himself knows it is a long journey and paddles leisurely, but then he is caught in a current and now the shore seems spread before him as in a picture, and he is “impressed as one who in a gallery looks at a scene from Brittany or Holland.” He reflects again on the possibility of his drowning, and then he thinks, or Crane does, that “Perhaps an individual must consider his own

death to be the final phenomenon of nature” (908). Philosophical reflection does not take us out of the un-reflected world except to turn us back to it to see what it means—which is also to say, to experience its wonder. “Reflection does not withdraw from the world toward the unity of consciousness as the foundation of the world,” Merleau-Ponty writes; “rather, it steps back in order to see transcendences spring forth and it loosens the intentional threads that connect us to the world in order to make them appear; it alone is conscious of the world because it reveals the world as strange and paradoxical” (*Primacy* lxxvii).

The correspondent does not die—he lives to tell the tale. But the oiler dies, perhaps because he had worked the longest, or had swum too fast, or just *because*; in any case, it seems, unfairly. Like the other men, and the rest of us, Billie would have been glad to see “the man who had been running and undressing, and undressing and running, come bounding into the water,” and he would have looked forward to receiving comfort from “the men with blankets, clothes, and flasks, and the women with coffee-pots”—but the welcome of the land for him was nothing more than “the different and sinister hospitality of the grave” (909).

The story ends with this sentence: “When it came night, the white waves paced to and fro in the moonlight, and the wind brought the sound of the great sea’s voice to the men on shore, and they felt that they could then be interpreters” (909). They could be interpreters not because they knew what it was to have experienced what they did but because they had experienced it. “The world is not what I think,” says Merleau-Ponty, “but what I live” (*Phenomenology* lxxx). Yet from life emerges self-consciousness, reflection, interpretation. Literary interpretation, too, is a genuine act of inter-subjective and related experience whose context is the world we share. Whether factual or fictitious, literature is not merely representation. It takes place against the background of the natural world. Its fact and its truth—the essence or form of its fact—is present in each of its sentences. The line between the world of a story and the world of the reader is less a line than a horizon.

At nearly the end of “Eye and Mind,” the last work Merleau-Ponty saw published, he asks: “Is this the highest point of reason, to realize that the soil beneath our feet is shifting, to pompously name ‘interrogation’ what is only a persistent state of stupor, to call ‘research’ or ‘quest’ what is only trudging in a circle, to call ‘Being’ that which never fully *is*?” His answer pertains directly to art and literature:

But this disappointment issues from that spurious fantasy which claims for itself a positivity capable of making up for its own emptiness. It is the regret of not being everything, and a rather groundless regret at that. For if we cannot establish a hierarchy of civilizations or speak of progress—neither in painting nor in anything else that matters—it is not because some fate holds us back; it is, rather, because the very first painting in some sense went to the farthest reach of the future. If no painting comes to be *the* painting, if no work is ever absolutely completed and done with, still each creation changes, alters, enlightens, deepens, confirms, exalts, re-creates, or creates in advance all the others. If creations are not a possession, it is not only that, like all things, they pass away; it is also that they have almost all their life still before them. (*Primacy* 190)

This is not the most logical or ideal affirmation of art and literature—or of human existence—but it is the best.

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Notes

1. *Primacy* 12. The essays I have cited from this collection, their translators, and their page numbers are as follows: "The Primacy of Perception and Its Philosophical Consequences," trans. James M. Edie 12-42 and "Eye and Mind," trans. Carleton Dallery 159-

90.

2. *Sense* 28. The essays I have cited from this collection and their page numbers are as follows: "Cézanne's Doubt," 9-25, "Metaphysics and the Novel," 26-40, "The War Has Taken Place," 139-152, and "Man, the Hero," 182-87.

3. Merleau-Ponty writes, "I would be at great pains to say *where* is the painting I am looking at. For I do not look at it as I do at a thing; I do not fix it in its place. My gaze wanders in it as in the halos of Being. It is more accurate to say that I see according to it, than that I *see it*" (*Primacy* 164).

4. Merleau-Ponty's full sentence reads, "With regard to spatiality, which is our present concern, one's own body is the always implied third term of the figure-background structure, and each figure appears perspectively against the double horizon of external space and bodily space" (*Phenomenology* 103).

5. *Phenomenology* 211-13. See also "Eye and Mind," *Primacy* 162-64.

Representations of Truth: The Significance of Order in Katherine Anne Porter's The Old Order Stories

Heather Fox

Abstract

Katherine Anne Porter submitted a group of stories called “Legend and Memory” to *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1934, but instead of the reception she hoped for, *The Atlantic Monthly* responded with a request for significant revisions. These recommendations, as Porter adamantly explained, would change the collective meaning of the stories. And yet, Porter ultimately chose to concede, publishing the stories separately in other magazines before finally collecting them together again in *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories* (1944). Over the next twenty years, Porter would publish the stories (later called The Old Order stories) in two more collections— *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories*, *The Old Order: Stories of the South from The Leaning Tower, Pale Horse, Pale Rider, and Flowering Judas* and *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter*. Each time she chose not to edit individual stories but rearranged the order of the stories. Individually, each story is like a sketch, or one component of the protagonist Miranda’s construct of identity from the perspective of an adult looking backward and remembering as a child. And yet collectively, these stories reveal memory’s process of reconstruction and how the perspective of time transforms event through addition, elimination, and arrangement. Using text, correspondence, manuscripts, and cognitive research to examine the progression of Porter’s work on The Old Order stories in three collections over more than thirty years, “Representations of Truth: The Significance of Order in Katherine Anne Porter’s The Old Order Stories” traces the progressive ordering of these stories from their original submission to their final collection in *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter* (1965). This essay argues that Porter’s rearrangements reflect a reconstructive process of memory. Over time, the reorganization of The Old Order stories demonstrate a shift in Miranda’s memories from a chronological positioning to a representational ordering, allowing Miranda to reexamine her perspective on past experiences.

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There are many levels of performance within a text, but in Katherine Anne Porter's *The Old Order* stories, the outer text, or arrangement of story content, is as important as the inner text, or the content, itself. Over several publications, Porter does not alter the content of the individual stories; however she does rearrange their order. Moreover, throughout the publication process, she maintains control over this evolving order. Order, therefore, in Porter's *The Old Order* stories, develops its own context as the stories are rearranged in three collections over thirty years, each time deconstructing the previous order which, in turn, subsequently reconstructs the meaning of the memory narrative over time.

Representative of some of her earliest work, *The Old Order* stories were written between 1932 and 1934¹ as part of a three section project called *Many Redeemers* and submitted for publication in 1934 as "Legend and Memory." In the project, Porter combines legend and memory to (re) create the past in the present. As she explained to her father, Harrison Porter, "I am trying to reconstruct the whole history of an American family (Ours, more or less) from the beginning by means of just those two things—legend, and memory. I want you to tell me all the stories you know, . . . and thus I hope to build a bridge back."² But Porter never completed *Many Redeemers*; and frustrated by *The Atlantic Monthly's* suggestion that she should publish "Legend and Memory" in fragments,³ she wrote to her publisher Charles Pearce that she was glad it was sent back because she "should not like at all for it to be published in such a state."⁴ Nonetheless, all of the "Legend and Memory" sections—I. The Grandmother, II. Uncle Jimbilly, III. The Circus, IV. The Old Order, V. The Grave, VI. The Last Leaf⁵—were first published as individual magazine stories: "Uncle Jimbilly" and "The Last Leaf" sections as "Two Plantation Portraits: The Witness and The Last Leaf" in *Virginia Quarterly Review* (January 1935), "The Grave" in *Virginia Quarterly Review* (April 1935), "The Circus" in *Southern Review* (1935), "The Old Order" in *Southern Review* (1936), and "The Grandmother," renamed "The Source," in *Accent* (1941). Years later, the stories were collected in *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories* (1944), *The Old Order: Stories of the South from The Leaning Tower, Pale Horse, Pale Rider, and Flowering Judas* (1955), and *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter* (1965). Even though Porter initially was adamant about the arrangement of the "Legend and Memory" sections, these sections (now stories) were ordered differently in each subsequent collection.

When discussing these sections, stories, and collections, it is important to differentiate between Porter's various uses of The Old Order title. For instance, in the "Legend and Memory" submission (1934), The Old Order is the title of the fourth section which becomes "The Old Order" short story in *Southern Review* (1935) and subsequent collections. Even though the six sections of "Legend and Memory" were published together in *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories* (1944), there is no distinction between the "Legend and Memory" stories and the other three stories in the table of contents. In fact, it was not until *The Old Order: Stories of the South* (1955) and *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter* (1965) that the six stories (or seven stories once "The Fig Tree" was added in *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter*) were grouped together under the subtitle The Old Order. *The Old Order: Stories of the South* (1955) is a collection that includes the "Legend and Memory" stories in addition to other "southern" stories. The Old Order, therefore, indicates the group of stories that began as "Legend and Memory" and ended under the subtitle The Old Order in *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter*. Additionally, since the complete "Legend and Memory" manuscript does not exist in the Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, references to "Legend and Memory" are cited from *The Leaning Towers and Other Stories*, first edition, which is closest in both publication date and story order to "Legend and Memory."

Like the changes in The Old Order title over time (fig. 1), both Porter's physical arrangements of the stories and the narrator Miranda's narrative within the stories replicate a reconstructive process of memory. Individually, each story is like a sketch, or one component of Miranda's construct of identity from the perspective of an adult looking backward and remembering as a child. And yet collectively, these stories reveal memory's process of reconstruction and how the perspective of time transforms event through addition, elimination, and arrangement. Over time, The Old Order stories shift Miranda's memories from a chronological positioning to a representational ordering that allows Miranda to reexamine her perspective on truth. As Porter explains in a 1955 letter to Edward Schwartz in response to his request to write her biography: "How can we write a story until we know the end? In a special and almost literal way, In my end is my beginning; nobody will be able to see what my life meant until it is ended; how can you sum up my work until it is finished" (Unrue 246). For The Old Order stories in *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter*, their end (in terms of their narrative placement in the final collection) is their beginning in the sense that Miranda's narrative progressively evolves outside of the confines

of chronological time and within the fluidity of episodic memory, or memory that places past event in the present. From their initial inception in “Legend and Memory” to their subsequent arrangements in *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories*, *The Old Order: Stories of the South from The Leaning Tower, Pale Horse, Pale Rider, and Flowering Judas*, and finally *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter*, the progressive reordering of The Old Order stories reflects the reconstructive process of memory as it repositions itself over time as an extension of the past, present, and future.

To understand the progressive reconstruction of The Old Order stories, it is important to examine Porter’s original submission, “Legend and Memory.” In a letter to Kenneth Burke on March 30, 1936, Porter writes that “Legend and Memory” is “a consistent, steady tapping of all the sources I have, and it is precisely what I have called it—my memory and the memories of my elders, their legends, and mine, and it is a book very necessary to be written before I shall go on to other things.” Most likely, Porter began writing “Legend and Memory” in Switzerland in 1932 as part of her project, *Many Redeemers*,⁶ and by October 19, 1933, she had written thirty thousand words.⁷ As Darlene Harbour Unrue argues in *Katherine Anne Porter: The Life of an Artist*, “before the enterprise exhausted itself, it would go on for more than thirty years, expand, change forms and titles, shed pieces of itself, and shift focus. It would become the widest stream in her fictional canon” (113). The project and, in particular, the sections originally submitted as “Legend and Memory,” remained foundational to Porter’s interest in the relationship between legend and memory as integral components of identity.

Within “Legend and Memory” there is a series of episodic memories in which Miranda acquires a new understanding about herself and her relationship to others as a result of direct and indirect experience. Miranda’s narrative looks both within and without, as a child experiencing and as an adult remembering. While it is difficult to determine the precise source of *Many Redeemers*, it is possible that the idea for the project originated from a short sketch in which Miranda remembers a conversation with her father as a young child. In an undated “Legend and Memory” manuscript fragment, Miranda recalls her father’s explanation about the “truth” of Virgin Mary:

Don’t ever let me hear you talking any of that nonsense about the slavery of women,” said her father, “I wishall (sic) you women who talk about slavery had to be turned into men for just one

day . . . Then you'd know the meaning of slavery. (sic) "He wrapped his ragged old bathrobe around him and had started down the hall. "Just look at me with my elbow out trying to keep a houseful of women in fine proper clothes. Where are you going at this time of day, anyhow?"

Miranda loved her father when he took that tone with her, and she answered a little primly, thinking she was going to please him: "I'm going to mass.

Her father stoped (sic) and turned back: "Good God, it isn't Sunday again, is it?"

"It's the feast of the immaculate conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary," said Miranda" (a double feast of the first class with common octave) One (sic) always goes to Mass . . ."

"Do you know the meaning of the words immaculate conception? Asked her father in quite an everyday voice, which left her unprepared for what was to follow . . .

"Yes, it means that the Blessed Virgin Mary was conceived without stain of original sin," gabbled Miranda prissily.

Point of this: "If Jesus was not the son of Joseph," said Father etc, (sic) very deliberately, "why then he was the son of some other living, mortal man The laws of nature, he said have never been reversed, even in one instance . . . the sooner you get that firmly fixed in your mind, the better off you'll be," he said . . ."

Mirand (sic) horrified, and confused and ashamed . . expected the floor to open and swallow him. What a mean, horrible, evil minded man he was! She ran , , her head roaring and her face scarlett . . .and besides, he had got everything mixed up. She [was not telling]⁸ about Mary conceiving by the Holy ghost!⁹

Beneath the sketch, Porter wrote Many Redeemers and outlined three sections: I. Legend and Memory, 2. Midway this Mortal Life, 3. The Present Day. The positioning of the project outline beneath the conversation between father and daughter suggests a relationship between this manuscript fragment, not included in Many Redeemers submission,

and the eventual content of the sketches. Psychologists Vinaya Raj and Martha Ann Bell argue in “Cognitive Processes Supporting Episodic Memory Formation in Childhood: The Role of Source Memory, Binding, and Executive Functioning” that the contextual detail of an episodic memory attributes a memory episode to its source which, in turn, provides an experience that binds certain features of a memory episode together with certain features of another memory episode (384). In other words, the source memory is not only an origin but also a future perceptual encoding for subsequent memories. In the manuscript fragment when Miranda’s father asks, “Do you know the meaning of the words immaculate conception,”¹⁰ she anticipates that her reply will demonstrate her knowledge and gain her father’s approval. Instead, her father’s response contradicts her previous understanding of truth. For Miranda, the Virgin Mary represents truth; but according to her father, the Virgin Mary represents how legend is mythologized to appear as truth. Thus, even though the sketch between Miranda and her father is not found in any of the submitted or published versions of the text, the tension between legend, memory, and truth becomes a context for her future memories in *The Old Order*.

Since the six sections of “Legend and Memory” are connected, in part, by legend, memory, and truth, their collective meaning is dependent on the interrelationship between sections. Porter was disheartened by *The Atlantic Monthly’s* suggestion that the sections of “Legend and Memory” be cut and reorganized into a separate story about Grandmother and Aunt Nannie¹¹ because she recognized the importance of the sections’ connections. After attempting the edit, Edward Aswell, assistant editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*, wrote that they were “not wholly satisfied with it: the writing is good and the characters of the two old women are very clearly delineated, and yet as a story the thing does not really get anywhere but tends to fade out at the end. . . . our editing has convinced us it will take more than a blue pencil to carve a story out of this material.”¹² And in frustration, Porter explained to Pearce the irony of the decision:

. . . wouldn’t you think that the editor, as he read it and liked it, would have been able to learn something from what happened to it when it was cut? . . . it is horribly tiresome and discouraging . . . There is one section which could better stand alone as a short story—if that is what they must have—but they overlooked it completely. It is “The Grave.” But if I take it out the rest of the

manuscript will be incomplete. It is a fragment, but it belongs where it is.¹³

As Raj and Bell argue, memory's binding processes are "crucial . . . because they connect separate parts of an event into a cohesive and memorable whole" and without proper binding, episodic memory representations become compromised (396); or, as Porter points out to Pearce, the representations are incomplete. In "Legend and Memory," each episodic memory moment is a fragment that relies on its connection to a different but similar memory in order to develop and extend its meaning. Aswell inadvertently recognizes the connectedness between the "Legend and Memory" sections when *The Atlantic Monthly* editors are unable to disassemble it in order to construct a new meaning. When separated, the sections become a distortion instead of a component of identity, isolated fragments instead of progressive insight into the interconnectivity of remembered experience.

Another element that binds the memories together in the "Legend and Memory" sections is Miranda's progression of age, which acts as a chronological framework for the individual sections. Porter asserts that "one lives an enormous span of life between one's first memory and one's thirteenth year;"¹⁴ and notably, Miranda is younger than thirteen in all of the "Legend and Memory" sections. In "Uncle Jimbilly," she is "a flighty little girl of six" ("The Witness" in *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories*), and she is "nine years old" at the time of "The Grave" ("The Grave" in *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories* 70). From narrative content in other sections, it can be deduced that Miranda was approximately six or younger in "The Grandmother," seven or eight when she cannot comprehend why the boys are looking up at her from beneath the seats in "The Circus," and older than nine in "The Last Leaf" since Grandmother's death was in the past and the family's financial stability was quickly deteriorating: "They [Miranda, her sister Maria, and her brother Paul] were growing up, times were changing, the old world was sliding from under their feet, and they had not laid hold of the new one" ("The Last Leaf" in *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories* 61). According to Yee Lee Shing et al's neurological study, "Episodic Memory across the Lifespan: The Contributions of Associative and Strategic Components," throughout life the capacity for episodic memory functions differently. It rapidly increases during childhood. The ability to remember events begins around six; and by middle childhood, children are capable of "mental time travel" and the "self-referential nature" of episodic memory (1081). Within episodic memory, there is, as psychologist

William Friedman asserts, an “internalized view of the past and future as part of a temporal framework” which is dependent on multiple kinds of representations and processes (“Developmental and Cognitive Perspectives on Humans’ Sense of the Times of Past and Future Events” 146).

Since Miranda’s narrative works from both within (as a child) and without (as an adult remembering childhood experiences), her age is significant at the time of each memory’s original experience. At the age of six, when all of her previous knowledge is based on Grandmother’s mythical legend, it is not surprising that she questions whether Uncle Jimbilly’s stories are true. Paradoxically, his stories seem less realistic than Grandmother’s illusory construct of reality. At nine years old in the family cemetery with her brother Paul, she easily buries experience deep within her memory. Most poignantly, Miranda’s ability to remember episodically appears twenty years later when Miranda, as an adult, suddenly remembers her experience in the family cemetery with Paul. The image resurfaces in the same way that it was initially experienced, “plain and clear in its true colors as if she looked through a frame upon a scene that had not stirred nor changed since the moment it happened” (“The Grave” in *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories* 78). Miranda, now at least thirty years old, has developed multiple representations and processes, as Friedman suggests, to encode the original source of the memory so that what she remembers in the market is not only the scene, itself, but also the relationship between the remembered scene and her brother: “the dreadful vision faded, and she saw clearly her brother, whose childhood face she had forgotten, standing again in the blazing sunshine, again twelve years old, a pleased sober smile in his eyes, turning the silver dove over and over in his hands” (“The Grave” in *The Leaning Towers and Other Stories* 78). Miranda’s age relates individual memories to one another through their place in chronological time.

Part of the reason that episodic memory relies on contextual binding is that it loses specificity over time. According to Lynn Nadel and Oliver Hardt in “Update on Memory Systems and Processes,” with the passage of time, two things happen: First, some of the links to the elements are lost, and second, a parallel representation directly linking elements and events, independent of context, develops outside the hippocampus [the location of the brain where studies suggest that episodic memory begins]. The former accounts for the loss of specific details and the latter for the generalization of behavior to new contexts (263). To this end, Porter tried to persuade her father, Harrison Boone Porter, to help her remember the

details from the past so that she might utilize them more accurately in her writing. In a letter on January 21, 1933, she asks, "Couldn't you just take your time and tell what you remember of your childhood, where you were born, what life was like, how we came to go to Louisiana and Texas?" She continues, "For example, I remember your telling once—this was when I was a child— . . . How you and one of your brothers got sick for Louisiana and ran away, trying to get back to where the sugar cane grew."¹⁵ Noticeably, this memory resembles Miranda's memory of Grandmother's sons in "The Old Order": When Grandmother asks Harry and Robert, "Why did you run away from me?" . . . All the answer they could make, as they wept too, was that they had wanted to go back to Louisiana to eat sugar cane. They had been thinking about sugar cane all winter" ("The Old Order" in *The Leaning Towers and Other Stories* 54).

While the remembered details of this episode are important for comparing the actual event to its fictional counterpart, the way in which the memory of the experience creates new meaning is even more important. In "The Old Order," Harry and Robert's longing for the sugar cane symbolizes more than just physical, or literal, hunger; it also represents a psychological, or figurative, hunger: "These two had worked like men; she felt their growing bones through their thin flesh, and remembered how mercilessly she had driven them, as she had driven herself, . . . because there was no choice in the matter" ("The Old Order" in *The Leaning Towers and Other Stories* 54). As psychologists Daniel Bernstein and Elizabeth Loftus describe in "How to Tell If a Particular Memory Is True or False," in the process of reconstructing the past, "we color and shape our life's experiences based on what we know about the world" (373). After recalling the story about Harry and Robert, Miranda notes that "this day was the beginning of her spoiling her children and being afraid of them" ("The Old Order" in *The Leaning Towers and Other Stories* 55). Miranda's memory of Grandmother's experience is significant not because of its remembered details but because of the meaning within the remembered details of the experience. Miranda recognizes that Grandmother's relationship with her sons was never the same after the moment.

Therefore, Miranda's narrative position acts as a perspective, or lens, for encoding memory's experience with meaning. Even when directly participating in the experience of memory, such as in "The Circus" or "The Grave," Miranda's voice is distant or even silent. When present,

her dialogue is almost always indirect. According to M. K. Fornataro-Neil in "Constructed Narratives and Writing Identity in the Fiction of Katherine Anne Porter," that silence allows for "greater opportunity to comment on constructed identity and objective truth" (349). In other words, Porter's position between conscious recollection and the perception of that recollection allows her to analyze the "truth" of the memory in a way that direct involvement does not allow. For instance, when she remembers Grandmother's yearly gallop with her horse, Fiddler, in "The Grandmother," she describes how Grandmother "walked lightly and breathed as easily as ever" but then adds: "or so she chose to believe" ("The Source" in *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories* 9). The judgment, disguised as description, *seems* objective even though it is explicitly addressing the reader. In "Boundaries of the Relation between Conscious Recollection and Source Memory for Perceptual Details," Thorsten Meiser and Christine Sattler found that "'remember' judgments" occur when memories are closely associated to a source memory with similar perceptual attributes (192). The way in which Miranda conveys her adult perceptions about Grandmother's legend (which are different than her childhood perspective) are similar to her "silent" response to her father's revelation about Virgin Mary in the manuscript fragment. Miranda does not directly confront her father but, instead, internalizes her counter-argument, as evidenced by Miranda's response which Porter handwrites after the typed dialogue: "and besides, he had got everything mixed up. She was not telling about Mary conceiving by the Holy ghost!"¹⁶ Miranda's voice is outside the narrative and, consequently, it is the perspective of the memory's experience and not the source of the memory that possesses relevant truth.

Like Miranda's narrative in "Legend and Memory," *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories* is primarily organized chronologically. Furthermore, as evidenced by letters from her publisher, Donald Brace,¹⁷ Porter chose the order of the stories for the collection. In the table of contents, the "Legend and Memory" stories come first (but are no longer grouped under the heading "Legend and Memory"), followed by three other stories: "The Downward Path to Wisdom," "A Day's Work," and "The Leaning Tower." Porter expressed concern about how to demonstrate that the "Legend and Memory" stories belong together and Brace suggested two options: a "half-title" such as "Plantation Sketches" with another half-title for the remaining three or a space in the table of contents between the first six and the final three stories.¹⁸ In the end, however, the stories appeared undifferentiated in the table of contents.

Porter did not revise any of the content of the individual stories before publishing them in *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories*, but she did change the order of the final two stories so that “The Grave” became the last story instead of “The Last Leaf.” Most likely, she did not realize the significance of this change, which would begin a process of reordering over time and reconstruct Miranda’s perception of identity. In *Understanding Katherine Anne Porter*, Darlene Harbour Unrue describes “The Grave” as less realistic in its details than other stories, “honed, pared, and shaped in such a way that the events seem placed in a spotlight that illuminates only central details and relegates everything else to peripheral darkness” (59). “The Grave” begins with knowledge of the distant past, “THE grandfather, dead for more than thirty years, had been twice disturbed in his long repose” (*The Leaning Tower and Other Stories* 69), progresses to Miranda’s memory of hunting with her brother, Paul, in their old family cemetery, and ends in present-day at a market where the adult Miranda is admiring a vendor’s tray of sweets.

Time moves from past to present; but, within the narrative, there is also a blending of time that is different from the chronologically-ordered sections in “Legend and Memory.” For instance, Miranda literally and physically leaps into “the pit that had held her grandfather’s bones” (*The Leaning Tower and Other Stories* 70), an action which is also figuratively and psychologically symbolic of her connection to her ancestral past. Additionally, when she smells “the mingled sweetness and corruption she had smelled that other day in the empty cemetery at home,” the past not only blends with the present but, in this instance, even overtakes the present so that “the scene before her eyes dimmed by the vision back of them” (*The Leaning Tower and Other Stories* 78). Structurally, as well, while Miranda is remembering her childhood, those same memories are simultaneously responsible for her response to the present. In a neuropsychological study, “Remembering the Past and Imagining the Future: Common and Distinct Neural Substrates during Event Construction and Elaboration,” Donna Rose Addis, Alana Wong, and Daniel Schacter define episodic memory as an individual’s unique ability to “project themselves backward in time and recollect many aspects of their previous experiences” (1363). Friedman complicates this definition by suggesting that there is a connection not only between the past and the present in episodic memory but also between the past and the future. He argues that “we have internalized a view of the past and future as parts of a temporal framework, . . . allow[ing] us to consider the pastness or futurity of events, their temporal distances from the present, their ‘locations’ within patterns of time (e.g., the day, week,

or year), and their order” (Friedman 146). Moreover, Friedman cites research on temporal reality, which considers the past-future distinction “unnecessary” for describing the physical world: “When adults think about when past events have occurred and future events will occur, time often appears to be a seamless, integral continuum. But our examination of the psychological processes underlying adults’ sense of past and future times leads to a very different conclusion: these abilities rest on a patchwork of representations and processes” (155). This “patchwork of representations and processes” is possibly what Unrue describes as the “peripheral darkness” (59) surrounding spotlighted events within Miranda’s episodic memory in “The Grave.” Unlike the arrangement of the sections in “Legend and Memory,” Porter positions “The Grave” as the last story. This first reordering begins a process of reconstruction, which first deconstructs the chronological structure of the stories and then reconstructs meaning through episodic representation.

Porter’s movement from chronological to episodic ordering, which began with her reorganization of the final two stories in *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories*, is most evident in *The Old Order: Stories of the South from The Leaning Tower, Pale Horse, Pale Rider, and Flowering Judas*. In a response to an interviewer, Porter explains that her “material consists of memory, legend, personal experience, and acquired knowledge. They combine in a constant process of re-creation” (“Three Statements about Writing” 123). This re-creation in *The Old Order: Stories of the South* does not include story-level revision. However, it is a complete revision of the stories’ arrangement. Catherine Carver from Harcourt, Brace, and Company proposed the idea for the collection in a letter to Porter on January 25, 1955, outlining their story preferences as the six stories in *The Leaning Tower* about Miranda and the Grandmother and “Old Mortality.” However, Porter, who in past collections determined which stories would be included and the order of those stories, was displeased and wrote to Donald Brace,

I thought the selection was limited, I should like all the southern stories; that is, besides the six under the heading The Old Order, and Old Mortality, I want He and Granny Weatherall—they’ll help give backbone. I should even like Magic, the New Orleans story, a kind of little low-life gloss on the gay New Orleans Amy knew, . . . The way it is now, the selection seems a little half-hearted, incomplete.¹⁹

Porter also wrote to Carver about how the collection *should* look, noting that her arrangement would ensure that no one would “mistake them

[The Old Order stories] for random sketches, as so many reviewers did, or fragments from an unfinished novel, which they are not.”²⁰

The Old Order

The Source

The Old Order

The Witness

The Circus

The Last Leaf

The Grave

THE JILTING OF GRANNY WEATHERALL

HE

OLD MORTALITY

Next to THE JILTING OF GRANNY WEATHERALL and HE, Porter admonished, “If this were my book I’d never leave out these two utterly southern stories. The collection is crippled without them.”²¹ The stories were selected for their “southernness”; and yet, the binding between them, particularly in the reordering of The Old Order stories, reveals more than a shared cultural context.

Their reordering indicates a transition from chronological time to representational time, which began by positioning “The Grave” at the end of The Old Order stories in *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories*, and exchanges veracity of detail for representational truth. For instance, Grandmother’s legend is still the first story; but by the end of the second story (“The Old Order”), she “dropped dead over the doorsill” (*The Old Order: Stories of the South* 33). In “The Witness,” there is only one reference to Grandmother in her youth as Miss Sophia Jane, but it is implied that she is still alive. In “The Circus,” she appears completely alive as the matriarchal voice that provides stability in the midst of Miranda’s disconcerting experience at the circus; but by “The Last Leaf” and “The Grave,” she is no longer alive. Thus, time in The Old Order stories becomes “detached and floating” (*The Old Order: Stories of the South* 15). In a manuscript fragment, Porter admits that she must work in three dimensions of time: “There is only the present; one lives always in memory, anticipation, and the split second of time which is the present, a transitory thing; where the past is in eternity, and the future, also. The past is real in the sense that it has occurred but the future is only a concept.”²² Grandmother’s physical presence—as depicted by life, burial, and “resurrection”—is actual in the sense that the events have

occurred in the past; but, with the anachronistic arrangement of stories in *The Old Order: Stories of the South*, which encompasses all three dimensions of time, the representation of the present through Miranda's narrative becomes symbolic of each memory's significance beyond a framework of chronological time.

Consequently, The Old Order stories now connect events through episodic-based memory and not through Miranda's chronological age. Moreover, Miranda's understanding of truth becomes a representation of truth from the progressively changing context of her episodic memories. For example, in *The Old Order: Stories of the South*, the first three stories idealize the past. Grandmother's legend in "The Source," which is representative of Miranda's understanding of truth, is problematic because it is, in actuality, a myth beginning like a fairy tale—"Once a year"—and perpetuating a Persephone-like immortality based on Grandmother's cyclic relationship with the seasons (*The Old Order: Stories of the South* 3). Miranda's initial experience with "truth," then, is a false representation of truth, an illusion without beginning, middle, or end that is overturned by the reality of Grandmother's actual death at the end of "The Old Order." Similarly, Miranda first questions authenticity with Uncle Jimbilly's stories, assuming that direct experience *must* be true; but her perception of the relationship between direct experience and truth is subsequently overturned in "The Circus" with her inability to differentiate between illusion and reality. "The Circus," for Miranda, is a turning point in which she finds herself separated from her family both physically and psychologically for the first time as an identity separate from others. After "The Circus," Miranda is left with two options: to reject the past and establish a new identity like Nannie in "The Last Leaf" or to bury the past as Paul instructs in "The Grave." Both options position the past behind the present; but, as evidenced by her experience at the end of "The Grave," even though her memories are buried, they are still capable of resurrecting themselves in the future (like Grandmother's death and resurrection throughout the new arrangement of the stories). As Edward Schwartz argues in "The Fictions of Memory," Miranda needs "to see and understand that self precisely, to render her perceptions and understanding without abandoning the identity between the self that knows and sees and the self that's seen and known" (72). While the reordering of *The Old Order* stories may seem less structured by its deconstruction of chronological time, its (re)construction allows Miranda to examine truth in terms of a contextual representation that analyzes both experience and the perception of that experience through episodic memory.

The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter, then, is Porter's final positioning of *The Old Order* stories. The "Southern stories" —"He," "Magic," and "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall"—which were added to *The Old Order: Stories of the South* are returned to the *Flowering Judas and Other Stories* section in this collection. The only significant changes in the arrangement of *The Old Order* stories between *The Old Order: Stories of the South* and *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter* are the addition of "The Fig Tree," which expands the *The Old Order* to seven stories, and "The Old Order" story's title change to "The Journey." In the preface to *The Collected Stories*, "Go Little Book," Porter clarifies the textual history of the story additions:

This collection of stories has been floating around the world in many editions, countries and languages, in three small volumes, for many years. There are four stories added which have never been collected before, and it is by mere hazard they are here at all. "The Fig Tree," now in its right place in the sequence called *The Old Order*, simply disappeared at the time *The Leaning Tower* was published, in 1944, and reappeared again from a box of otherwise unfinished manuscripts in another house, another city and a different state, in 1961. . . .A friend fished them out of the ancient Century files, got them re-published, after forty-odd years and so they join their fellows. (v-vi)

The volume represents thirty years of (re)ordering and is divided into three sections: *Flowering Judas and Other Stories*, *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, and *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories*. It represents Miranda's final understanding of truth.

The most prominent change between *The Old Order: Stories of the South* and *The Collected Stories* is the addition of "The Fig Tree," placed as the sixth story between "The Last Leaf" and "The Grave." If the source and binding of the episodic memories in *The Old Order* stories relates to representations of truth, then "The Fig Tree's" examination of death, life, and resurrection is a crucial addition to Miranda's sense of identity. In a letter to her sister Gay Porter in 1928 (the same year that she most-likely wrote "The Fig Tree"), Porter describes how she was beginning to feel as if "the world grows to be a familiar place, with no dark and terrifying corners, and no shocks and almost no strangeness" (Unrue 46). In "The Fig Tree," of course, the world is not a familiar place to Miranda. She feels isolated by events out of her control—Nannie's discipline,

Grandmother's and her father's expectations, and, most significantly, her mother's death. In fact, she feels as if she can only gain a sense of control by ritualistically burying dead farm animals. Since Shing et al. assert that "a core part of our identity formation is rooted in the ability to mentally travel back in time and re-experience events" (1080), it is significant that Miranda's memory in "The Fig Tree" begins with what death looks like to her (as a child): "When Miranda found any creature that didn't move or make a noise, or looked somehow different from the live ones, she always buried it in a little grave with flowers on top and a smooth stone at the head. Even grasshoppers. Everything dead had to be treated this way" (*The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter* 354). Difference indicates death and "dying was something that happened all the time, . . . and [after burial] that person was never seen again by anybody" (*The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter* 354). Miranda, even at a young age, understands death to be permanent and assigns its physical location to underground. Therefore, it is not surprising that she feels guilty when she thinks that she might have buried a live chick instead of a dead one. Even though it is clearly dead, "spread out on his side with his eyes shut and his mouth open" (*The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter* 355), the weeping sound that she hears constantly reminds her of the possibility that something buried might actually be alive or, more frighteningly, that observed truth might not be actual truth. In all of her previous experiences with death, burial was permanent; but, as Great-Aunt Eliza reveals when she explains the actual source of the weeping sound, experience is not always truth. Instead of burying knowledge, Great-Aunt Eliza unburies it.²³ In the final arrangement of *The Old Order* stories, resurrection takes many forms: Grandmother's death and reappearances in the anachronistic arrangement of the stories, the multiple times that Grandfather's remains are exhumed and reburied, the psychological resurfacing of Miranda's buried childhood memory of her experience with Paul in the family cemetery, and finally, Great-Aunt Eliza's revelation that the source of actual truth can be different from the experience of perceived truth.

Thus, if, as Daniel Schacter et al. discuss in "Memory Distortion: An Adaptive Perspective," the primary function of episodic memory is actually to support the future (468) and not simply to remember the past, then by adding "The Fig Tree" to *The Old Order*, truth is resurrected perspective that connects all dimensions of time—past, present, and future. In the "Legend and Memory" manuscript fragment, Miranda's father reveals the "truth" about Virgin Mary; and in "The Fig Tree" Great-

Aunt Eliza reveals the “truth” about the weeping sound. Both “truths” challenge Miranda’s perspective in relation to her previous understanding of truth. However, unlike her father’s revelation that complicates her understanding and renders her silent, Great-Aunt Eliza’s explanation relieves Miranda’s concern, smoothing out the “dark and terrifying corners” (Unrue 46) by deconstructing the perception of experience to reveal what lies beneath (or within) the source of that experience: “‘Just think,’ said Great-Aunt Eliza, in her most scientific voice, ‘when tree frogs shed their skins, they pull them off over their heads like little skirts, and they eat them. Can you imagine? They have the prettiest little shapes you ever saw—I’ll show you one some time under the microscope’” (*The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter* 362). The microscope symbolizes Miranda’s new lens of perception, which is not just a scientific lens, as the story suggests, but knowledge that does not render Miranda silent. Her voice, unlike the inner, suppressed dialogue after her conversation with her father in the manuscript fragment, is still heard at the end of “The Fig Tree”: “‘Thank you ma’am,’ Miranda remembered to say through her fog of bliss” (*The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter* 362). Great-Aunt Eliza’s revelation to Miranda is central to Miranda’s understanding of truth.

In an uncompleted Many Redeemers fragment (c. 1930-1931), Porter divides a page in two parts with the titles, “The Ancestors” and “The Fig Tree.” In “The Fig Tree” section she writes that “when the fig tree does not bear it must be cut down and cast into the fire—(find this passage in King James Version) . . . I do not want us to die and be altogether dust . . . the roots must n t (sic) be destroyed, there must be a replanting.”²⁴ By adding “The Fig Tree” to *The Old Order* stories, Porter’s original intentions for depicting Miranda’s evolving perception of truth are finally complete. Miranda’s narrative in *The Old Order* is not only capable of transcending chronological time but also capable of resurrecting what lies beneath the surface.

In the final publication of *The Old Order* stories, Miranda’s understanding begins as actual truth in legend but evolves into a representation of truth through legend. Truth, as Porter contends in “My First Speech,” is a “very tall word” (692); but Porter’s insistent rearrangement of *The Old Order* stories in four collections over thirty years confirms that truth must encompass the past, present, and future as both a deconstruction and a (re)construction of meaning. With each new memory episode, Miranda adapts so that she learns to depend on

something “*deeper than knowledge*.”²⁵ And, in this way, legend, memory, and truth are all components of Miranda’s identity in *The Old Order*.

The Old Order Stories – Katherine Anne Porter

Collection Story Order	“Legend and Memory” (submitted 1934) and Magazine Publications	<i>The Leaning Tower and Other Stories</i> , 1944	<i>The Old Order: Stories of the South from Her Books The Leaning Tower, Pale Horse, Pale Rider, Flowering Judas</i> , 1955 Stories given heading: The Old Order	<i>The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter</i> , 1965
1	“The Grandmother” <i>Accent</i> , 1941	“The Grandmother” renamed “The Source”	“The Source”	“The Source”

2	<p>“Uncle Jimbilly”</p> <p><i>Virginia Quarterly Review</i>, Jan. 1935, published as “Two Plantation Portraits: The Witness and The Last Leaf”</p>	<p>“Uncle Jimbilly”</p> <p>renamed “The Witness”</p>	<p>“The Old Order”</p> <p>renamed “The Journey”</p>	<p>“The Old Order”</p> <p>renamed “The Journey”</p>
3	<p>“The Circus”</p> <p><i>Southern Review</i>, 1935</p>	<p>“The Circus”</p>	<p>“The Witness”</p>	<p>“The Witness”</p>
4	<p>“The Old Order”</p> <p><i>Southern Review</i>, 1936</p>	<p>“The Old Order”</p>	<p>“The Circus”</p>	<p>“The Circus”</p>
5	<p>“The Grave”</p> <p><i>Virginia Quarterly Review</i>, Apr. 1935</p>	<p>“The Last Leaf”</p>	<p>“The Last Leaf”</p>	<p>“The Last Leaf”</p>
6	<p>“The Last Leaf”</p> <p><i>Virginia Quarterly Review</i>, Jan. 1935, published as “Two Plantation Portraits: The Witness and The Last Leaf”</p>	<p>“The Grave”</p>	<p>“The Grave”</p>	<p>“The Fig Tree” (written 1928; first published in <i>Harper’s Magazine</i>, June 1960)</p>
7				<p>“The Grave”</p>

* "The Grave," "The Witness," and "The Old Order" were also collected in *Selected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter, Armed Services Edition* (1945).

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Fig. 1: The Old Order Stories Publications Chart

The first row identifies the collections in chronological order by publication date. The first column indicates the order of the stories within these published collections.

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Notes

- 1 In Porter's correspondence with Caroline Gordon (1932, 1935), Harrison Porter (1932, 1933), and Josephine Herbst (1934), she mentions work on "Legend and Memory." Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections and Bayley, 109, 127.
- 2 Porter's letter to Harrison Porter, 31 May 1934, Papers of Thomas F. Walsh. In Papers of Katherine Anne Porter. University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.
- 3 Edward Aswell, *The Atlantic Monthly* assistant editor, recommends to Charles Pearce on 17 May 1934, that the novel be cut into a short story about the Grandmother and Aunt Nannie. A week later editors advise that "it will take more than a blue pencil to carve a story out of this material." Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.
- 4 Porter's letter to Charles Pearce, 8 June 1934, Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.
- 5 Aswell's letter to Pearce, 17 May, 1934, Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections and Alvarez, p. 267.
- 6 Porter writes to Caroline Gordon from Switzerland, 1932: "Little by little I have got out all my manuscripts and began very tentatively to experiment with writing again. I have about thirty short stories, and two novels, all in the first ragged stages of notes and occasional full paragraphs; the main novel is not even half done." Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.
- 7 "To Mr. Moe," Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.
- 8 Most likely, the fragment reads "She [was not telling] about Mary conceiving by the Holy ghost!" but Porter's handwriting is not definitively legible in the bracketed words.
- 9 Old Order Fragments, Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.
- 10 Old Order Fragments, Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.
- 11 Aswell's letter to Pearce, 17 May 1934. Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.
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- 13 Porter's letter to Pearce, 8 June 1934. Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.
- 14 Old Order Fragments, Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.
- 15 Porter's letter to Harrison Porter, 21 Jan. 1933, Papers of Thomas F. Walsh. In Papers of Katherine Anne Porter. Print. University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.
- 16 Old Order Fragments, Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.

- 17 Brace's letters to Porter, 2 June 1944 and 6 June 1944. Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.
- 18 Brace's letter to Porter, 6 June 1944. Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.
- 19 Porter's letter to Brace, 30 Jan. 1955. Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.
- 20 Porter's letter to Carver, 28 Jan. 1955. Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.
- 21 Porter's letter to Carver, 28 Jan. 1955. Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.
- 22 *Flowering Judas and Other Stories*, Preface?, Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.
- 23 See also Fox, "Resurrecting Truth in Katherine Anne Porter's 'The Fig Tree.'"
- 24 *Many Redeemers*, c. 1930-1931, Papers of Katherine Anne Porter. Print. University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections.
- 25 Porter's letter to Gordon, 9 June 1935. In Bayley, 127.

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Fiction

The Triumph of Kafka

Michael Bradburn-Ruster

*...to study and reflect on law offered
the greatest satisfaction... to implement it
was the saddest or most painful fate
that could befall one.*

—Ivan Klíma

An ordinary morning in Tel Aviv. Near the intersection of Allenby Street and Rothschild Boulevard, bicycles glide blithely past rows of paralyzed cars, whose average pace even sauntering pedestrians often outstrip. Though a pair of mourning doves nesting in a palm tree at the entrance to the Haganah Museum have fallen silent, they can be heard rustling in the fronds. Locals breakfasting on a terrace at Hatzuk Beach watch pelicans float listlessly on the swells. Along the shore, a few couples and clusters of people with paddles are already playing *matcot*, stooping to fetch the blue ball whenever it deserts its airborne arcs and flees across the white sand or into the surf.

But just east of the city, in Ramat Gan, something extraordinary is about to happen: any moment now, Judge Isaac Melamed will emerge from his chambers and render his decision.

For more than three years, phalanxes of lawyers and several nations have been entangled in the trial, involving the contents of a suitcase that arrived in Palestine over seventy years ago.

In some eyes, the affair has come to represent an archetypal contest between David and Goliath: a fragile old lady—her lonely life devoted to caring for stray cats—stands in danger of losing her precious legacy at the hands of an imperious power. This time, the giant Philistine was the

State of Israel and its National Library. So, at least, her lawyers have argued, likening the gloved government agents that rummaged through her belongings to the minions of “dark, despotic regimes.” No need to make the allusion more explicit: everyone knew the suitcase had left Prague and ended up in Tel Aviv on account of the Gestapo. One of her attorney’s assertions, that his client felt she was being raped, has been applauded by a number of feminists.

Others take a very different view. The papers once contained in that suitcase form a valuable part of a precious cultural legacy, and thus deserve a place on the shelves of the National Library in Jerusalem, among its five million manuscripts, incunabula, bound volumes and works of art. Where else would such documents be granted their due, be safely held in public trust, if not in the one nation specifically designated for the protection of the most persecuted people in history, who were both entitled and obliged to serve as custodians of an inheritance that ultimately belonged to the whole world? Yet that sacred commission was being thwarted by a selfish grimalkin who unlawfully sought to sell the precious manuscripts to the highest bidder, and was found to have entered into secret negotiations with a German museum.

And now, almost ninety years after his death, the fate of Franz Kafka’s papers is about to be determined. But since the matter involves both international prestige and a great deal of money, more than literary treasure is at stake.

Still, certain elusive questions remain ambiguous.

With the explicit demand that they be destroyed, Kafka left not only a sheaf of notebooks, sketches and letters to his friend Max Brod—he bequeathed him a dilemma: was the survivor’s solemn duty to honor the author’s dying desire, or to preserve his genius? In resolving that question, Brod became at once the writer’s champion and (out of devotion or self-interest?) his betrayer. For he edited and published many works his friend had never meant to release; yet had he not done so, Kafka would have remained an obscure, minor writer, only one degree shy of oblivion.

Fleeing from the Nazis in 1939, Brod settled in Tel Aviv, where a married woman became his secretary; that this term did not embrace the full extent of their relationship was something of an ill-kept secret.

He purportedly left all the papers to her upon his death... but had he

designated her as beneficiary, or only as executrix? Twenty years later, she would auction Kafka's original manuscript of *The Trial* to the Archive of German Literature in Marbach, a transaction that harvested some two million dollars.

Before her death at the age of over a hundred, she willed the papers in turn to her two daughters, only one of whom, now nearly eighty, survives. Having never married, the lady has no family to care for her. This gentle, reclusive soul, her lawyers insist, possesses nothing but that paper security—hers to do with as she wishes.

The State in its wisdom, however, contests that claim. Kafka, after all, had been a Jewish writer, and did that not make him, ultimately, an Israeli writer? The National Library, moreover, possesses a document in Brod's hand. Addressed to his intimate secretary, it stipulates that her heirs are to have no part in his literary estate.

And so, amid accusations, injunctions, and frozen assets, the trial has proceeded, in order to determine who has the legal right to those letters, drafts and manuscripts, in the hand of one of the 20th Century's most significant writers, one who saw perhaps more clearly than anyone else the absurdity, the cruelty, of our enlightened era, in which mechanism and procedure would replace the feeble judgment of human beings.

But just as the issues were complex, so were there more than two contenders. At times, the question seemed to have become not simply who owned the manuscripts, but who owned Kafka himself.

Charles University in Prague had also entered into the fray. Kafka, they claimed, was not an Israeli but a Czech writer. And let us not lower ourselves to competing persecutions—a great culture in the heart of Europe, the modern Republic suffered long under the tyranny of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, of the Germans, of the Soviets. Surely the papers of Prague's greatest writer belong in the library of that city's university. In applying to the Tel Aviv court to be admitted as a party to the dispute, they discreetly refrained from noting that the University was already six hundred years old when the State of Israel was established.

The German Literature Archive in Marbach, which had already paid such a handsome price for *The Trial*, and entered into further negotiations with the surviving daughter, also filed with the Court. From the sidelines, professors in Heidelberg and Freiburg noted that Kafka was, after all, a

German writer. What is the very flesh of an author's work if not the syllables of the language in which he writes? And Kafka wrote neither in Hebrew nor in Czech, but in the tongue of Goethe and Schelling, of Thomas Mann and Hermann Broch. Culturally, he had been a German Jew, like the Austrian Joseph Roth—whose papers, incidentally, now resided not in Israel but at the Center for Jewish History in New York. For reasons better left tacit, the Reichstag in Berlin did not become embroiled in the battle, but only sent a diplomatic cable affirming that Kafka's work belonged to the world, and expressing the sincere hope that the results of the trial would reflect that understanding.

San Diego State University in California also became tangentially involved, as the sponsor of a project devoted to recovering lost notebooks and perhaps as many as a hundred letters exchanged between Kafka and his lover, Dora Diamant.

Throughout the trial, the arguments marshaled by various parties ranged from the plausible to the spurious.

At some point, one of the lady's team of lawyers had responded with dismay to the insinuation that his client's interests were in any way mercenary. If anything, she had treated her legacy like a sort of portable shrine, a little cave of miracles. That was why she had dispersed the papers into a number of safe-deposit boxes, some in Tel Aviv, some in Zürich. Another of her attorneys, worried perhaps that such an action might appear suspicious, emphasized the fact that she lived on a street named in honor of Spinoza; as if drawing back a curtain, he swept out his arm with solemn majesty, hinting that the humble plaintiff somehow shared in the dazzling accomplishment of the lens-grinder of Amsterdam, whose vision encompassed the entire universe, uniting it to God Himself. That the great Jewish philosopher had been expelled from the synagogue as a result of his unorthodox views the attorney did not consider mentioning.

The Court, meanwhile, commissioned a special panel to examine those safe deposit boxes, both in Israel and Switzerland; their contents were to be itemized, thus providing a detailed inventory of any precious letters and notebooks.

More than once, a counsel for the State had stressed the promise made by the National Library's director-general: that all the documents would be made available to the public via the Internet, as a *global* trust. In time, he would adopt a more aggressive rhetorical strategy, suggesting that for the

Library to be deprived of the papers would constitute an echo of Kristallnacht. Despite audible gasps of recognition and even a stifled sob at the back of the courtroom, a few of the younger, less religiously inclined members of the public—for whom neither history nor Abraham and his legacy were any more than vague notions worthy of respect, though not attention or assent—had to be told in murmurs how the Brownshirt thugs had ravaged the synagogues, immolating the sacred pages of the Torah, in some cases inflicting the foulest desecration.

“That’s right,” came an edifying whisper, “*urinated* on the Holy Book.”

Despite his fervor, the same attorney maintained his patient, impassive dignity when, a moment later, someone (who was forcibly and swiftly removed from the courtroom) flung out a frantic, garbled question about the desecration of Palestinian children, the demolition of Palestinian homes.

A spokesman for the Czech University, whose Hebrew was surprisingly fluent, argued for the cultural centrality of his nation, a tradition transcending parochial interests of any kind. The birthplace of Kafka was indeed a nation proud of its own heritage, while cherishing the accomplishments of all peoples. Moreover, the University’s renowned collection of Old Assyrian tablets and its prominent role in the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative assured that the contested papers would benefit from “the most advanced technological milieu,” as he put it. He neither mentioned nor was questioned about the rampant corruption to which his nation had become addicted since its liberation from the Soviet sphere and subsequent assimilation into the Free World.

The German representative disputed the National Library’s claim that the Marbach Archiv had acquired the manuscript of *The Trial* illegitimately, since an Israeli court had deemed the documents a private inheritance in 1974. Furthermore, he scarcely needed to argue for the Museum’s reputation as a foremost repository of modern literature; the list he submitted of its holdings and the testimony of sister institutions sufficed to impress. Unbidden, he deftly addressed the obvious if implicit concern, earnestly wondering whether any other nation had so deeply and painfully assimilated the horrific lessons of racial hatred. Yes, Kafka’s own sisters had perished in the Nazi catastrophe—and yet did not the burgeoning Jewish population of Berlin and its thriving culture testify to the hope that while there could never be *compensation* for the past, surely genuine repentance merited the opportunity for *redemption*?

By this stage, the judge initially assigned to the case had resigned, amid wild rumors of bias and bribery; the judge who replaced her, Isaac Melamed, knew these slurs to be not only groundless, but contrary to all evidence. His predecessor had in fact withdrawn precisely on account of her probity, to insulate the trial from scandal.

Yet Judge Melamed was immediately afflicted with his own set of detractors: had he not been appointed to this important case only to quell the flurry of demands from civil rights groups, and under pressure from the Shas party, that Sephardic judges be granted more authority? The clamor subsided, however, when the man who had launched the accusations was found guilty of embezzling millions of shekels.

At last the lawyers' arguments, by turns brilliant and absurd, were coming to a close, their summations (according to some uncharitable observers) too prolix to deserve the name. Before resting their respective cases, they would marshal a dizzying array of national and international laws, of ethical and emotional tactics; would appeal to precedents and prejudices; would resort to persuasive facts and devious fallacies.

And having announced that on this very morning he would issue his ruling, the Honorable Isaac Melamed emerged from his chambers and took his seat at the bench. A man of dignified bearing and stunning features, he paused before delivering the verdict, his stern yet tranquil gaze scanning the courtroom, glancing over faces by turns eager and impassive.

The gallery, often sparsely populated until now, was brimming with people eager to learn the outcome of the trial. Few if any members of the public, however, noticed that the judge's voice was quavering as he pronounced his decision.

"The crucial question in this case," he began, "has been to resolve the contested ownership of certain documents left by Franz Kafka, in the form of manuscripts, drafts, letters and drawings. Said remnants have been examined by the Court and found to be invaluable.

"The arguments for all parties have been heard. Having carefully sifted and weighed their diverse merits, the Court has determined that despite certain irreconcilable differences, counsels for both plaintiff and the defendant have demonstrated identical grounds for applying a single decisive principle. This concurrence—no doubt inadvertent—provides the

basis for the Court's decision."

What? someone behind the panoply of lawyers bellowed, unable to restrain himself.

But those who turned to scold him with their glances were equally astonished at the judge's words. Had they misheard, had they misunderstood the legalese? Or did this judge fancy himself a son of Solomon? What was he going to do—call for the papers to be cut in half, then sagely await the moment when one of the parties would raise a piercing protest?

The judge continued: "Lawyers for the plaintiff Eva Hoffe have explicitly asserted two key precepts: First, that 'Any person has the right to decide how his assets should be used, no matter how "eccentric" his wishes might seem.' The second precept follows from the first: that the State must 'respect the deceased's wishes.'

"And on its own behalf, defense counsel for the State of Israel and the Israeli National Library has argued that Max Brod's explicit wishes—that the papers be transferred to a public archive—were never accommodated.

"The two parties are thus in fundamental agreement on the core principle; namely, that the desires of the deceased be regarded as inviolable.

"Their disagreement arises in the application of the term 'deceased.' While the plaintiff construes this to mean her mother Esther Hoffe, who willed that her daughters should receive the papers as their personal property; the State, on the other hand, regards 'the deceased' as meaning Max Brod, whose wishes Mrs. Hoffe failed to honor."

So that was it, a sly reporter nodded. A foregone conclusion: the judge was only spouting verbiage before announcing that he had found in the State's favor.

"In the Court's judgment, however," Melamed said, speaking more firmly than before, "it is manifestly evident that the 'deceased' in question, to whom the fundamental principle applies, has been misidentified. The person properly so designated is neither Esther Hoffe nor Max Brod, but rather the man who was doubly wronged—first by his lover, Dora Diamant, who defied his request that she destroy his letters, and then again after his death by Max Brod, to whom he had explicitly written, '*My dear Max... all that is left in my estate must be burned completely, unread.*'

“Justice demands that this egregious violation be finally rectified... The Court rules in favor of Franz Kafka.”

For several moments, no gasp nor cry of surprise broke the hush that seized the crowd. Perhaps it took a moment for some members of the public to realize the implications of the verdict. No doubt others, who understood immediately, were astonished into silence. Members of the public looked at one another with shock and amazement, scoffing soberly before the pandemonium broke forth.

The judge commanded silence, then pronounced his final sentence. “The contents of the suitcase, formerly in the possession of Max Brod, author of *Arnold Beer* and *The Redemption of Tycho Brahe*, heretofore in the possession of Eva Hoffe, and stored in bank deposit boxes in Israel and Switzerland, having been treated by representatives of the Court to a complete inventory, pursuant to my predecessor’s orders. The resulting list will be preserved and made available to the public via Internet servers at the National Library in Jerusalem, the Archive of German Literature in Marbach, Charles University in Prague, and San Diego State University. The extant papers currently in the Court’s custody are to be taken to a secure, undisclosed location, and there—in accordance with the express desire of Franz Kafka—burned to ashes.”

The claimants struggled to temper their outrage, and even sought to comfort one another, finding themselves now cruelly bound together. The lady was both dazed and furious, the National Library deeply disappointed, the State of Israel appalled. Within moments, attorneys hitherto at odds issued almost indistinguishable public statements, declaring that the verdict only served to illustrate, in the most ironic fashion imaginable, the absurd and arbitrary nature of bureaucracy, as Kafka had so brilliantly depicted in his work. Naturally, they vowed, appeals would be filed.

Months would pass before the last appeal was rejected. But over the next few days and weeks, countless others aired their views.

Some observers would cast Judge Melamed as a self-hating Jew, if not an outright anti-Semite, who had betrayed the cultural heritage of Israel. “We should thank God that this *tipeshe frenk* didn’t preside at Eichmann’s trial,” one radio commentator muttered; “he would have found the monster innocent.”

It was reported in *Haaretz*, however, that the writer A.B. Yehoshua praised the verdict, remarking that Kafka was, in any case, not a complete but only a partial Jew.

Others denounced the judge's decision as both legally incompetent and politically motivated, a cynical move designed to pander to Sephardic resentment over their alleged "marginal status," and promote those tiresome claims that the country's Ashkenaz majority strove to render them invisible. An immoderate Zionist suggested that the judge's action only confirmed the obvious: that the Sephardim were as inept and barbarous as the late lamented satirist Kishon had famously presented them.

Still others blamed the Interior Minister for inciting ethnic tensions, since it was he who only recently, spouting nonsense about "moral obligation," had urged that more Sephardic judges be appointed not only to the lower courts, but also that the sole representative of that group on the High Court should be joined by another.

A few lone voices, nonetheless, esteemed Judge Melamed's courage in daring to reach a manifestly unpopular verdict, his bold integrity in risking the wrath of the state, his honor in upholding the sanctity of the author's deathbed wishes.

Nor were the reactions outside Israel muted.

A popular American pundit would deem the judge a Communist, for having erased the sacred principle of private property.

Scholars the world over lamented or condemned the ruling, citing an "incalculable loss." One respected professor at Princeton, however, chose not to focus on the outcome of the trial, but to ridicule what he called "the benighted fiction of authorial intent."

Judge Melamed had anticipated the uproar, and his pensive nature would invite him to ignore the meager praise, inure him to the lavish indignation that lay in store. For months he had been in the spotlight, his every word and gesture scrutinized. Opinion was less than dust that returned to the earth, although the fact provided no occasion for his own conceit. Indeed, on this evening of the trial's conclusion, his burden was merciless, and promised to remain so.

Entering his house, no one greeted his arrival. His wife had gone to visit

their daughter in Haifa, and home seemed suddenly vast and alien, a repository of the loneliness he had struggled all his life to evade. Unseen, he slumped into the chair that in the past had offered an oasis; that it now provided no trace of comfort went unwitnessed. He knew that when she called he would not tell her this.

The righteous judgment he had rendered failed to soothe. Again and again he envisioned the humble suitcase that had traveled from Prague to Tel Aviv two generations ago, and imagined the flames that would engulf its paper soul. Though he did not sob or moan, the tears continued for quite some while, and that night his grief had not subsided when at last he fell asleep.

Poetry

The Still Life

Emilie Mathis

One extension rises from the curves;
One arch merges with the waves.
Serpentine and silent like the Medusa Head,
She moves her heavy shoulders,
Sprawling back on the boulders,
Exhaling a perfume of dead leaves.
Her eyes, so desperate, absorb the dust of the frame.
Famous, desirable, inaccessible -- who came?
The Madeleine studies the depths of her corpse
And before she collapses, her secret life is enclosed
Into her legs and her arms, like a rose
At the end of the day. Madeleine endures a final
Little death. At night, she bends back her neck;
Under our glance the painting comes alive.
Her desire is reaching one last ray of the moon,
Spreading sparkling stars in the sea.
Nobody has come and she has let her translucent arms
Fall into the silver foam.
The lonely Odalisque blows out her last candle,
Glares at the dark skull and whispers a last prayer
To the watcher. Don't look at her, don't look at *her*!
She holds eyes - she catches souls
She keeps hearts – her journey is dull.
The moon has gone, taking back the rose
That you wanted to keep enclosed.

Hayden Planetarium

Liz Glodek

As the film ends, a little boy turns
to his mother and whispers (What you
should know first about this mother
and son is that they are faithful,
gentle people. What you need
to know about this mother's son
is that he believes in the nature
of goodness. I believe he is the only one
left who does. And earlier this day
he overheard a man he admires,
reveal *The answers are in the stars,*
not God. Maybe he shouldn't have been listening;
maybe none of us should have heard it.
But we did. And when he heard it,
having only last year received
his First Holy Communion, I could see
the doubt in his eyes, the terror behind
their still blueness.), *I guess it's true.*
God isn't real. We are all just starstuff.

On Your Old Age

Liz Glodek

I know you are frightened of old people, of sick people
because you will one day be old and sick. I know it
because of the look I see on your face when we walk
by the elderly, pass a drugstore with canes in the window.
I know you are terrified of the old man who whispers,
It will happen to you, to me, to you, and that you won't
see him one day. And that you yourself may be that old
man, propped against a building, sitting on an milk crate,
waiting for death like we now wait for coffee. I know
this is your fear. I know it because I can feel it every time
you touch me to make sure I am near you when we
cross the street, when your eyes lose their focus,
when you say that you are tired at midnight, when you
wake up at noon. I know your old age scares you more
than death does, that being a stoic doesn't save you
from being decrepit, from losing your mind, from wanting
to live, from wanting too much. Forgetting that it is too much.

Notes on Contributors

Michael Bradburn-Ruster has published poetry, fiction, translations, and scholarly works in international journals including *Able Muse*, *Cincinnati Review*, *Allegro*, *Prick of the Spindle*, *Antiphon*, *Sacred Web*, *Grey Sparrow Journal*, *Eastown Fiction*, *Damazine* (Syria), and *Blue Lake Review*. He is a frequent contributor to *Poetry Salzburg Review* (Austria). Since receiving his doctorate from UC Berkeley, he has taught literature, philosophy, comparative religions and mythology in California, Oregon, and Arizona. His book *The Angel or the Beast* (University Press of the South, 1998) explores the interplay of philosophy, mysticism, theology and literature in the Spanish Renaissance.

Arthur Brown has published essays on American authors in a number of journals, including *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, *American Literary Realism*, *Studies in Short Fiction*, *Mississippi Quarterly*, and *Colby Quarterly*. His essay "Gen-, Shakespeare, Heidegger and the Nature of Mortal Being" was published recently in *Philosophy and Literature*. He is the author of two books of poems, *Duration and the Second Hand* (2013) and *The Mackerel at St. Ives* (2008), both published by David Robert Books.

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