

Face to Typeface: on Reading and Redemption

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## Acknowledgements

In order to avoid overstating what actually cannot be overstated, I will keep my comments brief. This brevity is in no way indicative of the scale of my gratitude. On the contrary, I hope that the simplicity of the following statements will increase their chances of actually getting read. I would like to thank my adviser, Jani Scandura, and committee members, John Mowitt, Tony Brown, and Cesare Casarino, for their support and encouragement throughout this project. I thank my colleagues and friends at the University of Minnesota, especially Maurits van Bever Donker and John Pistelli, who read my work as it progressed and were always willing to travel with me to thoughts unknown. Finally, I would like to thank my husband Ben, without whom I would quite simply be lost.

**Dedication**

For Ben

## Abstract

*Face to Typeface: on Reading and Redemption* is about reading literature. More precisely, it is about making sense of signs, about the movement, in other words, from the material sign that we see to an image or figure or idea of that sign that we understand. As such, it aims to move beyond current theoretical approaches to literary criticism, which for the past several decades have been caught in the critique of representation. The classical model of representation is derived from Platonic mimesis, the view that the literary image is a representation or copy of the world, which the critique contends is fundamentally flawed because language displaces the things it purports to represent and is thus destined to miss its mark, to fail. My dissertation does not take issue with that critique, but rather with the aporia that it tends to produce. This project is guided by a very simple question: if language and interpretation are indeed caught in a tautological loop in which the one continuously repeats the other, as I believe they are, then why do we continue to read texts that are essentially “made up,” texts that are about things and people who do not exist and events that never happened? Moreover, what kind of knowledge do such texts impart to us and how do we account for the joy we experience in reading them? Throughout the chapters that compose this dissertation, I answer these questions by turning to Walter Benjamin’s concept of redemption and Gilles Deleuze’s reworking of Spinoza’s “third kind of knowledge,” which is the highest form of knowledge and which is also named “beatitude” because it produces the feeling of love and joy. I continually emphasize the materiality of the text, the sign, and argue that reading is first and foremost a face-to-typeface encounter that always, potentially at least, opens up the possibility of what Benjamin describes as redemption and what Deleuze understands as “a non-subjective living love.” My first chapter considers the precise use and function of the literary figure by tracking the figure of the knight of courtly love as it surfaces in texts by Kierkegaard, Deleuze and Guattari, Erich Auerbach, Michel Foucault. My second chapter examines the figuration of surface in literature and in love, in particular the idea that “meaning” lies behind or beneath the surface, through a discussion of Plato’s Symposium, its influence on Shelley’s poetry and poetics, and on Walter Benjamin’s theory of allegory. My third chapter considers Samuel Beckett’s deployment of the letter M. I argue that the materiality of the sign of M, in which each arch mirrors the other, is a kind of rebus—both an image that reflects and a sound that resounds, a typographic composite of narcissus and echo. I further argue that Beckett also had in mind the medieval practice of using the letter M to allude to the human face, and that as such M marks the site of specifically human and linguistic condition. My fourth chapter is about how the aesthetic image, whether linguistic or visual, can be a vehicle of knowledge, and specifically the type of knowledge that produces feelings of love and joy.

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### List of Abbreviations

- OGTD Walter Benjamin. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. Trans. John Osborne. London, New York: Verso, 1998. Print.
- SW1-4 Walter Benjamin. *Selected Writings*. 4 vols. Ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2006. Print.
- DR Gilles Deleuze. *Difference and Repetition*. Trans. Paul Patton. New York: Columbia UP, 1994.
- LS Gilles Deleuze. *The Logic of Sense*. Trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale. London: The Athlone P, 1990.
- ECC Gilles Deleuze. *Essays Critical and Clinical*. Trans. Daniel W. Smith, Michael A. Greco. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997.
- PS Gilles Deleuze. *Proust and Signs*. Trans. Richard Howard. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2000.
- AO Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem & Helen R. Lane. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1983.
- ATP Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. London: The Athlone P, 1988.
- WP Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *What is Philosophy?* Trans. H. Tomlinson and G. Burchell. New York: Columbia UP, 1994.

## **Redeeming literature; or, what is literary criticism?**

In the *Trauerspiel* study, Walter Benjamin writes that origin “is an eddy in the stream of becoming, and in its current it swallows the material involved in the process of genesis” (OGTD 45). Genesis, in other words, names the process by which time is always in radical, absolute beginning, whereas origin is the cut of chronological time, the small eddies within the stream of becoming that mark a relative rather than absolute beginning. With this as a caveat, I will attempt to describe the origin of this dissertation.

In the beginning, I was compelled by two lines of questioning: one line of questioning was related to a set of literary texts, the other to a set of theoretical texts, and, as per academic convention, this second line of questioning would justify the asking of the first. At least that was the plan. However, rather late in the process of writing this dissertation—and by late, I mean when I was almost finished with it, though I must also insert the caveat that endings, like beginnings, are also always relative rather than absolute—I began to understand that the practice of justifying literary inquiry through an overarching theoretical model, which is articulated through the use of a specific object or figure or problematic, was opposed to the kind of reading that I was moving towards. I am not talking here about a type of reading that is guided by the poststructuralist critique of representation and logos, which introduced a necessary ethical turn in literary criticism, but which unfortunately also laid itself open to caricature as a mode of reading that inevitably arrives at, to invoke one of its own tropes, undecidability. Rather, I became more and more interested in the idea of redemption that Benjamin invokes

throughout his work—borrowed from theology, the concept of redemption for Benjamin quite unabashedly designates the revelation of truth itself. More precisely, redemption in the New Testament (apolytroxis) means freedom from bondage, a deliverance which is procured by the payment of a ransom (a lytron), which happens through Christ, the earthly son of God, the sacred rendered profane. Redemption is therefore not the same as justification (dikaiosis), which happens only through God, and which names the state of being in proper relation to God, of coming under his law. Justification may be likened to the practice of criticism that reads literature in terms of how it conforms to a theoretical model, a law. But redemption is trickier and raises a host of difficulties—what is truth, how can literature, something that is essentially “made up,” be its source, how does it redeem us, and why do we need to be redeemed in the first place? Furthermore, and perhaps of primary concern for the task at hand, how can the work of literary criticism be considered in terms of redemption?

I reiterate that this dissertation did not begin with redemption in mind. It began, not with the great stream of becoming, but rather with a concern for three eddies within that stream, and these eddies gradually synthesized in the idea of redemption. The first eddy was the concept of allegory. Benjamin, followed later by Paul de Man, described the process of reading as allegorical, not simply because in reading we produce an image of the text that is other than what the text materially (in terms of the sign, the words on the page) or even literally (the direct or perhaps intentional object of reference) provides for itself, but also because, in a broader sense, reading is itself an allegory of the condition for our experience as linguistic beings.<sup>1</sup> We are constructed by language—we

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<sup>1</sup> See Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Trans. John Osborne, (London, New York: Verso, 1998) and Paul de Man “The Rhetoric of Temporality,” *Blindness and Insight*:

are named and described by it, we think and learn through it, we communicate with other beings in it. But the images that I produce from language will not be the same as your images, and thus I can never be sure that my images are not delusions, that I have it all wrong. De Man is right when he says that literary critics do not know “quite what it is they are talking about,” and that “whenever one is supposed to speak of literature, one speaks of anything under the sun (including, of course, oneself) except literature.”<sup>2</sup> Literature does not hold a mirror to the world and reflect back to it a perfect image of itself. The image we see is not our own face, but a disfigured one—a *facies hippocratica* or death’s head for Benjamin, an effacement and defacement for de Man.<sup>3</sup> The recurrent figure of the human face (or more specifically the ruined or absent face) in accounts of allegory and poststructuralism constitutes the second eddy. If allegory is the condition of our experience as beings who must navigate a world of signs and if we ourselves are a sign, then all encounters, whether with texts or with people, take place through one surface meeting another, a face to face or face to typeface. These encounters with signs and surfaces are rarely simple and direct; they are epistemically ordered by the mind so that we may apprehend what we see, but the image or idea that we affix to what we see cannot be adequated to identity or representation. The persistent figure of the ruined face in theories of allegory is a figure for the critique of identity and representation.

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*Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*,  
(Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1983) 187-229.

<sup>2</sup> Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986) 29.

<sup>3</sup> See Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Trans. John Osborne, (London, New York: Verso, 1998) and Paul de Man “Autobiography as De-Facement,” *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia UP), 67-83.

The third eddy is the question of love. The allegorical predicament—which, as de Man argues, is both a “linguistic predicament” and a “temporal predicament”<sup>4</sup> (because the move from sign to image and back to sign is never instantaneous)—raises questions about how we think about love, that most profound of human bonds: if love is not a direct object of experience but instead must pass through the hallucinatory realm of images like everything else, then do we ever really see or experience or understand what we love? De Man’s answer is no. Love is less “a heightened version of sense experience,” than a *figure* that makes the experience of love possible: “We do not see what we love but we love in the hope of confirming the illusion that we are indeed seeing anything at all.”<sup>5</sup> The idea that love is derived from “illusion” and is perhaps itself an illusion is a claim that de Man repeats in his discussion of Rousseau: love is “the forever repeated chimera, the monster of its own aberration, always oriented toward the future of its repetition, since the undoing of the illusion only sharpens the uncertainty that created the illusion in the first place.”<sup>6</sup>

I began this dissertation with a somewhat vague idea that I wanted to rescue love from the fate assigned to it by de Man, and I proceeded with the understanding that the fact that love is not an illusion has something to do with the curious way in which Benjamin ends the *Tauerspiel* study by invoking the concept of resurrection redemption: he casts redemption as the “about-turn” that the allegorist makes when he realizes that his

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<sup>4</sup> De Man describes allegory as a “truly temporal predicament” in “The Rhetorical of Temporality” (*Blindness and Insight* 222) and prosopopoeia, one of the forms that allegory assumes, as a “linguistic predicament” In “Autobiography as De-Facement” (*The Rhetoric of Romanticism* 81).

<sup>5</sup> Paul de Man *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986) 53, 23n. I discuss this statement in more detail in the last section of my second chapter.

<sup>6</sup> Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1979) 198.

“ultimate objects, in which it believes it can most fully secure for itself that which is vile, turn into allegories, and that these allegories fill out and deny the void in which they are represented, just as, ultimately, the intention does not faithfully rest in the contemplation of bones, but faithlessly leaps forward to the idea of resurrection” (232-3). To ascribe yet another origin to this dissertation: I started this investigation because quite honestly I could not make head nor tail of that statement, and I found every explanation of it that I came across in the secondary literature unconvincing.<sup>7</sup>

The key to understanding this statement lies in Benjamin’s method: in order to perform a process of thinking that continually turns on itself, he pursues a method that he likens to “detour” or “digression” (*Umweg*), and he opposes this method to the systematic completeness and coherence of scientific deduction, which “has no more in common with truth than any other form of representation which attempts to ascertain the truth in mere cogitations and cognitional patterns” (OGTD 33). Truth is what Benjamin aims for in the *Trauerspiel* study and redemption depends on the revelation of truth. The possibility of redemption, and the kind of reading that opens the possibility of redemption, depends on the loss of those “cogitations and cognitional patterns,” which in his essay on Kafka he names “law.” There, Benjamin distinguishes between two kinds of reading, which he figures as two kinds of unfolding. The first kind of unfolding is the way a bud unfolds in a blossom; the second, the way in which a child’s paper boat unfolds into a flat piece of

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<sup>7</sup> Actually, in spite of the massive critical industry built around Benjamin’s work, most critics shy away from examining what is at stake in that closing statement of the *Trauerspiel* study. One exception is Howard Caygill, who argues that after the allegorist strips the material sign of the aura it enjoyed as a symbol infused with logos, he finds a first layer of truth, and that the “about-turn” or “leap” constitutes the second layer: the profaned sign itself becomes an allegory, it produces images, figures and ideas, and through these images the profaned sign may be redeemed (Caygill, “Walter Benjamin’s Concept of Allegory,” 249) I find this explanation wholly unsatisfactory because I think that the about-turn must be understood in terms of the dialectical image and redemption, as I show below.

paper. The second kind of unfolding, Benjamin argues, is appropriate to the parable—“it is the reader’s pleasure,” he writes, “to smooth it out so that he has the meaning on the palm of his hand” (*Illuminations* 118). But Kafka’s parables unfold in the second sense and thus have a similar relationship to meaning as the Haggadah does to the Halacah. This Talmudic reference, one of many in Benjamin’s essay, names the narrative or exemplary aspect of the Talmud and the doctrine or law that that narrative illustrates. Kafka’s stories, according to Benjamin, due to their multifarious unfoldings, are like Haggadah without the Halacah. His work is allegorical because it has lost the law that was once its ground.<sup>8</sup> Hence, the figures of forgetting and of attentiveness that Benjamin marks in Kafka’s work: the law has been forgotten, but one must not forget that one has forgotten, one must pay attention, study the law but not practice it, like actors who have “to catch their cues in a flash” (133), and in this way one arrives at the “gate of justice” (135) or redemption. In the *Trauerspiel* study, this loss of ground is what makes possible the “about-turn” that the allegorist makes at the end of the book, but the precise moment of the faithless leap towards resurrection receives more thorough development in “On the Concept of History” and *Convolute N* of the *Arcades Project*. There, redemption is

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<sup>8</sup> This haggadah-without-halacah reading brought Benjamin into conflict with Scholem. Scholem disagreed with Benjamin’s characterization of Kafka, particularly the suggestion that the halacah is the source of guilt and not the road to redemption, and countered that Kafka’s work constitutes “the moral reflection of a halachist who attempts a linguistic paraphrase of a judgment of God’s” (qtd. in Kaufman 161). This judgement is revelation and cannot be realized on earth, as it were, can never be immediately present—it is always in the future. In a letter to Benjamin, he writes: “Kafka’s world is the world of revelation, but of revelation seen of course from the perspective in which it is returned to its own nothingness...The *nonfulfillability* of what has been revealed is the point where a *correctly* understood theology...coincides most perfectly with that which offers the key to Kafka’s work, Its problem is not, dear Walter, its absence in a preanimistic world, but the fact that it cannot be *fulfilled*...Those pupils of whom you speak at the end are not so much those that have lost the Scripture...but rather those students who cannot decipher it” (Correspondence of WB and GS 1932-1940, 126-7). For an excellent discussion of this, see David Kaufman, “Beyond Use, within Reason: Adorno, Benjamin and the Question of Theology,” *New German Critique* 83 (2001): 151-173.

explicitly linked to a temporal complex that is articulated in the concept of the dialectical image: the dialectical image is said to emerge “suddenly, in a flash” [N9,7]; it brings “dialectics to a standstill” [N3,1], in which “thinking suddenly comes to a stop in a constellation that is saturated with tensions”; it is the flash of “the present as now-time shot through with splinters of messianic time” (SW4 396-395). It is a glimpse, we might say, of the eddy in constellation with the stream. “On the Concept of History” opens with a description of messianic time as a hunchbacked dwarf who hides inside a chessboard and, unseen, guides the hand of the puppet who is guaranteed to win against whatever opponent he plays. The name of the puppet, Benjamin tells us, is “historical materialism” (389). The hunchback appears again in “Berlin Childhood 1900”<sup>9</sup> and in his essay on Kafka, in which the hunchback is Odradek in “The Cares of a Family Man”: Odradek is “extraordinarily nimble and can never be laid hold of”; when he laughs, it “sounds rather like the rustling of fallen leaves” (*Illuminations* 428). This image is invoked again in “One Way Street,” where commentary and translation are said to stand in relation to the text as “eternally rustling leaves” to the “sacred tree” (SW1 449).<sup>10</sup> The task of commentary is to “redeem” literature by constellating the text with the present moment of reading: it is to the text what the “rustling leaves” are to the “sacred tree.”

This is not a straightforward image and even less so a clear description of method, but, as we have discussed, Benjamin was opposed to any method that over-determined its outcome. In the “Epistemo-Critical Prologue” of the *Trauerspiel* study, he attempts to

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<sup>9</sup> In her profile of Benjamin, Hannah Arendt likened Benjamin to this folkloric figure who would cause children to accidentally trip or make them drop things and them to break, and describes Benjamin as caught in “a net woven of merit, great gifts, clumsiness and misfortune. See Hannah Arendt, “Reflections: Walter Benjamin,” *The New Yorker*, Digital Edition, October 19<sup>th</sup>, 1968.

<sup>10</sup> SW1 449. This section is entitled “*Was ist ‘erlöst’?*” The translation unfortunately renders *erlöst* (“redeemed”) as “solved.”

justify the “absence of an uninterrupted purposeful structure” of his presentation: “Tirelessly the process of thinking makes new beginnings, returning in a roundabout way to its original object. This continual pausing for breath is the mode most proper to the process of contemplation. For by pursuing different levels of meaning in its examination of one single object it receives both the incentive to begin again and the justification for its irregular rhythm” (28). The refusal to perform the kind of interpretation that would make the text conform to context, to law, drew criticism from Benjamin’s best reader and self-described “true connoisseur,” Adorno (SW4 100). Adorno’s objection to Benjamin’s style of criticism, particularly that displayed in his Baudelaire essay and the Arcades Project, was that the images and motifs were “assembled but not worked through,” and that this practice of “mere juxtaposition” omits “all the crucial answers, and even in making the questions invisible to all but initiates” (99-100). He questioned whether such “‘material’ ...can patiently await interpretation without being consumed in its own aura” (100). Benjamin’s dialectical image, was not dialectical enough because for Adorno “dialectics means intransigence toward all reification” (*Prisms* 31). Dialectics grounds itself in the view that no “theory, not even that which is true, is safe from perversion once it has renounced a spontaneous relation to the object” (33). It is based on the knowledge that “the mind has always been under a spell,” that it “cannot take comfort in its own idea.” As Steven Helmling writes, Adorno’s immanent critique “is less a program that critique should aspire to than a predicament that critique must try not to flinch from” (101).

Attending to Adorno’s own concept of dialectics (which he calls elsewhere, namely in *Negative Dialectics*, “immanent critique”) one might assume that Benjamin’s

practice of commentary would be appreciated by Adorno. But for Adorno Benjamin's practice was dangerous because it relied on something that fell outside the realm of critical thought. Although Benjamin's understanding of time was firmly grounded in scientific discussions of the day (most notably Bergson<sup>11</sup>), the "flash" of the dialectical image smacked too much of some kind of mystical recognition scene in which reason is sacrificed for the Absolute, it lacked theoretical rigor, and the implied passivity of the reader carried with it the threat of that bourgeois interiority that Adorno so deplored. In fact, one of his most sustained diatribes against bourgeois interiority takes place in his study on Kierkegaard, and what he charges Kierkegaard with there may well have applied to his feelings about Benjamin's method: "it could be called realism without reality" (*Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic* 86).

Many critics have made the claim that it was Benjamin's use of theology that so riled Adorno, but as David Kaufmann argues, the matter is much more complicated. Adorno was in favor of what he called an "inverse theology," a theology that is less theological, as it were, and more ontological. As Kaufmann writes, theology has a practical use for Adorno: "By maintaining a horizon of redemption for all creation, by a studious attentiveness to *Kreatur*, "theology" breaks with the immanence of the positing subject. It releases the object world from its dependency on the human for meaning. Thus, a redemptive ontology is the only possible form ontology can take in modernity" (171). It is precisely on the issue of redemption that Adorno and Benjamin diverged. For Benjamin, the flash of the dialectical image was a redemptive force, and redemption was a material possibility and reality. For Adorno, whether or not redemption was a real

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<sup>11</sup> Benjamin famously refers to Bergson's *Matter and Memory* as a "monumental work" (SW4 314).

possibility was irrelevant; the point is, simply, that *it must be thought*. He makes this clear in the closing lines of *Minima Moralia*: one must contemplate all things “from the standpoint of redemption” because from this standpoint thought cannot deny its own conditionality for the sake of the unconditional (147). Thought, including the *thought of redemption*, must acknowledge even its own impossibility for the sake of the possible, and beside “the demand thus placed on thought, the question of the reality of unreality of redemption hardly matters.” It seems that Benjamin stopped short of the final necessary step for Adorno; the flash of the dialectical image veered too closely, dangerously close, to the Absolute, and the dialectics that would have saved it, the labor of the negative, is absent. These reservations are evident in Adorno’s otherwise approbatory essay on Benjamin: “Before his Medusan glance, man turns into the stage on which an objective process unfolds. For this reason Benjamin’s philosophy is no less a source of terror than a promise of happiness” (*Prisms* 234).

The image of Benjamin’s “Medusan glance” bears pausing at. Adorno’s repeated injunction, throughout his work, is to “reliquify” that which Enlightenment thought, Medusa-like, had set in stone.<sup>12</sup> This metaphor is evident as early as *The Dialectic of the Enlightenment: mana*, the energy of mimesis that in language is expressed in the contradiction that “it is at the same time itself and something other than itself, identical and not identical,” a concept which was “from the first, a product of dialectical thinking,” is “solidified, violently materialized” by Enlightenment thought, just as in Odysseus “the unity of his own life, the identity of the person, have been hardened” (15, 25). Benjamin’s dialectical image was “not dialectical enough” for Adorno because it

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<sup>12</sup> For an excellent discussion of this, see Steven Helming, “‘Immanent Critique’ and ‘Dialectical Mimesis’ in Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*,” *boundary 2* 32:3 (2005): 97-117.

threatened to harden thinking into that which no longer thinks because the dialectical image, in Benjamin's own words, brings "dialectics to a standstill." Indeed, Benjamin traces the source of the dialectical image back to the mimetic impulse of primitive man. In "Doctrine of the Similar," he links the origin of reading to mimesis, that "ancient faculty" by which primitive peoples understood the macrocosm as reflected in the microcosm and astrologers read the future from the stars (SW2 694). In the modern world, he argues, we recognize very few of those "magical correspondences," but this does not mean that the mimetic faculty has been weakened: rather, a "transformation" has taken place within it (695). The perception of similarity has shifted from the empirical world of things to the "nonsensuous similarity" that is housed in language. Language contains within it a "semiotic or communicative element" through which we move between text and figure, between word and image, between what is said and what is meant. It is now language that is "the medium in which objects encounter and come into relation with one another. No longer directly, as they once did in the mind of the augur or priest, but in their essences, in their most transient and delicate substances, even in their aromas" (697-8). But the swiftness with which reading takes place often conceals its "critical moment," which is "the effort, or gift, or mind to participate in that measure of time in which similarities flash up fleetingly out of the stream of things only in order to sink down once more...which the reader must not forget at any moment lest he go away empty-handed" (698).

The "critical moment" of reading is the flash of the dialectical image and it is dialectical because it hinges on two different movements. First, there is the perception of similarity in the nonsensuous element, which necessarily draws from the past and from

memory, from language as we have learned it and from the store of our associative images. Second, there is the moment in time, the instant or “flash” in which perception takes place, which interrupts chronological time and constellates the past with the present. This critical moment is the underlying node of Benjamin’s aesthetics and politics. In Convolute N of the Arcades Project, he describes it as the “perilous critical moment on which all reading is founded” [N3,1]. The “flash” of the dialectical image—that is, the moment in which the text is read that constellates the past with the present—“polarizes the event into fore- and after-history” [N7a,8]. In “On the Concept of History,” the flash is the “small gateway” through which Messianic time might enter. The historical materialist recognizes that the image, dialectically understood, contains “time in its *interior* as a precious but tasteless seed” (SW4 396). He views the historical object not as a stage in a linear series of events but rather as an image of the past that presents the past as an image, and this insight affords him an opportunity to blast “a specific life out of the era, a specific work out the lifework.” The historical materialist, operating within the logic of Messianic time, “grasps the constellation into which his own era has entered, along with a very specific earlier one. Thus, he establishes a conception of the present as now-time shot through with splinters of messianic time” (SW4 397).

The flash is the sudden understanding that chronological time always contains within it that which is without time, eternity, and that the eddies are no longer self-contained revolutions but rather are movements that are infused by a larger stream of becoming. It is redemptive because in the flash every moment is revealed as charged with potential: time is no longer forced to march unwavering down the track beaten out by history. Instead, each step is a moment that might pause, change directions, or move off

the track entirely. When Benjamin writes that the “reason that fascism still has a chance is that, in the name of progress, its opponents treat it as a historical norm,” he refers precisely to the view that events, political and otherwise, unfold according to a certain rule inevitability (SW4 392). In contrast, the historical materialist knows that “nothing that has happened should be regarded as lost to history” (390). Even the events of the past that compose what we understand as history carry within them the “secret index” of eternity and the force of becoming; this is why “a breath of air that pervaded earlier days” can caress us in the present as well and why “a redeemed mankind is granted the fullness of its past.”

For Gilles Deleuze, who, alongside Benjamin, is the other philosophical touchstone in this dissertation, the encounter with signs and the aesthetic image is no less political. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze asserts that the true encounter—the flash of the face-to-face before the subjectivated mind steps in to order what it sees—requires an “essential forgetting,” through which “the being of the past as such and the past of every time may be grasped” (140). For Deleuze, art and literature are constructed along breaks with signification and subjectivation, with reality, in short, as we know it and as it knows us: as he asks elsewhere, “The shame of being a man—is there any better reason to write?” (ECC 5). For Deleuze, literature is “the passage of life within language,” and writing is a “schizophrenic vocation” (90) because it “consists in inventing a people who are missing” (3) and creates “a kind of foreign language within language” (5). The images that literature produces are “are not fantasies, but veritable Ideas that the writer sees and hears in the interstices of language, in its intervals. They are not interruptions of

the process, but breaks that form part of it, like an eternity that can only be revealed in a becoming” (5).

In *Proust and Signs*, Deleuze presents a reading of *À la recherche du temps perdu* that resonates with the way I read the figures of my four chapters: the search of *À la recherche* consists in navigating “a system of signs” (PS 84), and the object of the search is “truth.” The hero of the search is thus a kind of apprentice to truth: “What is important is that the hero does not know certain things at the start, gradually learns them, and finally receives an ultimate revelation” (26). In order to arrive at the completion of his search, at “ultimate revelation,” the apprentice must first travel through three different realms of the sign. The first realm is “worldliness”: the salon chit-chat in which signs have usurped their meanings and one does “not think or act, but one makes signs” (6). The second is love, because the signs of love always mean something other than what they say. It is due to the beguiling nature of the first two realms, and the suspicion aroused by what their signs might conceal, that the apprentice embarks on the search in the first place: “who searches for truth? The jealous man, under the pressure of the beloved’s lies” (15).

The apprentice’s sensitivity to the lies and illusions of the worldly signs and the signs of love enables him to enter into a third circle of signs: the “sensuous signs.” The most famous example of a sensuous sign in the novel is the madeleine cake: the smell of the cake transports the apprentice back to his childhood and fills him with a feeling of bliss. It is the character of the sensuous signs to transmit a “strange joy,” which is the immediate effect, and also a “kind of imperative,” by which one feels impelled to seek the sign’s meaning (11-12). However, the sensuous signs are “not adequate” because

their effect cannot be adequated to the object that emits them. Of course, they are material signs, not only in their origin (in this case, the smell of a madeleine cake), but also in the development or explication of the sign (the memory of Combray summoned forth by the smell of the madeleine cake). But neither of these material reasons explains the essence of the material signs nor “why we feel so much joy” in their immediate perception—this joy cannot be traced or explicated through a logical order of material events or signs. So, the “final revelation” of the apprentice consists in the understanding that the “the material meaning is nothing without an ideal essence” (13), and further, that the only signs that convey pure essence are those of *art*, because in art “substance is spiritualized and physical surroundings dematerialized” (47). Art “gives us the true unity: unity of an immaterial sign and of an entirely spiritual meaning” (40). Deleuze even goes so far as to say that art is superior to life, because “all the signs we meet in life are still material signs, and their meaning, because it is always in something else, is not altogether spiritual” (41).

Deleuze does not mean “spiritual” in a theological sense, but rather in a virtual and temporal one.<sup>13</sup> He casts eternity as the “essence of time,” which is the principle by which the universe is always in the process of “an absolute, radical beginning” (44). So, just as all matter is suffused with virtual, metaphysical elements, all chronological time is suffused with eternity. Sensuous signs “gives us a simple image of eternity,” and it is because of this image, this essence, that they fill us with an “extraordinary joy,” a joy so profound that it makes us “indifferent to death” (56). But, as long as we remain in the

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<sup>13</sup> In his thesis in *Proust on Signs* Deleuze draws on both Leibniz and Bergson to explain the idea that the temporal and the virtual are anterior to the actual. See Chapter 5 “The Secondary Role of Memory,” which is mainly about Bergson, and Chapter 6 “Series and Group,” which hinges on a discussion of Leibniz.

circle of sensuous signs, we tend to think that the object holds the secrets of the signs that it emits (27). The apprentice to truth therefore must make one final step in order to complete the search and come into the final revelation: he must understand that essence is always artistic essence (51). For Deleuze, the work of art, and specifically the one that Proust constructs, consists of three “literary machines”: the first, under subjective and objective conditions, produces reminiscences, singularities, and partial objects; the second, under the conditions of worldly signs and the signs of love, produces resonances or correspondences between signs; the third produces the universal alteration of death and “the idea of death.” The “idea of death” is key to the final stage—it is that which “uniformly imbues all fragments, carrying them towards a universal end” (157). The idea of death “consists of a certain effect of Time,” which occurs as a consequence of two states that operate at the same time as each other: one, the past that we remember; the other, the present that we experience. The impression of the lapse of time between the one and the other “has the effect of pushing the earlier moment “into a past more than remote, almost improbable,” as if geological periods had intervened” (158). The intensification of the gap between past and present, is then “doubled by a forced movement of greater amplitude,” which moves in the other direction—that is, not from past to present, but from present to past—and this “sweeps away the two moments, emphasizes the gap between them, and pushes the past still farther back into time” (158-9).

The image of death is different from the powers of repetition and difference that Deleuze discusses earlier in the book: there, he relates the essence of time to Bergson’s *durée*. *Durée* drives chronological time but never coincides with it; in *durée*, events are in

the continuous process of their own becoming and thus exist outside the chain of causality and the order of chronological time. It is the power of repetition and also the power of difference because, just as one can never step into the same river twice, what is repeated is never the same. Deleuze thus characterizes the *powers* of the essence of time as difference and repetition (67). But neither the repetition nor the resonances between signs approach the “idea of death” that accompanies the image of eternity in the third literary machine, as Deleuze states very clearly: “We must not confuse it with the echo of resonance; [the idea of death or forced movement of greater amplitude] dilates time infinitely, while resonance contracts time to the maximum degree” (159). The image of death produces the effect of “withdrawal,” because death is no longer viewed as a severance from life, but rather as an “effect of mixture or confusion because the amplitude of the forced movement is as much taken up by the living as by the dead.” In this machine, “time itself becomes sensuous” (160), and passes into the work—in this case, Proust’s novel—as “the condition of its form.” In other words, and perhaps to simplify, the idea of death that emerges from the sign (the form) as image or idea, at the same time merges with the sign as the image of it. Thus, in the third literary machine, art ceases to be superior to life because life becomes art: in the end, “we see what art is capable of adding to nature: it produces resonances themselves, because style sets up a resonance between two objects and from them extracts a “precious image,” *substituting for the determined conditions of an unconscious natural product the free conditions of an artistic production*” (155). Once discovered, the third literary machine is “incarnated not only in spiritualized substances, in the immaterial signs of the work of art, but also in other realms, which will henceforth be integrated into the work of art” (51). This is a

point that Deleuze and Guattari make in *A Thousand Plateaus*: “art is never an end in itself; it is only a tool for blazing life lines, in other words, all of those becomings that are not produced only *in art*, and all of those active escapes that do not consist in fleeing *into art*, taking refuge in art...but instead sweep it away with them toward the realms of the asignifying, asubjective, and faceless” (187). If the face marks the sign, then the realm of the image is faceless, but the faceless is precisely that which causes the face to be actualized as such.

The correspondences between Deleuze’s description of the third literary machine as that which hinges on the charge created between two temporal orders that move in opposite directions and Benjamin’s dialectical image will no doubt be readily apparent to the reader.<sup>14</sup> Karen Feldman argues that “the dialectical image is for

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<sup>14</sup> In his essays on Proust and on Baudelaire, Benjamin links the concept of correspondences to *durée*. According to Benjamin, Baudelaire renders the idea of *durée* by juxtaposing apparently dissonant images and thus draws out their *correspondences*, which are the “data of recollection—not historical data, but the data of prehistory” (SW4 334). The correspondences between different images do not render the images the same, but instead pick up on a common thread, though a common thread that is very subtle, almost like a shared set of nerve-endings that fuse in an image or idea in which the past “murmurs.” Similarly, in the Proustian image (in German *Bild*, meaning both image and figure) “*correspondences rule*” (SW2 244-7). Proust seeks to “charge an entire lifetime with utmost mental awareness,” and anyone who wishes to understand the essential import of *A la Recherche du temps perdu*, according to Benjamin, must be alive to the pregnant potency of its images: he “must place himself in a special stratum—the bottommost.” This bottommost stratum is bound to *durée*. The world of *durée* is the world of correspondences: everything shares kinship with one another, things exist suspended in a “state of similarity.” The Proustian image is never merely “isolated, rhetorical or visionary,” but rather exists immanently in the text as both figure and ground. The “bottommost stratum” of the image is not an isolated idealism, but rather the sensuous, virtual element that causes the image to be actualized as such. Benjamin and Deleuze are not describing the special talent they see in Proust and Baudelaire for effectively representing a past event—not at all. Rather, what they demonstrate is the manner in which Proust and Baudelaire solicit experience: an experience from the past is called into the present so that it might be experienced again, and this new experience thus takes place in “real time,” as it were (*durée*, effectively), as we, the readers, read. It is for this reason that Benjamin pronounces Proust’s method to be “actualization, not reflection.” In the Proustian image, the “surrealist face of existence breaks through” and a “fragile, precious reality” is conveyed that is none other than itself: the image actualized.<sup>14</sup> Deleuze and Guattari make the same point in the chapter on art in *What is Philosophy?*: “Sensation is not realized in the material without the

Benjamin itself an intermediary, a mediating middle term that brings together two unlike things in order to present an abstract likeness” (346). But more than this, I argue, the dialectical image designates a specific mode of cognition and the object of this cognition is not simply the “abstract likeness” between unlike things, but the constellation of things; or, to use Spinoza’s word, the concatenation of things. Spinoza is never far from Deleuze’s thinking<sup>15</sup> and the three literary machines that Deleuze discusses in *Proust and Signs* loosely correspond to the three kinds of knowledge that Spinoza sets forth in the *Ethics*. The first kind of knowledge is the knowledge of partial objects, difference, singularity. The second kind of knowledge takes place at the cost of singularity and difference: it perceives correspondences and patterns, what Spinoza calls “common notions,” and these lead to the establishment of categories, systems, and universals. But the third kind of knowledge, which gives rise to beatitude or the infinite love of God, pauses at common notions, at correspondences: it is able see difference and singularity (essences), but under a species of eternity (*sub specie aeternitatis*), that imbues all essences, singularity and difference, and this produces a feeling of beatitude, bliss and love. The third kind of knowledge is the knowledge of the concatenation of all things, a glimpse of the *plane of immanence*, and Deleuze characterizes these glimpses as

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material passing completely into the sensation, into the percept or affect. All material becomes expressive” (167).

<sup>15</sup> Deleuze wrote one of his first texts on Spinoza (*Expressionism in Philosophy*), and Spinoza surfaces throughout his work in myriad ways. In *What is Philosophy?*, co-authored with Guattari, Deleuze names Spinoza as the “Christ of philosophers”: “Spinoza, the infinite becoming-philosopher: he showed, drew up, and thought the “best” plane of immanence—that is, the purest, the one that does not hand itself over to the transcendent, the one that inspires the fewest illusions, bad feelings, and erroneous perceptions” (60).

“flashes.”<sup>16</sup> For Deleuze, as for Benjamin, this “flash” is produced from the encounter with signs.<sup>17</sup>

The flash of the dialectical image and the flash of the third kind of knowledge is a force that sets the apprentice to truth on his way. As Deleuze writes in *Proust and Signs*, *force* is the “leitmotif of Time regained...impressions that force us to look, encounters that force us to interpret, expressions that force us to think” (95). The truth-seeker or apprentice is the “reader, the auditor, in that the work of art emits signs that perhaps will force him to create, like the call of genius to other geniuses” (97-8). The apprentice, argues Deleuze, always “feels alien” to the conception of art and literature that “signs by referring them to objects that can be designated (observation and description), if it surrounds itself with the pseudo-objective guarantees of evidence and communication (causerier, investigation), and if it confuses meaning with intelligible, explicit, and formulated signification (major subjects)” (33). In “Literature and Life,” Deleuze characterizes this as an “infantile conception of literature,” and argues, in a statement that one is tempted to use as a rejoinder to Adorno, that “it is the same thing to sin through an excess of reality as through an excess of the imagination” (2).

In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze again makes *force* a feature of the encounter with signs. He opposes encounter to “recognition.” In recognition, thought operates under the aegis of empirical memory, it “presupposes all that is in question” (DR 139). It is affirmed and indeed justified by what Deleuze calls the “image of thought.” In

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<sup>16</sup> Deleuze, “Spinoza and the Three “Ethics,” 32-33.

<sup>17</sup> Thus, the dialectical image is not an “image” as such but an encounter with signs. As opposed to Susan Buck-Morss, who treats Benjamin’s dialectical image as though it were literally an image, I take the dialectical image as a specific form of encounter, one which, as Anselm Haverkamp argues, depends on readability, or as Samuel Weber argues, one that involves “the movement of becoming readable” (50). I discuss this distinction in more detail in Chapter 4.

contrast, the “encounter” *forces* us to think. Its primary characteristic is that its “affective tones...can only be sensed.”<sup>18</sup> Like the dialectical image, the encounter necessarily presents itself as that which is undertheorized because it cannot recognize itself in the image of thought. For Benjamin, this is the revolutionary and critical potential of the dialectical image: it enables one to think what has not been thought before, just as for Deleuze, the encounter “forms an intrinsic genesis, not an extrinsic conditioning. In every respect, truth is a matter of production, not of adequation” (154).

This is where the theoretical line of questioning in this dissertation finally arrives. It initially began as an exploration of three issues: Benjamin’s concept of allegory, the *facies hippocratica* that is allegory’s emblem, and the concept of love as articulated by Spinoza and by Deleuze’s reading of Spinoza. Though the first two issues had no obvious connection to the third, I proceeded on the hunch that they might be connected, that love may have something to do with redemption, and that the third kind of knowledge could open a way to understand the elusive about-turn that the allegorist makes at the end of the *Trauerspiel* study and how the dialectical image, as it were, works.

If I’ve begun with an explanation of the theoretical concerns that underpin this project, it is not because these take precedence over the questions that are directly related to the literary texts that I explore. Since the literary text does not report an existing reality but instead invents a new one, the truth or knowledge that a literary text produces is fundamentally different to the model of truth and knowledge that one finds reflected in the Image of Thought. I do not import the Image of Thought as a means to justify the

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<sup>18</sup> “In recognition, the sensible is not at all that which can only be sensed, but that which bears directly upon the senses in an object which can be recalled, imagined or conceived...The object of the encounter, on the other hand, really gives rise to sensibility with regard to a given sense...it is not a quality but a sign. It is not a sensible being but the being *of* the sensible. It is not the given but that by which the given is given” (139-40).

thought generated by literary texts by showing how they “match” one another. Redemption, not justification, is the internal logic of each of my chapters. Each begins with a question concerning a literary text. At their core, each question is concerned with how the text produces truth, how it generates knowledge, how to understand that moment of reading that really does seem to emerge like a flash, an experience that is difficult to articulate because it exceeds articulation, an experience that makes us shiver, as if someone had walked on our grave. My chapters attempt to track this feeling, the *sensus*, which, as Lyotard writes, cannot be brought under the rule of *intellectus*: it is rather “a matter of tact or tangent” (208). Or to immodestly quote Foucault’s essay on Deleuze: “there is no heart, but only a problem—that is, a distribution of notable points; there is no center, but always decenterings, series that register the halting passage from presence to absence, from excess to deficiency...All things return on the straight and narrow, by way of a straight and labyrinthine line” (165-6).

The question that my first chapter turns on is about the knight of courtly love tradition. It seemed to me that every literary protagonist, especially those of the modern novel, shared some essential features in common with the knight of courtly romance: an isolation that necessitates an abandonment of their social milieu and its codes in order to follow a deviant path of desire—in the case of courtly romance, what sets it apart from previous literary traditions and makes it a “first” in western literature, is that the desire of the knight is directed not towards a transcendent ideal or God, but to a mortal woman, who is now spiritualized. Given that the Knight is such a simple and identifiably “literary” construct, and one so often dismissed as having no serious import, I was especially interested in the way in which the knight surfaces in the work of philosophers

such as Foucault, Kierkegaard and Deleuze. For these thinkers, the significance of the figure of the knight, and especially the figure of Don Quixote as the apex and completion of courtly romance, lies in his attempt to cut his own path through a world in which the rules and social codes were already established before he arrived in it, and to find in desire and love the only means by which he might be able to orient his journey within it and perhaps out of it. The knight is attuned to the temporal distinction that I invoked at the beginning of this introduction, he is aware of the eddies in which he is caught, aware that the infinite produces the finite. He lives by what Foucault calls the “analytic of finitude,” whereby the discourse of history and of man’s finitude is reclaimed and turned into his own grounding. He is Kierkegaard’s knight of faith or infinity, and the protagonist which, for Deleuze, opens up the possibility of crossing the white screen of signification and the black hole of subjectivity, to deterritorialize what it means to be a man. But the knight is a literary construct, not a man, and so in the final section of this chapter, I explore the idea of the knight in terms of figural reading as described by Erich Auerbach and Jacob Taubes. I demonstrate the proximity between Foucault’s analytic of finitude and Benjamin’s understanding of Messianic time, and argue that the knight can be understood as a figure of redemption. For Benjamin, redemption comes through the intensification of the profane, a seeking deeper and deeper into profanation until an “about turn” or leap redeems it, and it is this kind of profane redemption that the knight of courtly love mobilizes.

My second question was about Plato’s Symposium. Every reading of the Symposium that I had encountered subjected it to a Platonic reading, whereby the meaning of the Symposium is located in Socrates’s speech on love. But if the Symposium

is read without prejudice and simply a work of literature, then the climax of the dialogue is in Alcibiades's dramatic entry and his subsequent speech about Socrates. Propelled by the conviction that I was obviously right to read the *Symposium* in this way, I wanted to explore the role of Plato in Shelley's poetry and poetics and in Walter Benjamin's theory of allegory. Shelley translated, read and was greatly inspired by Plato, particularly the *Symposium*, but the subtleties of those crosspollinations have been typically lost on critics because the critical conversation about Shelley and Plato tends to be reduced to the question of whether or not Shelley was a Platonist. He was not a Platonist, I argue, he was a writer, and it was as a writer that he read the *Symposium*: in other words, he read not under the aegis of the Image of Thought, which in this case would be Platonism, but rather as an encounter with signs, and the final scene in which Alcibiades confronts Socrates and speaks from the actual experience of love rather than simply the theory of it is invites the most explosive encounter with signs in the dialogue. For Walter Benjamin, the *Symposium* is also important. It is actually named as the model for the theory of allegory in the *Trauerspiel* study, but in spite of the huge critical industry built around Benjamin's text, the mention of the *Symposium* in one of his most important texts and about his most important theory, has garnered exactly zero critical attention. In my chapter on the *Symposium*, I therefore try to redress this deficit. I focus specifically on the image that Alcibiades uses to describe Socrates—he compares Socrates to a Silenus statue, a statue of a satyr that contains within its interior multiple golden gods. This image, I argue, is a figure of repetition and difference, and as such it is the underlying figure that pervades Shelley's theory and practice of poetry and Benjamin's concept of allegory. It is a demonstration of what Deleuze calls the "anti-Platonism at the heart of

Platonism,” those occasional moments in Plato that “suggest the different, the dissimilar, the unequal—in short, becoming.” These moments, he goes on to say, appear “momentarily, like a flash of lightning in the night” (128).

My third question was about Beckett’s use of the letter M. Again, I found that the common explanation for Beckett’s persistent use of the letter M was singularly unimaginative—Beckett’s M supposedly stood for Mother. However, there is a wealth of possible reasons as to why Beckett may have used the letter M so often. I argue that the materiality of the letter, in which each arch mirrors the other, together with the sound of mmm that reverberates in waves that mirror the waves of the letter, M functions as a kind of rebus, both an image that reflects and a sound that resounds, a typographic composite of Narcissus and Echo. In Freudian and poststructuralist reworkings of the myth of Narcissus and Echo, this myth is taken as a demonstration of the predicament by which one cannot recognize oneself either in the image or in the linguistic sign. M is therefore the mark of man itself, a kind of face. While Anglo-Saxon literature has many examples of the written word forming a human face, the example with which Beckett was certainly familiar occurs in Dante’s *Purgatorio*. The pilgrim reaches a plateau where he is confronted by the starving faces of those who committed the sin of gluttony and who are forced to live in the presence of trees whose fruit is forever out of reach. On their emaciated faces is inscribed the name of man—OMO. According to the text, “their eyes seemed like a ring that’s lost its gems;/ and he who, in the face of man, would read/ OMO would here have recognized the M.” The M that recurs in the names of the central characters of Beckett’s fiction, as well as the proliferation of ghoulish faces in his shorter late works, thus marks the site of a much more complicated human predicament than

merely the psychoanalytical drama of the mother. For Benjamin, the *facies hippocratica* or ruined face is the emblem of allegory, the modern form of which arises from the conditions of technological reproducibility inaugurated by capitalism and this causes the mimetic faculty, the pareidolia through which one sees faces in the stars, to undergo a transformation—one no longer sees one's face in the mimetic sign, the sign can no longer be equated with identity or representation. Beckett's faces, I argue, are no longer the sign of a person, but the mark of a different articulation, which I approximate to Levinas's concept of the oneself, that which both precedes and exceeds the subject, and which gathers itself into the process of substitution, which Levinas defines as responsibility, the condition by which one is forced to respond to the other, to echo the outside. Where the old model of mimesis designated the one for the one, in Levinas's formulation mimesis is transformed to the one for the other. It is a transformation that Benjamin works out in his theory of allegory, whereby sign and signified are no longer fused in symbol; like the sinners who committed the sin of gluttony and can no longer taste the fruit, the artwork loses its aura through the endless cycle of technological reproducibility. In Beckett, the gnawing away of the self by the oneself, by the forces of multiplicity and difference, is registered in the ghostly faces and the Ms that proliferate in his work.

The question of my final, concluding chapter is how love can be understood as the affect of a specific mode of cognition. I begin by discussing a rather problematic passage from Alphonso Lingis's *Trust*, in which he discusses the love he feels upon looking at a photograph of a dying woman that he briefly noticed while he on a trip in Ethiopia. Taking Lingis at his word, though not without some hesitation, I consider Barthes's framing of love and image in *The Lover's Discourse* and *Camera Lucida*: for Barthes,

love evades discourse, yet it depends on image. I consider the ways in which this might be understood as the specific type of cognition that occurs in the “flash” of Benjamin’s dialectical image. I discuss the similarities between Benjamin’s dialectical image, by which veil and veiled are grasped in a single instant or “flash” that leads to redemption, and Deleuze’s reading of Book V of Spinoza’s *Ethics*, which he describes as “an aerial book of light” that proceeds by “flashes.” I argue that the conduit for Spinoza’s third kind of knowledge is the dialectical image, and that this form of knowledge gives rise to the love that Barthes and Lingis describe. I end the chapter with a brief discussion of Deleuze’s understanding of immanence as *a life*, in which I try to show how the “critical moment” of reading can be understood in terms of the flash of *a life* within life, of a genesis within the eddies.

### The Knight Sets Forth

I take the title for this chapter from a chapter of the same title that appears in Erich Auerbach's study of representation in Western literature, *Mimesis* (1946). In the years after its publication, *Mimesis* attracted much admiration and some criticism, enough to prompt Auerbach to write a postscript in 1953, "Epilogomena to *Mimesis*," in which he acknowledges the book's modest shortcomings and explains his intentions and the circumstances under which he wrote it. These circumstances are chastening for readers who wish to undertake a critique of *Mimesis*: driven out of Germany by the Nazis and exiled in Istanbul, Auerbach had far fewer resources available to him than those to which he was accustomed in Germany, and many of the long passages from the various texts he discusses were actually recalled from his own memory. As Edward Said noted, if one wanted to write a book like *Mimesis* nowadays, one would have to "be familiar with eight or nine languages and most of the literatures written in them, as well as archival, editorial, semantic, and stylistic skills that disappeared in Europe at least two generations ago"; in short, "no one is really educated to do that honestly anymore" (qtd. In Damrosch, 97). It is therefore with some trepidation that I confess that my title is intended as both homage and critique. The critique, however, is a small one, and one of which we may well find Auerbach absolved in the course of things.

The issue at stake here concerns the knight of courtly love tradition. In *Mimesis*, virtually every literary tradition prior to Dante is found lacking and compared unfavorably to the pristine realism of the *Divine Comedy*. In the chapter entitled "The

Knight Sets Forth,” speaking generally about the style of courtly love in Chrétien de Troyes and focusing on *Yvain* as an example, Auerbach writes that the “grace and attractiveness of this style—whose charm is freshness and whose danger is silly coquetry, trifling, and coldness” (132), betrays a certain “naïveté and childishness” (133), it is “completely devoid of reality” (137), and courtly romance of the twelfth century “is not reality shaped and set forth by art, but an escape into fable and fairy tale” (138). Towards the end of the chapter, Auerbach mentions *Don Quixote* and frames it as a parody of the world of courtly romance. Don Quixote is “the victim of a social order in which he belongs to a class that has no function...His setting forth is a flight from a situation which is unbearable and which he has borne far too long” (137). However, later in *Mimesis* in the chapter devoted to *Don Quixote*, Auerbach views the madness of the Knight of the Sad Countenance rather differently. He argues that though “one might suppose that his mad decision represents a flight from a situation which has become unbearable, a violent attempt to emancipate himself from it,” and that even he himself “advanced [this idea] in an earlier passage of this book,” as an “interpretation of Cervantes’ artistic purpose it is unsatisfactory” (348). To conceive the madness of Don Quixote in “symbolic or tragic terms seems to me forced. That can be read into the text; but it is not there of itself” (358). Rather, at the time of writing *Don Quixote* the world for Cervantes had “become difficult to survey and no longer possible to arrange in an unambiguous and traditional manner.” As reality came to seem more and more unsurveyable, he “found the order of reality in play.” What *Don Quixote* expresses fundamentally is a “neutral gaiety,” one so “noncritical and nonproblematic...in the portrayal of everyday reality [as] has not been attempted again in European letters.”

The first of Auerbach's statements asserts that *Don Quixote* is the tragedy of an impoverished hidalgo who desperately wants to participate in the rarefied world of courtly romance but cannot; the second, that *Don Quixote* presents a certain freedom that is granted once the symbolic codes and social ordering of the twelfth and thirteenth-centuries are rendered obsolete and, as it were, brought down to earth. Though they contradict each other, both statements are congruent in that they both stem from the view that courtly romance is overwrought, trivial and frivolous, maybe even a little bit childish, and this is a view that Auerbach does not revise. In both statements, Auerbach presents Don Quixote as a figure that marks the end of the world of courtly romance and a commentary on it. I take a different view: Don Quixote activates and develops traits that were already implicit in the genre of courtly romance, namely the attempts of an isolated character to cut his own path through a world in which the rules and coding were already established before he arrived in it, and to find in desire and love the only real means by which he might be able to orient his journey within it and perhaps out of it. As such, the figure of the knight of courtly romance did not come to an end with Don Quixote, but rather remains active as the ur-character of literature right up to the present day. What follows is not an attempt to trace the variations that this knight has taken over the course of the history of literature, but rather a meditation on how the knight of courtly romance and Don Quixote are figures that dramatize a specific relationship to the concept of man, to language and to love. I set forth by exploring the issues that come into play when Michel Foucault, Søren Kierkegaard and Gilles Deleuze invoke the knight—these are the concerns of the first and second sections of this chapter. Finally in the third section, after much wandering, I return to Auerbach.

## I. A hero of the Same: Foucault and Quixote

In *The Order of Things*, Foucault places *Don Quixote* at the threshold between the old world and the new. The old world, according to Foucault, lasted until the end of the sixteenth century. It was a world that was ordered by resemblances and similitude, a system of sympathies and antipathies according to which things were either drawn together because of a likeness they shared or held apart because of intractable difference. Words and things were interwoven and the “universe was folded in upon itself: the earth echoing the sky, faces seeing themselves reflected in the stars (17). The universe was fundamentally *readable*, “like a vast open book” (27). The readability of the world depended on a very specific epistemological condition: the non-distinction between the visible and the articulable, between what is seen and what is said (39). In sixteenth-century knowledge, the written word had two forms: first, there was the readable world, language as visible in “its raw and material being, in the simple material form of writing, a stigma upon things”; second, there was commentary, which articulates and explains those marks upon things and “recasts the given signs to serve a new purpose” (42). But there was a third element also. The system itself was ternary: beneath the two forms of writing and reading was a third text, a “primal text,” whose “primacy is presupposed by commentary to exist beneath the marks visible to all.” It was to this “enigmatic, murmured element” that commentary was addressed, that it hoped to reveal, and against which it was both measured and limited. Together, these three elements composed the “single being of the written word” in sixteenth-century knowledge. However, there was a

danger in this order. The principle of resemblance carries the threat of snuffing out the singularity of things and making them all reducible to one another, forcing them to share the same identity as everything else. It “is an instance of the *Same* so strong and so insistent that...it has the dangerous power of *assimilating*”: sympathy transforms, renders things foreign to what they were before, causes their singularity to disappear (17). Sympathy takes what is Different and renders it the Same, squeezes the heterogeneous into homogenous uniformity. It wraps a chain around the whole world that holds all of its contents in place and prevents their movement, “like those metal chains held suspended by sympathy to the attraction of a single magnet” (23-4).

This situation changed in the seventeenth-century. The concept of language, which had previously been based on a ternary system that composed the single being of the written word, now became binary. As Foucault explains it, the arrangement of signs was defined as the connection of a sign and a signified, words and things were separated, and the “eye was thenceforth destined to see and only to see, the ear to hear and only to hear” (43). That region beneath the visible and articulable world, which the sixteenth century imagined as a sovereign, primal text, was eliminated. Where the sixteenth century had organized its knowledge on the principle that everything in the visible world shared a resemblance or similitude with one another, and that the task of language was to draw out that other, primal language that governed and upheld the entire interwoven web of what can be seen and what can be said, in the seventeenth century this kinship between language and the world was dissolved and the primacy of the written word went into abeyance. The epistemic assemblage point shifted from Resemblance to Representation: words no longer intersected with things, but instead replaced them. The mysterious

“murmured element” whose filaments threaded through all that could be seen and said in the sixteenth century disappeared in seventeenth-century discourse because, in order for representation to work effectively, “words had to be freed from the silent content that rendered them alien” (305).

The discourse of the seventeenth century eliminated the old form of resemblance that was undergirded and to a large extent held in check by the sense of that mysterious, murmured element: the sovereign, primal text that commentary was directed towards but could never hope to reveal in its entirety. With the loss of that idea of a primal text upon which one could not encroach, or articulate, or put to use, was lost the “living being of language” (43): in other words, language was no longer considered an autonomous entity, but a tool for thinking and representing. According to Foucault, there “is nothing now, either in our knowledge or in our reflection, that still recalls even the memory of that being. Nothing, except perhaps literature.” The “living being of language” that literature recalls, however, is not the same living being of the sixteenth century: there is no sovereign text upholding the entire system of things, there is no divine word, but rather *pure language* that speaks only of and for itself. Foucault thus heralds *Don Quixote* as the “first modern work of literature” (48).

Don Quixote is not a man given to extravagance, but rather a diligent pilgrim breaking his journey before all the marks of similitude. He is the hero of the Same. He never manages to escape from the familiar plain stretching out on all sides of the Analogue, any more than he does from his own small province. He travels endlessly over that plain, without ever crossing the clearly defined frontiers of difference, or reaching the heart of identity. Moreover, he is himself

like a sign, a long, thin graphism, a letter that has just escaped from the open pages of a book. His whole being is nothing but language, text, printed pages, stories that have already been written down. He is made up of interwoven words; he is writing itself, wandering through the world among the resemblances of things. Yet not entirely so: for in his reality as an impoverished hidalgo he can become a knight only by listening from afar to the age-old epic that gives its form to Law. The book is not so much his existence as his duty. (46)

In Foucault's reading, Don Quixote is a hero of the Same for a few reasons. First, and most obviously, he is a hero of the Same because he directs all his energies towards fulfilling the role of the knight of courtly romance, a role that requires that everything that comes under his gaze lose its singular reality in order to be subjected to the same Law to which Don Quixote submits. But there is more to it than merely this. The fact that Don Quixote is not a real knight means that he must always defer to something outside himself—the Law, the Book—in order to know what to do or say, how to behave and present himself, but “the fact that he wishes to be like them means that he must put them to the test, that the (legible) signs no longer resemble (visible) people.” His way of encountering the world is to decipher it, to make it conform to the books in order to “furnish proof and provide the indubitable sign that they really are telling the truth, that they really are the language of the world” (47). He thus reads the world in order to prove his books, and “the only proofs he gives himself are the glittering reflections of resemblances.” Indeed, it is as if by sorcery that difference, non-resemblance, is smuggled into Don Quixote's carefully crafted world of similitude, but since magic is already an accepted reality in that in which Don Quixote stakes his imaginative life, it is

difference that is deemed illusory. Rather than a similitude contaminated by difference, Don Quixote construes from difference “an enchanted similitude, and, therefore, yet another sign that the signs in the books really do resemble the truth.” Don Quixote is thus a “negative of the Renaissance world,” because the world he occupies is no longer truly readable, “writing has ceased to be the prose of the world...words wander off on their own, without content, without resemblance to fill their emptiness; they are no longer the marks of things; they lie sleeping between the pages of books and covered in dust...relegated to the same category as its own chimeras” (47-48).

However, Foucault argues, language is not rendered completely impotent in *Don Quixote*. On the contrary, “it now possesses new powers, and powers peculiar to it alone” (48). In the time that elapses between the first part of the novel and the second, the first part has been published, so the Don Quixote that we meet in the second part meets people who know him from the first part, and he must now live according to a different rule—the one he himself has established. In the first part of the book, Don Quixote viewed the world according to the chivalric code of courtly romances; in the second part of the book, it is his own story from the first part replaces the old courtly romances. Don Quixote has not read the first part of the book, but he does not need to because he is already “the book in flesh and blood.” A great transformation thus takes place between the first part and the second:

Having read so many books that he became a sign, a sign wandering through a world that did not recognize him, he has now, despite himself and without his knowledge, become a book that contains his truth, that records exactly all that he has done and said and seen and thought, and that at last makes him recognizable,

so closely does he resemble all those signs whose ineffaceable imprint he has left behind him. Between the first and second parts of the novel, in the narrow gap between these two volumes, and by their power alone, Don Quixote has achieved his reality—a reality he owes to language alone, and which resides entirely inside the words. Don Quixote’s truth is not in the relation of the words to the world but in that slender and constant relation woven between themselves by verbal signs. The hollow fiction of epic exploits has become the representative power of language. Words have swallowed up their own nature as signs. (48)

And this is how, in *Don Quixote*, the being of language shines once again, but not in quite the same way as it did during the sixteenth-century. Words no longer draw their life force from the belief in a primal text as in the sixteenth century. But neither do they have the power of representation. Instead, they are exposed as signs without content. They have “swallowed up their own nature” and become pure language in which words, as it were, speak amongst themselves. The modernity that *Don Quixote* inaugurates, Foucault argues, “begins” when man “lodges his thought in the folds of a language so much older than himself that he cannot master its significations, even though they have been called back to life by the insistence of his own words” (318). What words have lost in representative value, they gain in edging closer to the being of language, to the exposure of man as a figure of himself, and to a third element that exists between words and things, the visible and the articulable.

Not the same third element that ruled in the sixteenth century, however: the new third element is the Outside, the Unthought, the Other. In his study of Foucault, Deleuze describes the distinction between the visible and the articulable as one of Foucault’s

fundamental theses. Visibilities “form scenes which are to the visible element what a statement is to the sayable or readable” (*Foucault*, 80). But the visible and the articulable depend on completely different conditions in order to function, and these different conditions are ultimately what gives primacy to the statement: “the statement has primacy by virtue of the spontaneity of its conditions (language) which give it a determining form, while the visible element, by virtue of the receptivity of its conditions (light), merely has the form of the determinable” (67). Statements, therefore, by virtue of the greater freedom that their conditioning element affords, are determining rather than determined and revelatory rather than revealed, “even though they reveal something other than what they say.” “As long as we stick to things and words we can believe that we are speaking of what we see, that we see what we are speaking of, and that the two are linked: in this way, we remain on the level of an empirical exercise,” but as soon as we open up words and things and discover statements and visibilities, with their unique properties, potential and limitations, we see that “each reaches its own unique limit that separates it from the other, a limit with two irregular faces, a blind word and a mute vision” (65). Foucault conceives these two faces facing each other as a kind of knightly battle: “between the figure and the text we must admit a whole series of crisscrossings, or rather between the one and the other attacks are launched and arrows fly against the enemy target, campaigns designed to undermine and destroy, wounds and blows from the lance, a battle.”<sup>19</sup> Deleuze continues the metaphor: words and things, though they are separate, continually “spill over into one another, as in a battle”; they “grapple like fighters, force one another to do something or capture one another, and on every occasion constitute ‘truth’” (*Foucault*, 66-7).

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<sup>19</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, 95.

Still, it is not an even match because the articulable—statements—will always have primacy over the visible. This is because a statement avails of words, and words involve concepts whose force comes from a region that is outside the empirical domain. It is for this reason that Deleuze argues that a statement “is the curve joining *individual points*,” the individual points being not that which the words refer to, nor the letters on the keyboard that make up with words, but rather forces, concentrations or intensities of power (79). The statement actualizes relations between forces, between text and figure. “But *the individual points themselves*,” Deleuze continues, did not, by themselves and prior to the statement that thrust them into relation with each other, already constitute a statement: “they are the outside of the statement, which the statement may strongly resemble to the point of being virtually identical.” In *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari discuss concepts as “absolute surfaces or volumes, formless and fragmentary” (36). Concepts are events, and as events they are composed of three components or conditions: an extensive component, by which the event has a body or some material form, such as the words on a page or the sound of a voice; an intensive component, which can be understood as the intrinsic principle that enables things to be perceived or recognized in extension, such as, for example, the values that we attach to words that are brought into relation in statements, or the particular timbre of a voice; finally, an individual component, which means only that no event is ever the same as another, an idea that Heraclitus illustrated with the river (one cannot step into the same one twice), and which both Deleuze and Foucault invoke with the figure of repetition, which is drawn from the understanding that what is repeated is never the Same.<sup>20</sup> These concepts

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<sup>20</sup> A full description of these three conditions or components appears in the chapter entitled “What is an Event?” in *The Fold* (87-88).

or events merge and move about on the *plane of immanence*, “the formless, unlimited absolute, neither surface nor volume but always fractal.” The plane of immanence is “the horizon of event,” but “not the relative horizon that functions as a limit, which changes with an observer and encloses observable states of affairs, but the absolute horizon, independent of any observer, which makes the event as concept independent of a visible state of affairs in which it is brought about” (36). Deleuze and Guattari list multiple analogies in order to express what the plane of immanence is—it is like a desert, whose only regions are the concepts themselves, the tribes or milieus that populate it and move around on it; it is like an ocean, where “concepts are like multiple waves, rising and falling”; it is like the breath that suffuses the separate parts of the body in which concepts are the spinal column (36-7). These images are intended to give the reader a foothold, some point of reference or representation, as it were, through which we can try to broach what immanence actually is, because the plane of immanence is an “image of thought, the image thought gives to itself of what it means to think, to make use of thought, to find ones bearings in thought” (37). As an image of thought, immanence is constituted by those modes of habitual thinking that are implanted in the unconscious by discourse and “common sense,” and it is “*in terms of* this image that everybody knows and is presumed to know what it means to think.”<sup>21</sup> The plane of immanence is therefore always historically determined by the presiding discourse and values of each epoch. At the same time, however, Deleuze urges us to think beyond the pre-given discourses and value systems of our time, to undo the image of thought and create a *thought without image*. Hence the recurrence of the figure of paradox in Deleuze’s thinking of immanence: it is

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<sup>21</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 131-2.

that which “cannot be thought yet must be thought” (60), “the unconscious itself, and the conquest of the unconscious.”<sup>22</sup>

In his study of Foucault, Deleuze locates the plane of immanence in the “third informal dimension” that opens up between the limits of the visible and the articulable (69). Deleuze characterizes this space between the visible and articulable as a “non-place” (68) or “non-relation” (87). Between the visible and the articulable, the third dimension takes “account both of the stratified composition of the two forms and of the primacy of the one over the other” (69). In *The Order of Things*, Foucault calls this third dimension “the middle domain.” It lies between the empirical domain—the visible realm that we make our home in—and the domain of discourse, the articulable world that is trafficked by “the scientific theories or philosophical interpretations which explain why order exists in general, what universal order it obeys, what principle can account for it, and why this particular order has been established and not some other” (xx). This middle domain also has an order, but it is that *fundamental order* of things upon which the general theories of order and interpretation (discourse) are constructed and derived. But as the fundamental order, the middle-region order both upholds and undermines the secondary orders and in doing so “liberates order itself” (xx).

Thus, “between an already ‘encoded’ eye and reflexive knowledge there is a middle region which liberates order itself: it is here that it appears, according to the culture and the age in question, continuous and graduated or discontinuous and piecemeal, linked to space or constituted anew at each instant by the driving force of time, related to a series of variables or defined by separate systems of coherences, composed of resemblances which are either successive or

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<sup>22</sup> Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 29.

corresponding, organized around increasing differences, etc. This middle region, then, in so far as it makes manifest the modes of being of order, can be posited as the most fundamental of all: anterior to words, perceptions, and gestures, which are taken to be more or less exact, more or less happy, expressions of it (which is why this experience of order in its pure primary state always plays a critical role); more solid, more archaic, less dubious, always more “true” than the theories that attempt to give those expressions explicit form, exhaustive application, or philosophical foundation. Thus, in every culture, between the use of what one might call the ordering codes and reflections upon order itself, there is the pure experience of order and of its modes of being” (xxi).

The “pure experience of order” is the outside, the unthought. Deleuzian immanence has many correspondences with Foucault’s concept of the outside and the unthought. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault writes of the necessity of thinking the unthought, “of lifting the veil of the Unconscious, of becoming absorbed in its silence, or of straining to catch its endless murmur” (327). As Deleuze explains, the unthought is not external to thought but what lies, unthought, at its heart. It is possible to think the unthought if we understand that thinking “does not depend on a beautiful interiority that would reunite the visible and the articulable elements, but is carried under the intrusion of an outside that eats into the interval and forces or dismembers the internal” (*Foucault*, 87). For Foucault, the figure for thinking the unthought is the Other: “The unthought (whatever name we give it) is not lodged in man like a shriveled-up nature or stratified history; it is, in relation to man, the Other: the Other that is not only a brother but a twin, born, not of man, nor in man, but beside him and at the same time, in an identical newness, in an unavoidable duality”

(326). According to Foucault, man, a new figure of epistemological consciousness that designated both the empirical object of representation and its transcendental subject, emerged during the eighteenth century with Kant. At every point, man is corralled: the discourse on life determines his relation to his body, the discourse on labor and production determines his relation to his desires, and the discourse on language and representation determines his thinking, his knowledge of the world, and his place in it. Circumscribed by the discourses of life, labor, and language, man is strapped into a role that both designates him as man and requires him for their relentless progression. Thrust into this world, a world whose rules are already established before he arrives in it, there emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a concern to establish a story and a history to explain and justify why the world is organized the way it is and why it must be so, which manifested in the obsession with establishing histories and origins: the origin of economics is traceable to the simple bartering system whereby different kinds of property and desires are rendered equivalent for the purpose of exchange; the origin of nature is found in the table upon which all beings were distributed and followed one another in a linear succession; the origin of language is conceived as transparent representation; finally, the origin of knowledge is sought in that “pure sequence of representations” and the duplication of representation. In the linear succession from one thing to another, the second is deemed so alike the first as to be identical with it, and it “was only when a sensation appeared to be more “like” a previous one than all the others that reminiscence could come into play, that imagination could represent a representation afresh, and that knowledge could gain a foothold in this duplication.” Origin was now located in the folds of representation and in the duplication of representations, such that historicity, “in its

very fabric, makes possible the necessity of an origin which must be both internal and foreign to it.” Thus, to return to the origin was really just “to place oneself once more as near as possible to the mere duplication of representation” (329). Man is an “irreducible anteriority, a living being, and instrument of production, a vehicle of words which exist before him” (313). He is out of joint with time, “cut off from the origin that would make him contemporaneous with his own existence: amid all the things that are born in time and no doubt die in time, he, cut off from all origin, is already there” (332). He finds himself lodged in an order that pre-exists his own existence and excluded from the positivity of the forms of knowledge that have already defined his existence for him—life, labour, and language are forms that bear the aspect of infinity because their progression seems assured in perpetuity. Man comes to be defined by what he is not—by finitude. The positivity of the forms of knowledge that pre-exist his existence bear the aspect of infinity, but his life does not. His finitude is outlined by “a fundamental finitude which rests on nothing but its own existence as fact, and opens upon the positivity of all concrete limitation” (315). The episteme that developed from this discourse thus reformulates the figure of the Same: the forms of knowledge imposed during the classical age were concerned primarily with the “the identity and the difference of the positivities, and of their foundation, within the figure of the *Same*,” and it is in this figure that “Difference is the same thing as Identity” (315).<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> In a 1982 lecture, Foucault outlined his philosophical project as the interrogation of this Difference: “How was the question of the truth of the subject constituted through the set of phenomena and historical processes we call our “culture”? How, why, and at what cost did we undertake to hold a true discourse on the subject: the subject we are not, in the cases of the mad or delinquent subject; on the subject we are in general, inasmuch as we speak, work, and live; and on the subject we are directly and individually, in the particular case of sexuality? I have tried to address this question of the constitution of the truth of the subject in these three major forms, perhaps with blameworthy stubbornness.” Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 253.

The Other and the thought of the outside have the potential to undo the discourse of man. Foucault works out the concept of the outside in a text that was published in the same year as *The Order of Things* called “The Thought of the Outside.” Foucault defines the thought of the outside as a thought

that stands outside subjectivity, setting its limits as though from without, articulating its end, making its dispersion shine forth, taking in only its invincible absence; and that at the same time stands at the threshold of all positivity, not in order to grasp its foundation or justification but in order to regain the space of its unfolding, the void serving as its site, the distance in which it is constituted and into which its immediate certainties slip the moment they are glimpsed. (15-16)

Taking Blanchot as exemplary of this mode of thinking, Foucault argues that Blanchot constantly negates his own discourse by refusing to repatriate the “I speak” to the dimension of interiority, instead casting it outside into the void that effaces it. The sense of the subject as the source and origin of discourse and as the point through which language is ordered and controlled is thus eroded. This kind of negation is not dialectical—that would only bring “what one negates into the troubled interiority of the mind.” (15-16). Rather, it is a negation that simply deprives words of positivity; attaching itself to nothing and attached to nothing, it constantly contests itself, and deprives itself at every moment “not only of what has just been said, but of the very ability to speak” (9). Blanchot’s writing refuses to dissemble the fact of its exteriority through auto-interiorizing reflexivity: “Not reflection, but forgetting; not contradiction, but a contestation that effaces; not reconciliation, but droning on and on; not mind in laborious conquest of its unity, but the endless erosion of the outside; not truth finally shedding

light on itself, but the streaming and distress of a language that has always already begun” (10). Blanchot deprives us of the sense that we want to find in writing and of the sense that we expect to find there. Instead, we are made aware of the “void between words,” the “neutral interstices” (22-24). By thus revealing the “invisibility of the invisibility of the visible”—we could call this the “being of language”—we are led towards the outside, and towards “the visible effacement of the one who speaks” (54). Literature alone has the power to expose this “being of language”:

Literature is not language approaching itself until it reaches the point of fiery manifestation; rather, it is language getting as far away from itself until it reaches the point of fiery manifestation; it is rather language getting as far away from itself as possible. And if, in this setting “outside of itself,” it unveils its own being, the sudden clarity reveals not a folding back but a gap, not a turning back of signs upon themselves but a dispersion. (12)

With this dispersion, language is deprived of its power to represent and thus loses its foothold in the world. Driven to the outside, it exposes the outside, and reveals to Man that he is a figure of himself and outside the outside.

Only literature opens up the possibility of opening up the being of language, and this, according to Foucault, is why literature is “appearing more and more as that which must be thought; but equally, and for the same reason, as that which can never, in any circumstance, be thought in accordance with a theory of signification” (*The Order of Things* 44). But, as he reminds us in, man is “quite a recent creature” (308), born at just the same time that the “being of language” disappeared: “The only thing we know at the moment, in all certainty, is that in Western culture the being of man and the being of

language have never, at any time, been able to co-exist and to articulate themselves one upon the other. Their incompatibility has been one of the fundamental features of our thought” (339).

*Don Quixote* is the “first work of modern literature” because in it we see the two characters and the two experiences, which have dominated literature ever since the seventeenth century, come “face to face.” First, is the madman:

The madman, understood not as one who is sick but as an established and maintained deviant, as an indispensable cultural function, has become, in Western experience, the man of primitive resemblances. This character, as he is depicted in the novels or plays of the Baroque age, and as he was gradually institutionalized right up to the advent of nineteenth-century psychiatry, is the man who is alienated in analogy. He is the disordered player of the Same and the Other. He takes things for what they are not, and people for one another; he cuts his friends and recognizes complete strangers; he thinks he is unmasking when, in fact, he is putting on a mask. He inverts all values and all proportions, because he is constantly under the impression that he is deciphering signs: for him, the crown makes the king. In the cultural perception of the madman that prevailed up to the end of the eighteenth-century, he is Different only in so far as he is unaware of Difference; he sees nothing but resemblances and signs of resemblances everywhere; for him all signs resemble one another, and all resemblances have the value of signs. (49)

At the other end of the spectrum, and standing facing the madman, is the poet:

the poet is he who, beneath the named, constantly expected differences, rediscovers the buried kinships between things, their scattered resemblances. Beneath the established signs, and in spite of them, he hears another, deeper discourse, which recalls the time when words glittered in the universal resemblance of things; in the language of the poet, the Sovereignty of the Same, so difficult to express, eclipses, the distinction existing between signs...his is the allegorical role; beneath the language of signs and the interplay of their precisely delineated distinctions, he strains his ears to catch that 'other language,' the language, without words or discourse, of resemblance. (49-50)

Both figures, in different ways, are riveted to the being of language: because the madman cannot distinguish between things, cannot categorize or identify them, he cannot submit to the rule and order of discourse; because the poet pledges himself to the fundamental order that liberates order itself, he will not submit to it. Both untether themselves from the compound known as man and behave as if they did not know the rules of the game; they instead make up their own rules at every moment. Both thus demonstrate what Foucault calls the "analytic of finitude" (339). As we have discussed, the classical age defines man in terms of his fundamental finitude. In the analytic of finitude, man takes the discourse of finitude and the history that has been imposed on him and reclaims it as his own grounding. The infinity that he is excluded from is no longer a limitation; instead, man recognizes that infinity is composed and grounded and perpetuated by the finite, and as a finite being, he is himself the grounding of infinity.<sup>24</sup> This is the

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<sup>24</sup> Deleuze makes a variation on this point in a lecture from 20/05/1980: "The finite ego founds the world and knowledge of the world because the finite ego is itself the constitutive founding of what appears. In other words, it is finitude that is the founding of the world. The relations of the infinite to the finite shift completely. The finite will no longer be a limitation of the infinite;

possibility that opens up for Don Quixote in the second part of the novel—he sees the groundlessness of the ground of representation, and for a brief moment there is a possibility for him to break out of the system altogether. Thus, the analytic of finitude, though derived from the finitude of classical discourse, has an exactly inverse role to the discourse that initially defined and limited him:

in showing that man is determined, it is concerned with showing that the foundation of those determinations is man's very being in its radical limitations; it must also show that the contents of experience are already their own conditions, that thought, from the very beginning, haunts the unthought that eludes them, and that it is always striving to recover; it shows how that origin of which man is never the contemporary is at the same time withdrawn and given as an imminence: in short, it is always concerned with showing the Other, the Distant, is also the Near and the Same" (339).

The Double is the unthought in thought, the outside that is interiorized. As Deleuze comments, "the double is never a projection of the interior; on the contrary, it is an interiorization of the outside. It is not a doubling of the One, but a redoubling of the Other. It is not a reproduction of the Same, but a repetition of the Different. It is not the emanation of an 'I', but something that places immanence as an always other or a Non-self" (*Foucault*, 98). The Double is difference itself: the distant, the other, the outside. Unlike the figure of the Same of classical discourse, the Double of modernity is a figure of the Same that is not forced to assume Identity. The Double is thus a new ontology, according to Foucault, but an "ontology without metaphysics" (340). The Double is that

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rather, the infinite will be an overcoming [dépassement] of the finite. Moreover, it is a property of the finite to surpass and go beyond itself. The notion of self-overcoming [auto-dépassement] begins to be developed in philosophy." <[www.webdeleuze.com](http://www.webdeleuze.com)>

“hiatus, miniscule and yet invincible, which resides in the ‘and’ of retreat and return, of thought *and* the unthought, of the empirical *and* the transcendental, of what belongs to the order of positivity *and* what belongs to the order of foundations.” It is the hiatus “in which we exist and talk” (339).

This *and*, according to which something can be both a thing *and also* the exact opposite of that thing, the hiatus in which it is neither exclusively the one nor the other, is the domain of paradox. It is appropriate, therefore, to end this section with an excursus on Kierkegaard, whose figure for paradox was none other than the knight of courtly romance. In *Fear and Trembling*, we are presented with two knights: the knight of resignation and the knight of faith or infinity. As in courtly romance, both knights are in love with a princess. The knight of resignation understands finitude: he knows that his love for the princess, which is the very “substance of his life,” cannot possibly be transported unscathed from the ideal of infinity to the finite reality of his life (41). He realizes therefore that his love is impossible, but he does not give up his love; on the contrary, he renounces hope of satisfaction and draws all his pleasure from the recollection of the desire whose satisfaction he has renounced. His love for the princess thus assumes a religious character:

The knight...makes this impossibility possible by expressing it spiritually, but he expresses it spiritually by renouncing it. The desire that would lead him into actuality but has been stranded on impossibility is now turned inward, but it is not therefore lost, nor is it forgotten. Sometimes it is the vague emotions of desire in him that awaken recollection; sometimes he awakens it himself, for he is too proud to be willing to let the whole substance of his life turn out to have been an

affair of the fleeting moment. He keeps this love young, and it grows along with him in years and in beauty. But he needs no finite occasion for its growth. From the moment he has made the movement, the princess is lost. He does not need the erotic titillation of seeing the beloved etc., not does he in the finite sense continually need to be bidding her farewell, because in the eternal sense he recollects her, and he knows very well that the lovers are so bent on seeing each other for the last time in order to say farewell once again are justified in their eagerness, justified in thinking it to be the last time, for they forget each other very quickly. (44)

In contrast to the lofty purity of the knight of resignation, the knight of faith “belongs entirely to the world; no bourgeois philistine could belong to it more” (39). But his prosaic appearance is deceptive: infinite resignation is in fact “the last stage” before infinite faith, and the knight of faith has passed through this stage, but he makes one further movement. Just as the analytic of finitude can only occur once the conditions of finitude, as imposed by history and the discourse of life, labor and language, have been appropriated by man himself as his own grounding, so too the knight of faith must pass through the stage of infinite resignation in order to make the movement of infinity. “Temporality, finitude—that is what it is all about” (49): unlike the knight of resignation who habituates himself to the pleasures of recollection, the knight of faith lives by the principle of repetition, by the knowledge that the ground of infinity is, in reality, the finite. In *Repetition*, Kierkegaard states that repetition and recollection are “the same movement, except in opposite directions, for what is recollected has been, is repeated backward, whereas genuine repetition is recollected forward,” that it takes “youthfulness

to hope, youthfulness to recollect, but it takes courage to will repetition,” and that repetition “is actuality and the earnestness of existence” (131-3). In the Foucauldian register, repetition and the movement of infinity could be called the analytic of finitude.

#### The knight of faith

drains the deep sadness of life in infinite resignation, he knows the blessedness of infinity, he has felt the pain of renouncing everything, the most precious thing in the world, and yet the finite tastes just as good to him as to one who never knew anything higher, because his remaining in finitude would have no trace of a timorous, anxious routine, and yet he has this security that makes him delight in it as if finitude were the surest thing of all. And yet, yet the whole earthly figure he presents is a new creation by virtue of the absurd. He resigned everything infinitely, and then he grasped everything again by virtue of the absurd. He is continually making the movement of infinity, but he does it with such precision and assurance that he continually gets finitude out of it, and no one ever suspects anything else. (40-41)

Faith is not “the spontaneous inclination of the heart but the paradox of existence” (47). The narrator, Johannes de Silentio, continually bemoans the fact that he cannot make the movements of faith, even though he can describe them. He compares it to learning to swim: one first makes the motions of swimming outside the water, then one moves to the water. De Silentio learns the movements of infinity outside the water and he makes the movements of infinity in the water: this is his mistake. In contrast, the knight of faith “makes the opposite movements: after having made the movements of infinity, it makes the movements of finitude” (37-8). The knight of faith is like a ballet dancer who is able

to leap into the upward movement of infinity and almost in the same instant land on his feet in the finite—almost, but not quite. One can recognize a knight of faith by a visible hiatus, a “waving” that happens when they touch the ground:

It is more or less conspicuous according to their skill, but even the most skillful of these knights cannot hide this waving. One does not need to see them in the air; one needs only to see them the instant they touch and have touched the earth—and then one recognizes them. But to be able to come down in such a way that instantaneously one seems to stand and walk, to change the leap into life into walking, absolutely to express the sublime in the pedestrian—only a knight can do that, and this is the one and only marvel. (41)

The knight of faith is equipped with the ability to both leap into infinity *and* land in the finite: the waving takes place in the paradox of the *and*, that “hiatus, miniscule and yet invincible.” The knight of faith “finds pleasure in everything, takes part in everything” (39). He turns water into wine, but the knight of resignation turns wine into water because he renounces the finite (37). The knight of faith is at ease in the world. He may sit at his window and survey the neighborhood in which he lives, and “everything that happens—a rat scurrying under a plank across the gutter, children playing—engages him with an equanimity akin to that of a sixteen-year-old girl” (40). But he is no sixteen-year-old girl: his faith is not innocent. A young girl might have faith because her parents taught her that faith was ennobling and nothing in her experience challenges that faith, but her faith is not true faith because it “does not dare, in the pain of resignation, to look impossibility in the eye” (47). The knight of faith, on the other hand, is “always absolute

isolation” (79). He is “the heir to the finite,” and it is by virtue of the impossible, of paradox, of “the absurd,” that he can have the princess and find happiness with her:

To get the princess in this way, to live happily with her day after day (for it is also conceivable that the knight of resignation could get the princess, but his soul had full insight into the impossibility of their future happiness), to live happily every moment this way by virtue of the absurd, every moment to see the sword hanging over the beloved’s head, and yet not to find rest in the pain of resignation but to find joy by virtue of the absurd—this is wonderful. (50)

## **II. The adventure of lost characters: Courtly Love in *A Thousand Plateaus***

The knight of courtly love makes a number of appearances in Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*. It is a curious pairing: on the one hand, a figure that is so often associated with the strict social hierarchy of the feudal age and the quasi-religious idealism of romantic love; on the other, two authors whose philosophical project is avowedly opposed to the thinking that imposes transcendent systems of values that seek to order, organize and stratify human experience—exactly the kind of thing that, according to conventional wisdom, goes on in courtly romances. Thus far only two authors, to my knowledge, have attempted to fully explain Deleuze and Guattari’s motive for using this figure, and each approaches the question in very different ways.<sup>25</sup> Phillippe Mengue hinges his explanation on the concept of indetermination or “unaccomplishedness” that is threaded through *A Thousand Plateaus* and argues that this

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<sup>25</sup> Phillippe Mengue, “Desire in Courtly Love,” *Deleuze Studies* 6 (3):485-494 (2012); Janell Watson, “Intimacy without Domestication: Courtly Love in *A Thousand Plateaus*,” *L’Esprit Creatur*, Volume 44, Number 1, Spring 2004: 83-95.

is registered in courtly love as the suspension of desire. The principle of indetermination is “a part [of event] that cannot be effectuated, which constitutes its *sense*, and which is the Event proper” (485). It is indetermination that overflows “actual and finite determinations” and “opens the first step towards *pure line of pure desire*” (486). This pure line of desire is, paradoxically, a line of life and also of death: “The *line of life* necessarily coexists with a *line of death* since the life in which it claims to partake is not the organized life of a living body but a *pure abstract line* which, as such, lies beyond *all life that is organized*, whether biologically or socially; that is, which is particularly determined” (486). Mengue further argues that Deleuze valorizes the joy of desiring over the enjoyment of satisfaction, and that what fascinated him in masochism was “nothing but the overcoming of the principle of pleasure” (492). He thereby understands both Lacan and Deleuze to be fundamentally in agreement:

When Deleuze states the necessity of detaching desire from passion, when he posits that the pure affect of desire can be constructed by wrestling oneself loose from all the affections, all the pathoses bordering on such a passion (jealousy, vanity, fear of abandonment, etc.), he fully joins Lacan. The latter, in the years 1959–60, had already proposed, in seminar number VII, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, a reading of desire in connection to courtly love. He showed that the Lady did not leave immanence, and that the finality of the loving dispositif was that desire be disconnected from its object, as object of enjoyment (object of the fantasy, or *fantasme*). What was at stake in courtly love was to put the Lady in the place of the Thing, or *Chose*, that is, beyond the pleasure principle. And this position is also that of Deleuze, as we have seen. (493)

However, as Janell Watson counters, Guattari, though a student of Lacan's, rejected Lacanian "lack as constitutive of psychic life," and both he and Deleuze opposed "the Lacanian tendency to define courtly love in terms of lack" (91). Janell's primary argument is directed against feminist criticisms that Deleuze and Guattari promote the cosmic man-of-war at the cost of denigrating the domestic-feminine domain. Watson argues that the nomadic man of war is also the man of love, and that Deleuze and Guattari's critique is of domestication rather than the domestic sphere per se (84). But what is of most interest to me is how she accounts for Deleuze and Guattari's interest in the knight of courtly love. She derives an explanation from George Duby's exploration of courtly love.<sup>26</sup> Courtly love, according to Duby, was a response to the societal constraints and functions of marriage in feudal Europe. Duby's treatment of courtly love shares two important features with that in *A Thousand Plateaus*: the premise that literary works function socially and the focus on the warrior class (84). Paraphrasing Duby, Watson writes:

It is well known that in most noble households, since only the eldest son inherited, most of the younger aristocratic sons remained bachelors, often becoming either clerics or warriors. With large inheritances at stake for those noble sons who did marry, marriage was too important to entrust to love, and was decided by the family. Love thus had to be separated from marriage. The church supported the noble families on this point. Unlike the church, however, the secular nobles tolerated love outside of marriage, at least for men who took servants as mistresses and frequented prostitutes. Trying to seduce a noble woman provided

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<sup>26</sup> Georges Duby, "Le Modèle courtois," in Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, ed., *Histoire des femmes en Occident*, vol. 2, *Le Moyen Âge* (Paris: Pion, 1991).

young knights with an even greater challenge, giving them another terrain on which to carry out rivalries with those brothers and uncles who inherited and were able to establish their own households...Courtly literature encouraged unmarried knights to seduce, rather than to rape. Better ritualized love than brutal force. Better a private love affair for two than forced sexual relations by a gang. Better respectful secrecy than open defiance. Better ritual than raw animal passion. Duby thus formulates a clever paradox: the young knight's adulterous love upheld the social order of the feudal household. The model of courtly love, instead of merely advocating transgression by advocating adultery, actually helped maintain domestic order by taming the brute passions of the savage knight, imposing a domestication of carnal appetites. (85)

However, neither Watson's discussion nor that of Mengue examines Deleuze and Guattari's deployment of the knight from the perspective that seems, at least to me, most pressing and obvious. First, as one of the earliest forms of literature in Western Europe, and a form so highly stylized and with characters so abstracted from real life that truly, as Foucault comments, "no one in the world ever did resemble them,"<sup>27</sup> the question of the knight as *figure* seems more insistent than the question of the knight as representative of a historical reality. Second, the question of love: love is of course central to courtly romance, but the kind of love that courtly romance is predicated upon is very different to the kind of Spinoza-inspired love that Deleuze and Guattari espouse. For Spinoza, love is an effect of the third kind of knowledge, which is the highest form of knowledge because it alone is capable of understanding God as the infinite cause of all things, the understanding of which enables one to, in Deleuze and Guattari's language, discover the

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<sup>27</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, (46-47).

construction of the plane of immanence. Nevertheless, given the centrality of love in both courtly romance and in the type of new love-as-knowledge that Deleuze and Guattari are working towards, one would imagine that some connection stands to be made between them.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari collapse the figure of the knight of courtly romance, Don Quixote, and Beckett's characters into one figure:

It is false to see Don Quixote as the end of the chivalric novel, invoking the hero's hallucinations, harebrained ideas, and hypnotic or cataleptic states. It is false to see novels such as Beckett's as the end of the novel in general, invoking black holes, the character's line of deterritorialization, the schizophrenic promenades of Molloy or the Unnameable, their loss of their names, memory, or purpose. The novel does have an evolution, but that surely is not it. The novel has always been defined by the adventure of lost characters who no longer know their name, what they are looking for, or what they are doing, amnesiacs, ataxics, catatonics...Molloy is the beginning of the genre of the novel. When the novel began, with Chretien de Troyes, for example, the essential character that would accompany it over the entire course of its history was already there: The knight of the novel of courtly love spends his time forgetting his name, what he is doing, what people say to him, he doesn't know where he is going or to whom he is speaking, he is continually drawing a line of absolute deterritorialization, but also losing his way, stopping, and falling into black holes. (174-5)

The knights of Chretien de Troyes romances, Don Quixote, and the various protagonists of Beckett's novels, are characters who, in a very basic sense, are confused by the world,

by its systems of representation, by its rules and its ordering, by who they are meant to be within that order, where they are in its territory, and what they are required to do there. In realizing that they will never fit and never understand, they try to escape: they pursue a line of flight, they lose their names and their way, they deterritorialize. Often in these novels they fall into black holes. But, there is always the possibility that they might succeed: “Cannot the knight, at certain times and under certain conditions, push the movement further still, crossing the black hole, breaking through the white wall, dismantling the face—even if the attempt may backfire?” (173).

For Deleuze and Guattari, the face is the figure of representation and subjectification. The face is an assemblage that combines both the “white screen of signifiante” and the “black hole of subjectivity.” The white wall of signifiante is the signifying totality of signs; the “black hole of subjectivity” is the articulation of that signifying regime in the compound known as man. The signifier, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is “always facialized” (115): as the marker of individuation, as something that can be read, as the mask that others see but we do not, a mask that, rather than hiding the face, is the face, faciality traits are the very substance and form of the signifier (117). Deleuze and Guattari identify two regimes of the sign. The first is what they call the “paranoid-interpretive ideal regime of signifiante.” It is the chain of representation, the regime in which a sign refers to another sign, which refers to another sign, and so on. It is a closed system of “radiating circles expanding by circular irradiation in all directions, and in which the individual jumps from one point to another, one circle to another” (120). The second regime has to do with the subjectification of man. Unlike the regime of signifiante that seems to self-perpetuate from within, man is subjectivated by forces from

the outside. His relation with the outside is more an emotion than an idea: the feeling of finding himself in a role he may not fit, of having an identity he may not want, and of always having arrived to the world too late, all of which he must passively bear. They thus call this second regime the “passional or subjective, post-signifying, authoritarian regime” (121). Unlike the first regime, which operates through spiraling circularity, the passional regime “operates *by the linear and temporal succession of finite proceedings, rather than by the simultaneity of circles in unlimited expansion*” (120). The second regime alone, therefore, opens up the possibility of escaping the regime of signifi-ance. In the attempt to resist the “despotic regime of signs,” the face undergoes a transformation—it turns away, averting itself, and the “averted faces, in profile, replace the frontal view of the radiant face” (123). In this turning away, there is “no longer a signifier-signified relation, but a subject of enunciation issuing from the point of subjectification and a subject of the statement in a determinable relation to the first subject”: in other words, a relation between the being who is subjectivated and the figure of that subjectification—man. It is as if the passional subject discovers, to his horror, that he has swallowed the sign and that he is himself a sign: in turning away from the radiant face of signifi-ance, there is an accompanying desire to force the sign out, to expel it, because every “consciousness pursues its own death, every love-passion its own end, attracted by a black hole, and all the black holes resonate together” (133). We see this in the undercurrent of death that pervades courtly romance, in which two subjects, whose union is prohibited, are magnetized towards each other, repelled by the white wall of signifi-ance and drawn instead to “a cogito built for two,” a black hole (173). Courtly love, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is “the cry of two subjects [who climb] the scale

of intensities until it reaches the summit of a suffocating consciousness.” But, it need not always end this way. There is always the possibility of *crossing the black hole*. It is a question switching planes:

The principle strata binding human beings are the organism, signifiante and interpretation, and subjectification and subjection....Subjectification carries desire to such a point of excess and unloosening that it must either annihilate itself in a black hole or change planes. Destratify, open up to a new function...Let consciousness cease to be its own double, and pass on the double of one person for another. Make consciousness an experimentation in life, and passion a field of continuous intensities, an emission of particles-signs. Make the body without organs of consciousness and love. Use love and consciousness to abolish subjectification...Stammer language, be a foreigner in one's own tongue. (134)

Changing planes involves moving into a different cognitive register, one that involves errant adventures in fields of continuous intensities and using love as a means to wage battle against subjectification. It is still not quite clear, however, how the desire for deterritorialization would not stem logically from an initial lack of deterritorialization.

I think that what Deleuze and Guattari are advancing here is the Spinozan idea of the third kind of knowledge. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza identifies three kinds of knowing, each of which is based on the relation of the mode, a person, to the knowledge of final causes: the first is opinion or imagination, the second reason, and the third intuition (IIP42S2). The first kind of knowledge is derived from things presented to the senses by external impressions and is as a consequence “a mutilated and confused knowledge” that prevents the mind from completely knowing either itself or the other body (IIP29, C, S).

The first kind of knowledge is described as “passion” not only because it is primarily emotional and irrational, but also because it is connected to passivity: with the first kind of knowledge, the subject only knows that it is acted upon, and as such, as soon as nothing acts on it, it is no more. The second kind of knowledge is that which stems from memory: “It is simply a certain interconnection of ideas which involve the nature of things which are outside the human body, and which occurs in the mind in accordance with the order and the interconnection of the affections of the human body” (IIP18S). This second kind of knowledge is a step above the first kind because now the subject is the adequate cause of its knowledge and thus can continue in its essence. The second kind of knowledge is capable of producing common or universal notions; that is, it capable of understanding points of similarity between things and forming general categories of identification, though it also risks developing transcendental categories that blot out the singularity of things. However, it is through this cognitive capacity for creating connections and establishing relations that the conditions for the development of the third kind of knowledge are created. When we establish relations between things, we are pleased, and this pleasure increases our desire to understand; that is, it increases our *power*, our ability to act, thus rendering us capable of establishing more relations. According to Deleuze, what must follow this increase in power is “a genuine “leap,”” which puts us in possession of an adequate idea, by the aid of such accumulation” (*Expressionism* 283). The “genuine leap” is opposed to the Fall: Adam became enslaved to a transcendent God because he lacked power of understanding. A mode that makes the leap, on the other hand, is not only in possession of adequate ideas, but is also the adequate cause of those adequate ideas. This is the third kind of knowledge, a knowledge

by which we understand not only relations, but also essences. We glimpse the *rerum concatenationem*, the interconnection or concatenation of all things: in other words, God.<sup>28</sup> The third kind of knowledge builds on the adequate knowledge accumulated through common notions. A mode operating within the third kind of knowledge is conscious of itself both as a thing that exists within the concatenation of all things and as the adequate cause of the idea of the idea of the concatenation of all things of which it is a thing. Genevieve Lloyd provides a helpful breakdown: “The first way of knowing is focused on singular things, but is inherently inadequate. The second is inherently adequate, but unable to grasp essences of singular things. The third and highest kind of knowledge is inherently adequate and able to understand singular things” (Lloyd 67). We may map these three stages onto the orders of knowledge that Foucault describes: the first is the domain of the visible world, the world of particular things, singularities, that seem to resemble one another but are fundamentally different; the second is the regime of representation, classical discourse, which must ignore difference and singularity in order to establish its codes and functions; the third is the outside, the unthought within thought, the “pure experience of order and of its modes of being,” that order that liberates order itself.

But all of these movements—from the first, the second, and finally to the third kind of knowledge—depend on the operation of *conatus* (desire). Conatus is the desire of each mode or being “to persevere in its being” and constitutes “the actual essence of the thing” (IIP6, IIP7). In order to persevere in its being, a mode wants to understand the final causes of things so that it can best seek what is useful to it and what will best enable

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<sup>28</sup> For full discussion of this see Cesare Casarino, “Marx before Spinoza,” *Spinoza Now*, Dimitris Vardoulakis, ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 179-234.

it to persevere in its being (IAppendix). This is what can lead us to an initial and fundamental misunderstanding: if we cannot learn about final causes from the world around us, then we inevitably turn inward and look for answers in our own mind, and so we “necessarily judge the mind of another from [our] own mind.” This kind of thinking, according to Spinoza, has led to some serious misconceptions about the nature of God, principle among which is the view that he created the world specifically for us, and the shortcomings that we see in the world are therefore evidence that God necessarily desires something that he lacks, with the implication that he is therefore not perfect. But God does not lack anything: God is “a substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which express eternal and infinite essence,” and a substance is “that which is in itself and is conceived through itself; that is, that which does not need the concept of another thing, from which concept it must be formed” (ID6). Furthermore, the human being, as a mode, is one of the “affections of substance, or, that which is in something else, through which it is also conceived” (ID5). And since each “thing that exists exists either in itself or in something else” (IA1), and only God, as the concatenation of all things, exists “in itself,” then it follows that we, as modes, do not exist “in ourselves” but rather immanently in God. Our misconceptions about God stem from the fact that the mind is not free: “There is in the mind no absolute, i.e. no free, will, but the mind is determined to will this or that by a cause, which is again determined by another, and that again by another, and so on to infinity” (II, P48). When certain authors define love as the will of the lover to join himself with the loved thing, Spinoza counters that this is not the essence of love, but merely a property of it, because the will is not free if it is clouded with inadequate ideas (IIID6Exp). The power of the mind over the emotions consists in: first, forming a clear

and distinct idea of that emotion; second, separating the emotions from the thought of their external cause, which we only ever imagine confusedly; third, seeing that the emotions that arise from reason are stronger than the emotions that arise from confusion because the emotions that arise from reason always remain the same, and consequently the emotions that arise from external causes, which are always ephemeral, will gradually and necessarily have to accommodate to the emotions that arise from reason; fourth, in recognizing the multitude of causes for a particular emotion, the less the mind attaches itself to a few or one particular cause and the more it is inclined to contemplate the common properties of things; finally, fifth, the mind, in contemplating the multitude of causes for emotions and the common properties of things, sees that everything is related to God and thus becomes capable of arranging and interconnecting its emotions according to the order of the intellect and of God (VP20S). Partial knowledge of causes leads to confusion and passivity, but the knowledge that is capable of taking in the interconnection of all things is thinking in its active sense: “The mind sometimes acts, but sometimes is passive; namely, in so far as it has adequate ideas, so far as it necessarily acts, and in so far as it has only inadequate ideas, so far it is necessarily passive” (IIP1); “The actions of the mind arise from adequate ideas alone, but passions depend on inadequate ideas alone” (IIP3). Only actions are virtuous: “A man, in so far as he is determined to do something by the fact that he has inadequate ideas, cannot be said absolutely to act from virtue; he can only be said to do so in so far as he is determined by the fact that he understands” (IVP23). Therefore, the “highest good of the mind is the knowledge of God, and the highest virtue of the mind, is to know God” (IV, Prop 28). Since all adequate knowledge has its source in the mind, the essence of which is God,

who is his own cause and thus eternal, “adequate knowledge of the essence of things” partakes in God’s conatus and is, to this extent, also its own cause. From this there arises the emotion of pleasure and of love: “From the third kind of knowledge there necessarily arises the intellectual love of God. For there arises from this kind of knowledge...pleasure, accompanied by the idea of God as its cause, that is...the love of God: not in so far as we imagine him as present...but in so far as we understand God to be eternal” (VP32C).

Like the third point in the list of stages of the mind’s attainment of power over the emotions above, which states that the emotions that arise from reason are stronger than those that we imagine arise from external causes because the emotions of reason are always the same, the pleasure that is followed by the intellectual love for God depends on the understanding that he is eternal, and this “species of eternity,” as Spinoza puts it, is a property of the mind: “The intellectual love of the mind for God is the love by which God loves himself; not in so far as he is infinite, but in so far as he can be explained through the human mind, considered under a species of eternity; that is, the love of the mind for God is a part of the infinite intellectual love with which God loves himself” (VP36). Once the mind has entered into the third kind of knowledge, it is “free”: “That thing is called free which exists solely by the necessity of its own nature, and is determined to action by itself alone. However, that thing is called necessary, or rather compelled, which is determined by another to exist and to operate in a certain and determinate way” (ID7). Therefore an “emotion towards a thing which we imagine simply, and not as necessary, possible, or contingent is...the greatest of all” (VP5), because that emotion is free. Furthermore, “Only free men are grateful to one another” (IVP71), and “Gratefulness, i.e.

gratitude, is the desire, i.e. the zeal, displayed by love, by which we endeavor to benefit man who, with an equal emotion of love, has benefited us” (IIIDef34). In so far as people are guided by reason and are therefore free, “to that extent alone they always necessarily agree in nature” (IVP35); it is only when they are harassed by inadequate ideas that they are different in nature. Once we enter into the third kind of knowledge, *conatus*—our desire to persevere in our being and essence—is the highest virtue (IVP21, P22) and desires only what is virtuous because “if the human mind had only adequate ideas, it would form no notion of bad” (IVP64C), and the greater the knowledge of God, the more the desire for the same good for all men as one desires for oneself (IVP37). So, in terms of romantic love, “it is certain that this agrees with reason,” as long as “the love of each person, namely of the man and the woman, has as its cause, not beauty alone, but above all the freedom of the mind” (IV Appendix 20).

When Deleuze and Guattari appear to praise the celibacy of the lovers in courtly romance—as they do in the quotation below, which Philippe Mengue cited (partially) in support of his suggestion that they condone courtly love *because* of its celibacy—they do so under the very specific conditions of what constitutes the free and real (that is, inspired by adequate ideas) love that Spinoza describes:

it would be an error to interpret courtly love in terms of a law or lack or an ideal of transcendence. The renunciation of external pleasure, or its delay, its infinite regress, testifies on the contrary to an achieved state in which desire no longer lacks anything but fills itself and constructs its own field of immanence. Pleasure is an affection of a person or a subject; it is the only way for persons to “find themselves” in the process of desire that exceeds them; pleasures, even the most

artificial, are reterritorializations. But the question is precisely whether it is necessary to find oneself. Courtly love does not love the self, any more than it loves the whole universe in a celestial or religious way. It is a question of making a body without organs upon which intensities pass, self and others—not in the name of higher level of generality or a broader extension, but by virtue of singularities that can no longer be said to be extensive. The field of immanence is not internal to the self, but neither does it come from an external self or a nonself. Rather, it is like the absolute Outside that knows no Selves because interior and exterior are equally a part of the immanence in which they fused. “Joy” in courtly love, the exchange of hearts, the test or “assay”: everything is allowed, as long as it is not external to desire or transcendent to its plane, or else internal to persons. The slightest caress may be as strong as an orgasm; orgasm is a mere fact, a rather deplorable one, in relation to desire in pursuit of its principle. Everything is allowed: all that counts is for pleasure to be the flow of desire itself, Immanence, instead of a measure that interrupts it or delivers it to the three phantoms, namely, internal lack, higher transcendence, and apparent exteriority. If pleasure is not the norm of desire, it is not by virtue of a lack that is impossible to fill but, on the contrary, by virtue of its positivity, in other words, the plane of consistency it draws in the course of its process. (156-7)

Under optimal conditions, the lover of courtly romance knows that what appears to be the external cause of his love—the Lady—is not the true cause. Conatus is the flow of desire that exists in all things; it is the plane of immanence itself. As such, it is composed by a multitude of singularities, many of which “can no longer be said to be extensive.” In

Deleuze and Guattari's reading of the knight, the desire that drives the knight towards the Lady is not mere sexual attraction, so the question of celibacy is neither here nor there. What drives the knight is the desire to deterritorialize, to undo his subjectivity, to undo "man," to make a becoming-woman of man. Conatus, when equipped with adequate ideas, "knows no Selves because the interior and exterior are equally part of the immanence in which they are fused." The lover who fixates on the beloved and directs all his desire towards the ultimate goal of consummation is a man who is thoroughly subjectivated: he believes that he is a man and that pleasure will stop and stem the flow of desire. But desire cannot be stopped. It is its nature to deterritorialize. The plane of immanence is an order that liberates order, because in it "everything is allowed." The courtly lover who grasps this truth would be like Kierkegaard's knight of faith for whom everything is pleasure because his desire knows no lack. He may walk home fantasizing about the hot meal his wife will have ready for him, perhaps even a "roast lamb's head with vegetables," but when he arrives and finds that she has nothing prepared, "curiously enough, he is just the same" (*Fear and Trembling*, 39-40). The knight of faith lives by the analytic of finitude, a "species of eternity" in which the infinite is beheld in the finite.

But if conatus is linked to the experience of temporality, as it appears to be in Kierkegaard's knight, then from this it follows that conatus is at every instant produced: it is pure instantaneity. However, this directly contradicts what Spinoza says about conatus: firstly, that it is pure essence and that essence is eternal; secondly, a concept of duration is implied by the order of the three kinds of knowledge, because according to that order, it is possible to progress from first to second to third, to become, as it were, "better." These are the protests that Willem van Blyenbergh makes in a letter to Spinoza.

Spinoza does not respond to those protests, but Deleuze does, in a lecture of 1981.<sup>29</sup> He reminds us of the distinction that Spinoza makes between affectus and affectio. Our essence is indeed eternal, but once that essence comes into existence, it is referred to as conatus. Our conatus is active in two ways— as affectus and as affectio. Affectio, or affections, are the instantaneous effects of images and ideas. Affectus, or affect, is what is enveloped by affection. This does not mean that it depends on affection or is based on affection; it simply means that affect is enfolded within affection and intrinsic to it. Duration is located in affect: it is the mobilization between states, the lived transition between one state and another, which is not necessarily (indeed, it seldom is) a conscious transition. In this idea, Deleuze sees in Spinoza a forerunner for Bergson:

When, centuries later, Bergson will make duration into a philosophical concept, it will obviously be with wholly different influences. It will be according to itself above all, it will not be under the influence of Spinoza. Nevertheless, I am just pointing out that the Bergsonian use of duration coincides strictly. When Bergson tries to make us understand what he calls duration, he says: you can consider psychic states as close together as you want in time, you can consider the state A and the state A, as separated by a minute, but just as well by a second, by a thousandth of a second, that is you can make more and more cuts, increasingly tight, increasingly close to one another. You may well go to the infinite, says Bergson, in your decomposition of time, by establishing cuts with increasing rapidity, but you will only ever reach states. And he adds that the states are always of space. The cuts are always spatial. And you will have brought your cuts together very well, you will let something necessarily escape, it is the passage

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<sup>29</sup> Cours Vincennes - 20/01/1981 [www.webdeleuze.com](http://www.webdeleuze.com).

from one cut to another, however small it may be. Now, what does he call duration, at its simplest? It is the passage from one cut to another, it is the passage from one state to another. The passage from one state to another is not a state, you will tell me that all of this is not strong, but it is a really profound statute of living. For how can we speak of the passage, the passage from one state to another, without making it a state? This is going to pose problems of expression, of style, of movement, it is going to pose all sorts of problems. Yet duration is that, it is the lived passage from one state to another insofar as it is irreducible to one state as to the other, insofar as it is irreducible to any state. This is what happens between two cuts.

I quote this passage because it emphasizes very clearly that states are instants, cuts, and that the passage between states, “however small it may be,” is duration. It is in this small passage between states that the knight of faith may be seen to momentarily waver between the leap into infinity and the landing back down to earth. The passage between states is the hiatus of the *and*, “miniscule and yet invincible,” that Foucault locates between retreat and return, thought and unthought. For Spinoza, the passage between states in which the composition or decomposition of power that takes place is affect. One can say, then: the mode is a part of God’s essence, a degree of God’s power, and in this sense is eternal; the mode experiences instantaneous affections (such as happiness or sadness), and in this sense is pure instantaneity; each time the mode experiences instantaneous affections, the mode’s power is either increased or decreased, and it is in this composition or decomposition that the mode durates. Affect is therefore the

relational component between that which is infinite (our essence) and that which is finite and instantaneous (our affections).

Indeed, the mode itself can be viewed as a system of relations: it is defined by Spinoza as, first, a capacity to affect and to be affected, and secondly as a body that is composed of an infinite number of particles which each exist in a relation of movement and rest, and it is these speeds and slownesses between particles that form the individuality of the body. A mode is therefore always subject to encounters, to the outside. In *Expressionism*, Deleuze summarizes the three kinds of knowledge. The knowledge of the first kind is produced solely from encounters: it has as its object “only encounters between parts of bodies, seen in terms of their extrinsic determination” (*Expressionism*, 303). The knowledge of the second kind is able to establish common notions: in other words, it is able to perceive relations between things. The third kind of knowledge is the knowledge of essences as they are in God. After summarizing these three kinds of knowledge, Deleuze makes the following observation: “We thus rediscover in the three kinds of knowledge the three aspects of the order of nature: the order of passions, that of the composition of relations and that of essences themselves.” We might say: from instantaneity, to duration, to eternity; or from affections, to attributes to essences. Eternity is essence: as Deleuze argues in *Practical Philosophy*, the knowledge of the second kind involves knowledge of attributes and this necessarily leads to the idea of God, and the idea of God enables us to pass from the second kind of knowledge to the third “because it has one side facing the common notions and one side facing the essences” (118).

In Book V of the *Ethics*, Propositions 24 to 29 chart the transition quite clearly. Proposition 24 states that the “more we understand particular things, the more we understand God.” The next proposition tells us that the “highest endeavor of the mind, and its highest virtue, is to understand things by the third kind of knowledge” (VP25). From here, contentment ensues and increases our “desire to understand things by this kind knowledge” (VP26). From this kind of knowledge, “the highest contentment of mind can arise” (VP27). But, the desire for this kind of knowledge and the contentment that it brings “cannot arise from the first kind of knowledge but can arise for the second” (VP28). Finally, Proposition 29: “Whatever the mind understands under a species of eternity [*sub specie aeternitatis*], it understands not from the fact that it conceives the present actual episode of the body, but from the fact that it conceives the essence of the body under a species of eternity.” The Demonstration for this proposition sends us back to Definition 8 of Book I and its explanation, in which it is stated: “By eternity I understand existence itself, in so far as it is conceived to follow necessarily solely from the definition of an eternal thing,” because if existence is conceived as an eternal truth, as it is, then it cannot “be explained by duration or time.” Therefore, when we understand things in terms of essence—that is, when we understand things under a species of eternity—we enter into the third kind of knowledge.

A species of eternity, the analytic of finitude: there is an unusual temporal construct afoot here. In *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze names it event. Every event is characterized by a certain doubleness, one side facing relations, by which the event is actualized, the other essences, by which the actualized event is sidestepped. Deleuze considers death as the ultimate example of the double structure of event.

Death has an extreme and definite relation to me and my body and is grounded in me, but it also has no relation to me at all—it is incorporeal and infinitive, impersonal, grounded only in itself. On one side, there is the part of the event which is realized and accomplished; on the other, there is that “part of the event which cannot realize its accomplishment.” There are thus two accomplishments, which are like actualization and counter-actualization. It is in this way that death and its wound are not simply events among other events. Every event is like death, double and impersonal in its double. (152)

Once dead, death has already been realized in spatio-temporal terms. It offers no clues. The expression of death as an incorporeal sense-event is wholly singular, and it is only and only ever pertinent to the living, to those for whom it is not yet actualized. When Deleuze states that “every event is like death,” he refers to precisely this double structure: the spatio-temporal event of death realized, and the sense-event of death, which cannot be realized because we always arrive too late, after it has already been accomplished. This is the point at which “death turns against death; where dying is the negation of death” (153).

Event is a species of eternity: eternity within duration. it is the passage of “becoming” that eludes the transcendence of the subject, even though it pre-, co-, and post- exists the subject all at the same time. It designates the elusiveness of the instant which is without beginning or end, and within which the modal being, the “anti-god” that Deleuze invokes with the figure of Aion, is bound, but outside of which he durates. While his counterpart, Chronos, occupies “the divine present in the circle of its entirety,” Aion side-steps event: like the actor, he “is always still in the future and already in the past” (150-151):

It is in this sense that there is an actor's paradox; the actor maintains himself in the instant in order to act out something that is perpetually anticipated and delayed, hoped for and recalled. The role played is never that of a character; it is a theme (the complex theme or sense) constituted by the components of the event, that is, by communicating singularities effectively liberated from the limits of individuals and persons. The actor strains his entire personality in a moment which is always further divisible in order to open himself up to the impersonal and pre-individual role. The actor is always acting out other roles when acting one role. The role has the same relation to the actor as the future and past have to the instantaneous present which corresponds to them on the line of Aion. The actor thus actualizes the event, but in a way which is entirely different from the actualization of the event in the depth of things. Or rather, the actor redoubles this cosmic, or physical actualization, in his own way, which is singularly superficial—but because of it more distinct, trenchant and pure. Thus, the actor delimits the original, disengages from it an abstract line, and keeps from the event only its contour and its splendor, becoming thereby the actor of one's own events—a *counter-actualization*. (150)

The actor is neither anchored within his own individual past-future (whereby he would, like most people, completely bypass event), nor does he actualize the event in the depth of things, as would Chronos, a God who is fixed and unmovable in the “divine present.” The actor is in constant motion. He changes shapes; even when he performs a role, it is not that of a character, but only some small slice of a composite mode. Entering different roles brings him closer to principle of common notions, that is, “the idea of similarity of

composition in existing modes.” When he acts out roles, he holds the past and the future in one instant, he hovers over event; he gets as close as possible to sense-event, to this birth of becoming, without alighting upon it and holding on, like Chronos, or fetishizing it as though it were a Transcendent eminence, or still less submitting himself for subjectivation by it. Instead, event is endlessly subdivided, fractalized. Through constant motion, constant changing of shapes, constant emptying out of the personality, the actor resists subjectivation. His closeness to event, the better that it is superficial, ensures his resistance.

I end this section with another brief excursus on Kierkegaard: the figure of the actor appealed to him also. Everyone at one time or another, he writes, has “wished to be swept along into that artificial actuality in order like a double to see and hear himself and to split himself up into every possible variation of himself, and nevertheless in such a way that every variation is still himself” (*Repetition*, 154). This ability to occupy doubleness, to abide in paradox, is what Deleuze and Guattari advocate when they argue that the impasse of faciality, is a “tool for which a new use must be invented” (189). Only “in the black hole of subjective consciousness and passion do you discover the transformed, heated, captured particles you must relaunch for a nonsubjective, living love in which each party connects with unknown tracts in the other without entering or conquering them, in which the lines composed are broken lines” (189). Don Quixote, like Beckett’s figures, are “lost characters who no longer know their name”—they have reached the impasse, the black hole. But they open up the possibility of crossing it, of using it. If we could use it, as Foucault writes in the closing lines of *The Order of Things*,

“then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea” (387).

## **II. *Lieber Herr Auerbach: Benjamin, Auerbach, Redemption and Love***

When Auerbach states that the world for Cervantes, at the time of writing *Don Quixote*, had “become difficult to survey and no longer possible to arrange in an unambiguous and traditional manner,” he does not seem to be fundamentally in disagreement with either Deleuze and Guattari or Foucault’s interpretation of the novel. It is only when he describes the narrative as “noncritical and nonproblematic” and reduces it to one of “neutral gaiety” that there appears cause for protest. One issue might give one pause before protesting, however. The chapter on *Don Quixote* was the only chapter that Auerbach wrote after the war: it only appeared in the second edition of *Mimesis*. David Damrosch has argued that *Mimesis* was written primarily as a response to the collapse of European culture during the war and constitutes an attempt to recreate and salvage what remained of it. He points to various moments in which the war and Auerbach’s own exilic status appear to actually enter the book.<sup>30</sup> His central claim about *Mimesis* is that Auerbach could not attain the objectivity he desired: he was “far more irrevocably wedded to his present age than he would wish to be,” and he “knew too much about his own times, and that knowledge, so often repressed, continually returned to shift the course of his argument away from the free play of the material itself” (115-6). In

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<sup>30</sup> Damrosch points to one notable example from a passage in which Auerbach discusses the Swiss poet Gottfried Keller: “Whenever a specific form of life or a social group has run its course, or has only lost favor and support, every injustice which the propagandists perpetrate against it is half consciously felt to be what it actually is, yet people welcome it with sadistic delight” (*Mimesis*, 404; qtd. In Damrosch, 103).

particular, he draws attention to the fact that Auerbach at no point in his discussion of *Don Quixote* mentions its central metafictional device—Cide Hamete Benengeli, the Arabic historian who is the supposed author of the book. At the beginning of the second part of the novel, Benengeli outlines some of the difficulties he had to overcome in order to write the story of Don Quixote:

When the author of this great history [ie. Benengeli] comes to relate the events of this chapter, he says that he would have liked to pass over them in silence, through fear of not being believed...However, he wrote them down finally, although not without some fear and misgiving, just as they occurred, without adding or subtracting one atom of the truth from the history, or heeding any objection that might be brought against him as a liar. And he was right, for truth, though it may run thin, never breaks, and it always flows over the lie as oil over water. (Don Quixote, 558; qtd. in Damrosch, 111)

In the *Don Quixote* chapter, Auerbach makes a remarkably similar statement: the task of the literary historian, his own task, is to “endeavour insofar as that it is still possible, to attain a clear understanding of what the work meant to its author and his contemporaries. I have tried to interpret as little as possible” (353). Pointing to the similarity between the two passages, Damrosch argues that Auerbach thus “echoes Benengeli even as he suppresses him” (111).

Damrosch’s argument is difficult to dispute: indeed, I do not dispute it. However, the criticisms that he advances are in fact both anticipated and countered by Auerbach in his explorations on the nature and task of literary interpretation—namely, those contained in the 1944 essay “Figura.” There, Auerbach charts the transition from the Old Testament

to the New in terms of prophecy and fulfillment. He points to the Pauline epistles (First Cor. 10:6 and 11) where Jews are termed “figures of ourselves” (51), and argues that, for Paul, the Old Testament ceased to be a book of the law and history of Israel and became instead shadow and typos for what was to come, “a promise and prefiguration of Christ, in which there is no definitive, but only a prophetic meaning which has now been fulfilled, in which everything is written “for our sakes” (I. Cor. 9:10, Rom. 15:4).” In figural interpretation, events have a fundamentally different structure than they do in the modern view of historical development. Whereas in the modern view of historical development, “the provisional event is treated as a step in an unbroken horizontal process” and the event is always “self-sufficient and secure” while its interpretation is “fundamentally incomplete,” in the figural view, events are in need of interpretation, they have “something provisional and incomplete about them; they point to one another and both point to something in the future, something still to come, which will be the actual, real, and definitive event.” (58-9). In figural interpretation, events are not self-sufficient, but rather *figures*, “cloaked and needful of interpretation.” For Auerbach, figures are:

prophecies of something that has always been, but which will remain veiled for men until the day when they behold the Saviour *revelata facie*, with the senses as well as in spirit. Thus the figures are not only tentative; they are also the tentative form of something eternal and timeless, they point not only to the concrete future, but also to something that always has been and always will be; they point to something which is in need of interpretation, which will indeed be fulfilled in the concrete future, but which is at all times present, fulfilled in God’s providence, which knows no difference of time. This eternal thing is already figured in them,

and thus they are both tentative fragmentary reality, and veiled eternal reality.  
(59-60)

Criticism brings that “eternal thing” to fulfillment, but not with any degree of finality: since it is eternity is that characterizes that thing, there will always remain in it something that slips out of grasp. Auerbach takes the figures of *The Divine Comedy* as examples of revealed or fulfilled figures, in which both figure *and* fulfillment have equal importance. Focusing on the portrait of Beatrice in *Vita Nova* to illustrate, Auerbach argues against both the tendency of the nineteenth century to lay emphasis on the “human” Beatrice and to view *Vita Nova* as a “kind of sentimental novel” (73) and the critical trends that were contemporary at the time of Auerbach’s writing that tended to make her an allegory for various theological concepts. Instead, Auerbach argues that in the portrait of Beatrice “the literal meaning or historical reality is not annulled, but confirmed and fulfilled by the deeper meaning” (73).

The Beatrice of the *Vita Nova* is an earthly person; she really appeared to Dante, she really withheld her salutation later on, mocked him, mourned for a dead friend and for her father, and really died. Of course this reality can only be the reality of Dante’s experience—for a poet forms and transforms the events of his life in his consciousness and not of the outward reality. It should be borne in mind that from the first day of her appearance the earthly Beatrice was for Dante a miracle sent from Heaven, an incarnation of divine truth. Thus the reality of her earthly person is not, as in the case of Virgil and Cato, derived from the facts of a historic tradition, but from Dante’s own experience: this experience showed him the

earthly Beatrice as a miracle. But an incarnation, miracles are real happenings; miracles happen on earth, and incarnation is flesh. (73-74)

Dante's realism is thus founded on an "astounding paradox." One of the most essential characteristics of life on earth is that it is marked by time, by growth and decay, by transience and mortality. Dante's realist characters are therefore keenly aware of time, but since they are also occupants of hell, purgatory, and heaven, they inhabit a "changeless existence."<sup>31</sup> In examining how Dante maintains this paradox, Auerbach concludes: "We behold an intensified image of the essence of their being, fixed for all eternity in gigantic dimensions, behold it in a purity and distinctness which could never for one moment have been possible during their lives upon earth" (192). The impression they produce is "not that they are dead—though that is what they are—but alive" (191). They are as they were when alive on earth, but concentrated, intensified. Dante, in exaggerating their earthly, human characteristics to, indeed, "gigantic proportions," creates not caricatures, but rather extracts the essences of their singular being. In the passage from earthly person to figure, from the world of time to one of timelessness, Beatrice becomes an intensified image of her essence.

Just as Dante brought Beatrice to fulfillment or completion, the reader or critic views the text as essentially "cloaked and needful of interpretation." But the act of reading is one that is always situated in time, and thus can change as times change: there is some "eternal thing" that eludes interpretation and is preserved for future interpretations. Damrosch is no doubt correct when he refers to Auerbach's initial comments on *Don Quixote* in "The Knight Sets Forth" as "another self-portrait" (111); that is, a portrait of a man driven out of his academic post and his homeland for reasons

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<sup>31</sup> 191. Auerbach acknowledges that he takes this expression from Hegel.

of birth, of race, reasons he could do absolutely nothing about. This is what Auerbach says in that chapter:

[Don Quixote] belongs to this class; he cannot emancipate himself from it; but as a mere member of it, without wealth and without high connections, he has no role and no mission. He feels his life running meaninglessly out, as though he were paralyzed. Only upon such a man, whose life is hardly better than a peasant's but who is educated and neither able nor permitted to labor as a peasant does, could romances of chivalry have such an unbalancing effect. (137)

But it is significant that in the second edition of *Mimesis*, which included the new chapter on *Don Quixote* that refuted the view expressed in the statement above, Auerbach did not revise or change anything in those initial comments. Referring to the view that *Don Quixote* presents a tragic “flight from a situation which has become unbearable,” a view he now dismisses, Auerbach writes this: “I myself advanced [that view] in an earlier passage of this book, and I leave it there because in the context of that passage it is justified” (348).

Auerbach's interest in figural interpretation stems from biblical exegesis, which was a major topic of interest for German-Jewish thinkers during the twenties and thirties. Jacob Taubes, in his book *The Political Theology of Paul*, describes this conversation as one that centered on the messianic logic of Pauline theology, a logic that was fundamentally paradoxical in nature (10). Like Auerbach's friend and correspondent Walter Benjamin, Taubes was a student of Gershom Scholem. In *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, Scholem states that “Jewish Messianism is in its origins and by its nature—this cannot be sufficiently emphasized—a theory of catastrophe” (7). While Judaic thought in

general is dominated by three forces—conservative, restorative and utopian—only the restorative and the utopian operate in Messianism. The figure of the Messiah, in whom the fulfillment of redemption is concentrated, is accordingly characterized by a certain *doubling*, which Scholem figures as a combination of the Messiah ben Joseph and the Messiah ben David:

The Messiah ben Joseph is the dying Messiah who perished in the Messianic catastrophe. The features of the catastrophic are gathered together in him. He fights and loses—but he does not suffer. The prophecy of Isaiah regarding the suffering servant of God is never applied to him. He is a redeemer who redeems nothing, in whom only the final battle with the powers of the world are crystallized. His destruction coincides with the destruction of history. By contrast, when the figure is split, all of the utopian interest is concentrated on the Messiah ben David. He is the one in whom what is new finally comes to the fore, who once and for all defeats the antichrist, and thus presents the purely positive side of this complex phenomenon. The more this dualism becomes weakened, the less is the doubling mentioned, and the special figure of the Messiah ben Joseph becomes superfluous and meaningless. (18)

Messianic redemption in its true, Judaic form is always accompanied by “elements of the catastrophic and the visions of doom” (8). It is useful to think about Scholem’s description of Messianic logic alongside Deleuze’s description of the event in *The Logic of Sense*. He begins by asking why every event is “a kind of plague, war, wound or death,” and answers thus:

Is this simply to say that there are more unfortunate than fortunate events? No, this is not the case since the question here is about the double structure of every event. With every event, there is indeed the present moment of its actualization, the moment in which the event is embodied in a state of affairs, an individual, or a person, the moment we designate by saying “here, the moment has come.” The future and the past event are evaluated only with respect to this definitive present, and from the point of view of that which embodies it. But on the other hand, there is the future and the past of the event considered in itself, sidestepping each present, being free of the limitations of a state of affairs, impersonal and pre-individual, neutral, neither general nor particular, *eventum tantum...*(151)

The point is the double structure: in Messianic redemption, the destructive and utopian elements are held together in tension, and the Deleuzian event occupies the precise point of that tension—its hiatus, its *and*.

The Messianic vision of redemption is the insight with which the allegorist is rewarded at the end of Benjamin’s *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*: it is through “visions of the frenzy of destruction,” “that grim store which signifies death and damnation,” that the allegorist is finally able to make “an about turn into salvation and redemption” (232). Just as “those who lose their footing turn somersaults in their fall,” the hopelessness of the allegorical landscape can vanish through the very intensification of that hopelessness. The loss of hope is accompanied by a sense of abandon that makes possible the embrace of the earthly, the creaturely. Everything that once evoked despair now becomes an object of wonder.

And this is the essence of melancholy immersion: that its ultimate objects, in which it believes it can most fully secure for itself that which is vile, turn into allegories, and that these allegories fill out and deny the void in which they are represented, just as, ultimately, the intention does not faithfully rest in the contemplation of bones, but faithlessly leaps forward to the idea of resurrection. (232-233)

The leap forward to redemption happens through the portal of the Messiah, through what Benjamin describes in “On the Concept of History” as “the small gateway in time through which the Messiah might enter” (SW4 397).<sup>32</sup> Messianic time is infinity, but infinity in a very specific cast: infinity as the finite. If infinity is understood as an endless process of production, then at every instant it is cut by what is finite and passing. In Messianic logic, the dead matter of the past ferments in the living flesh of the present; it understands that every moment that has been lived constitutes the moment that one presently lives, and the moment that one presently lives is itself passing into what has been lived. The historical materialist, as one operating within the logic of Messianic time, “grasps the constellation into which his own era has entered, along with a very specific earlier one. Thus, he establishes a conception of the present as now-time shot through with splinters of messianic time” (SW4 397). Messianic time is bound to memory, to the present force of the past. It is “the secret index by which [the past] is referred to redemption” (SW4 390). The images of ruins that litter the allegorical landscape evoked in the *Trauerspiel* study and the Arcades Project are objects for a form of contemplation in which Messianic time might be felt: the ruins are dialectical images, images in which

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<sup>32</sup> This phrase (“die kleine Pforte”), is an allusion to Martin Luther’s translation of Matthew 7:13-14, where the phrase “the narrow gate” (“die Enge Pforte”) appears: “Enter by the narrow gate...For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life.”

“the past can be seized only as an image that flashes up at the moment of its recognizability, and is never seen again” (SW4 390). In the Arcades Project, the dialectical tension between past and present is configured as a flash that brings thought to a standstill: “It is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words: image is dialectics at a standstill” [N3,1]. For the historical materialist, every historical moment must be viewed not as part of a linear chain of events, but as an image in which we recognize the present that is intended by it and this is how we become capable of blasting open the continuum of history.

This, I think, is what links Benjamin to Auerbach: if history itself is a series of citations or dialectical images, then it is the act of reading that brings those images to fulfillment, constellating the past with the present in “an image that flashes up at the moment of its recognizability, and is never seen again.” In the closing paragraph of his “Epilegomena to *Mimesis*,” Auerbach responds to the criticisms that his discussion was “all too time-bound and all too much determined by the present”: “It is better to be consciously than unconsciously time-bound...*Mimesis* is quite consciously a book that a particular person, in a particular situation, wrote at the beginning of the 1940s” (573-4). Auerbach is keenly aware of the limits of representation and the limits of criticism. He no doubt would agree with Giorgio Agamben’s view that the object of criticism can never be fully possessed: “Like all authentic quests, the quest of criticism consists not in discovering its object but in assuring the conditions of inaccessibility” (*Stanzas* xvi). Auerbach alludes to a “specific purpose” that guided him in his quest. Rather like Don

Quixote, it was one that “assumed form only as I went along, playing as it were with my texts, and for long stretches of my way I have been guided only by the texts themselves” (*Mimesis* 556). In the closing lines, this “specific purpose” assumes a final form: he hopes “to find him—to find the reader, that is,” and that his study will “contribute to bringing together again those whose love for our western history has serenely preserved” (557).

As Taubes discusses, love is bound to the Messianic logic of redemption. Where Auerbach views the transition from the Old Testament to the New in terms of prophecy and fulfillment, Taubes views it as the transition from creation to redemption: the leitmotif of the Old Testament is that of a barren woman clamoring for a child (Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Hannah), but in the New Testament, though Christ performs many of miracles, no woman ever beseeches him for a son.<sup>33</sup> Redemption stems from Paul’s concept, which was picked up by Marcion but subsequently dropped from the dominant development of church doctrine, of two Gods. Marcion, who considered himself to be Paul’s true disciple, taught a dual system in which the father of Jesus Christ is not God the creator, the Demiurge of the old testament. From “a Pauline-Marcionite perspective,” says Taubes, the “creator-god must have demonic qualities: He is powerful...but he has no interest at all in anything having to do with redemption” (57). Redemption therefore comes from the father of Jesus Christ, but the father can only be reached through the son, the divine through the earthly. Redemption therefore comes about only through the revealed figure of the Christ, and this accounts for the persistent figure of the face (*prosopon*) in Corinthians. Taubes argues that First Corinthians 13, while it “is certainly a

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<sup>33</sup> Taubes here anticipates an objection, but the story of John the Baptist’s conception, though of the New Testament, takes place before the birth of Christ.

lyrical hymn... is also an amazingly theoretically consistent text; there isn't one passage that is sentimental kitsch" (25). The text in question:

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profiteth me nothing. Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall be done away; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall be done away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child: now that I am become a man, I have put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know fully even as also I was fully known. But now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

Without love, there is nothing. Love makes everything possible—it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Prophecies, knowledge, language

and discourse are transient and partial, which love will make redundant because it brings all things to perfection or completeness (*teleios* is the original Greek word that is translated as “perfect” above). This coming to perfection or completeness is likened to a child becoming a man: in a state of completeness or perfection, one will look upon prophecy, knowledge, language and discourse as the playthings of childhood. One will see, “not through a mirror, darkly,” not through representation, but face to face. The motif of the revealed face appears a few more times in Corinthians. In Second Corinthians 3, for example, in which Paul famously writes that the “letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life,” the vision of the revealed face of God is opposed to veiled face of Moses. In Taubes’s reading of First Corinthians 13, he asks why, of faith hope, and love, should love be deemed greatest and answers: “Love is in the admission of my need...need consists in perfection itself. Just as it says in Second Corinthians: “Your power is made perfect in your weakness.” Telos, perfection, is a notion from mysticism, from the language of the Mysteries, but also from physics. And the punchline is: *en astheneia*, “in weakness”” (56)

In Benjamin’s understanding of Messianic redemption, weakness is cast as the creaturely, the profane. In his “Theologico-Political Fragment,” for example, a text that Taubes considers to be Benjamin’s most Pauline text, this is explicit:

The order of the profane should be erected on the idea of happiness...If one arrow points to the goal toward which the profane dynamic acts, and another marks the direction of Messianic intensity, then certainly the quest of free humanity for happiness runs counter to the Messianic direction; but just as a force can, through acting, increase another that is acting in the opposite direction, so the order of the

profane assists, through being profane, the coming of the Messianic Kingdom. The profane, therefore, though not itself a category of this Kingdom, is a decisive category of its quietest approach. (*Reflections* 312-4)<sup>34</sup>

Taubes reads this as a virtual recasting of Romans 8 and Romans 13; specifically, the “nature” of Romans 8, in which the whole of creation is depicted as “groaning in labor pains” (74). Where Benjamin diverges from Paul, however, is “the autonomy of that which he calls here the profane” (74). This is not, after all, the language of Schmitt, who, in contrast to Benjamin’s “profane,” pushes the concept of the “secular”: “All significant concepts of the modern state are secularized theological concepts” (*Political Theology*, 36). As Agamben argues in *Profanations*, secularization is “a form of repression which preserves intact the forces that it limits itself to merely displacing from one realm to another” (96). The profane is an entirely different category: it is not a secular recasting of the sacred, but precisely that which is *not* sacred. As Kenneth Reinhard argues, the “profane world...hastens the coming of the messianic era not by aspiring to emulate it, but by intensifying its own profanity, and thereby speeding its fall. The more the world follows its intrinsic drive to “happiness,” the more natural it becomes, subject to “passing away,” eternal decay, entropy” (14-15). In this decay and entropy, the profane becomes more profane, the human becomes more human, and in this way, “by intensifying the cut between the earthly and divine” (15), Messianic redemption may enter through a small gateway.

Paul figures love as weakness because it is characterized by need. But, paradoxically, this weakness is also our strength. Like Spinoza’s *conatus*, it a force that

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<sup>34</sup> The translation of this text that appears in the Selected Works unfortunately translates “profane” as “secular.”

propels us and cannot be characterized by lack. Brian Britt draws attention this idea of *power in weakness* (270): the text that precedes and influences Paul with the idea of a weak messiah, he argues, is Isaiah 9, 11 and 40-55. There, Isaiah develops a vision of a “suffering servant” who *redeems* Israel, and this word is rendered in Luther’s translation as *erlöst*. Not only do the terms *Erlösung* and *Erlöser* (redemption and redeemer) abound in Benjamin’s “On the Concept of History” (six times in an 11-page text) the word *erlöst* also appears in “One Way Street,” under the section entitled “To the Public: Please Protect and Preserve These New Plantings.” Benjamin begins this text by asking “what is “*erlöst*”?”<sup>35</sup> It is a plain enough question, but Benjamin’s answer is anything but. I quote his answer in full because it systematically touches on the key concerns of this chapter, and indeed this dissertation as a whole:

Do not all the questions of our lives, as we live remain behind us like foliage obstructing our view? To uproot this foliage, even to thin it out, does not occur to us. We stride on, leave it behind, and from a distance it is indeed to open view, but indistinct, shadowy, and all the more enigmatically entangled.

Commentary and translation stand in the same relation to the text as style and mimesis to nature: the same phenomenon considered from different aspects. On the tree of the sacred text, both are only the eternally rustling leaves; on that of the profane, the seasonally falling fruits.

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<sup>35</sup> SW1, 449. The translation unfortunately renders this as “solved,” not “redeemed.”

He who loves is attached not only to the “faults” of the beloved, not only to the whims and weaknesses of a woman. Wrinkles in the face, moles, shabby clothes, and a lopsided walk bind him more lastingly and relentlessly than any beauty. This has long been known. And why? If the theory is correct that feeling is not located in the head, that we sentiently experience a window, a cloud, a tree not in our brains but rather in the place where we see it, then we are, in looking at our beloved, too, outside ourselves. But in a torment of tension and rapture. Our feeling, dazzled, flutters like a flock of birds in the woman’s radiance. And as birds seek refuge in the leafy recesses of a tree, feelings escape into the shaded wrinkles, the awkward movements and inconspicuous blemishes of the body we love, where they can lie low in safety. And no passer-by would guess that it is just here, in what is defective and censurable, that the fleeting darts of adoration nestle. (SW1, 449)

In his rather cryptic answer to the question “what is redeemed?,” Benjamin thus moves, in the first paragraph, from the consideration of how a person relates to his or her own past, next to the critic or translator’s relation to the text and to the text’s relation to nature, and finally, in the third paragraph, to the lover’s relation to the beloved.

In the first case, the present may be redeemed—that is, disentangled from the causal, linear chain of events—if we look to the past, where the foliage crowds behind us. We look to the past, to our memories, and see in them images and citations by which the present may become a fulfilled or redeemed present, every instant a gateway through which the Messiah might enter. We establish *relations*, not the relation between a cause and effect, which would simply be the linear chain of causality, but a relation peculiar to

the image because history is not the past, but an image of the past, memories are not the past, but images of the past. From these images, we form a constellation by which we see the diagrammatic relations between events—that is, we grasp the past and the present immanently, not fused, but folded one within in the other.<sup>36</sup> From the “flash of recognition” of this constellation, we may be redeemed: as Benjamin states in “On the Concept of History” that “only a redeemed mankind is granted the fullness of its past—which is to say, only a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments” (SW4 390). Only by viewing the past as an image of the past, and not as a necessary stage in the chain of cause and effect, is the present able to reach its fullest potential, are we able to make the movement of infinity, and to possibly blast open the continuum of history.

In the second paragraph, the foliage image is continued: on the tree of the “sacred text” the artwork and art criticism are only the “eternally rustling leaves,” transient and subject to decay. The “sacred text” recalls Foucault’s concept of the “primal text,” but here Benjamin replaces the divine word with *nature*. As Benjamin states in the “Theologico-Political Fragment,” nature is “Messianic by reason of its eternal and total passing away.” Nature is the infinite, but we can only know it through the images of finitude that it produces: death, decay, ruins. Nature has precisely the “double structure of event” that Deleuze invokes with death: nature, in itself, has “no other present than that of the mobile instant which represents it” (*Logic of Sense* 151). It leaves behind citations

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<sup>36</sup> Deleuze and Guattari write extensively and in many different places about the diagrammatic features of the plane of immanence, but I am thinking in particular here about a passage from *What is Philosophy?*. They argue that elements of the plane should be understood as diagrammatic features, concepts as intensive features: “The former are movements of the infinite, whereas the latter are intensive ordinates of these movements...finite movements in which the infinite is now only speed” (39-40).

of that mobile instant, images not of its life but of its afterlife, its fallen leaves. Benjamin suggests that the artist who cites or represents nature *redeems* nature and that the critic who cites or interprets the artwork *redeems* the artwork: in both cases, the artist and the critic call out to what is infinite in the finite.

Finally, in the third paragraph, Benjamin makes a statement about love. The kind of love that can redeem is not the kind that is held in thrall to beauty; rather, it seeks out what is most intensely creaturely about the beloved, what is most natural, weak, profane. Love, as Paul said, is a need: it drives us outside ourselves. It drives us to persevere in our being, in our essence, which is not at all the same thing as the identity we passively and passionately assume within the discourse of man. Love produces a “torment of tension and ravishment” precisely because it destroys that identity: we are compelled to deterritorialize, to become outcasts, to wander errantly. We are drawn to the leafy recesses, the “the awkward movements and inconspicuous blemishes of the body we love,” not only for their greater guarantee of safety, but because, as Benjamin writes in the “Theological-Political Fragment,” the pursuit of happiness in that which is profane, earthly, creaturely, is not the foreclosure of the Messianic Kingdom, but rather “its quietest approach.”

One of the few places in his published writings in which Benjamin mentions Auerbach is his essay on Surrealism. It is telling that Benjamin uses the preeminent scholar of realism to cast light on surrealism, and Auerbach may well have approved of such a move. In the “Epilogomena,” Auerbach broaches the question of what he actually means by the subtitle of *Mimesis*, “The Representation of Reality in Western Literature,” and comments: “Perhaps I would have done better to call it “existential realism,” but I

hesitated to use this all too contemporary term for phenomena of the distant past” (561). Benjamin quotes from Auerbach’s “excellent” *Dante: Poet of the Secular World*: “All the poets of the ‘new style’...possess a mystical beloved; they all have approximately the same very curious experience of love. To them all, Amor bestows or withholds gifts that resemble an illumination more than sensual pleasure; all are subject to a kind of secret bond that determines their inner and perhaps also their outer lives” (qtd. in Benjamin, *SW2* 210). Benjamin uses this passage to explain André Breton’s research into the courts of love during the reign of Louis VII, and the resonances of that research in his surrealist romance *Nadja*. Breton opens this novel by asking “Who am I?” and then describes himself as split into two entities: the man who can be identified as man and who exists among other men, and the ghost of “what I must have ceased to be in order to be *who I am*” (11):

My image of the “ghost,” including everything conventional about its appearance as well as its blind submission to certain contingencies of time and place, is particularly significant for me as the finite representation of a torment that may be eternal. Perhaps my life is nothing but an image of this kind; perhaps I am doomed to retrace my steps under the illusion that I am exploring, doomed to try and learn what I should simply recognize, learning a mere fraction of what I have forgotten. This sense of myself seems inadequate only insofar as it presupposes myself, arbitrarily preferring a completed image of my mind which need not be reconciled with time, and insofar as it implies—within this same time—an idea of the irreparable loss, of punishment, of a fall whose lack of moral basis is, as I see it, indisputable. What matters is that the particular aptitudes my day-to-day life

gradually reveals should not distract me from my search for a general aptitude which would be peculiar to me and which is not innate. Over and above the various prejudices I acknowledge, the affinities I feel, the attractions I succumb to, the events which occur to me and to me alone—over and above a sum of movements I am conscious of making, of emotions I alone experience—I strive, in relation to other men, to discover the nature, if not the necessity, of my difference from them. Is it not precisely to the degree I become conscious of this difference that I shall recognize what I alone have been put on this earth to do, what unique message I alone may bear, so that I alone can answer for its fate?  
(12-13)

For Benjamin, Breton's quest to realize his singular difference, to break with his identity (*who* I am) and to recover the ghost, the fallen leaves of that which he has ceased to be, is fundamentally a quest for emancipation from the order of life as defined for him before he arrived in it. Breton makes "the streets, gates, squares of the city into illustrations of a trashy novel," and yet at the same time he "draws off the banal obviousness...to inject it with the most pristine intensity towards the events described" (SW2 211). Herein lies the revolutionary potential of the surrealist movement, one that rivals even that released by the *Communist Manifesto* (218). Through the intensification of profanity, of trashiness, the everyday becomes a small portal through which the Messiah might enter and out of which a line of flight may be drawn. Benjamin sees in courtly love and in surrealism the expression of "philosophical realism," that is, "the belief in a real, separate existence of concepts whether inside of outside things" (SW2 212). It is an "image space" in which "political materialism and physical creaturliness share the inner man, the psyche, the

individual, or whatever else we wish to throw to them, with dialectical injustice, so that no limb remains untorn” (217). Through this image space we may cross the black hole, because the image space initiates us into “profane illumination,” from which a “revolutionary discharge” may be released (SW2 217). The figure of Nadja, thus becomes, in Breton’s novel, a figure through which is expressed the quest for “human emancipation—conceived in its simplest revolutionary form” (*Nadja* 142).

She was born to serve it, if only by demonstrating that around himself each individual must foment a private conspiracy, which exists not only from his imagination—of which it would be best, from the standpoint of knowledge alone, to take account—but also—and much more dangerously—by thrusting ones’s head, then an arm, out of the jail—thus shattered—of logic, that is, out of the most hateful of prisons. (143)

## SUR-FACE

Nothing is more fragile than the surface.

—Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*.

This chapter is concerned with the veil and the veiled, the surface of images and their innermost meaning. More specifically, it is about the figure of Silenus that Alcibiades invokes towards the end of Plato's *Symposium*. Apparently quite a common statue—"You know the kind of statue I mean; you'll find one in any shop in town," says Alcibiades (215a)<sup>37</sup>—Silenus is a statue of a satyr that splits down the middle to reveal an interior that is full of tiny golden statues of the gods. Alcibiades, who has just arrived at the Symposium drunk, late and lovesick, asserts that Socrates is just like this figure because, in spite of his physical ugliness and his tendency to "make the same tired old points in the same tired old words" (221e), if one catches Socrates, as Alcibiades once did, when he is in a serious mood and "open like Silenus statues" (216e), he will completely transport you with his words, trounce anyone in debate, and cause beautiful and desirable young men (such as Alcibiades) to fall hopelessly in love with him, even though he continually spurns their sexual advances. The overwhelming critical tendency is to read the *Symposium* Platonically; in other words, to make Socrates and his speech

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<sup>37</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, I use Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff's translation from C. D. C. Reeve, *Plato on Love: Lysis, Symposium, Phaedrus, Alcibiades, with Selections from Republic and Laws* (Hackett Publishing Company, Inc: Indianapolis, 2006).

the locus of the text's meaning and to relegate Alcibiades to a comic role and cautionary tale of how one should *not* love.<sup>38</sup> I propose instead to take the character of Alcibiades very seriously.

In the first section of this chapter, I pursue a reading of the *Symposium* that foregrounds the Silenus statue and Alcibiades, how they function within the dialogue, how they complicate and undermine the figure of Socrates, and how they disrupt the Platonic understanding of writing, truth, and love. The Silenus statue is an image that expresses a duality between the veil and the veiled, surface and meaning, language and truth, dualities that lie at the heart of the problem of representation. The critique of representation has been articulated in many ways: by Jacques Derrida in his concept of *differánce*; by Jean-Luc Nancy in his understanding of “sense”; by Kierkegaard in his concept of repetition; and finally, by Gilles Deleuze, who recasts the concept of difference and repetition as a question of ethics. In my discussion of these critiques, I try to reframe the question of representation as one that fundamentally concerns the nature of love, because in its most basic and therefore most important sense, the image of the Silenus statue is used by Alcibiades to express not only how he views his beloved

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<sup>38</sup> For Platonic readings of *the Symposium*, see for example: R. E. Allen, *Plato's Symposium* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1991); Rachel Barney, “Eros and Necessity in the Ascent from the Cave”, *Ancient Philosophy*, 2008:28(2): 357–372; Richard Bett, “Immortality and the Nature of the Soul in the *Phaedrus*” *Phronesis* 31 (1986): 1–26; R. G. Bury, *The Symposium of Plato*. 2d ed. (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1973); James Davidson, *Courtesans and Fishcakes: The Consuming Passions of Classical Athens*. (London: St. Martin's P, 1998); K. J. Dover, *Plato's Symposium*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Ferrari, G., “Platonic Love,” *The Cambridge Companion to Plato* (248–276), ed. Richard Kraut (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992); Richard Foley, “The Order Question: Climbing the Ladder of Love in Plato's Symposium”, *Ancient Philosophy*, 30(1):57–72, Spring 2010; Richard Hunter, *Plato's Symposium* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004); Kraut, Richard, “Plato on Love”, *The Oxford Handbook of Plato* (286–310), ed. G. Fine (New York: Oxford UP, 2008); James Leshner, *Plato's Symposium: Issues in Interpretation and Reception* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2007); C. D. C. Reeve, “Telling the Truth About Love: Plato's *Symposium*,” *The Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* (1992) VIII: 89–114; Frisbee C. C. Sheffield, *Plato's Symposium: The Ethics of Desire* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 2006).

Socrates and became enslaved to him as a student and a lover, but also his frustration at being unable to ever physically possess him.

In the second and third sections, I discuss the *Symposium* as it pertains to Shelley's poetry and poetics and to Benjamin's understanding of the literary text and the task of criticism, particularly that put forward in his *Trauerspiel* study. In neither case has the *Symposium* been given much critical attention: in the case of Shelley, this is perhaps due to the early characterization of his poetry, first by the Victorians and then later by the New Critics in America and T.S. Eliot in Britain, as "idealist," and the post-structuralist rehabilitation of his reputation since then has generally tended to minimize the role of Plato in his poetics, as though to cleanse Shelley of idealism one must also cleanse him of Plato<sup>39</sup>; in the case of Benjamin, beyond remarking that Benjamin's understanding of the Idea is similar to the Platonic concept of the idea, no critic has asked why Benjamin would focus on the *Symposium* and not on another Platonic text. This is not an unfair question: the *Symposium* is a curious choice given that, first of all, the theory of ideas is not one of its major themes, and secondly, the concept of love is. The *Symposium* is also

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<sup>39</sup> Shelley's supposed "idealism" seems to rest mainly on the shoulders of the Victorian and mid-century opinion-makers that thusly characterized him. Donald Reiman and Neil Fraisant provide a summary of the public comments made by Arnold, Chesterton, Dowden, John Crowe Ransom, and Eliot in "Shelley's Reputation Before 1960: A Sketch" (in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, Norton Critical Edition, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Reiman and Fraisant).

As Hugh Roberts has helpfully pointed out, whenever Shelley's idealism has been invoked in recent critical commentaries, seldom are specific examples of Shelley's idealism given or a definition of his idealism supplied: "It is equally revealing," he further comments, "that in Curran's bibliography [Stuart Curran, "Percy Bysshe Shelley, in *The English Romantic Poets: A Review of Research and Criticism*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. John Clubbe et al., 593-663 (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1985)] after having disposed of the Shelley-as-Platonist question in the "Shelley's Thought" section, he does not even address the question of other possible frameworks for Shelley's idealism" (Roberts, *Shelley and the Chaos of History*, 81n).

For a comprehensive account of the post-structuralist rehabilitation of Shelley, see *The New Shelley: Later Twentieth-Century Views*, ed. Kim Blank (New York: St. Martin's P, 1991). In his essay in this book, Woodman goes so far as to describe Shelley as "one of Deconstruction's recognizable and acknowledged founding fathers" (177).

more than an exploration of romantic love, however. As a philosophical text, the discussion of love implicitly foregrounds the conditions of philosophy's own being—philosophy, the love of knowledge. Though Benjamin spends little time on the subject of love in the *Trauerspiel*, the entire text foregrounds an understanding of the relationship between reader and text as an erotic orbit around its object: the text keeps its clothes on, and the reader seeks its hidden truth as "its lover, not as its pursuer."

Besides their evidently high regard for *Symposium*, there are further correspondences between Shelley and Benjamin that have caused them both to be drawn together in this chapter. Both suffered tragic, untimely deaths, and since those deaths have been elevated into romantic figures, receptacles for our common desires and phantasies about poetry, genius, and tragedy. They themselves have become figures, signs cut off from bodies. As figures, they inspire sympathy primarily because, in spite of their great talent, they were both marked by extreme human frailty. Michael Taussig, in "Walter Benjamin's grave," recounts stories of Benjamin's final weeks in France—how he could barely hold a cup of hot tea but was nonetheless considered a "holy man," how he was an embodiment, according to one person, of "the tragic conflict between thought and action."<sup>40</sup> Like the misunderstood Alcibiades, Benjamin seems to have cut a pathetic figure. Hannah Arendt describes Benjamin as caught in "a net woven of merit, great gifts, clumsiness and misfortune" and accounts for the bad luck that plagued him by invoking the story of "the little hunchback," the folkloric figure who would cause children to accidentally trip or make them drop things and them to break, which Benjamin describes in "Berlin Childhood": "Anyone whom this little man looks at pays no attention—not to

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<sup>40</sup> Michael Taussig, "Walter Benjamin's Grace," *Walter Benjamin's Grave* 3-33 (Chicago, U of Chicago P, 2006).

himself and not to the little man. In consternation he stands before a pile of debris.”<sup>41</sup> Arendt's Benjamin bears an uncanny resemblance to the angel of history described in the "Theses on the Philosophy of History": “His eyes are wide, his mouth is open, his wings are spread...[The] storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky” (SW4, 392). Had Benjamin made it to the Spanish border just one day earlier, he would have made it across the border into Spain and escaped German-occupied France; instead, he took his own life. Shelley's death at sea at age of twenty-nine was no less tragic, such that his texts, as Paul de Man has commented, have been viewed as “epitaphs and monumental graves,” the ultimate expression of signs without bodies.<sup>42</sup> Michael Palmer is justifiably reminded of Shelley in Benjamin's description of the angel of history. For Palmer, the “inscrutable expression” of the angel is the very image of Shelley: “We might even imagine him as the Angel of Poetry, whose many faces are like the multiple Shelleys which, since his death, have been imagined or posited or projected towards our time” (38).

Correspondances notwithstanding, there are more concrete points of intersection between Benjamin and Shelley. There is one famous mention of Shelley in the *Arcades Project* when Benjamin pronounces him to have a “grasp” on allegory that Baudelaire notably lacks (J81, 6). With this grasp, Shelley “rules over allegory”; without this grasp, “Baudelaire is ruled by it.” The “allegory” of Shelley's that Benjamin is referring to, however, is “Peter Bell the Third,” a satiric send-up of Wordsworth's “Peter Bell,” which Shelley sent to Leigh Hunt in 1819 with the instructions “to print & publish

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<sup>41</sup> Hannah Arendt, “Reflections: Walter Benjamin,” *The New Yorker*, Digital Edition, October 19<sup>th</sup>, 1968.

<sup>42</sup> Paul de Man, “Shelley Disfigured,” *Rhetoric of Romanticism*, 121.

immediately... NOT however with my name...as I have only expended a few days on this party squib...& and am about to publish more serious things this winter.”<sup>43</sup> Since only a handful of Shelley’s poems were available in German translation at this time and the “party squib” was not one of them, Benjamin appears to have relied on Brecht’s translation of “Peter Bell the Third” and it is quite possible that Benjamin was not fully aware that Shelley’s “allegory” was intended as a mere “party squib.”<sup>44</sup> Perhaps there is a sense, then, of having missed each other, in the same way that the significance of Alcibiades is so frequently missed, and in much the same way as the *Symposium* is the

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<sup>43</sup> From a letter to Leigh Hunt, dated November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1819. Quoted in *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*, 338.

<sup>44</sup> With a few notable exceptions, the Shelley-Brecht-Benjamin matrix has received very little scholarly attention. Steven Jones’s *Shelley’s Satire* mentions the connections between Brecht, Benjamin and Shelley in a footnote, which discusses Benjamin’s inclusion of a one-stanza quotation and two-line analysis from “Peter Bell the Third” that was included in his “The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire” essay and is an apparently unpublished Brecht translation (183-84, n.24). The fragment in Convolute J is an extended version of this analysis. Another source that documents this relationship, and the one I am relying on here, is Robert Kaufman’s essay “Intervention and Commitment forever! Shelley in 1819, Shelley in Brecht, Shelley in Adorno, Shelley in Benjamin.” According to Kaufman, most non-English speaking Germans heretofore relied on Alfred Wolfenstein’s 1922 translations of Shelley. The *Dichtungen* included excerpts from *Adonais*, *Hellas* and *Prometheus Unbound*, and the entirety of shorter works such as “Alastor,” “Ode to the West Wind,” and “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty.” Though this was by no means an exhaustive collection, Wolfenstein’s afterword was “quite an undertaking,” according to Kaufman:

[Wolfenstein] insists on the radical unity of Shelley’s work, the ways that the seemingly idealist and activist modes inhere within each other. He specifically transvalues—or bounces off Swinbourne’s transvaluation—of the Arnoldian “Shelley the ineffectual angel,” conceding that Shelley *was* angelic, provided one remembers the terrifying nature of angelic presence. Bringing together *Prometheus Unbound*, *The Defence of Poetry*, the *Mask*, various Hölderlin poems, and a string of allusions highly resonant for a left German tradition that tended to think in terms of Promethean assaults on the heavens (from Goethe’s work, to Marx’s and Engel’s lines about the Parisian Communards having “stormed heaven itself”), Wolfenstein maintains that Shelley’s “idealism” is best understood as poetry’s fierce judgement of a world built on oppression and suffering (Nachwort 87-94).

One may readily discern from this the ease with which Shelley was co-opted into the German left tradition.

Robert Kaufman, “Intervention and Commitment forever! Shelley in 1819, Shelley in Brecht, Shelley in Adorno, Shelley in Benjamin,” *Romantic Circles Praxis Series*, Reading Shelley’s Interventionist Poetry, 1819-1820 (April 2009)

<<http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/interventionist/kaufman/kaufman.html>>

very text that is missed by this text. The *Symposium* comes to me, as it did for Benjamin and for Shelley, through various translations: multiplicatively, repetitively, through copies without origin.

### **I. Silenus**

The conventional approach to the *Symposium* is to frame Diotima's speech as the culminating point of the dialogue: since it is Socrates who reports the speech, this speech is taken to represent the Platonic statement on love. John Brenkman is one of the few critics who deviates from this approach. Citing Derrida and Lacan, the stated aim of his analysis of the *Symposium* is "to reconcile the practice of the deconstructive reading with that of the materialist rewriting" (Brenkman 429). According to Brenkman, the *Symposium* is situated between philosophy and literature: as a philosophical text, it presents "the idealist discourse on desire as it emerges and takes shape through a series of speeches that culminates with Socrates' account of love and philosophy"; as a literary text, it frames the "fragmented narrative of a drama in which the course a philosophical reflection is already interwoven with the paths of desire" (317). But the first part of this claim, which splits the "philosophical discourse" apart from the literary narrative, is problematic. If Socrates's account of love and philosophy is to be described as the culminating point of the philosophical discourse of the text, then his speech must be read in complete isolation from the rest of the speeches in the dialogue and the logic of "if it's Socrates saying it, then it must be true" pursued, which is a very faulty logic because it denies any presence Socratic irony.

Since the *Symposium* is composed of multiple framing devices (Apollodorus

recounting the story of what happened at the Symposium, an event which took place many years ago and at which he himself was not present, to an unnamed Friend, and relying on the account of Aristodemus, who was there, to do so), and it takes the form of a dramatic monologue in which each character is given space to deliver long, uninterrupted speeches on the topic of love, there is no single, direct point of view presented. Without an omniscient narrator or any central persona, the “philosophical discourse” must be looked for not in any one speech, and certainly not in that of the trickster Socrates, but rather in the sum of its parts. Each of the speakers in the Symposium deliver speeches in a measured manner that is thoroughly detached from the content of those speeches, including that of Socrates, whose speech is in fact second-hand, having heard it from Diotima first. But when Alcibiades drunkenly arrives, the narrative concentrates into a point of emotive intensity thus far unprecedented. While all of the other participants attempt to impress Socrates with their highly-mannered speeches, and Socrates’s own speech is no less controlled, Alcibiades’s eulogy to Socrates is the only one that is presented as issuing from the lived experience of its speaker. The urgency and emotional power of his speech undermines all of the speeches that came before it. Alcibiades effectively, as the modern parlance goes, shuts it down: there are no more speakers once his speech is finished, and there “was noise everywhere, and everyone was made to start drinking again in no particular order” (222b). Mere lines later, we find Socrates relentlessly holding forth to Agathon and Aristophanes like a boorish pedant as they struggle to keep awake.

...Socrates was trying to prove to them that authors should be able to write both comedy and tragedy: the skillful dramatist should also be a comic poet. He was

about to clinch his argument, though, to tell the truth, sleepy as they were they were hardly able to follow his reasoning. In fact, Aristophanes fell asleep in the middle of the discussion, and very soon after, as day was breaking, Agathon also drifted off. (223d)

In *The Use of Pleasure*, Michel Foucault argues that the meaning that should “doubtless” be given to the *Symposium* is that the hunger for wisdom and truth is to be valorized over the sexual appetite, renunciation and abstention over carnal pleasure (241). A “new figure,” in the shape of Socrates, thus makes its appearance in the west: “that of the master, coming to take the place of the lover; moreover, this personage, through the complete mastery that he exercises over himself, will turn the game upside down, reverse the roles, establish the principle of renunciation of the aphrodisia, and become, for all young men who are eager for truth, an object of love.” But it seems to me that there is much reason to doubt this “meaning”; namely, that the final image of Socrates with which the dialogue closes is hardly admirable. He is so absorbed by his mind that he is cut off not only from his own body, but from his surroundings too, to the extent that he continues his monologue even though his audience is exhausted and falling asleep.

Brenkman would agree that Alcibiades’s arrival and subsequent speech is the most important moment in the dialogue. However, he insists on presenting this reading as a subversive “rewriting” of the text. He claims that *the text* “lets Socrates’s discourse appear triumphant,” and that his reading is one that “the text itself shuns” (404). He claims that the “instability” in the text that arises due to the disputes among the participants in the *Symposium* are “in general *designed* to protect the system itself” (my italics) (403). He asserts that “the narrative seems to treat Alcibiades’ disruption as no

more than a playful, less meaningful supplement to the seriousness of the philosophical debate.” Aligning his reading with that of Lacan and Freud, he describes his reading as “unrestrained”; in contrast, the reading that is *encouraged by the narrative’s organization* is “restrained”:

The restrained reading, encouraged by the narrative’s organization, would relegate Alcibiades’ discourse to a secondary status within a well known set of oppositions: his remarks can easily be viewed as anecdotal rather than philosophical, comic rather than serious, drunken rather than sober, bodily rather than spiritual. The narrative structure of the Symposium, its presentation as a second-hand account, further underscores this devaluation of Alcibiades’ discourse by helping to explain away the failure of Socrates’ speech to maintain its central and triumphant position in the dialogue. Alcibiades, according to this reading, provides a mere side-show on the margins of philosophy. His role is part of the Symposium’s entertainment but not its meaning. (452)

Finally, Brenkman states his reason for making these claims for the text: Alcibiades in each case represents the inferior half of the oppositions, so we’re not meant to take him too seriously. But Brenkman has to ignore so much textual evidence in order to make this claim—the fact that all of the oppositions present each part as essential to the other, that Socrates spends the rest of the night arguing that comedy and tragedy are arts requiring equal skill, that Alcibiades’s love for Socrates is primarily spiritual rather than bodily, that he fell in love with Socrates, in spite of his physical ugliness, and continues to love him even though Socrates refuses to requite the passion. Earlier in his argument, Brenkman asserts that the oppositions and values (earthly and heavenly love; body and

soul; matter and idea; paternal and maternal; man and woman) presented by each speaker are “never open to question” (399), even though each of the opposition-sets is contested by the other characters who wish to replace the preceding speaker’s opposition with their own, so the oppositions are dismantled even as they are constructed. Brenkman remarks that the final opposition between lover and beloved, “while belonging to this entire series, does not thoroughly conform to the other oppositions; it will, however, be pivotal to Socrates’ effort to fuse a theory of desire with the practice of philosophy” (401). Though it logically follows that this final opposition, in magnetizing both elements, drawing them into proximity with one another but repelling their fusion, has implications for the other oppositions that preceded it, Brenkman does not comment on this.

Making “Plato” pedagogical shorthand for Platonism often results in critical mishaps: Brenkman is intent on arguing that the *Symposium*, at least in the *restrained* reading, “makes the theory of desire go hand in hand with the foundations of the metaphysics of presence” (448), but by peppering his essay with assertions that *Plato himself* deposited signs in the text that indicate the way he *intended* it to be read (and also other signs that produce a completely opposite meaning), that there is a self-present meaning (and also an unconscious, supplemental, accidental or absent one), that the *Symposium* testifies for Plato and that Plato testifies for Platonism, he participates in that very metaphysics. However, it should be noted that Brenkman’s article was published in 1977, at a time when literary theorists were consciously, and perhaps for the first time, reading texts against the traditional grain: deconstruction expanded the possibilities of what literary critics could do and this included challenging traditional interpretations and the view, for example, that Plato is Platonic. Barbara Johnson, in her introduction to the

1981 English translation of Derrida's *Disseminations*, and referring specifically to the essay on the *Phaedrus*, "Plato's Pharmacy," asserts that what "Derrida does in his reading of Plato is to unfold those dimensions of Plato's *text* that work against the grain of (Plato's own) Platonism" (xxv). Reading this today, that bracketed term seems otiose because the larger implications of Derrida's project question whether anything in Platonism can justifiably be termed "Plato's own": language only ever speaks for and about itself.

In "Plato's Pharmacy," Derrida unsettles the Platonic distinction between the spoken or original word and its written copy, and thereby disrupts the easy identification of Plato with Platonism. This is particularly evident in the portrait of Plato we encounter at the very end, in which Plato attempts "to separate the good from the bad, the true from the false" and fails because the signs simply repeat each other endlessly, blurring the stamp that would have made them identifiable. It would be one thing (literally) if each repetition simply replaced the repetition that preceded it, but since the repetitions are not identical to one another, they cannot act as substitutes. Rather, each adds to the pile up: one, after another, and another. Realizing this, he abandons the project and settles down to "finish that Second Letter":

Consider these facts and take care lest you sometime come to repent of having now unwisely published your views. It is a very great safeguard to learn by heart instead of by writing ... It is impossible for what is written not to be disclosed. That is the reason why I have never written anything about these things ... and why there is not and will not be any written work of Plato's own. What are now called his ... are the work of a Socrates embellished and modernized. Farewell

and believe. Read this letter now at once many times and burn it... (170)

Derrida thus places “Plato” outside the text, manipulating the surrogate Socrates to make claims that he knows to be false, to make him his scapegoat, but Socrates’s position inside the text is as unstable as Plato’s position outside: they are both enclosed by another outer layer, layers upon layers, “a web that envelopes a web” (63). Plato is not in control. He composes in language and is himself composed by language, and he cannot step outside language because its outer limits continually recede, layer after layer after layer—a *repetition without identity*, a *double mark*, which is the very structure of *differánce* (4). There is a suggestion in “Plato’s Pharmacy” that Plato’s relation to Socrates is akin to that of Thoth to Ra: Ra, the father, the god of speech, the sun and life, and Thoth, his son, the god of writing, the night and death. Thoth is bound to take the place of the father, and by passing into his Other, Thoth actually opposes himself, becoming “the absolute passage between opposites” and the “god of nonidentity” since he is the father, his son, and himself all at the same time: “He cannot be assigned a fixed spot in the play of differences. Sly, slippery, and masked, and intriguer and a card, like Hermes, he is neither King nor Jack, but rather a sort of joker, a floating signifier, a wild card, one who puts play into play” (93). Plato floats in and out of Socrates, making of him his *pharmakon*, his poison and cure, and also his *pharmakos*, the scapegoat. The scapegoat infects the inside from the outside, and yet “the representative of the outside is nonetheless constituted, regularly granted its place by the community, chosen, kept, fed, etc., in the very heart of the inside” (133). Plato-Socrates is Thoth-Ra: which is to say, language itself.

That there is no inside or outside of the text, does not mean that language is to be

thought of as an undifferentiated mass in which the ontology of presence and of the One would be *replaced* by an ontology either of absence or of the many/multiple: “if reading and writing are one, as is easily thought these days, if reading is writing, this oneness designates neither undifferentiated (con)fusion nor identity at perfect rest; the *is* that couples reading with writing must rip apart” (64). The *is* of ontology is what must be continually deconstructed, which is the project of *differánce*:

Differánce, the disappearance of any originary presence, is *at once* the condition of possibility and the condition of impossibility of truth. At once. “At once” means that the being-present (on) in its truth, in the presence of its identity and the identity of its presence, is doubled as soon as it appears, as soon as it presents itself. It appears, in its essence, as the possibility of its own most proper non-truth, of its pseudo-truth reflected in the icon, the phantasm or the simulacrum. What is is not what it is, identical and identical to itself, unique, unless it *adds to itself* the possibility of being *repeated* as such. And its identity is hollowed out by that addition, withdraws itself in the supplement that presents it. (168)

According to Derrida, if anything is to usurp the old ideas of truth, presence, ontology, it is the wild card of *differánce*, an operation or movement that hinges on the mysterious little *a* that cannot be heard, that exists below the surface that sounds, but is the variable that is repeated in infinite variations. It is a “tiny difference that, in separating the imitator from the imitated...[renders] the imitator absolutely different” (139). If a repetition were simply a perfectly identical imitation, it would cease to be an imitation because it would become one with the imitated. For an imitation to be an imitation, it has to be “in some way at fault or rather in default.” A perfect imitation is not an imitation; an imitation can

only be an imitation in so far as it is bad, and in that case, it ceases to really imitate: “For imitation affirms and sharpens its essence in effacing itself. Its essence is nonessence” (139).

The little *a* undermines the idea of the platonic One, and the concept of repetition unsettles the metaphysics of presence. We have looked at how this functions in terms of language, but in sense might this also be part of the mechanism of love? Jean-Luc Nancy locates ontology and the problem of difference and identity in the phrase *hoc est enim corpus meum*, a phrase that is reiterated in religious rites and rituals to invoke the presence of the One, and which, “in the realm of our sentences [is] perhaps *the* repetition par excellence” (3). In pronouncing this sentence,

We have to insist: “I’m telling you truly that *hoc est enim*, and that I’m the one saying this: who else would be so sure of my presence *in flesh and blood*? And so this certainty will be yours, along with this body that you’ll have incorporated.” But the anxiety doesn’t stop there: what’s this *this*, who is the body? This, the one I show you, but *every* “this”? All the certainty of a “this,” of “thises”? *All that*? Sensory certitude, as soon as it is touched, turns into chaos, a storm where all senses run wild. (5)

The little *a* that is inaudible in *differánce* is “sense”—what *hoc est enim corpus meum* tries to say, lay hold of and name, is something that is beyond the realm of the signifying system. But this does not mean that *hoc est enim corpus meum* makes no sense. The sense of *hoc est enim corpus meum* is what is repeated in the repetition. This is what leads Nancy to assert that ontology “is affirmed as writing,” because writing is “a gesture toward *touching upon sense*” (17). The writer’s currency is the little *a*: to make sense, he

“sends himself *to* the touch of something outside, hidden, displaced, spaced” (17). Nancy locates the “is” of ontology in this rocking back and forth between inside and outside. The writer’s touch is like a pharmakos, a double-agent that neither the inside nor outside wants to or can claim: “His very touch, which is certainly *his* touch, is in principle withdrawn, spaced, displaced. It *is*: may the foreign contact draw near, with the foreigner remaining foreign in that contact (remaining a stranger *to* contact *in* contact: that’s the whole point about touching, the touch of bodies” (17-19).

Where Derrida insists that the little *a* of *differánce* is, for the repetition or bad imitation, a “(de)fault inscribed within it,” Nancy locates sense at the site of exscription, at the point where bodies touch. The inside and outside, inscription and exscription, Ra and Thoth, must be understood as enfolded within a single movement, but not fused. We can consider this kind of folding from the perspective of the “ideal fold” that Deleuze describes in *The Fold*. The ideal fold, the best kind of fold, is one that preserves the difference between the two elements while also acknowledging their inseparability from one another and is exemplified by the Heideggerian *Zweifalt*:

When Heidegger calls upon the *Zweifalt* to be the differentiator of difference, he means above all that differentiation does not refer to a pregiven undifferentiated, but to a Difference that endlessly unfolds and folds over from each of its two sides, and that unfolds the one only while refolding the other, in a coextensive unveiling and veiling of Being, of presence and of withdrawal of being. (*The Fold* 33-34)

The problem with the Platonic paradigm of the fold, according to Deleuze, is that, at least in the *The Republic* and the *Timaeus*, it presupposes “a common measure of two terms

that are mixed” (42). In mixture, the formal element of the fold is lost—things are either “lost in the upper order of the One” above or “disintegrated in the ocean of the multiple” below (33). But this division seems to be ordered differently in the *Symposium*, at least if we read it as I am suggesting. Alcibiades twice describes Socrates as a Silenus statue: “But I once caught him when he was open like Silenus’ statues, and I had a glimpse of the figures he keeps hidden within: they were so godlike—so bright and beautiful, so utterly amazing—that I had no choice—I just had to do whatever he told me” (217a). Later on, he realizes that Socrates’s way of speaking is also like the Silenus statues:

Come to think of it, I should have mentioned this much earlier: even his arguments are just like those hollow statues of Silenus. If you were to listen to his arguments, at first they’d strike you as totally ridiculous; they’re clothed in words as coarse as the hides worn by the most vulgar satyrs. He’s always going on about pack asses, or blacksmiths, or cobblers, or tanners; he’s always making the same tired old points in the same tired old words. If you are foolish, or simply unfamiliar with him, you’d find it impossible not to laugh at his arguments. But if you see them when they are open up like the statues, if you go behind the surface, you’ll see that no other arguments make any sense. They’re truly worthy of a god, bursting with figurines of virtue inside. They’re of great—no, of greatest—importance for anyone who wants to become a truly good man. (221e-222a)

The body of Socrates and the language of Socrates are Silenic: and in both cases, “Socrates” is a cipher without essence, a surface charged by the multiplicitous gods within. Let us consider this idea through Nancy’s dissection of *hoc est enim corpus meum*, which he performs in stages. First, Nancy defines what the body is: the body is a

place. But the body does not have an outside or an inside as such; it is rather a skin that is “variously folded, refolded, unfolded, multiplied, invaginated, exogastrulated, orificed, evasive, invaded” and so on (15). In other words, the body is “acephalic and aphallic”: the outside is always entering the body through some pore or orifice or other, composing and decomposing the inside, just as the inside dwells in the outside, abiding, existing, emitting and excreting into it. Since nothing can exist without a place, without a “here” or a “there” or a “this,” it follows that the body is truly the “being of existence” (15). Thus, the ontology of the body is “ontology itself,” though it is an ontology “without essence” (since the body has no essence), and this is why ontology is “affirmed in writing” (17). Nancy’s project is thus to inaugurate a new kind of ontology, one that is *without essence*. He claims that an “entirely different articulation of *hoc est enim*” is coming (39). In contrast to the “weak discourse about appearance and spectacle...[that] is only a Christian discourse on transubstantiation, but lacking substance,” what is coming is “*whatever images show us*” (39). In other words, surfaces, skin, bodies— charged with sense. To see bodies in this way, a “just clarity” is required:

To see bodies is not to unveil a mystery; it is seeing what is there to be seen, an image, the crowd of images that the body is, the naked image, stripping areality bare. Images of this kind are foreign to any imagining and any appearance—and any interpretation as well, any deciphering. There is nothing to decipher in a body—except for the fact that the body’s cipher is the body itself, not ciphered, just extended. The sight of bodies does not penetrate anything invisible: it is the accomplice of the visible—of the ostentation and extension that the visible is.

Complicity, consent: the one who compears with what he sees. That is how they can be discerned, according to the infinitely finite measure of just clarity. (47)

That this “clarity” would be “just” indicates that the coming ontology has important ethical implications. But for now, we have not yet arrived to this clarity: “We remain in the solar order whose sovereign blaze is no clearer than lunar ice, its opposite...(solar thinking sacrifices bodies, lunar thinking phantasmagorizes them: taken together, they compose the Aztec-Austrian System—in a word, Metaphysics)” (47).

Brenkman interprets the *Symposium* according to the Austrian rule, replacing the pure presence of ontology with the “pure loss” of lack from which desire issues (417). Within this schema, in which all meaning is drawn from the absence of the signified, love is a narcissistic disorder that rests on misrecognition. This is what Brenkman calls a “materialist reversal” of the “idealist discourse.” But there is an important etymological point to note about the Greek word for love, which is elided in Brenkman’s analysis: when Socrates claims in the *Symposium* that the only thing he knows is “*ta erôtika*” (177d) the art or craft of love, the claim, according to C.D.C Reeve, is double-edged: it is “a nontrivial play on words” facilitated by the fact that the noun *erôs* (“love”) and the verb *erôtan* (“to ask questions”) are etymologically connected, a connection that is explicitly mentioned in the *Cratylus* (398c5-e5) (Reeve xix). Kierkegaard also, whose work pertains to many of the issues under consideration here, in *The Concept of Anxiety, with Continual Reference to Socrates*, while not drawing on the etymological frisson between *erôs* and *erôtan*, makes much of the Socratic emphasis on asking questions. He argues that to ask questions denotes two separate relations: the relation to the thing about which one is asking, and the relation to the person to whom one addresses the question.

The first sense is

clearly, even though remotely, analogous to the negative in Hegel, except that the negative, according to Hegel, is a necessary element in thought itself, is a determinant *ad intra* [inwardly]; in Plato, the negative is made graphic and placed outside the object in the inquiring individual. In Hegel, the thought does not need to be questioned from the outside, for it asks and answers itself within itself; in Plato, thought answers only insofar as it is questioned, but whether or not it is questioned is accidental, and how it is questioned is not less accidental. (CI 34-5)

In Plato, answering is part of the same movement as questioning. The relation between the one who asks and the thing about which he asks are joined in a relation of necessity, which unsettles the subject because his reason for asking about anything is due, not to his “arbitrariness,” but to that thing about which he asks; in a note, Kierkegaard offers the metaphor of the divining rod to illustrate: “Just as a divining rod [*Onskeqvist*, wishing twig] mysteriously communicates with the water hidden in the earth and wishes only where there is water” (35). No less than eros, questions want to penetrate a surface. In the second case, the relation between the one who asks and the person to whom one addresses the question (asker and askee) manifests itself in a “rocking gait.” Questioning establishes a relation of reciprocity, neither genuinely dualistic (because every answer invites a new question, the positions bleed into one another), nor truly dialectical because unity and finality are foreclosed: “like a *pronomem reciprocum* [reciprocally retroactive pronoun] it does not have the nominative but only *casus obliqui* [dependent cases] and only in the dual and plural forms” (36).

We should keep this “rocking gait” in mind because it surfaces again when Kierkegaard articulates the concept of repetition: “Repetition and recollection are the same movement, except in opposite directions, for what is recollected has been, is repeated backward, whereas genuine repetition is recollected forward” (*Fear and Trembling; Repetition* 131). Repetition is the name of the movement of the “now” moment through time—the present moment, but without presence. In his essay “*Repetition* (in the Kierkegaardian sense of the term),” Arne Melberg helpfully describes *Repetition* as a “movable text” in terms of the disorienting temporality of the text and the slippage that happens, often imperceptibly, between narrative and philosophical discourses, especially in terms of who is supposed to be representing the repetition, the narrator “Constantin Constantius” or the nameless young man (71-75). But this is the point of the text: repetition cannot be represented as such. Melberg takes his essay title from the famous closing lines of de Man’s classic essay on allegory, “The Rhetoric of Temporality”: in contrast to the symbol, where the sign is fused with the signified, the “meaning constituted by the allegorical sign can...consist only in the *repetition* (in the Kierkegaardian sense of the term) of a previous sign with which it can never coincide, since it is of the essence of this previous sign to be pure anteriority” (207). In a discussion of Baudelaire’s essay on laughter (“De l’essence du rire”), de Man describes how Baudelaire draws a distinction between two kinds of comedy: *comique significatif*, an interpersonal kind in which one subject asserts superiority over another, and *comique absolu*, which arises from language and entails the recognition that the empirical self is split apart from the linguistic self, that multiple selves exist, and that no one self is particularly “authentic.” *Comique absolu* always takes place, for Baudelaire, as a result of

a *fall*, which instigates a “progression in self-knowledge” and is mediated through the ironic language that is proper to allegory: “The ironic language splits the subject into an empirical self that exists in a state of inauthenticity and a self that exists only in the form of a language that asserts the knowledge of this inauthenticity. This does not, however, make it an authentic language, for to know inauthenticity is not the same as to be authentic” (214). This last point captures the peculiar difficulty for the critic who wishes to write about repetition—to paraphrase Derrida, entering the game involves getting a few fingers caught. Hence, in Kierkegaard’s *Repetition*, repetition is performed rather than represented. Melberg draws attention to a phrase that de Man uses to characterize the moment of the *fall* in Baudelaire’s prose poems: they are said to “climax in a single brief moment of a final *pointe*” (225f).<sup>45</sup> Melberg argues that the difference between late de Man and early de Man turns on this *pointe*: in late de Man, as opposed to the earlier essays, there is a realization that the rupture enacted by this *pointe* cannot be located in the text, but is instead distributed along the time line, permeating the text, and not only the one under scrutiny, but also the one doing the scrutinizing. Thus, the attempt to arm-wrestle irony into an interpretation all but disappears in later essays: at the end of *Allegories of Reading*, irony is defined as “the systematic undoing...of understanding” (300); in “Pascal’s Allegories of Persuasion,” it is “no longer susceptible to definition,” it is not even “intelligible,” and “it cannot be put to work as a device of textual analysis”

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<sup>45</sup> Here *pointe* means not simply “point,” but also “witticism.” Lacan’s discussion of jokes is also relevant here: “the visage [the joke] reveals to us is that of wit [l’esprit] in the ambiguity conferred on it by language, where the other face of its regalian power is the witticism [*pointe*], by which the whole of its order is annihilated in an instant—the witticism, indeed, in which language’s creative activity unveils its absolute gratuitousness, in which its domination of reality [*réel*] is expressed in the challenge of nonmeaning, and in which the humor, in the malicious grace of the free spirit [*esprit libre*], symbolizes a truth that does not say its last word” (*Écrits*, 270).

(12); in “Autobiography as De-Facement,” the “specular moment... is a part of all understanding...including knowledge of self” (71).

In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze posits two kinds of repetition: the first is, more or less, “ordinary” repetition, in which difference (that variable that prevents as repetition from being an exact copy and therefore the exact same as the thing it repeats) is externally manifested by objects represented by the same concept; in the second, difference is the internal logic of difference itself that unfolds as “pure movement” within repetition (24). In a later work, *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze will frame these two kinds of repetition as Platonic and Nietzschean respectively:

Let us consider the two formulas: “only that which resembles differs” and “only differences can resemble each other.” These are two distinct readings of the world: one invites us to think difference from the standpoint of a previous similitude or identity; whereas the other invites us to think similitude and even identity as the product of disparity. The first reading precisely defines the world of copies of representations; it posits the world as icon. The second, contrary to the first, defines a world of simulacra; it posits the world itself as phantasm. From the point of view of this second formula, therefore, it matters little whether the original disparity, upon which the simulacrum is built, is great or small; it may happen that the basic series have only a slight difference between them. It suffices that the constitutive disparity be judged in itself, not prejudging any previous identity, and the *disparate* (*le dispars*) be the unity of measure and communication. Resemblance then can be thought only as the product of internal difference. It matters little whether the system has great external and slight

internal difference, or whether the opposite is the case, provided that resemblance be produced on a curve, and that difference, whether great or small, always occupy the center of the thus decentered system.

The first kind of repetition is produced through the second; which is to say, Platonic repetition is produced through Nietzschean repetition; which is to say, representation is produced through repetition. Deleuze takes Kierkegaard's insistence that the act of asking questions be understood in the pronominal sense moves it into the internal relation of repetition itself: because repetition always involves two subjects, the manifest or empirical subject of representation and its Other, the secret, larval subject of repetition, repetition "must be understood in the pronominal" (23). At the level of logical propositions, an explanation of the intrinsic difference that manifests in repetition may be mapped onto Deleuze's description of sense-event in *The Logic of Sense*. In order for logical propositions to make sense, there must be a fourth dimension added to the triad of denotation-manifestation-signification: sense, which the "Stoics discovered...along with the event: sense, the expressed of the proposition is an incorporeal, complex, and irreducible entity, at the surface of things, a pure event which inheres or subsists in the proposition" (19). Sense-event is both repetition and what is repeated in repetition. It is the condition of possibility for identification and representation, but it cannot, in itself, in its own time, be represented: "we cannot say that sense exists, but rather that it inheres or subsists" (21). Deleuze's ethics hinge on the idea of sense-event. We should recall both Nancy's "just clarity" and Kierkegaard's *onskeqvist* here: drawing on Diogenes Laertius, who posits the egg as philosophy—the shell as Logic, the white, Ethics, the yoke, Physics—Deleuze assigns *sense-event* to the deep, metaphysical yolk (143) and asserts

that “*divination* grounds ethics.” Just like dowsing for water, divination is the art of “surfaces, lines, and singular points appearing on the surface,” which are expressed by the sense-event below. In Kierkegaard’s summation, Socrates must be viewed as a constantly morphing surface charge that is charged by the force of repetition, the multiple small gods of becoming: “He was not like a philosopher delivering his opinions in such a way that just the lecture itself is the presence of the idea, but what Socrates said meant something different. The outer was not at all in harmony with the inner but was rather its opposite, and only under this angle of refraction is he to be comprehended” (*The Concept of Irony* 12). From this perspective, Socrates is as Alcibiades said: like a Silenus statue.

## **II: The text of every heart, the heart of every text**

It is frequently acknowledged that there are two kinds of Shelley: the first Shelley is the “ineffectual angel” of Arnold’s summation, an idealist who, according to Leavis, was “weak in his hold on objects” (Leavis 222); the second Shelley is not an idealist but rather a revolutionary skeptic, and not only that but, according to Woodman, “one of Deconstruction’s recognizable and acknowledged founding fathers” (Woodman 177). The central place granted to Shelley in the essays gathered in the seminal *Deconstruction and Criticism* (1979), a collection that effectively launched Shelley as the face of post-structuralism in America, has ensured that the second Shelley has increasingly become as the standard Shelley, and, with a few exceptions, the critical attention on the role of Plato in Shelley’s poetics has accordingly decreased in inverse proportion.<sup>46</sup> But Shelley read

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<sup>46</sup> As the title indicates, Michael O’Neill’s “Emulating Plato: Shelley as Translator and Prose Poet” (in *The Unfamiliar Shelley*, ed. Alan M. Weinberg and Timothy Webb (Aldershot: Ashgate,

Plato widely and deeply, and in spite of having a less-than-perfect command of Greek, he also undertook many translations, the most important of which is the *Symposium*. My reading of Shelley's *Symposium*, as before, will focus on his translation of the final part when Alcibiades joins the fray. I argue that Shelley's Plato is inherently an anti-Platonic Plato, that the figure of Silenus is embedded within the theory of poetics posited in the "Defense," and that it resurfaces in the figure of the poet as it appears in one of Shelley's "most Platonic" poems, "Julian and Maddalo."<sup>47</sup>

But first, a word about Shelley's method of translation. Shelley's Greek, by his own admission, was far from fluent. He used the Bipontine edition of Plato with the accompanying Latin translation by Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) and frequently, when he found the original Greek particularly unwieldy, he either translated the Latin or used his own guesswork. He did not use a lexicon, and according to Mary Shelley's journal, he completed the translation in just ten days (Notopoulos 382-3). For a poet so sensitive to the subtleties of language as Shelley, this cavalier approach to translating Plato (no less) may seem surprising, especially since Shelley had strong views on the subject of

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2009), 239-55) reads Shelley's translation as a work of prose-poetry, and the implicit argument (one that I agree with) is that Shelley read Plato as a poet rather than as a philosopher. Stephanie Nelson's "Shelley and Plato's *Symposium*: The Poet's Revenge" (in *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 14/1-2:100-29) traces the differences between the original Greek, the Marsilio Ficino Latin translation that Shelley relied on, and Shelley's resultant translation. She takes a very conventional attitude (one I strongly disagree with) both to the "Platonism" of the *Symposium* ("Plato's focus in the *Symposium* is on the tension between the transcendent and the particular, between beauty and particular beautiful objects, between "forms" and a particular victory celebration, between love and Alcibiades") and to Shelley's supposed "idealism," whose interest in the *Symposium* is described as being "in the transcendent alone" (104). Douka Kabitoglou's *Plato and the English Romantics* offers a rich perspective from her point of view as a scholar of ancient Greece. Though she does not discuss the importance of Plato to Shelley's general poetic project, she traces the recurrence of Platonic imagery in *Prometheus Unbound*. Finally, David K. O'Connor provides a useful introduction in *The Symposium of Plato: The Shelley Translation*.

<sup>47</sup> This is Douka Kabitoglou's claim in *Plato and the English Romantics*. She makes this claim based on the fact that it emulates the form of the Platonic dialogue. This is a very important point, though my own reading of Shelley's "Platonism" is more interested in his anti-Platonic turn.

translation. In the “Defense of Poetry,” Shelley makes the following statement about translation:

Sounds as well as thoughts have relation both between each other and towards that which they represent, and a perception of the order of those relations has always been found connected with a perception of the order of the relations of thoughts. Hence the language of poets has ever affected a certain uniform and harmonious recurrence of sound, without which it were not poetry, and which is scarcely less indispensable to the communication of its influence, than the words themselves, without reference to that peculiar order. Hence the vanity of translation; it were as wise to cast a violet into a crucible that you might discover the formal principle of its color and odor, as seek to transfuse from one language into another the creations of a poet. The plant must spring again from its seed, or it will bear no flower—and this is the burden of the curse of Babel. (514)

At first sight, it appears that Shelley views any attempt at translating poetry as futile, and the fact that later, in the same text, he refers to Plato as “fundamentally a poet” and rejects the distinction between poets and prose writers as a “vulgar error” (514), would suggest that Shelley might have rather chosen *not* to translate the *Symposium*. But translate it he did, and on a closer inspection of the above passage, we see the caveat: the *plant must spring again from its seed*. If the plant springs again from its seed, some kind of translation is possible, not a pure transfusion, but an act of creation that “reproduces the common universe of which we are portions and percipients”—tellingly, the word “reproduce” appears often in the “Defense.”

By coincidence, this motif of origin-seed and translation-copy recurs in one of the most important twentieth-century statements on translation: Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator." In terms of the impossibility of translation, Benjamin is in agreement with Shelley, and yet, a true work of art is said to depend on its translatability. The task of translator must access the "pure language" of the poem by "realizing it in embryonic or intensive form" (*SWI* 257, 255). A translation should not strive for likeness to the original, but rather call forth "a transformation and a renewal of something living," a "ripening of the seed of pure language" (256, 259). The ideal translation is the interlinear version of the Scriptures, where the "potential translation between the lines," that is, where the "pure language" lies, is made graphic without one subsuming the other (263). The "growth of religions" thus "ripens the hidden seed into a higher development of language" (257). We might think here of a statement such as *hoc est enim corpus meum*; significantly, Nancy does not actually translate this line, though he devotes an entire book to thinking through it. The line cannot be translated, but its translatability can be repeated.

The "Defense" beckons further comparison with the idea of repetition. It opens by drawing a distinction between imagination and reason. The first denotes the "principle of synthesis," "the mind acting upon those thoughts so as to color them with its own light" (510). Each thought of this kind is generative, capable of producing other thoughts, each one of which contains "within itself the principle of its own integrity." They have for their object "forms which are common to nature and existence itself." The second kind of thought is primarily interested in the relations borne of one thought to the next, in "algebraical representations which conduct to certain general results," and in "the

enumeration of qualities already known.” The second kind of thought is concerned with representation; the first arises from repetition (in the Kierkegaardian sense of the term), and the image of the seed is its recurrent image. It recurs throughout the “Defense”: all high poetry is “infinite; it is as the first acorn, which contained all oaks potentially” (528). The poet, operating within the field of imagination, draws into his present the intense, seed-like potential of the future: “he not only beholds intensely the present as it is and discovers those laws according to which present things ought to be ordered, but he beholds the future in the present, and his thoughts are the germs of the flower and the fruit of latest time” (513). Poets are “the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration, the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present, the words which express what they understand not, the trumpets which sing to battle and feel not what they inspire: the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the World” (535). Instead of repeat, the word that Shelley uses is “reproduce”: poetry “reproduces all that represents” (517). This power of reproduction/repetition is embedded within representation, hidden and veiled. In normal, everyday consciousness, our perception is so accustomed to the patterns thrown up by representation that we do not perceive the internal condition of repetition. The task of poetry is to show us that being within our own being:

And whether it spreads its own figured curtain or withdraws life’s dark veil from before the scene of things, it equally creates for us a being within our own being. It makes us the inhabitants of a world to which the familiar world is chaos. It reproduces the common universe of which we are portions and percipients, and it purges from our inward sight the film of familiarity which obscures from us the

wonder of our being. It compels us to feel that which we perceive, and to imagine that which we know. It creates anew the universe after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration. (533)

The theory of poetry that Shelley thus posits is decidedly Silenic. In the poet, language speaks: he is the instrument “over which a series of external and internal impressions are driven,” and his target is “that imperial faculty, whose throne is curtained within the invisible nature of man” (513).

Keeping this in mind, we turn now to the Alcibiades episode of Shelley’s *Symposium*. Alcibiades enters the party and he is “excessively drunk” (212d)—“excessively” appears twice within the space of just a few lines to describe Alcibiades’s level of intoxication, whereas in most other translations (Jowett, Reeve and Howatson), the word “very” suffices. In contrast, and this is a fact mentioned a few times in the *Symposium*, Socrates, though he consumes as much as everybody else, somehow resists inebriation. Alcibiades and Socrates are the bipolar nexus of the Symposium: the one, easily intoxicated, the other preternaturally sober; the one vulnerable to the workings of eros, the other impervious to them; the one pleading for permission to enter, the other continually refusing it.

The next deviation occurs when Alcibiades attempts to remove his “fillets” (the “ribands” or garland worn on the top of the head) in order to crown Agathon, which blocks his view of Socrates (213a). In the Jowett translation, Alcibiades “took the ribands from his own head and held them in front of his eyes; he was thus prevented from seeing Socrates.” In Reeve, Alcibiades struggles with the fillets, and what “with all the leaves and all, he didn’t see Socrates.” In Howatson, because he “was simultaneously untying

the ribbons in order to crown Agathon with them and had them in front of his eyes, he did not notice Socrates.” In all three translations, the emphasis is on the physical reason why Alcibiades’s view was impaired. But Shelley leaves this reason out, and instead gives the impression that it is through a spiritual or moral blindness that Alcibiades cannot see Socrates: “He then unbound his fillets that he might crown Agathon, and though Socrates was just before his eyes, he did not see him.” Then he sits down and suddenly realizes that he is seated beside Socrates, he accuses him of “lying in ambush for me wherever I go!” (213c). What follows is laden with irony: Socrates complains of Alcibiades’s jealousy to the company gathered and appeals to Agathon to defend him against the “fury of [Alcibiades’s] amatory impulse,” and Alcibiades asks Agathon to return the fillets he just crowned him with so that he can crown Socrates instead “lest I incur the blame, that having crowned you, I neglected to crown him who conquers all men with his discourses, not yesterday alone as you did, but ever” (213e). Before accepting the invitation to deliver an encomium to love, in which he will proceed to conquer Socrates, he asks the gathered company “did Socrates really persuade you that what he just said about me was true, or did you not know that matters are in fact exactly the reverse of his representation” (214e). He then gives Socrates permission, and not for the last time, to interrupt him if he says anything false in his speech—that Socrates stays silent for the entire duration of the subsequent speech is telling.

Socrates, according to Alcibiades, is like a cross between a Silenus statue and a Marsyas. Both Silenus and Marsyas share kinship with the satyr family. Often characterized by ignorance and drunkenness, satyrs were forest creatures considered to have voracious sexual appetites and were often depicted with the physical traits of horses

or goats. Marsyas was a legendary satyr who challenged Apollo to a musical contest and was skinned alive for his impudence; according to O'Connor, "His tunes were reputed to effect ecstatic catharsis of morbid mental states" (92). A Silenus, meanwhile, was another name for a Satyr, and in the singular, often functioned as a proper name for the king of the satyrs, who was reputed to either have taught or have been taught by Dionysus. These references may come as a surprise if one is familiar with Nietzsche's argument in *The Birth of Tragedy*, which charges Socrates with valorizing Apolline reason, ascetism, and order over Dionysiac emotion, expressiveness and chaos. But as Walter Kaufman argues, the established notion that Nietzsche's attitude towards Socrates was uniformly hateful is incorrect. In 1864, as he was leaving for the University of Bonn, Nietzsche listed the Symposium as his *Lieblingsdichtung* on his *curriculum vitae*, and his conception of Socrates was decisively shaped by this text (Kaufman 23, 393). Kaufman calls for some distinction to be made between the personality of Socrates and Socrates himself, and points to Section 15 of the *Birth of Tragedy*, which was the concluding section of the original manuscript: Socrates's influence was to regenerate art through the inauguration of the archetype of a form of existence previously unknown—the theoretical man.

Like the artist, theoretical man, too, finds infinite contentment in the world as it exists, and, like the artist, he is protected by his contentment against the practical ethic of pessimism and its Lynkeus eyes which only gleam in the dark. Whenever truth is unveiled, the ecstatic eyes of the artist remain fixed on what still remains veiled, even after the unveiling; similarly, theoretical man enjoys and satisfies himself with the discarded veil, and his desire finds its highest goal in a process of

unveiling which he achieves by his own efforts and which is always successful.  
(72-3)

This impulse to carry out the practice of unveiling is driven by “arrogance” and belongs inseparably to science, but once it reaches its limit, the point at which further unveiling is impossible and one is left with the discarded veil and what still remains insistently veiled, it must transform itself into art, which is actually “*given this mechanism, what it has been aiming at all along*” (73) (original italics). As for Socrates’s “theoretical optimism” in the face of Dionysian tragedy, anyone “who has experienced the intense pleasure of a Socratic insight, and felt it spread out in ever-widening circles as it attempted to encompass the entire world” could understand this, and Plato’s Socrates “seems to be the teacher of a quite new form of ‘Greek Serenity’ and bliss in existence” (74-5). The ultimate test of this, and the one that Nietzsche mentions many times throughout his writings, is the image of the dying Socrates, “a man liberated from fear of death by reasons and knowledge, is the heraldic shield over the portals of science, reminding everyone of its purpose, which is to make existence appear comprehensible and thus justified,” and if this is not convincing because not enough reasons can be found to justify it, “then it must ultimately be served by myth—which I have just defined as the necessary consequence, indeed intention, of science” (73). Kaufman ultimately compares Nietzsche to the mad, drunken Alcibiades, fascinated and obsessed by Socrates and yet despising him for it, and suggests the following passage from the *Symposium* as a fitting epitaph for him—this is Shelley’s translation of that passage:

I then, bitten by something more keen and vehement than the keenest of all things  
by which any one ever was bitten, wounded in my heart and soul or whatever else

you choose to call it, by the words of philosophy which pierce more sharply than a viper's tooth, when they seize on a fresh and not ungenerous spirit, and instigate it to say or do anything, seeing Phaedrus, and Agathon, and Eryximachus, and Pausanias, and Aristodemus, and Aristophanes, and Socrates himself, and the rest of our companions; for ye are all participators with me in the sacred madness and bacchic enthusiasm of philosophy, am willing that you should hear all. Pardon, I entreat you, what then was done and now is said. Let the servants, or if any other profane and unrefined person is present, close their ears with impenetrable gates.

(218a,b)

There is certainly something of Socrates in the description of the Satyr in the *Birth of Tragedy*: the Satyr is “the original image (Urbild) of mankind,” created by the Greeks out of a longing for “what is original and natural,” an image of “nature, as yet untouched by knowledge,” “sublime and divine” and “bound to seem so to the painfully broken gaze of Dionysiac man”; “Faced with the satyr, cultured man shriveled to a mendacious caricature” (41). Alcibiades’s conflicted feelings about Socrates do seem to resemble those of Nietzsche, if we are to go with Kaufman’s argument: at full emotional tide, Alcibiades declares that sometimes he wishes Socrates were dead (215c), but later, having reached a point of greater equanimity, he concedes that there are things “for which I praise Socrates, as well as those which I complain of in him, for I have mixed up in my discourse the peculiar scorn with which he has treated me” (222b). Alcibiades suffers this same fate every time he faces Socrates—Socrates’s discourses poke him out of the urbane, cultured existence of a well-connected Greek noble, convincing him that “the life I lead seemed hardly worth living” (216a). He reduces him “to feel the sentiment

of shame, which I imagine no one would readily believe in me,” and whenever he sees him he is “overwhelmed with humiliation, because I have neglected to do what I have confessed to him ought to be done” (216b). All this he suffers from the “pipings of this satyr” (216c).

For Alcibiades, this is all part of Socrates’s deceptive, Silenic nature. He pretends to be susceptible to beautiful young men and that he is ignorant, but in fact he is “excessively Silenic”—the addition of “excessively” is again Shelley’s own. Where Alcibiades is drunk to excess, his mind intoxicated and disordered by substances earthly and profane, Socrates’s excess is vertiginous in the abstract: a statue concealing a cluster of smaller statues, each of which, perhaps, concealing another cluster of statues, and so on, smaller and smaller, continually receding. His external form is that of a normal man, but in fact he cares neither for beauty, nor wealth, nor glory, nor “any other thing for which the multitude felicitates the possessor” (2126e). He makes the objects of admiration for other men “the playthings of his irony.” But, if anyone were to truly see Socrates, as Alcibiades once did, they would see those divine images within him: “I have seen them, and they are so supremely beautiful, so golden, so divine, and wonderful, that every thing which Socrates commands surely ought to be obeyed, even like the voice of a God” (217a). This last clause is Shelley’s addition; according to O’Connor, “nothing in the Greek compares to it” (93).

It is a curious addition. Shelley was a devout and infamous atheist, and so the figure of God or the One that recurs in his work has been a troubling issue for critics. According to O’Neill, the comparison of Socrates to a God and also to a Satyr mimics the mixed feelings that the figure of Wordsworth held for the second generation Romantics,

and in 'Peter Bell the Third,' a poem that mostly satirizes Wordsworth, there is at the same time some grudging respect paid to the older poet: 'An Apprehension clear, intense, / Of his mind's work, has made alive / the things it wrought on' (II. 309-11). O'Neill argues that "no poet engaged Shelley more deeply than Wordsworth did," and that Shelley's Wordsworth is infused in "the imperturbable, near-Olympian alertness discernible in Plato's portrait of Socrates," and most especially in the closing scene when Socrates is found "forcing" those still awake to confess that tragedy and comedy were the essentially the same" (245). But Socrates is also like a God in the Spinozean sense: an immanent God that infuses the surface from a multifarious, larval penetralium within, a God that, like discourse itself, is Silenic in nature. And so Alcibiades duly comes to remember the most Silenic thing of all about Socrates:

At first I forgot to make you observe how like his discourses are to those Satyrs when they are opened, for, if any one will listen to the talk of Socrates, it will appear to him at first extremely ridiculous; the phrases and expressions which he employs, fold around his exterior the skin, as it were, of a rude and wanton Satyr. He is always talking about great market asses, and brass-founders, and leather-cutters, and skin-dressers; and this is his perpetual custom, so that any dull and unobservant person might easily laugh at his discourse. But if anyone should see it opened, as it were, and get within the sense of his words, he would then find that they alone of all that enters into the mind of man to utter, had a profound and persuasive meaning, and that they were most divine; and that they presented to the mind innumerable images of every excellence, and that they tended towards objects of the highest moment, or rather towards all, that he who seeks the

possession of what is supremely beautiful and good, need regard as essential to the accomplishment of his ambition. (221d-222a)

Perhaps an obvious point to note, but one that must be emphasized nonetheless: the actual contents of Socrates's discourse are not described for the rest of the gathering. They take place in private with Alcibiades, presumably in an amorous context, yet even then full revelation is withheld, like the theory of poetry posited in the Defense: "Veil after veil may be undrawn, and the inmost naked beauty of the meaning never exposed" (528). But there is no evidence to suggest that the discourses that Socrates conducts in private are different from those about the "great market asses, and brass-founders, and leather-cutters, and skin-dressers" that he conducts in public. The discourse itself does not change, but its prosaic and profane surface becomes illuminated by the presence of the shining golden gods within. In the "Defense," Shelley assigns to the poet the ability to infuse the ordinary with this inner force: the poem "lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects appear as if they were not familiar" (517), but it is also has the ability to veil and to spread "its own figured curtain" (532, 533). He even goes so far as to explicitly compare the poet to God, quoting the Italian poet Tasso in approval: "*Non merita nome di creatore, se non Iddio ed il Poeta*" (None deserves the name of Creator except God and the poet)" (533).

This juxtaposition of God and poet is important. In the Romantic age, the figure of Tasso was the stereotype of the tortured poet who eventually succumbs to madness and critics have consistently identified the Maniac in "Julian and Maddalo: A Conversation" with Tasso. According to Clark, Shelley viewed poetic madness as a product of politically oppressive times (*Embodying Revolution*, 14-43, 179-80). He idealized the

Greek city states as representing health and wholesomeness, and thought their people to be of “most perfect physical organization,” in contrast with the “disease of monarchy,” which, as he writes in the *Defense*, “destroys all sensibility to pleasure” (52). The *Defense* expressly sets up an ideal of poetic sensibility; poets are “spirits of the most refined organization,” who possess sensibility “in excess,” as in the case of the Maniac, who is like “a nerve o'er which do creep/ The unfelt oppressions of this earth” (449-50). The poet-figure of the Maniac is a stark contrast to the image of health embodied in the Greek ideal, a contrast which Clark views as symptomatic of Shelley's perception of the deteriorated state of contemporary society as a bitter pill to his philhellenism, where the organic unity has broken down and only the “coarse” might survive, while those of purer character expire. The Maniac is like an antique fragment sculpture, a husk of a man who has “had torn out/ The nerves of manhood by their bleeding root” (424-5).

In contrast with the Maniac, Maddalo and Julian are at opposite ends of fairly narrow and rather quotidian spectrum. Count Maddalo is a “nobleman of antient family,” Julian is “an Englishman of good family”; Maddalo is cynical, a “person of the most consummate genius, and capable, if he would direct his energies to such an end, of becoming the redeemer of his degraded country. But it is his weakness to be proud,” Julian is idealistic and “passionately attached to those philosophical notions which assert the power of man over his own mind, and the immense improvements of which, by the extinction of certain moral superstitions, human society may be yet susceptible” (120). The poem takes the form of a Platonic dialog, with Julian and Maddalo debating their different understandings of life and man's place in it: Maddalo claims that man has a “teachless nature” (164), while Julian counters that “there is no love, beauty and truth we

seek / But in our own mind” (174-5). Maddalo concedes that Julian could “make such a system refutation-tight/ as far as words go,” but then he draws out his ace: “I knew one like you / ... / With whom I argued in this sort, and he / Is now gone mad” (194-8). This is the Maniac, about whom little is known, except that he “had been disappointed in love,” that in his right mind would probably be “a very cultivated and amiable person,” and that in his story, which “might be like many other stories of the same kind,” one may find “a sufficient comment for the text of every heart” (121). It is as a kind of bet that Maddalo proposes to take Julian to meet the Maniac: “his wild talk will show / How vain are such aspiring theories” (200-1). As they enter the Maniac’s cell, they are greeted with the sight of the maniac, his face a *facies hippocratica*, wretchedly still clinging to life:

His lips were pressed against a folded leaf  
 In hue too beautiful for health, and grief  
 Smiled in their motions as they lay apart—  
 As one who wrought from his own fervid heart  
 The eloquence of passion, soon he raised  
 His sad meek face and eyes lustrous and glazed  
 And spoke— (280-286)

Everything in this passage seems to be about inverting the expected: his grief “smiled”; his face is “meek,” but his heart “fervid” and his eyes “lustrous”; his beauty is of the spirit rather than the body, of decay and decomposition, not of health. The “folded leaf” that he presses to his lips, so suggestive of a love letter, will be accounted for later in the poem. When the Maniac speaks, Julian comments that his words “came each / Unmodulated, cold, expressionless,” that “despair made them so uniform,” but in spite of

this he remembers “what he said / Distinctly: such impressions his words made” (292-9). The ramblings of the Maniac are rendered in passages separated by rows of *x*'s indicating silent pauses, but it is an interesting typographic choice—elipses are used in other parts of the text and could also have been used here, but the visually jarring rows of *x*'s create the impression of a kind of blockade—this barring of the reader from the full content of the poem will recur at the end of the poem. The maniac rocks violently between lucid self-awareness and debilitating self-pity. On the one hand, he declares that he has become wedded to “pale Pain / My shadow” (324-5), and cries out to “remove / A veil from my pent mind” (383-4). On the other, he declares, with no small degree of pride, that he is “ever still the same/ In creed as in resolve” (359-60). Disjointed as things are, some details about the Maniac become clear. He lost his sanity through a love affair gone wrong. Spurned, he must retreat from the world entirely: “I cannot bear more altered faces / Than needs must be, more changed and cold embraces, / More misery, disappointment and mistrust” (311-313). Disconnected from every living being and isolated in the madhouse, the Maniac occupies his time with writing:

How vain

Are words! I thought never to speak again,  
 Not even in secret,—not to my own heart—  
 But from my lips the unwilling accents start  
 And from my pen the words flow as I write,  
 Dazzling my eyes with scalding tears ... my sight  
 Is dim to see that characterized in vain  
 On this unfeeling leaf which burns the brain

And eats into it ... blotting all things fair

And wise and good which time had written there. (473-481)

The Maniac is compelled to write, and yet he associates it with death and corruption: “I do but hide / Under these words like embers, every spark / of that which has consumed me—quick and dark / The grave is yawning” (530-6). He is somewhat like Kierkegaard’s young man who has yet to be freed from the melancholy of love by the discovery of repetition. He is stuck at the point of “intensified recollecting,” which is erotic love’s eternal expression “at the beginning.”<sup>48</sup> In order to move beyond melancholic recollection, there must be a “second mood” alongside it, which the young man only later learns. This second mood is an “ironic resiliency,” through which the young girl who inspired the love is displaced in his affections, though not replaced: instead she is acknowledged simply “the occasion that awakened the poetic in him and made him a poet...and precisely thereby had signed her own death sentence” (138).<sup>49</sup> Shelley’s

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<sup>48</sup> Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, 137. This is also what Deleuze describes as the “second synthesis” of the unconscious—the first is habitus, in the which the unconscious experiences a constantly renewed form of the living present; the second is Eros-Mnemosyne, in which the subject is always looking for what is missing from its place, from its own identity and from representation (such as the Lacanian phallus); the third synthesis is Thanatos, but completely rearticulated by Deleuze. In the third synthesis, Thanatos is orientated only towards the future. It is “the absence of ground into which we are precipitated by the ground itself” (*Difference and Repetition* 114). It is associated, in Freudianism, with death, and it does indeed signify death, but only as a challenge to the dominance of psychoanalytical ontology: “It is said that the One subjugated the multiple once and for all. But is this not the face of death? And does not the other face cause to die in turn, once and for all, everything which operates once and for all?” (115)

<sup>49</sup> In Deleuze’s reading of psychoanalysis, displacement is the process by which the “virtual object” of repetition manifests on the surface as a real object that can be represented (*Difference and Repetition*, 103). The problem with psychoanalysis is that it thinks that the two presents (the former and the present one) are separate, when in fact they co-exist with one another and neither can be thought of as original or derived. The “virtual object” operates between these two presents. It has no identity or fixed place; rather it is continuously disguised and displaced. If it can be identified at all, it is only within Lacan’s subtle terms whereby the phallus is “always what is missing from its place, from its own identity and from representation” (105). This is why questions, if properly pursued, always transcend answers because they are directed towards a virtual object that is continually displaced and disguised; every answer begets a new question,

Maniac seems to reach this understanding too; the woman who spurned him is not mentioned consistently throughout and does not appear in the passage quoted above either. The heartbreak he suffered at her hands is displaced to the general feeling that words are utterly disconnected from what is real. He wanted never to speak again, not even to his own heart, but he cannot escape: “unwilling accents” start from his lips and words seem to involuntarily flow from his pen. The very paper he writes on, presumably the same that he pressed his lips to earlier, is “unfeeling” and “burns the brain / And eats into it.” It blots out the “fair / And wise and good” memories that are held there, yet, oddly enough, those too are said to have been “written there” by time. This is an important point: the entire poem rests on verbal exchange rather than action—it is, quite literally, “a conversation”—and the Maniac is ensnared in text, unable to escape the impulse to write and speak, unable to break through words and, like Narcissus, unable to discover something beyond the reflection of his own private hell (the word “vain” appears twice in the short passage quoted above). He is unable to escape Julian’s narrative enclosure, and unable to break out of the literary cliché he occupies as one whose story “might be like many other stories of the same kind.” The Maniac’s pain thus shifts from the beloved to the immateriality of the Word; his is fundamentally an ontological crisis, not an erotic one.

The gravity of the Maniac’s sufferings so impresses Julian that he suspects the Maniac “must have lacked a touch / of human nature...” (517-20). He and Maddalo return to Maddalo’s palace, and Julian contemplates the Maniac:

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like the child’s insistent “but why?” According to Deleuze, neuropaths and psychopaths “explore this original ultimate ground at the cost of their suffering, the former asking how to shift the problem, the latter where to pose the question. Precisely their suffering, their pathos, is the only response to a question which in itself is endlessly, to a problem which in itself is endlessly disguised” (107).

The colours of his mind seemed yet unworn;  
 For the wild language of his grief was high,  
 Such as in measure were called poetry;  
 And I remember one remark which then  
 Maddalo made. He said: "Most wretched men  
 Are cradled into poetry by wrong,  
 They learn in suffering what they teach in song." (544-6).

Directly after this, Julian abruptly announces his departure from Venice. If he "had been an unconnected man," he might have stayed (547). He would have liked to watch over the Maniac "as men study some stubborn art," but if the poetic life requires the solitude and disconnection of the Maniac, then Julian opts for the less risky option of communion with others. He abandons the Maniac to visit with "friends in London" (564), admitting that the "chief attraction" of this escape is the "relief/ From the deep tenderness that maniac wrought/ Within me" (565-7). He flees to the commercial world of London, a modern version of the Socratic world of "great market asses, and brass-founders, and leather-cutters, and skin-dressers." Maddalo, in effect, won his bet.

Many years later, Julian returns to Venice. Maddalo is away, traveling in Armenia, and his daughter, now grown-up, is likened to "one of Shakespeare's women" (592)—once again the text draws attention to itself as a work of literature, and more insidiously, as a work about literature. According to Maddalo's daughter, the Maniac's lady returned and she and the Maniac reunited, but now they are "As yon mute marble where their corpses lie" (615). She refuses to divulge any further details, but Julian "urged and questioned still" and finally she relents. The poem stops just as she begins:

“she told me how / All happened—but the cold world shall not know” (616-7). This ending has commonly been interpreted as political: a corrupt society destroys its most sensitive, perfectly formed element (the poet-Maniac), and succeeds in corrupting those idealists who should know better (Julian), and so it must be shut out from the conclusion of the story, which it probably would not be able to understand anyway. But the ending might also be read as a refusal to make whatever happened between the Maniac and his lover into a representation of whatever happened between the Maniac and his lover. The text of the heart is ultimately one that cannot be written.

Yet in the “Defense,” one of the primary tasks of poetry is to draw out man’s love of his fellow man. Poetry “redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man” (532), and is intimately connected with the operations of eros: it entails “a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person not our own” (517). This echoes the sentiments expressed in the fragment “On Love”: we “seek to awaken in all things that are, a community with what we experience within ourselves” (502-3). Love is the “bond and the sanction which connects not only man with man, but with every thing which exists.” Like poetry, it is Silenic in structure: “We dimly see within our intellectual nature a miniature as it were of our entire self...the ideal prototype of every thing excellent and lovely that we are capable of conceiving as belonging to the nature of man. Not only the portrait of our external being, but an assemblage of the minutest particles of which our nature is composed.” Without love, man is reduced to the state of the Maniac: “So soon as this want or power is dead, man becomes the living sepulchre of himself, and what yet survives is the mere husk of what once he was.” But Shelley’s ideas about love came

from other texts besides the Symposium. Lucretius occupies the epigraph of “Queen Mab,” where the opening of Book IV of *De Rerum Natura* is quoted at length. Of this book, which deals with the nature of sensation and erotic love, Shelley writes in a letter, “The 4<sup>th</sup> book is perhaps the finest. The whole of that passage about love is full of irresistible energy of language as well as profoundest truth” (*Letters*, I, 545).

In this book, Lucretius reiterates his previous statements about the nature of the mind in order to prepare the ground for his explanation of love and desire. There are “images” of things, “a sort of skin / Shed from the surface of objects, from the outer layer-- / Films that drift about this way and that upon the air” (30-2). The images are like a “skin, or *bark*” and bear the “same / Form and likeness of whatever thing from which it came” (51-2); thus, they keep a “certain trace” (86) of the original. These images are emitted not just by the interior of bodies or objects, but also from the exteriors, and these images in turn emit other images, and some images, indeed, “spontaneously arise” by themselves (131), as clouds make giant floating faces and trail shadows in their wake (135-6). These images, taken altogether, compose “all matter’s / weave” (114). When one of these images encounters a substance that is rough or hard (such as wood or stone), the image will shatter, and the collision “can give no image back.” But,

...on the other hand, when it meets with an obstacle

That is both polished and tightly knit, the mirror most of all,

Nothing like this happens. For although it cannot pass,

As through glass, neither does it shatter. The polished face

Of the mirror is ever mindful to guarantee its safety. Thus

It turns out that the likenesses flow back, from it, to us.

Thrust an object quickly as you can before a mirror—  
 Its image is there. From, this experiment what could be clearer? –  
 These gauzy films and flimsy shapes continually pour  
 From the surfaces of objects...  
 ... —since wherever we place  
 A mirror, whatever angle to an object it may face,  
 It gives a picture back that corresponds in form and hue. (150-68)

The mirror is the most frequently used image in Book IV. Lucretius later discusses how the mirror reverses things, that “which faces left, flips to right again, and next / Flips back to what it was” (308-9). And the mirroring action will again be invoked when Lucretius turns his attention to love. Images are the origin of desire, and Venus “teases with images” (1101). Lucretius ridicules the obsessive and deluded lover for confusing the natural urges of the body with spiritual desire. The body simply “seeks what struck the mind with love and caused it / hurt. / For as a rule, men fall towards the wound, and blood will spurt / along the same trajectory from which we took the blow” (1048-50). It is much better, he says, “to direct / your attentions somewhere else, and spend the fluids that collect / on any body—rather than retain them and remain / Fixed ever on one love, laying up stores of pain” (1064-8). What lovers feel is never “some pure and simple bliss” (1081). Lovers “think that they can quench the fire / by means of the same body that ignited their desire / Something Nature contradicts with all her might” (1086-8). Love can have no real satisfaction because it is composed of images. It is like a man who in a dream attempts to slake his thirst by drinking, only to find that though “he gulps and gulps from a gushing stream, his / throat is dry” (1100). Even when lovers seek to satisfy

their desire with their bodies, the results are ephemeral: “They are allowed a brief reprieve from passion’s raging fire. / But then the fever starts again” (1017-18). Sex is really “all in vain – There’s nothing of the other they can run off and retain. / Nor can one body wholly enter the other and pass away” (1109-1111). However, in spite of lampooning the foibles of lovers for most of the book, the closing ten lines suggest that, in fact, “love” is sometimes genuine and not simply the product of delusion. Sometimes a woman, by her own merit and not simply through the beguiling effects of “Venus’s dart” (1278), can win a man’s heart. The final lines assert that it is “familiarity that leads to love,” and the closing image is of drops of water slowly eroding stone through time: “Haven’t you seen how drops of water falling, on their own / Have the power, over time, to wear their way through stone?” (1282-87).

This image is imported directly into “Julian and Maddalo”: the Maniac claims that he has a heart that “a stranger’s tear might wear / As water-drops the sandy fountain-stone” (442-3). The idea of the poet as extra-sensitive to the onslaught of images is also presented in the “Defense.” The poet’s mind is an “image of all other minds” (515), and poetry has a moral function: “Neither the eye nor the mind can see itself, unless reflected upon that which it resembles” (520). The figure of the Maniac is evidently a mirror for Julian: though Julian has been fortunate in his friendships, after he meets the Maniac he comments, “never saw I one whom I would call / More willingly my friend” (576-7), and the fate he sees the Maniac suffer is what prompts him to leave Venice. But if the poem itself is a mirror, what is one to make of the sudden truncation of the story and the snub to the “cold world” at the end?

In the *Arcades Project*, Benjamin posits a remarkable image of two mirrors looking into each other: “Let two mirrors reflect each other; then Satan plays his favorite trick and opens here in his way (as his partner does lovers’ gazes) the perspective on infinity” (“The Arcades of Paris,” <c°,2>). This vertigo is again invoked by de Man in the “Rhetoric of Temporality,” where irony is described as “the reversed mirror-image of allegory” (225), which leads to what Baudelaire calls the “*vertige de l’hyperbole*” (214)—the reverse, of the reverse, of the reverse. In Derrida’s essay on de Man, “Psyche: The Invention of the Other,” the mirror is again invoked. Derrida draws a parallel between de Man’s understanding of allegory and the “rapid oscillation” that occurs in language between the constative and performative registers. *Psyche* is not only the French term for a double-sided mirror, and not only the Greek term for butterfly and a symbol of transformation, but also the mythological figure of Psyche, who is never allowed come into full contact with Eros. De Man invokes this myth at the end of “The Rhetoric of Temporality”: “When they can see each other they are separated by an “unbreachable distance”; when they can touch, it has to be in a darkness imposed by a totally arbitrary and irrational decision, an act of the gods” (228). Something approaching this insurmountable distance between Eros and Psyche, and between sense and representation, is evident in a fragment entitled “On Life.” Here, Shelley claims that the words *I*, *you*, and *they* “are not signs of any actual difference subsisting between the assemblage of thoughts thus indicated, but are merely marks employed to denote the different modifications of the one mind.” This is not, however, to suggest that the subject can know this One mind:

Let it not be supposed that this doctrine conducts to the monstrous presumption

that I, the person who now write and think, am that one mind. I am but a portion of it. The words *I*, and *you*, and *they* are grammatical devices invented simply for arrangement, and totally devoid of the intense and exclusive sense usually attached to them. It is difficult to find terms adequate to express so subtle a conception as that to which the Intellectual Philosophy has conducted us. We are on that verge where words abandon us, and what wonder if we grow dizzy to look down the dark abyss of how little we know!

If the Maniac is the text of the heart, he is also the heart of the text. The heart of the text is this dark abyss. It is the site of difference and multiplicity, repetition and sense. It is from this place that the multiple golden gods send their emanations to the surface. But they do not reveal themselves as such—they remain veiled and distant. They cannot be represented as such—representation is the for world, the “cold world” of “great market asses, and brass-founders, and leather-cutters, and skin-dressers.” The heart is its Other—a dark abyss, the satanic-erotic perspective of eternity.

### **III. As its lover, not as its pursuer: Benjamin’s Allegory**

In the *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin has this to say about the *Symposium*:

It presents truth—the realm of ideas—as the essential content of beauty. It declares truth to be beautiful. An understanding of the Platonic view of the relationship of truth and beauty is not just a primary aim in every investigation into the philosophy of art, but it is indispensable to the definition of truth itself.

To interpret these sentences in terms of the logic of their system, as no more than part of a time-honoured panegyric to philosophy, would inevitably mean leaving the sphere of the theory of ideas; which is where—and perhaps nowhere more clearly than in the statements to which we referred—the mode of existence of ideas is illuminated. The second of these pronouncements needs some amplification. If truth is described as beautiful, this must be understood in the context of the Symposium with its description of the stages of erotic desires. Eros—it should be understood—does not betray his basic impulse by directing his longings towards the truth; for truth is beautiful: not so much in itself, as for Eros. And so it is with human love; a person is beautiful in the eyes of his lover, but not in himself, because his body belongs in a higher order of things than that of the beautiful. Likewise truth; it is not so much beautiful in itself, as for Eros. If there is a hint of relativism here, the beauty which is said to be a characteristic of truth is nevertheless far from becoming simply a metaphor. The essence of truth as the self-respecting realm of ideas guarantees rather that the assertion of the beauty of truth can never be devalued. This representational impulse in truth is the refuge of beauty as such, for beauty remains brilliant and palpable as long as it freely admits to being so. Its brilliance—seductive as long as it wishes only to shine forth—provokes pursuit by the intellect, and it reveals its innocence only by taking refuge on the altar of truth. Eros follows in its flight, but as its lover, not as its pursuer; so that for the sake of its outward appearance beauty will always flee: in dread before the intellect, in fear before the lover. And only the latter can bear witness to the fact that truth is not a process of exposure which destroys the

secret, but a revelation which does justice to it. But can truth so do justice to beauty? That is the innermost question of the Symposium. Plato's answer is to make truth the guarantor of the existence of beauty. This is the sense in which he argues that truth is the content of beauty. This content, however, does not appear by being exposed; rather it is revealed in a process which might be described metaphorically as the burning up of the husk as it enters the realm of ideas, that is to say a destruction of the work in which its external form achieves its most brilliant degree of illumination. (*The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 31)

Truth is the "unity of essences," and essence is understood as the Platonic idea. Truth is necessarily beautiful, according to the Platonic system. Plato makes Socrates his surrogate for truth: in Socrates, truth is formally self-present, intrinsic to the personality it inhabits, but invisible to ordinary perception. If Plato makes beauty the necessary quality of truth, it cannot be the beauty of appearances, but rather the beauty that Alcibiades momentarily understands when he looks into Socrates and sees him opened up like a Silenus statue. Truth is ultimately housed in the idea, and the idea is the *genetic principle* in truth and thus cannot be intellectually apprehended. This is why Benjamin insists on the word "origin" in his title. Origin [*Ursprung*] is not the same as Genesis [*Entstehung*]. Genesis names the process by which the existent came into being; origin names what emerges from that process. It might be thought of as secondary to genesis, but for the fact that the conditions of genesis are folded into it: "Origin is an eddy in the stream of becoming, and in its current it swallows the material involved in the process of genesis" (45). The genetic idea is to things "what constellations are to stars," neither their concepts nor their laws, but rather their redeeming element (34-35). Hence Benjamin's image of

the burning husk: the Silenus statues might be thought of as a germ, but the germ is integral and intrinsic to the husk, and so when one glimpses the germ the entire husk becomes illuminated, infused and lit by the germ inside. The germ of truth cannot be seen in itself, it “cannot be conceived of as the object of vision, even intellectual vision”; however, it is “bodied forth in the dance of represented ideas” (29). It cannot be summoned before the intellect for examination. It may only be approached through “a total immersion and absorption”; as such, it is the “death of intention” (35-36).

With this idea of the “death of intention,” we might be reminded of Deleuze’s definition of ethics as an acceptance of what is on the surface, here and now: “Either ethics makes no sense at all, or this is what it means and has nothing else to say: not to be unworthy of what happens to us” (*Logic of Sense*, 169). We may also recall the happiness of Kierkegaard’s young man who has discovered repetition. This truth will necessarily excite joyful emotions and because of these joyful emotions its aspect will be beautiful. This is why Benjamin associates Eros with truth: the truth is beautiful only for those who seek it. This is also why Shelley, who was no stranger to writing poems that might in another context be called “sad,” can write in the “Defense” that poetry “is the record of the best and happiest moments of the best and happiest minds” (532). And similarly, too, for Spinoza, the feeling a person has when they understand something “simply” (that is, as “free and necessary”), the greater their capacity becomes to enjoy the “highest contentment of the mind that can exist” (Book One, Def. 7; Book Five, Prop. 5; Book Five, Prop. 27). And finally, there is Alicibiades’s account of the truth-content and consequent goodness of Socrates’s discourse: “if you ever see his discourse opening up and you get inside it, first you will find that his is the only discourse which has any

meaning in it, and then that it is also most divine and contains the greatest number of images of virtue. Moreover, it has the widest application, or, rather, it applies to everything that one should consider if one intends to become fine and good” (Shelley’s translation, 222a).

But in spite of Benjamin’s high regard for Plato, it is Adam, not Plato, who is named as the father of philosophy because Adam is the original name-giver: the “idea is something linguistic, it is that element of the symbolic in the essence of any word,” and in philosophical contemplation, “the idea is released from the heart of reality as the word, reclaiming its name-giving rights” (36-37). He criticizes the older generation of the romantics for having truth assume the character of reflective consciousness rather than linguistic character (38). This is the central criticism Benjamin levies at the Romantics in “The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism,” where truth is recast as the Absolute, the totalizing work to which all artworks pertain. The Romantics were fixated on the idea of art, which they conceive of as anchored in form, and thought that in the idea lay the object of true reflection and the “criticizability” of the artwork. According to Benjamin, Schlegel was correct in understanding ideas as essentially Platonic, but he was mistaken and hazarded a “mystical thesis” when he confused the abstract with the universal, when he defined the relation of artworks to art as infinity in totality, and when he held that the totality of all works is one work—the Absolute (SW1 167, 172). Benjamin counters that the Absolute cannot be broached through reflection. All critique is finite and its power is suspended in relation to the Absolute. Goethe’s aesthetic philosophy is taken as a corrective to this Romantic aesthetic of the idea by invoking instead the *ideal*. In contrast to the idea, the ideal posits a unity in plurality, which is not

at all the same thing as a unity *of* plurality, which would have been Schlegel's articulation.<sup>50</sup> Instead, the unity in plurality means that "the unity of art is found again and again *in* the plurality of works" (183) (my italics). The idea of art is concerned primarily with form; the ideal is concerned with content. The ideal is a "supreme conceptual unity, the unity of content" and is therefore completely different to the idea, which "shelters in itself and builds out of itself the context of forms" (179). The ideal is grasped in a "limited plurality of pure contents, into which it decomposes," manifesting in "a limited, harmonic discontinuum of pure contents," which are designated by "refraction." The "pure contents" cannot be found in works; works can "resemble them only in a more or less high degree," but this resemblance should not be understood from the viewpoint of a "ruinous materialist understanding," but rather as the relation between that which is "perceptible in the highest degree" and that which is "only intuitable" (180). The "pure contents" are the deep metaphysical core not of the created work, but of nature. The created work can produce "relative archetypes" or "prototypes," and through this the "pure content" may be sensed, but not signified: "In this, the object of intuition is the necessity that the content, which announces itself in the feelings as pure, become completely perceptible. The sensing of this necessity is intuition. The ideal of art as object of intuition is therefore necessary perceptibility—which never appears purely in the artwork itself, which remains the object of perception." To use Nancy's phrase, sense is exscribed.

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<sup>50</sup> This distinction is made very clear in a fragment entitled "Language and Logic": "The unity of essence is of the same kind as the essence of whose multiplicity we are speaking. But it is *not* the unity *of* the essences" (SW 273).

The kind of critique Benjamin argues for here is further developed in “Goethe’s Elective Affinities,” where commentary and critique are distinguished; commentary is concerned with the material content, critique with the truth content. It is useful keep in mind the “burning of the husk” that happens when one enters into the realm of ideas in the *Trauerspiel* while reading the simile he uses to illustrate the task of the critic:

If, to use a simile, one views the growing work as a burning funeral pyre, then the commentator stands before it like a chemist, the critic like an alchemist. Whereas, for the former, wood and ash remain the sole objects of his analysis, for the latter only the flame itself preserves an enigma: that of what is alive. Thus, the critic inquires into the truth, whose living flame continues to burn over the heavy logs of what is past and the light ashes of what has been experienced. (SW1 298)

Criticism is directed towards ideas, truth, and attempts to make this the “living flame” of truth, the object of experience. But this truth content “neither appears in art nor can be unambiguously named,” yet in spite of this stands in a necessary relation to semblance, and in fact without semblance would cease to be essentially beautiful (350). This relationship is akin to that of the object and its veil: “Beauty is not a semblance, not a veil covering something else...the beautiful semblance is the veil thrown over that which is necessarily most veiled. For the beautiful is neither the veil nor the veiled object but rather the object in its veil” (351). The veil, the beautiful semblance, is essential, for it makes visible “not the idea but rather the latter’s secret.”

Yet, in the context of Benjamin’s other works, these passages are rather confusing. If the contents of Benjamin’s oeuvre were spilled out onto a flat surface and allowed to organize themselves according to the gravitational pull that each element

exerted on the others, the result would resemble a very large map of a pre-industrial, almost feudal, landscape: there would be no major city surrounded concentrically by suburbs and townships and fed by every road and river, but instead a haphazard scattering of villages and hamlets of various sizes connected by many winding lanes and cow paths that shoot off in different directions from each cluster, like a constellation of stars precipitated onto earth. This is Benjamin's style of *Darstellung*, representation: "method is essentially representation. Method is a digression [or detour]" (28).<sup>51</sup> Tracing the logic of Benjamin's thinking from one cluster to the next can be challenging. Here, the "living flame" of the artwork seems to be incompatible with the other images that Benjamin uses to describe the work of criticism and the allegorical object, which more often than not concern images of death. For example, in a letter to Florens Christian Rang, Benjamin goes so far as to define criticism as "the mortification of works" (SW1 389). He continues: "Not the intensification of consciousness in them (that is Romantic!), but their colonization by knowledge. The task of philosophy is to name the idea, as Adam named nature, in order to overcome the works, which are to be seen as nature returned." And here is another problem: How is it possible to "return nature"? Or, in the terms of the *Trauerspiel*, how can ideas be thought of as a "redeeming element"? The idea of redemption is completely incompatible with the stricture against irony becoming "therapeutic" that de Man insists on. And in Benjamin's early fragment, "On Language as Such and the Language of Man," no possibility for redemption appears. Benjamin

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<sup>51</sup> Martha B. Helfer in the *The Retreat of Representation*, explores the *Trauerspiel* in terms of its critique of Kant. Kant "tried to eliminate the *Darstellung* problematic in philosophy by modeling the Critiques on a mathematical paradigm," but Benjamin counters that truth is in fact contained in the very structure of language and its functioning. His answer then to Kant's aporiae (what Helfer calls the "paradoxical notion of negative *Darstellung*") is the constellation and the notion of digression or detour. (178-9).

asserts that all language is based on the name, and points to Genesis, in which the name is both creative and the thing created. This “absolute relation of name to knowledge exists only in God; only there is name, because it is inwardly identical with the creative word, the pure medium of knowledge” (68). With the Fall, comes the birth of the human word, which is no longer creative because it has lost its naming power. Human names, as mere imitations of the creative word, no longer have any natural correspondence to things. Words become mere signs and abstractions ensue. As a consequence, nature becomes mute. “Overnaming” is the condition of language and of allegory, and it is “the deepest linguistic reason for all melancholy and (from the point of view of the thing) for all deliberate muteness.” Signs no longer share a “natural mediation” with things. Language is ultimately capable of communicating nothing but itself, being both the communication of the incommunicable and the “symbol of the noncommunicable.” Furthermore, in the *Arcades Project*, the idea of the veil and the object are presented as the belonging to the field of mystery, with all of its theological associations:

Allegory recognizes many enigmas, but it knows no mystery. An enigma is a fragment that, together with another, matching fragment, makes up a whole. Mystery, on the other hand, was invoked from time immemorial in the image of the veil, which is an old accomplice of distance. Distance appears veiled. Now, the painting of the Baroque—unlike that of the Renaissance, for example—has nothing at all to do with this veil. Indeed, it ostentatiously rends the veil and, as its ceiling frescoes in particular demonstrate, it brings even the distance of the skies into nearness, one that seeks to startle and confound. (J77a, 8)

Neither mystery nor enigma foreclose the idea of truth or meaning, but where in mystery truth has religious provenance and connotations, in enigma it is wholly secular. In mystery, truth is always veiled. Mystery promises the possibility of revelation, but on a cosmic plane, not an earthly one, and it finds its aesthetic articulation in symbol. With enigma, however, there is no inside, or rather the inside is outside, its interior displayed on its skin. Allegory renounces the specious emanation of symbol, the *Schein*: “Allegory, as a sign that is pointedly set off against its meaning, has its place in art as the antithesis to the beautiful appearance [*Schein*] in which signifier and signified flow into each other” (J83a, 3).

The distinction between symbol and allegory must be therefore understood in terms of repetition. In symbol, image and substance are fused, and time is collapsed into space: “The measure of time for the experience of the symbol is the mystical instant in which the symbol assumes the meaning into its hidden and, if one might say so, wooded interior” (*OGTD* 165). This “mystical instant” is essentially unrepresentable. That the Romantics thought they could broach it through reflection and make it an object of consciousness was the fatal flaw in their aesthetics. However, the “mystical instant” itself is not a fiction. In the “Concept of History,” Benjamin renames it “messianic time.” The historian who understands that history cannot be understood simply through the lens of the causal nexus ceases to document the sequence of events as though they were “beads of a rosary” (*SW4*, 397). Instead, this historian would grasp “the constellation into which his own era has entered, along with a very specific earlier one. Thus, he establishes a conception of the present now-time shot through with splinters of messianic time.” This would mean that thinking would have to come to a sudden stop: “Where thinking

suddenly comes to a stop in a constellation saturated with tensions, it gives that constellation a shock by which thinking is crystallized as a monad” (396). The Leibnizian monad, together with the Platonic idea, formed a *summa* for Benjamin’s thinking of ideas. Ideas are to things “what constellations are to stars”—in the mystical instant in which everything hangs suspended, the idea is the intrinsic, dynamic force that holds everything apart *and* in relation. This is the *dialectical image*, in which the historian (or artist) is able “to blast a specific life out of the era, a specific work out of the life work.” He is thus able to pull what is singular and specific from what is by nature totalizing and universal. By injecting this life back into the work, where it is “both preserved *and* sublated,” the “nourishing fruit of what is historically understood contains time in its *interior* as a precious but tasteless seed.” It is tasteless because one cannot taste it.

Messianic time finds its corollary in literature in the “expressionless.” The expressionless is a “critical violence,” an “objection” [Einspruch], and a “counter-rhythmic rupture” that “grounds” the contents of the artwork by preventing essence from mingling with semblance, by insisting on the true conditions of language, and refusing “the false, errant totality—the absolute totality” (SW1 340). No mediation occurs between semblance and essence. Creation comes from chaos, nature, and the work is the product of a temporal suspension of chaos in semblance. Form “enchants chaos momentarily into world”:

The life undulating in it must appear petrified and as if spellbound in a single moment. That which in it has being is mere beauty, mere harmony, which floods through the chaos (and, in truth, through this only and not the world) but, in this flooding-through, seems only to enliven it. What arrests this semblance,

spellbinds this movement, and interrupts the harmony is the expressionless [*das Ausdruckslose*]. (SW1 340)

Recourse to Deleuze is helpful here: in *Difference and Repetition*, the idea is defined as “not yet the concept of an object which submits the world to the requirements of representation, but rather a brute presence which can be invoked in the world only in function of that which is not “representable” in things” (59). For Deleuze, the one saving grace of Platonic Ideas, which he otherwise disapproves of, is the lack of mediation between the ideas and things: Platonic division “acts in the immediate and is inspired by the Ideas rather than by the requirements of a concept in general.” Thus, the “Heraclitean world still growls in Platonism.” The means for overturning Platonic division (or to “reverse Platonism,” which is Nietzsche’s phrase and is quoted many times by Deleuze) is therefore inscribed within the Platonic system itself. It exists within in it, just as the expressionless exists within representation—preserved *and* sublated, but not mediated.

Symbol is the organic incarnation or embodiment of that which it represents, whereas what allegory represents is always different to itself, because it carries its Other within it— the expressionless, the mute. The expressionless resists representation and thereby interpretation. For this reason, I argue that Benjamin’s model of critique is derived from Silenus, and he seems perhaps to be thinking of this figure in this passage from “Goethe’s Elective Affinities”:

Let us suppose that one makes the acquaintance of a person who is handsome and attractive but impenetrable, because he carries a secret with him. It would be reprehensible to want to pry. Still, it would surely be permissible to inquire

whether he has any siblings and whether their nature could not perhaps explain somewhat the enigmatic character of the stranger. In just this way critique seeks to discover siblings in realm of philosophy. And all genuine works of art have their siblings in the realm of philosophy. It is, after all, precisely these figures in which the ideal of philosophy's problem appears. (SW1 333)

But philosophy's ideal, as we know from earlier, is grasped as a "limited plurality of pure contents, into which it decomposes." Hence the proliferation of images of death and decay, and above all, the *facies hippocratica*. Only the expressionless can complete a work of art, "by shattering it into a thing of shards, into a fragment of the true world, into the torso of a symbol." This image—the torso of a symbol—is what is left of the symbol once allegory arrives on the scene and makes off with its head. Allegory continuously hollows out its identity. In the *Trauerspiel*, the *facies hippocratica* expresses a specifically allegorical way of seeing, a secular explanation of history as the suffering of a profane world: "Whereas in the symbol destruction is idealized and the transfigured face of nature is fleetingly revealed in the light of redemption, in allegory the observer is confronted with the *facies hippocratica* of history as a petrified, primordial landscape" (166).

The *facies hippocratica* is a face that has lost its aura. In the "Little History of Photography," the first essay in which Benjamin mentions the aura, it is described thus: "What is aura actually? A strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be" (SW2, 518). The aura is specifically associated with early photographic portraits, but the aura is lost, the distance

is brought into proximity like the Baroque sky, with the development of technology: “The camera is getting smaller and smaller, ever readier to capture fleeting and secret images whose shock effect paralyzes the associative mechanisms of the beholder” (527). Faster shutter speeds fractalize the mystical instant, messianic time is rendered into shards, and the ordinary and everyday become virtualized—sense-event, that deep metaphysical core, rises to the surface, the virtual is actualized. Gashé’s gloss on the ending of the “Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism,” where Benjamin invokes the “sober light” of ideas, draws out the significance of this point, and we might do well to remind ourselves of the steadfast sobriety of Socrates here also:

The Absolute becomes de-sacralized, de-divinized by reflection—in an intellectual and conceptual process of an intuiting no longer intuitive [anschaulich], but soberly rational, down to earth (and hence distinct from the mystics intellectual intuition of the whole). But not only is reflection sober, the Absolute to which it becomes potentiated—the medium of reflection and the continuum of forms—turns prosaic as well. It is an Absolute only relatively different from the profane forms, one that has been divested of its separating and discriminating force. The sober Absolute is an Absolute that has forfeited its transcendence. (65)

The “redeeming light” must be understood in terms of this forfeited transcendence. The Trauerspiel ends with the invocation of a redemptive about-turn:

Allegory, of course, thereby loses everything that was most peculiar to it: the secret, privileged knowledge, the arbitrary rule in the realm of dead objects, the supposed infinity of a world without hope. All this vanishes with this *one* about-

turn, in which the immersion of allegory has to clear away the phantasmagoria of the objective and, left entirely to its own devices, re-discovers itself, not playfully in the earthly world of things, but seriously under the eyes of heaven. And this is the essence of melancholy immersion: that its ultimate objects, in which it believes it can most fully secure for itself that which is vile, turn into allegories, and that these allegories fill out and deny the void in which they are represented, just as, ultimately, the intention does not faithfully rest in the contemplation of bones, but faithlessly leaps forward to the idea of resurrection. (233)

According to Howard Caygill, in exposing the arbitrariness of signs, the condition of anteriority with which we must grapple in order to communicate, and the very impossibility of that communication, allegory suddenly turns and sees that that which it has allegorized and that which has done the allegorizing is itself an allegory. He reads this about-turn as a sort of allegory of allegory and maintains that it is actually not possible in the period of high capitalism: Benjamin was mistaken in this early text, and the fact that in a later text (*The Arcades Project*) Benjamin considers Baudelaire's modernist allegory to have "foundered" before the spectacle of an allegorical modernity proves this.<sup>52</sup> I would like to counter this view and argue that there is more to what Benjamin is calling for than simply a comment on allegorical modernity or a presentation of the "allegory of allegory," that "*vertige de l'hyperbole*." Allegory includes the idea of the expressionless, and its emblem is the *facies hippocratica*. What I hope to have made clear by now, is that the expressionless is related, a sibling if you will, to Derrida's *differance*, Nancy's sense, and Deleuze's sense-event. Every event has a double structure: on the one hand, there is the expressive, genetic event of repetition, succinctly

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<sup>52</sup> Caygill, 252.

encapsulated in Kierkegaard's phrase, "the existence, that has been, now becomes" (*Repetition* 149); on the other, there is the representation of the event that is spatio-temporally realized on the surface. When Deleuze states that "every event is like death" (*The Logic of Sense* 152), he refers precisely to this double structure: the spatio-temporal event of death that is representable, and the sense-event of death that cannot be represented and which we always miss because we arrive too late, after it has already taken place. This is the node at which "death turns against death; where dying is the negation of death" (153). Deleuze opposes representation to expression: expression resists representation. In Benjamin's terms, this is what makes expression essentially expressionless, but the condition of the expressionless does not foreclose expressivity; rather, expression expresses the expressionless. When Benjamin speaks of the "pure language" in the "Task of the Translator" he refers precisely to this expressive center: "Unlike a work of literature, translation does not find itself in the centre of the language forest but on the outside facing the wooded ridge; it calls into it without entering, aiming at that single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one." Translation comes not from the original or the ultimate primal sound, but rather from that which emanates from it. It comes "not so much from its life as from its afterlife" (72). Thus, critique should not simply rest at the contemplation of bones; It should not stop at death, but rather should leap forward into its afterlife. With this leap forward, one also leans forward and listens for the echo of pure language, the resonance of sense.

### **Silenus: the Lover and the Reader**

Paul de Man opens “Hypogram and Inscription” with the following statement about the ground of literary criticism and theory:

In a manner that is more acute for theoreticians of literature than for theoreticians of the natural or the social world, it can be said that they do not know quite what it is they are talking about, not only in the metaphysical sense that the whatness, the ontology is hard to fathom, but also in the more elusive sense, that, whenever one is supposed to speak of literature, one speaks of anything under the sun (including, of course, oneself) except literature. (29)

This is the backdrop of the underlying question that de Man pursues throughout his work. “Hypogram and Inscription” focuses on Riffaterre’s study of Saussure’s research on anagrams, research that was driven by the conviction that there was some underlying word or proper name governing Latin poetry. De Man argues that Riffaterre, in his attempt to both understand and complete Saussure’s research, produces a circular argument for the phenomenality of reading: “the actualization of signification is what allows the text to be read and the possibility of reading certifies the necessity of this actualization” (35).<sup>53</sup> But Riffaterre’s semiotic system depends on accepting that there is a distinction between *reference* (the idea that a word represents a thing) and *signification* (that a word exists within a system of signs and that it is because of this system that the word can signify or represent) (50). De Man counters that prosopopeia, “the very figure

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<sup>53</sup> In “Psyche,” an essay written in memory of Paul de Man, Derrida describes allegory as a double-sided mirror that enacts a “rapid oscillation” between constative and performative registers and leads to specular aporia: language describes what it enacts and enacts what it describes, the mirror reflects what it sees and sees what it reflects.

of the reader and of reading” (45), undoes this distinction.<sup>54</sup> Prosopopeia is the process by which a sign posits a voice that “assumes mouth, eye, and finally face, a chain that is manifest in the etymology of the trope's name, *prosopon poien*, to confer a mask or a face (*prosopon*).”<sup>55</sup> Prosopopeia is what causes the “actualization” of literature. It makes the “invisible visible” and is essentially “hallucinatory,” “uncanny” (49). Just as dreaming undoes the certainty of sleep, and hallucinations undo the certainty of seeing, “it is impossible to say whether prosopopeia is plausible because of the empirical existence of dreams and hallucinations or whether one believes that such a thing as dreams and hallucinations exists because language permits the figure of prosopopeia” (50). Though de Man grants that, as Riffaterre argues, literature is to be understood as primarily verbal rather than referential, this does not mean that a text is simply a mimesis of a signifier or of a system of signifiers. Rather, it is the mimesis of prosopopeia, and “since mimesis is itself a figure, it is the figure of a figure (the prosopoeia of a prosopopeia)” (48). Saussure himself identified the proximity of the hypogram to prosopopeia, and de Man suspects that Saussure also understood its accomplice implication that “*prosopon-poiein* means to give a face and therefore implies that the original face can be missing or nonexistent” (44). It was perhaps because of this “terror glimpsed” that he aborted his research (37). In contrast, Riffaterre attempts “a figural evasion which...takes the subtly effective form of evading the figural” (51).

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<sup>54</sup> Fontanier's 1821 definition of prosopopeia: “Prosopopeia, that must not be confused with personification, apostrophe or dialogism, which however do almost always occur with it, consists in staging, as it were, absent, dead, supernatural or even inanimate beings. These are made to act, speak, answer as is our wont. At the very least beings can be made into confidants, witnesses, accusers, avengers, judges etc.” Michael Riffaterre, ‘Prosopopeia’ in P. Brooks, S. Felman, J. Hillis Miller (eds.), *The Lesson of Paul de Man*, ‘Yale French Studies’ n° 69, 1985, pp. 107-123.

<sup>55</sup> Paul de Man, *Rhetoric of Romanticism*, 76.

What makes this text particularly relevant to our discussion of the *Symposium*, and particularly to Silenus as a figure for both discourse and the erotic object, is that in this same essay, buried in the endnotes (therefore outside the text, but also inside it), de Man makes a rare statement about love: “Rather than being a heightened version of sense experience, the erotic is a figure that makes such experience possible. We do not see what we love but we love in the hope of confirming the illusion that we are indeed seeing anything at all” (53). Just as *prosopopeia* is the figure of reading and of the reader, it is also the figure of loving and of the lover. Reading and love both involve negotiating a surface in order to penetrate sense. For Eros, this surface is the face or the skin in which the body is wrapped; for discourse, it is the material sign, the inscription or typeface. In the face-to-face encounter and the face-to-typeface encounter, sense is broached in a manner akin to what Alcibiades describes: the ungainly form of Socrates, his unyielding surface, is momentarily infused by the luminous multiplicity of sense within, and it is this saturation of the surface with sense that causes Alcibiades to fall in love with Socrates and to be entranced by his discourse.

But de Man’s suggestion that this saturated surface is an “illusion,” that in fact we are *not* seeing anything at all, is telling. Post-structuralist literary theory is marked by the persistent figure of the face, and it is invariably a withered face, a dead face, or simply an absent face. Adumbrated by Benjamin, whose *facies hippocratica* or death’s head is the emblem of allegory, de Man makes *prosopopeia*, which is at once a defacement and an effacement, the trope (indeed, the “trope of tropes”) of the linguistic predicament. Derrida, towards the end of “Plato’s Pharmacy,” writes that the “structure of repetition,” and specifically the loss of “Identity” caused by the structure of repetition, is marked by

the “disappearance of the Face” (168). The loss of face has a particularly bereft cast in de Man and Derrida, which at times is present also in Benjamin (with his emphasis on melancholy and mourning) and at other times not (the promise of “resurrection” at the end of the *Trauerspiel*). Though Nancy also dispenses with the face—most notably in his critique of Levinas in the essay “Shattered Love”—the emphasis is not on the specular aporia that is left after the break with illusion. For Nancy, logos is indeed an illusion, but sense is not an illusion—there is something rather than nothing.

It is worth pausing at the particulars of Nancy’s critique of Levinas. While he credits Levinas for clearing the way for a “metaphysics of love,” he argues that his insistent use of the motif of the face means that Levinas is forced into a dialectical view of love whereby the subject appropriates or sublates its own becoming in order to be. Nancy opposes this “completion” of the dialectical subject to “exposition.” Like the dialectical subject, the condition for the “exposed being” is “that whose essence or destination consists in being presented: given over, offered to the outside, to others, and even to the self” (89). But where the exposed being is different from the dialectical subject is that its goal is *shattering*, not completion: “What is exposed, what makes it exposed, is that it is not completed by this process, and it incompletes itself to the outside; it is presented, offered to something that is not it nor its proper becoming” (89). Nancy counters the face to the heart, arguing that the shattering caused by love takes place “before the face and signification. Or rather, this takes place at another level: at the *heart* of being” (105). In *On Listening*, Nancy again locates sense at the heart center, describing the body as a drum: a skin stretched taut around a cavity that functions as an “echo chamber” or a “reverberation chamber” (9, 27), a space of resonance to which

listening would be “an approach to the self—*not* to the proper self (I), not to the self of an other, but to the form or structure of self as such—which is, infinite referral” (9).

Nancy moves sense from the face to the heart. Against this, and with Silenus as my figure, I would counter that sense must be located *both* at the heart center *and* at the surface. Sense cannot be broached without first physically grazing the surface. The skin carves out of space the enclosure for the heart and for sound and it is the skin which then vibrates with that sound. The skin vibrates with sense, and its surface must first be struck in order for sense to resound. Furthermore, Levinas is much closer to Nancy’s thinking than Nancy lets on. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas describes the “I” as autochthonous in the sense that it is borne out of a physical and social situation (*lieu* and *milieu*, respectively), and is the host for the conscious intentions of the subject, but it is always secondary to the self of embodiment and sensation, which are always anterior and primary. Metaphysics therefore must precede ontology simply by virtue of the fact that sensation precedes reflection; where the one is orientated towards the outside (as sense, for Nancy, is *exscribed*), the other, coming after and attempting to “catch up,” is orientated within. This second movement, Nancy argues, is where the subject appropriates or sublates its own becoming in order to be. However, Levinas always insists that the interruption caused by the face-to-face encounter exposes our fundamental lack of ontological freedom. The subject cannot dominate the relationship with the Other: “One does not question oneself concerning him; one questions him. Always he faces” (47). The encounter is always “anterior to the crystallization of consciousness, I and non-I, into a subject and object” (188). The subject attempts to constitute and reconstitute itself by sublating this experience (its moment of becoming) in order to be, but continual

face-to-face encounters undo these attempts even as they take place. The *facies hippocratica* therefore has no place in Levinas's thinking of the face, because the face, for Levinas, must always denote a living presence. The dead face, by comparison, is "a mortuary mask; it is shown instead of letting see—but precisely thus no longer appears as a face."

In contrast to the mortuary mask, a living face is one that we cannot apprehend directly or fully. It is not a single, unmoving and solid surface, complete unto itself. The surface is always mobile, always expressive. Pocked by eye sockets, nostrils and mouth, the face is porous and expressive. Sense simmers on the surface: we follow the frown lines that might suddenly become laugh lines and ask what it is that those eyes are expressing, or the tautness of those lips, the smoothness of that forehead...<sup>56</sup> In the same

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<sup>56</sup> I think here not only of the simple face-to-face encounters that happen to us every day, but also of Walter Pater's famous description of the Mona Lisa, which has clearly much more to do with the "deep, metaphysical yolk" (Deleuze's phrase in *Logic of Sense*—see above p. 23) than with the physical painted surface of the face: "The presence that rose thus so strangely beside the waters, is expressive of what in the ways of a thousand years men had come to desire. Hers is the head upon which all "the ends of the world are come," and the eyelids are a little weary. It is a beauty wrought out from within upon the flesh, the deposit, little cell by cell, of strange thoughts and fantastic reveries and exquisite passions. Set it for a moment beside one of those white Greek goddesses or beautiful women of antiquity, and how would they be troubled by this beauty, into which the soul with all its maladies has passed! All the thoughts and experience of the world have etched and moulded there, in that which they have of power to refine and make expressive the outward form, the animalism of Greece, the lust of Rome, the mysticism of the middle age with its spiritual ambition and imaginative loves, the return of the Pagan world, the sins of the Borgias. She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave; and has been a diver in deep seas, and keeps their fallen day about her; and trafficked for strange webs with Eastern merchants: and, as Leda, was the mother of Helen of Troy, and, as Saint Anne, the mother of Mary; and all this has been to her but as the sound of lyres and flutes, and lives only in the delicacy with which it has moulded the changing lineaments, and tinged the eyelids and the hands. The fancy of a perpetual life, sweeping together ten thousand experiences, is an old one; and modern philosophy has conceived the idea of humanity as wrought upon by, and summing up in itself all modes of thought and life. Certainly Lady Lisa might stand as the embodiment of the old fancy, the symbol of the modern idea." (*The Renaissance* (London, 1893). Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1980, pp. 98-99.)

spirit, Deleuze and Guattari's critique of "faciality" is not a summons to do away with the face (which we obviously cannot do away with) but rather to find for it a "new use" (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 188-89). The old use was to either make the face the marker of identity (which Deleuze and Guattari term the "white wall of the signifier") or to view it as a kind of specular aporia (which they term the "black hole of subjectivity"). They advocate "dismantling" this model of faciality in order to "set faciality traits free like birds" (189). These newly freed traits—the multiple particles of sense, the storm of Lucretian atoms, the luminous, heterogenous interior of Silenus— will open up "lines of flight" and these will be capable of producing "a nonsubjective, living love in which each party connects with unknown tracts in the other without entering and conquering them, in which the lines composed are broken lines."

Entering and conquering—this is how we apprehend meaning. But sense is not to be equated to meaning, though it is related to it. Mirroring the relation of repetition to representation, sense is anterior to meaning, and therefore foundational to it. Nancy correctly associates sense with truth, but not with meaning (*logos*): to *hear* is to make sense, or "to be *logos*," but before hearing, "at the very bottom of it," there must be a *listening*, "which is why it is necessary that sense not be content to make sense (or to be *logos*), but that it want also to resound" (*Listening* 6). Listening understands the energy repetition, the energy of sense; hearing makes that energy represent, freezes it into *logos*. Sense is infinitely resounding and infinitely deferred: it is that movement of deferral itself, the movement of repetition.

But as de Man suggests, the infinite deferral set in motion by the process of reading is not simply because the system of signs in which a particular sign exists

reproduces the pattern of infinite deferral in our attempt to make sense of what we see, hear or read. It is rather because of the process he names *prosopopeia*, which, we should remind ourselves, is *both* the figure of reading *and of the reader*. For this figure of the reader, we might take the lover Alcibiades as our example. Erotically enslaved to Socrates and yet unable to effect erotic union, Alcibiades's predicament might be described as allegorical: since erotic fusion is foreclosed, he must remain always separate from and yet in thrall to the multiplicity that charges the surface of the object before him. But Alcibiades is also the host of the Silenus image and is therefore himself something of a Silenus: an embodiment of that same multiplicity, he presents himself as a comic minor character to those critics in pursuit of *logos*, when in fact he is the specular locus of sense-truth, an image of the reader reading the reader reading.

In "Shattered Love," Plato does not fare much better in Nancy's reading than does Levinas. While lauding Plato's "generosity" in the *Symposium* towards "the indefinite abundance of all possible loves, and an abandonment to their dissemination, indeed to the disorder of these implosions" (81), Nancy asserts that, "for all its generosity, the *Symposium* also exercises a mastery over love" (85). Nancy's reading of Plato is Platonic; against this, what I have argued throughout these pages is for an anti-Platonic reading of the *Symposium*. In my reading, the *Symposium* is constructed in a way that instigates its own shattering through the drunken arrival of Alcibiades and his description of Socrates as Silenus. This image opposes the luminous gods of becoming to the implacable mono-surface of Socrates *qua* God (in the Shelleyan sense). It gestures towards something that no other speech in the *Symposium* did: not *logos*, but *sense*. The intoxicated Alcibiades, as host of this image, becomes infected with it: he not only brings an abrupt end to the

debate about the meaning of love that he burst in upon, but in a further ironic move—a most Silenic move, indeed—he presents himself as the comic figure of the *Symposium* and not its point of true gravitas.

We must return to the surface: “There is nothing that is anything but outer darkness beyond this wall.”<sup>57</sup> In Virginia Woolf’s “The Mark on the Wall,” the narrator attempts to fix her attention on a physical object, a mark on the wall, only to find how “readily our thoughts swarm upon a new object, lifting it a little way, as ants carry a blade of straw so feverishly, and then leave it.”<sup>58</sup> It is imperative for the narrator to continually return to the solid surface of things, to the mark on the wall:

Indeed, now that I have fixed my eyes upon it, I feel that I have grasped a plank in the sea; I feel a satisfying sense of reality...waking from a midnight dream of horror, one hastily turns on the light and lies quiescent, worshipping the chest of drawers, worshipping solidity, worshipping reality, worshipping the impersonal world which is a proof of some existence other than ours. That is what one wants to be sure of....

Though not named, it appears that this is the story Deleuze is thinking of in *Difference and Repetition* when he mentions the “figures of repetition which appear in the work of a great novelist,” a work which centers on an “ever displaced stain on the wall” (114).<sup>59</sup> The three “figures of repetition” are repetition-binding, repetition-stain, and repetition-

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<sup>57</sup> Lacan, *Écrits*, 316.

<sup>58</sup> “The Mark on the Wall,” *Monday or Tuesday*, Virginia Woolf. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc., 1921.

<sup>59</sup> Woolf’s title is usually translated into French as “la marque sur le mur,” but also, occasionally, as “le tache [stain] sur le mur.” Deleuze and Guattari appear to be thinking of Woolf again in the image of the face as a “white wall of signifiante” and a “black hole of subjectivity” in their essay “Year Zero: Faciality” (*A Thousand Plateaus*). In “The Mark on the Wall,” Woolf describes the mark as a “small round mark, black upon a white wall.”

eraser. These are the three syntheses that Deleuze claims to be constitutive of the unconscious, and they correspond to Eros, Habitus and Thanatos respectively. The first is the foundation of time in the living present and is the domain of the id; the second is the subjection of the id to the rule of the ego and the grounding of the time (the “living present”) as pure past or linear time; the third is the exposure of the absence of that ground, “the absence of ground into which we are precipitated by the ground itself,” and this is the domain of Thanatos, which is beyond “the ground of Eros and the foundation of Habitus.” Within this third synthesis of Thanatos, three moves take place: first, all three synthesis and the dimensions of time they accommodate (present, past, future) are collapsed into one “pure form”; second, it reorganizes time so that the id comes to operate within the past (formerly the domain of the ego) and the ego comes to operate in the present (formerly the domain of the id); finally, Thanatos becomes orientated only towards the future (115). In Freudianism, Thanatos is associated with death, and it does indeed still signify death in Deleuze, but only as a challenge to ontology (whether that of psychoanalysis or theology): “It is said that the One subjugated the multiple once and for all. But is this not the face of death? And does not the other face cause to die in turn, once and for all, everything which operates once and for all?” (115). The “other face” of Thanatos, by negating everything including negation itself, becomes a force of pure affirmation: “the death instinct reveals an unconditional truth hidden in its “other” face—namely, the eternal return in so far as this does not cause everything to come back but, on the contrary... [affirms] only the excessive and the unequal, the interminable and the incessant, the formless as the product of the most extreme formality.”

Thanatos is the energy of eternal return, of repetition. It is what precipitates us from the ground into groundlessness. This is the point at which de Man's break with illusion occurs. But at the same instant, in affirming this groundlessness as ground, groundlessness renews itself as ground. In Benjamin's terms, this is the point at which "death turns against dying" and "faithlessly leaps forward to the idea of resurrection." In Deleuze and Guattari's terms, this is when a "line of flight" opens up and a "new use" is found for the impasse of faciality: "Only across the wall of the signifier can you run lines of asignifiante that void all memory, all return, all possible signification and interpretation. Only in the black hole of subjectivity do you discover the transformed, heated, captured particles you must relaunch for a nonsubjective, living love..." (189). Love is oriented towards surfaces, faces, skin, but only because surfaces are porous: the living multiplicity within us is pulled towards the living multiplicity we see in another. To perceive a person without the markers of their subjectivity (which are the categorizing markers that reduce them to the same as other subjects) is to perceive them as Silenus. Sense resists logos, it resists representation, and it resists subjectification: "Love attaches to the abyss. It is hate that circumscribes its own identity. Tell me whom you hate and I will tell you who you are. Tell me whom you love and I will know as little about you as before."<sup>60</sup> Saussure, hunting through pages of poems for the secret word, the one word, the key that unlocks everything, but he cannot find it. De Man suggests that Saussure's failure to find that word, the evidence that in fact there is no such word, was a "terror glimpsed," but de Man perhaps reveals his own proclivities here: his own description of reading as an activity that induces "permanent parabasis" is accurate if we understand reading simply as the search for logos, but it is not appropriate if we understand reading

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<sup>60</sup> Alphonso Lingis, *Trust*, 124.

as something that operates at the level of sense. Logos demands revelation, but sense insists on concealment and it hides in our midst.

### Beckett and the letter M

Beckett's work evidently lends itself to philosophical discussion, and many of the more important books on Beckett have addressed the ways in which poststructuralism, existentialism and phenomenology intersect with the central themes of his work.<sup>61</sup> However, Beckett himself was famously opposed to elaborate exegesis: in a frequently-quoted letter, he rails against "those bastards of critics" and insists that his "work is a matter of fundamental sounds (no joke intended) made as fully as possible, and I accept responsibility for nothing else. If people want to have headaches among the overtones, let them. And provide their own aspirin."<sup>62</sup> Certain of these critical bastards seem to have been on Terry Eagleton's mind when, in his introduction to Pascale Cassanova's *Samuel Beckett: Anatomy of a Literary Revolution*, he decries both the critics that evoke an "existential-cum-metaphysical Beckett" (who he accuses of the "Blanchot-ing of Beckett") and the critics that draw on Beckett's psychobiography to explain his work. To make this last point Eagleton offers a rather self-defeating argument that draws on Beckett's expressed aversion to self-expression: we must remind ourselves, Eagleton

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<sup>61</sup> This is a short list of some of these publications: Stephen Connor, in *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), looks at Beckett through the Deleuzian concept of repetition; Elizabeth Barry, in *Beckett and Authority: The Uses of Cliché* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), looks at the manifold implications of Beckett's impoverished language; Anthony Ullman, in *Samuel Beckett and the Philosophical Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006) makes the (Deleuze and Bergson inflected) case that Beckett's use of the word "image" strongly relates to the sense in which Spinoza, Descartes and other seventeenth-century rationalist use the concept of image, which they understand to include all sensations; H. Porter Abbott, in *Beckett writing Beckett: The Author in the Autograph* (New York: Cornell UP, 1996), studies Beckett's shifting use of the first person pronoun; Matthew Feldman has pursued some of the new channels of inquiry opened up by Knowlson's biography in his book *Beckett's Books: A Cultural History of Samuel Beckett's 'Interwar Notes'* (London: Continuum, 2006), most notably Beckett's early interest in Arnold Geulincx.

<sup>62</sup> From a letter to Alan Schneider (29 December 1957; Harmon, 24; *Village Voice*, 19 March 1959). Quoted in *The Grove Companion*, 215.

warns us, of “this author’s aversion to the idea that he was somehow ‘expressing himself’ in his writings,” and so even “if something as inconceivable as expression is going on, what is being expressed is certainly nothing as drearily passé as a self.”<sup>63</sup>

Cassanova’s invective against “Blanchot-style criticism” (12) is equally harsh: she argues that criticism inspired by Blanchot has reduced Beckett to “the passive archaic function of inspired mediator, charged with ‘unveiling being’” (11), that this criticism “has not simply masked the meaning of his literary project but inverted it,” and that Beckett has thus been “celebrated and consecrated in the name of an idea of poetry he always fought against” (12).<sup>64</sup> “Far from being frozen in the bombast consubstantial with the rhetoric of Being,” she counters, Beckett “was more than anyone else concerned with aesthetic modernity” (13). His “break with signification” and his commitment to “literary abstraction” were motivated by the need “to write after Joyce, and, so as not to imitate him, beyond Joyce” and “to put literature on a par with all the major artistic revolutions of the twentieth century” (12), especially that which had taken place in painting. In order to do this, Cassanova argues that Beckett concerned himself with primarily formal elements and that his writing, especially his later works (she takes *Worstward Ho* as the ultimate fruition of his efforts), performs two operations. First, he inverts semantic modalities: well said becomes ill said, somehow becomes nohow, said becomes missaid, for good and all becomes for bad and all, and so on. The second operation is what

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<sup>63</sup> From Eagleton’s preface to Pascale Cassanova’s *Samuel Beckett: Anatomy of a Literary Revolution* (3, 2).

<sup>64</sup> She refers to Blanchot’s famous essay-review of *L’Innomable* that appeared in *Nouvelle Revue Française* in October 1953, and which is reproduced in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage*, ed. L. Graver and R. Federman (London: Routledge, 1979). Here, Blanchot suggests that the “character” or authorial surrogate of the *Unnameable* is a “being without being, who can neither live nor die, neither begin nor leave off, the empty site in which an empty voice is raised without effect, masked for better or worse by a porous and agonizing I” (119). Cassanova partially quotes this line on page 11 of her book.

Cassanova calls the “logic of the worst” (22): Beckett “worsens” the figures of conventional narrative such as characters (who are often simply lettered or numbered), scenery (such as the indistinct location in *Worstward Ho*), and so on.

She offers a close reading of the following passage from *Worstward Ho* to demonstrate: “A place. Where none. A time when try see. Try say. How small. How vast. How if not boundless bounded. Whence the dim. Not now. Know better now. Unknow better now” (92). Her reading of the passage:

Here Beckett relates how he tried in other texts to refer to something out of frame, a reality existing outside textual closure. But in *Worstward Ho* there are no longer any concessions to the ultimate conventions of literary realism, no longer things or places (there are still some objects at the beginning of the text—boots and overcoat—but they rapidly disappear). Beckett accomplishes his own project of an absolutely self-sufficient writing, generating its own syntax, vocabulary, self-ordained grammar, even creating terms that respond exclusively to the logic of the pure space of the text: no more referents, no more attempts to imitate reality or provide an equivalent to it, no more direct links of transposition of the world—a text that indebted solely to itself for the fact that it could be written. (21)

Cassanova’s reading of *Worstward Ho*, a text that has received less attention than Beckett’s other works, is valuable because it does something that few readings of Beckett do: rather than use passages to demonstrate how Beckett exemplifies or performs or represents this or that philosophy, she fixes her attention on the text itself, on how the words interact with each other on the page, and she describes in detail the effects of these interactions. However, by reducing Beckett’s approach to “a quasi-mathematical rigour”

(16), she over-simplifies the text. It is true that Beckett “worsens” the tropes of conventional narrative, but for many readers, academic and non-academic, that is simply one of the least interesting observations one can make about Beckett’s writing because language can never completely shed itself of its representative, signifying function: at some level, to paraphrase Bahktin, language always means. It is thus a very different medium to painting, which can be pure color and pure form without signifying anything else. A canvas painted the color red can express redness in a much more direct way than the word “red,” which neither creates nor expresses redness, but rather signifies it, represents it—it itself is not red. Cassanova and Eagleton trivialize both writing and reading by suggesting that the task of the writer is to progress literature, to bring it up to a kind of industry standard set by painting, and in denouncing Blanchot and “Blanchot-style critics,” they advocate a style of reading in which words have no truck with the world outside their own hermetically sealed orbit. They overstate the autonomy and isolation of writing: is it possible for writing ever to be “absolutely self-sufficient” or to be “indebted solely to itself for the fact that it could be written”? (Even the simple effectivity of the rhetorical question demonstrates that it is not.)

A 1973 essay on Beckett by J.M. Coetzee attempts to do literally what Cassanova suggests figuratively: he subjects a Beckett text to algorithmic analysis.<sup>65</sup> Focusing on *Lessness*, a short text from 1966, Coetzee’s basic premise is that “normal discourse” draws on a word-stock that is infinite, but “Lessness,” a text that is 1538 words long, uses only 166 lexical items in the first half (words 1-769), and the second half (words 770-1538) is composed of those exact same words only arranged in a different order. Taking a

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<sup>65</sup> J.M. Coetzee, “Samuel Beckett’s *Lessness*: An Exercise in Decomposition,” *Computers and the Humanities*, Vol. 7, no. 4 (Mar., 1973), pp. 195-198.

mathematical approach, Coetzee tries to discover whether there is a rule behind the re-ordering. He explores various kinds of repetition (sometimes of whole sentences, sometimes just of phrases) that are at work in the text and indeed manages to establish some patterns. But he nonetheless concludes that there are “no determinate principles of ordering among phrases, sentences, or paragraph, yet that all are interdependent and connected.” More importantly:

The residue of the fiction is then not the final disposition of the fragments but the motions of the consciousness that disposes them according to the rules we have traced, and no doubt to others we have failed to trace. The subject of *Lessness* is the plight of consciousness in a void, compelled to reflect on itself, capable of doing so only by splitting itself and recombining the fragments in wholes which are never greater than the sums of their parts. This endless enterprise of splitting and recombining is language, and it offers not the promise of the charm, the ever-awaited magical combination that will bring wealth or salvation, but the solace of the game, the killing of time.

Beckett's figures are generally waiting. They wait for someone to appear, for something to happen, for death, but mostly they wait for the waiting to end. His characters kill time by talking to themselves, by thinking ceaselessly, but they have no choice—language seems to possess an ominously remote power that prolongs the wait rather than alleviates it, and it never ceases. In a letter that Cassanova cites in support of her thesis, Beckett complains that literature has been left behind in the “lazy old way” of representation that music and painting abandoned long ago, and advocates an alternative “literature of the

unword” (*Disjecta* 172-3). But in the same letter, Beckett makes it clear that this is not simply a formal game in which the pieces on the board are inverted for the sake of it:

As we cannot eliminate language all at once, we should at least leave nothing undone that might contribute to its falling into disrepute. To bore one hole after another in it, until what lurks behind it—be it something or nothing—begins to seep through; I cannot imagine a higher goal for the writer today...I know there are people, sensitive and intelligent people, for whom there is no lack of silence. I cannot but assume that they are hard of hearing. For in the forest of symbols, which aren't any, the little birds of interpretation, which isn't any, are never silent.

Acknowledging that one cannot simply break with language because it already makes up the fabric of consciousness, Beckett's proposal is to create a literature that is deprived of the traditional devices of scene, character and plot that tend to make readers forget the medium they inhabit. By reducing language to its barest elements, repeated words, repeated phrases, Beckett pushes language to a point where the meanings of the words become unglued from the signifying chains and become only sounds or images of words, “until what lurks behind it—be it something or nothing—begins to seep through.” Something seeps through: otherwise, Beckett's texts would be unreadable in the plainest sense. But this something that seeps through is precisely that which resists reading, resists representation and signification—it is, as I will argue in the following pages, the “trace,” and I explore this idea by following the way in which the letter M and the face functions in Beckett's texts, how they emerge from the text as figure and at the same time merge with the text as the figure of it. I argue that the letter M, in both its graphic and sonorous

materiality, and the related figure of the face, exposes “the plight of consciousness in a void, compelled to reflect on itself.”

## II. one syllable m at the end is all that matters

In the *Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett*, the entry for the letter M reads as follows:

**M**: the *thirteenth* letter and SB’s favorite (**Murphy**, **Mercier**, **Molloy**, **Malone**). “**W**” is an inverted “**M**” (Watt, *Waiting for Godot*); “**E**” one rotated 90 degrees (*Endgame*, “**The Expelled**,” “**The End**”). Beginning *L’Innommable*, SB used “**M**” before choosing “**Mahood**.” “**M**” suggests “**Mama**,” a **fundamental sound**, the first a baby makes. In **Footfalls** it helps identify **May** with her **mother**. In “**Play**,” **M** is the male in an eternal triangle; in “**Bare Room**,” one speaker. The narrator in *Company* (59) calls his “hearer” **M**, and “himself” **W**. In **How It Is**, language retreats to its roots and names have minimal articulation: **Pim**, **Bom**, **Bem**, **Pam**, “one syllable m at end is all that matters” (109).

In spite of the ubiquity of the letter M in Beckett’s texts, M has not been the object of intense critical inquiry that one might expect it to be. As the entry in the *Grove Companion* indicates, and reinforced no doubt by Beckett’s time spent on Bion’s couch, it is indeed largely taken to indicate “**Mama**” and left at that. Certain passages from Beckett’s texts, such as the one below from *How It Is*, corroborate this interpretation.

it comes the word we’re talking of words I have some still it would seem at my disposal at this period one is enough aha signifying mamma impossible with open mouth it comes I let it at once or in extremis or between the two there is room to

spare aha signifying mamma or some other thing some other sound barely audible signifying some other thing no matter the first to come and restore me to my dignity (26)

But a brief reading of the passage demonstrates that there is something more going on here besides the evocation of Mama. The sound of “mmm” is given added emphasis in the Latin spelling of *mamma*, which has three Ms (as opposed to the English *mama*, which only has two); producing the sound of “mmm” requires the barest of muscular movements, which is convenient for Beckett’s characters who are often physically compromised, and especially in Beckett’s late works, where the process of bodily degeneration wrought by time also entails the additional indignity of infantilization. For its ease of utterance and the function of its call, “Mamma” is therefore the “first to come and restore me to my dignity.” The phrase “signifying mamma” echoes the famous lines spoken by Macbeth, that life is a story “Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury/ Signifying nothing” (V.v.2384-5). Playing on this connection, the sound of “mmm” may signify “some other thing some other sound barely audible some other thing.” Not necessarily “mamma” then, but not nothing either. Rather, *some other thing*.

I take the letter M to function in Beckett as a kind of rebus. I understand rebus in the sense proposed by Walter Ong: that is, as “a kind of phonogram (sound-symbol), but only mediately: the sound is designated not by an abstract coded sign, as a letter of an alphabet, but by a picture of one of the several things the sound signifies.”<sup>66</sup> Now, M is a letter of the alphabet, but it is also, like many early letters, a picture: the zigzag of M is a descendant of an early Semitic-language letter called *mem*, whose wavy lines are thought

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<sup>66</sup> Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 86.

to represent water.<sup>67</sup> And, as Beckett shows us, mmm is one of the few sounds we can make and *continuously* make without so much as opening our mouths; the sound of mmm travels in the rhythmic waves that resound in the zigzag and arches of M's various typefaces. Visually, no matter the typeface, the form of M is always palindromic: each arch or peak mirrors the other, like a typographic Narcissus. M is therefore both an image and a sound that repeats: both Narcissus and Echo.

Narcissus is irrevocably associated with narcissism, yet direct commentary on Ovid's Narcissus is in fact absent from both Freud's *On Narcissism* and Lacan's reworking of Freudian narcissism in "The Mirror Stage."<sup>68</sup> Two important correctives redress this absence: Blanchot's *The Writing of the Disaster* and Spivak's "Echo," both of which, as I will argue, provide important ways in which we can rethink Beckett's use of the letter M.

As its title indicates, Blanchot's text is about the possibility of writing about the disaster, which in some instances is figured as the holocaust, but in most instances is figured as the schism between the experience of an event and its inscription. The original French title *L'Écriture du désastre* has a dual implication that its English translation does not: it suggests both the writing of the disaster, how to write *about* the disaster, and also

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<sup>67</sup> David Marks, *Letter Perfect: The Marvelous History of our Alphabet from A to Z*, 233. "The letter M, thus representing a primordial sound of human speech, has been a member of the alphabet from the start. Letters believed to be M's appear as vertical wavy lines in the world's oldest extant alphabetical writing, the two rock-carved Semitic language inscriptions at Wadi el-Hol in central Egypt, from about 1800 B.C. Scholars think this letter was called *mem*, meaning "water" in the users' Semitic tongue, and that it took the "m" sound with which its name began. Like all early letters, *mem* was also a picture, the wavy lines clearly suggesting water... Today, nearly 4000 years later, the waves of the original *mem* survive in the zigzags of our capital M" (233).

<sup>68</sup> Sigmund Freud, *On Narcissism* (1925). Lacan's "The Mirror Stage" was originally a paper delivered at the Fourteenth International Psychoanalytical Congress at Marienbad in 1936. A reworked version was later delivered and published in 1949. Appears in *Écrits* as "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" (94).

the writing *from the* disaster, how the disaster is written, how the disaster writes itself, and how to write is to produce disaster, to bring about a break (*-dis*) with the future as augured by the stars (*-aster*). Blanchot turns to the myth of Narcissus and argues that there is far more to the story than simply that Narcissus is unable to recognize his reflection: rather, what Ovid forgets (and Freud by association) is that what Narcissus sees in the water is not himself, but an image that he cannot claim or identify as his own. Since this alien image bears no “likeness to anyone or anything,” it “characteristically resembles nothing” (125), and thus carries with it the pale pallor of death, “reflecting dangerously (crazily) in the illusion of surface proximity” (126). Lacking a reflected presence of himself, lacking identity, which Blanchot argues is the “the basis upon which a living relation with life, which is other, can be ventured” (127), Narcissus cannot be said to ever have lived and thus he cannot die: when he falls into the pool, he is “turned into an image, he dissolves in the immobile solution of the imaginary, where he is washed away without knowing it, losing a life he does not have” (126). If he can be said to die at all, then he paradoxically dies of immortality: merging with the image, which is nonliving and therefore immortal, he assumes the form of a funereal flower, which Blanchot calls the “flower of rhetoric” (128). Unlike Narcissus, we mortals cannot merge with the image or the inscription. We are more in the position of Alice and the Mad Hatter, caught in a cyclical argument about whether saying what we mean and meaning what we say are the same thing.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Coincidentally, David Sacks, writing about John Tenniel’s illustration of the Mad Hatter and the March Hare trying to stuff the Dormouse into a teapot from the original 1865 edition of *Alice in Wonderland*, points out that the pictorial shape of the three figures huddled together bear a strong resemblance to the letter M. David Sacks, *Language Visible*, 238.

Blanchot's text also mentions Echo. He draws attention to the fact that Echo can love Narcissus only by staying out of his sight and that her language is "not the language whence the Other would have approached him, but only the mimetic, rhyming alliteration of a semblance of language" (127). This he compares to the language of lovers, "who touch each other with words, whose contact with each other is made of words, and who can thus repeat themselves without end, marveling at the utterly banal" (127-8). However, it is Spivak, not Blanchot, who most fully reinstates Echo into the myth of Narcissus. For Spivak, the story of Narcissus and Echo is "a tale of the aporia between self-knowledge and knowledge for others" (19). Spivak's primary concern is to explore the situation of the subaltern: though she shifts the positions accorded to Echo and Narcissus throughout the text, Narcissus is largely presented as the cultural critic who presumes to be able to speak for others (namely, the subaltern) and cannot recognize that his own historical, political and cultural situation limits his ability to perceive or understand that of another. For Spivak, Narcissus is an "icon of mortiferous self-knowledge" (22), who bears out Teiresias's prophecy that he will live as long as he does not "know himself." If Narcissus or the cultural critics were to really see themselves and to achieve self-knowledge, they would be paralyzed in their efforts to understand and communicate with the other. In contrast with Narcissus, Echo lies outside the parameter of self-knowledge. Her exclusion renders her passive: she can only repeat what Narcissus says, but what she repeats, as Spivak painstakingly shows, is never exactly the same. Spivak uses the example of the Latin conjugation of the verb "to fly" to demonstrate: Ovid has to have Echo repeat the final words of everything Narcissus says, including the question "why do you fly from me?" (*Quid...me fugis*). But here, Ovid is caught "in the

discrepancy between second person interrogative (*fugis*) and the imperative (*fugi*"); since he cannot allow Echo to be, Ovid must erase her, so he intervenes and reports her speech (24-5). There is thus a gap between what Narcissus says and what Echo "would have been able to echo," and in this gap lies Echo's power as a "deconstructive lever" (26): what she repeats will always defer from and be different to its source. Here lies Echo's potential and the possibility to move beyond the aporia, or at the very least to make the aporia productive. Spivak considers Echo to be "the (un)intending subject of ethics" because if we understand ethics as "not a problem of knowledge but a call of relationship" (32), then we must also understand that both the problem and the call are locked in deconstructive embrace, which Spivak figures as the embrace between Narcissus and Echo.

Spivak's central thesis might be further simplified thus: just as it is impossible to fully or completely explain ourselves, so too is it impossible to speak for another, and it is an ethical imperative to acknowledge this impossibility. Some parallels can be drawn between Spivak's ethical imperative for postcolonial criticism and with the general practice of literary criticism. For example, in Andrew Gibson's response to Badiou (*Beckett and Badiou: The Pathos of Intermittency*, 2006), the central claim is that Badiou's reading of Beckett does not allow for what Gibson terms "the remainder," *le reste*, also known as "the trace."<sup>70</sup> Gibson argues that Badiou's tendency to read literature

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<sup>70</sup> Gibson is participating in a much larger critique of Badiou. For example, Jean-Luc Nancy argues in his essay "Philosophy Without Conditions" that Badiou all but ignores the preconditions upon which event and its interpretation occurs, writing that there is "a precondition that is at once and indissociably historical, technical and transcendental." In *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*, Peter Hallward (ed.), London, Continuum, 2004, 39-48, at 47. Other useful critiques of Badiou: Adrian Johnston, "The Quick and the Dead: Alain Badiou and the Split Seeds of Transformation," *International Journal of Zizek Studies*, vol. 1, no.

as philosophy, at the cost of ignoring the trace, occludes how art and aesthetic experience “might modulate [his thought], temper it, lend it other intonations” (116). The trace is the unassimilable difference that resists knowledge and interpretation.<sup>71</sup>

The trace is irreducible difference, that which cannot be signified or represented. For at least the past fifty years, the trace has been a key figure for thinking about the politics and ethics of alterity, multiplicity and contingency, but what makes it perhaps most pertinent to our discussion is the way in which it is so often figured as that which is put into play in the face-off between the subject and either its own image or echo or that of an other. We can see this plainly in Spivak’s essay. It also recurs in Levinas and Derrida. And in Foucault and Nancy, it is figured as the sound of murmuring, or mmmm. In the 1968 preface to the *History of Madness*, Foucault invokes the presence of unreason as a “murmuring” within the discourse of reason. To force an etymology, murmur might be described as the rhythmic volley of *the trace* from *mur* to *mur*, the sound that bounces between two walls, the gaze that is exchanged between two faces. Foucault argues that “history is only possible against the backdrop of the absence of history, in the midst of a great space of murmurings,” and that what falls through its net is “the ultimate residue, a sterile beach of words, sand that has run its course and is immediately forgotten, keeping nothing, in its passivity, other than the empty imprints of abstracted figures” (xxxix). Thinking along similar lines, in *On Listening* Nancy draws a distinction between “listening” and “hearing,” a distinction that is much more pronounced in French, where *entendre*, “to hear,” also serves as “to understand”: “If “to hear” is to understand the

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2., 2007; Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* (2003); Paul Ashton, A. J. Bartlett and Justin Clemens (eds.), *The Praxis of Alain Badiou* (2006).

<sup>71</sup> The term appears in Derrida’s *Glas* (1974), a book in which Genet and Hegel are made to face each other. See also Peter Baker, *Deconstruction and the Ethical Turn*, 64.

sense (either in the so-called figurative sense, or in the so-called proper sense: to hear a siren, a bird, or a drum is already each time to understand at least the rough outline of a situation, a context, if not a text), to listen is to be straining toward a possible meaning, and consequently one that is not immediately accessible” (6). Listening in Nancy’s sense is an ethical imperative that entails listening specifically for the trace, which in this book is figured as the “resonance of sense”: to hear is to make sense, or “to be *logos*,” but before hearing, “at the very bottom of it,” there must be a listening, “which is why it is necessary that sense not be content to make sense (or to be *logos*), but that it want also to resound.” (6). This resounding, which is also an echoing, is what he calls the “fundamental resonance of sense.” In the middle of the book, in the section entitled “Interlude: Mute Music,” this resounding or echoing, this play of the trace, is characterized as the sound of mmm:

Mmmmmmm continues: repeats its murmuring, mouth closed...the buzzing, the humming, the muttering and borborygmus of the consonant that only resounds, articulating no voice. Mmmmmmm resounds previous to the voice, inside the throat, scarcely grazing the lips from the back of the mouth, without any movement of the tongue, just a column of air pushed from the chest in the sonorous cavity, the cave of the mouth that does not speak. Not a voice, or writing, or a word, or a cry, but transcendental murmuring, the condition of all words and all silence, a primal or archiglottal sound in which I give my death rattle and wail, death agony and birth (24-5)

In Beckett, the first instance of mmm occurs as MMM, the Magdalene Mental Mercyseat, a hospital for the better class of mentally deranged in *Murphy*, but as we have seen, M

resonates throughout Beckett's oeuvre in the names of his characters. In late works like *Company* and *Worstward Ho*, the speaker is almost entirely hollowed out—no name, no identity, barely a body—and these images are prefigured by a passage that occurs towards the end of *The Unnamable*: “perhaps that’s what I’ll feel, an outside and an inside and me in the middle, perhaps that’s what I am, the thing that divided the world in two, on the one side the outside, on the other the inside, that can be thin as foil, I’m neither one nor the other, I’m in the middle, I’m the partition, I’ve two surfaces and no thickness, perhaps that’s what I feel, myself vibrating, I’m the tympanum” (383). The figuration of the body as a tympanum finds an uncanny parallel with the closing lines of Nancy’s *On Listening*. Nancy locates listening in timbre, the differential characteristic of sound. The word timbre comes from the Greek tympanum, the tambourine of orgiastic cults that was made of stretched skin enclosing a hollow chamber within, and he likens this tympanum to the body: “that skin stretched over its own sonorous cavity, this belly that listens to itself and strays away in itself while listening to the world and while straying in all directions, that is not a “figure” for rhythmic timbre, but it is its very pace, it is my body beaten by its sense of body, what we used to call its soul” (43).

I am not arguing that Beckett is saying “the same thing” as Nancy, Blanchot and Spivak. If Beckett’s texts “repeat” any of the ideas here, then they repeat as Echo repeats: that is, what is repeated is never the same.<sup>72</sup> There remains always and irreducibly the differential characteristic of timbre, *the trace*. My reading of Beckett also involves an echoing of the original text: I try to listen for the text’s resonance and to make that resound in my interpretation and commentary. But, of course, Narcissus is also involved

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<sup>72</sup> Stephen Connor’s excellent book *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988) discusses Beckett’s work in terms of the concept of repetition in the Deleuzian sense.

in these attempts. Just as Narcissus cannot recognize his own image reflected in the pool, my ability to listen will naturally be compromised by the subjective limitations of my ear. When Spivak juxtaposes the stated projects of Ovid and of Freud, she draws attention to the ways in which both Freud and Ovid more or less admit that they are not taking the pre-existing object and *saying what it means*, but rather changing it, transforming the object into something else, through their respective subjective processes: “Freud: “I am replacing the special clinical substances [of the organic soil (*Boden*) of the psyche] by special psychological forces”; Ovid: “My mind is bent to tell of bodies changed into new forms”” (21). Spivak would therefore be in agreement with Northrop Frye’s contention that since all literary criticism provides an account of a literary text that is other than what the literary text provides for itself, it necessarily reads literature in terms of its allegorical signification. Indeed, the unfortunate Narcissus, who cannot recognize himself in the image, haunts the theory of allegory: for Walter Benjamin, Paul de Man and Jacques Derrida, the recurring figure of allegory is the disfigured human face. In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin gives to allegory the emblem of the *facies hippocratica* or death’s head; for de Man prosopopeia, at once a defacement and effacement, is produced by the “allegorical predicament”; in “Psyche,” Derrida describes allegory as a double-sided mirror that enacts a “rapid oscillation” between constative and performative registers and leads to specular aporia.<sup>73</sup>

The face is inscribed in the letter M. According to David Sacks, our lower case m derives from the letter’s rounded shape in the late Roman pen style known as uncial, and during the Middle Ages, “this m shape contributed to a religious idea that God has written the human name upon our face: The nose, eyebrows, and cheekbones form an m,

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<sup>73</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, 4.

and the eyes form two letters o within the m. Our face is thus readable as “omo” of Latin *homo*, “human being” (235). This image appears in Dante, *Purgatorio* 23: 31-33, in which a man’s two eyes are described as zeros, with the nose and eyebrows like an M between them, creating a ghostly abstraction of a face with empty eyes. The image surfaces in English poetry for the first time when Chaucer, a great reader of Dante, notes that Criseyde, who is otherwise a beautiful woman, has “hire browes joyneded” (V. 813).<sup>74</sup> Beckett surely knew of this image. His interest in Dante has been well documented by the biographies that recount the years during which his tutor Bianca Esposito guided him through the *Commedia*, the “schoolboy copy” of Dante that he kept with him throughout his life and which appears in various of his texts as the “beslubbered Salani Edition,” and his final years spent in the old people’s home, where he was to be found “rereading Dante in Italian.”<sup>75</sup> As for Chaucer, according to Knowlson, Beckett carefully transcribed several quotations from Chaucer, including the epigraph to *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (from *The Legend of Good Women*) a 1931-2 notebook Beckett (716). Other than this, the only other mention of Chaucer in Knowlson’s biography is that “Beckett spent comparatively little of his time now reading modern literature [the time period in question in 1977-9] but regularly went back to what he called the ‘old chestnuts’: Chaucer, Pascal, Schopenhauer, Shakespeare, Dante, La Fontaine, Pope. Swift, Kierkegaard, Goethe, Heine and Mallarmé” (653).<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> I owe this connection to Donald R. Howard and James Dean’s introduction to *Troilus and Criseyde*. *Troilus and Criseyde and Selected Short poems*, ed. Donald R. Howard and James Dean. London, Signet Classics: 1976.

<sup>75</sup> Daniela Caselli, *Beckett’s Dantes: Intertextuality in the fiction and Criticism* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2005), 1.

<sup>76</sup> James Knowlson’s 1996 biography is considered to have made a major impact on Beckett studies, mainly because of its identification of many of the books on which Beckett took notes and drew inspiration from. Mathew Feldman has pursued some of the new channels of enquiry

It is hardly a coincidence that ghostly, disembodied faces figure throughout Beckett's work with as much frequency as the letter M. When Neary tells Murphy that "all life is figure and ground," he is referring to the American psychologist Woodworth, whose *Contemporary Schools of Psychology* (1931) was a "help" for Murphy, particularly for its discussion of Gestalt psychology.<sup>77</sup> *Figure*, as obviously Beckett was well aware, is French for face, and to draw out this connection, Neary continues: "The face...or system of faces, against the big blooming buzzing confusion" (6). In later works, the face increasingly comes to replace the M. In the television play *What Where*, the screen is filled with four white faces; in *Not I*, the face is reduced simply to a mouth; in *That Time*, an "Old white face" appears ten feet above stage level; Winnie in *Happy Days* spends the second act buried up to her neck with only her face visible. The face recurs throughout the prose works also, where characters often exhibit a kind of pareidolia. In "Old Earth," the speaker sees faces in the sky (238-9); in "Still 3," faces, dead and white, emerge from and disappear in the darkness (269-70). And in *The Unnamable*, the speaker longs to see a face:

A face, how encouraging that would be, if it could be a face, every now and then, always the same, methodically varying its expressions, doggedly demonstrating all a true face can do, without ever ceasing to be recognizable as such, passing from unmixed joy to the sullen fixity of marble, via the most characteristic shades of disenchantment, how pleasant that would be. Worth ten of Saint Anthony's pig's arse. Passing by the at the right distance, the right level, say once a month,

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opened up by Knowlson in his book *Beckett's Books: A Cultural History of Samuel Beckett's 'Interwar Notes'* (2006). *Arnold Geulincx Ethics with Samuel Beckett's Notes* (translated by Martin Wilson) was published the same year.

<sup>77</sup> From the *Murphy* entry in the *Grove Companion*.

that's not exorbitant, full face and profile, like criminals. It might even pause, open its mouth, raise its eyebrows, bless its soul, stutter, mutter, howl, groan and finally shut up, the chaps clenched to cracking point, or fallen, to let the dribble out. That would be nice. A presence at last. A visitor, faithful, with his visiting-day, his visiting-hour, never staying too long, it would be wearisome, or too little, it would not be enough, but just the necessary time for the hope to be born, grow, languish and die, say five minutes...Fortunately it's all a dream. For there is no face, nor anything resembling one, nothing to reflect the joy of living and succedanea, nothing for it but to try something else. (362-3)

“If it could be a face”: what does the *it* refer to in this sentence? It almost manages to slip by unnoticed, but several clues might be inferred from a careful reading of the passage: *it* is absent, but if a face could be found, *it* might have an identifiable presence; the face, like Echo and Narcissus, *reflects* and creates the conditions for joy (and equally, misery—the face also involves threat); finally, the face is a *succedanea*, which is the Latin for substitution, for “something else,” or, as we have seen in *How It Is*, “some other thing.”

Of course, in this context *succedanea* is simply another way of saying “and the like” or “and so on,” but it is a very unusual way of saying it, and it is worth pausing at because the concept of “substitution” is a major category in the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, a thinker for whom the face also holds special importance. In “Substitution,” the core chapter around which *Otherwise than Being* grew, Levinas explains substitution as responsibility, and responsibility as “the-one-for-the-other.” In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas articulated this idea through the example of the face-to-face encounter. Here, in

order to describe how the concept of substitution impacts the person at the very deepest level, and to move beyond such loaded concepts as subject, being and ego, none of which express what he wants to get at, Levinas uses the term “the oneself.” The oneself is formed in the *recurrence* of the trace (105). If this sounds like Nancy’s concept of resonance, it is with good reason: at another point in the text, Levinas states that the recurrence of the oneself is “like a sound that would resound in its own echo, the node of a wave which is not once again conscious” (103). The oneself both precedes and succeeds the subject. We do not remember the circumstances of our creation, and we are “brought out of nothingness,” obeying a call before hearing the order (113). We also experience life in an essentially passive, hypostatic state: we are exposed and provoked, interpellated, “persecuted” and “accused,” by a life we did not choose. The oneself is prior “to the play of being, before the present, older than the time of consciousness that is accessible in memory”; what we call being or the subject is really only a “mask,” a “borrowed name, a pseudonym, a pro-noun” (106). Substitution, thus understood, “signifies in the saying before showing itself in the said”; as such, it is the “very signifyingness of signification” (100). Levinas understands signifyingness as that which is both anterior to the saying and a “going beyond” of the said. It “goes beyond” the said because of the recurrence of the trace, with recurrence understood as “an “outdoing” of unity” (108). We might even call this recurrence “negativity,” says Levinas, but only if it were a negativity “by contraction and breakup” which is in fact “not a flight into the void, but a movement into fullness” (108).

This understanding of negativity is a productive way to think about Beckett’s negativity, and perhaps a way of understanding the following statement, which he wrote

in a 1952 letter to Aidan Higgins: ‘I used to think all this work was an effort, necessarily feeble, to express the nothing. It seems rather to have been a journey, irreversible, in gathering thinglessness, towards it.’<sup>78</sup> Again, I am not suggesting that Levinas and Beckett are saying the same thing. I want to make a case for confluence, rather than influence.<sup>79</sup> Reading their work alongside each other, listening for the echos, produces an enriched understanding of both. This is particularly true for considering the late novels that are gathered in the collection entitled *Nohow On*.

### III. *Nohow On*

Beckett wrote the three novels *Company*, *Ill Seen Ill Said* and *Worstward Ho* in quick succession and they are grouped together under the single title *Nohow On*. They are commonly described as “closed space” novels and are considered to best exemplify Beckett’s “mature” style. For John Banville, these novels are “moving, disconsolate, and scrupulously crafted works which rank among the greatest of world literature,”<sup>80</sup> while Cassanova describes *Worstward Ho*, in particular, as “the magisterial conclusion to the whole oeuvre” (16). They seem to have been in gestation even as early as the writing of *Malloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnameable*. In *Malone Dies*, for example, the speaker imagines himself in the situation of the protagonist of *Company* and *Worstward Ho*: “Perhaps as hitherto I shall find myself abandoned, in the dark, without anything to play

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<sup>78</sup> Quoted in Ciaran Ross, *Beckett’s Art of Absence*, 1.

<sup>79</sup> This distinction between confluence and influence is one that Deleuze and Guattari gesture towards in an endnote to their “Year Zero: Faciality” essay in which they compare an image that appears in Chretien des Troyes and another that appears in Malcolm Lowry (533, n.8). Arguably, all of the essays in *A Thousand Plateaus* are based on an idea of confluence rather than influence.

<sup>80</sup> Quoted in S.E. Gontarski’s introduction to *Nohow On*, xxvii.

with. Then I shall play with myself. To have been able to conceive such a plan is encouraging” (180). And throughout all three of the earlier novels a sense of exhaustion accompanies the listing of characters’ names, a sense of wanting to simply be done with the whole idea of character: in *Molloy*, “Murphy, Watt, Yerk, Mercier and all the others. I would never have believed that—yes, I believe it willingly. Stories, stories. I have not been able to tell them. I shall not be able to tell this one” (137); in *Malone Dies*, “Then it will be over for the Murphys, Merciers, Morans and Malones, unless it goes on beyond the grave” (236); and finally in *The Unnameable*, “All these Murphys, Malloys and Malones do not fool me. They have made me waste my time, suffer for nothing, speak of them when, in order to stop speaking, I should have spoken of me alone” (303). In the novels of *Nohow On*, Beckett demonstrates how one can speak of oneself alone and simultaneously stop speaking.

*Company* opens thus: “A voice comes to one in the dark. Imagine.” The “one on his back in the dark” has no voice (for a time, he will be given the name Haitch: the aspirate, the voiceless). He only knows that he is tethered to a body that is on its back in the dark. He has apparently dreamed up this voice for company. The voice addresses him as “you”; first person, second removed. Although “only a small part of what the voice says can be verified,” that which can is that which can be experienced physically, thus “verified,” by the one in the dark: the pressure on his hind parts; how the dark changes as he opens and closes his eyes; the faint sound of his breath. However, the voice then suggests that there may not even be that anchor to rely on: “You will end as you are now. And in another dark or the same another devising it all for company.” This thought opens to an impasse. It is as if this thought is as far as a thought can go, and it is horrifying. It

must be swiftly silenced with command “Quick leave him,” a command that is reiterated throughout the novel and in which every word is troubling: the urgency of “quick”; the order to abandon and evacuate with “leave”; the replacement of the somewhat intimate “you” with the more remote and alienable “him,” that “cankorous other.”

Again and again in *Company*, the one in the dark almost—almost—manages to go beyond himself, but finally finds that he cannot. Like cresting waves, thoughts seem to rise to an apex, or a limit, hover for a moment, then break and fall. It is the moment of hovering at the crest that the one in the dark seems to want to prolong, the moment of silence between inhale and exhale, the moment of stillness between ebb and flow. The motion of ebbing and flowing is borne out in the use of block paragraphs; each paragraph ends at the point at which it can go no further, and each new one begins, after a pause of white space, with a sense of having to start over. “Ebbing,” the reflux of tidewater to the sea, is itself an image that surfaces throughout and is invoked to describe elements as various as the voice, light and breathing. Often, one will be integrated with the other; the voice rises and falls like breath, ebbing “till almost out of hearing,” and then slowly flowing “back to faint full.” He longs for the silence that the ebb seems to promise: “At each slow ebb hope slowly dawns that it is dying. He must know it will flow again. And yet at each slow ebb hope slowly dawns that it is dying” (11). The silence that he longs for is not death as such, but rather freedom from the horror and inevitability of repetitiousness: the “unstillable” mind (16); the “eyelids stirring on and off since technically they must” (19); the “foot falls unbidden in midstep... Stilled when finally as always they do” (27). Much of this horror is due to his inability to resist the force of necessity: a “certain mental activity is a *necessary* adjunct of company”; the effect of the

voice on the hearer is a “*necessary* complement...but company apart this effect is clearly *necessary*” (5) (my emphasis). It is beyond his control: the flow, by necessity, follows the ebb. He cannot make a final break with “company” (such as it is).

The thought of the one on his back in the dark can only take him “up to a point” before breaking. The mental activity required to “devise” company “need not be of a high order”: “Indeed it might be argued the lower the better. Up to a point. The lower the order of mental activity the better the company. Up to a point” (7). The attempt to extend beyond this point is what leads to the impasse of “Quick leave him.” There is nowhere to go beyond this point. The thought, for example, that perhaps there might be *yet another* devising all of this—the thoughts, the memories, the voice, the dark, his own self (such as it is)—induces horror: “Yet another then. Of whom nothing. Devising figments to temper his nothingness. Quick leave him. Pause and again in panic to himself, Quick leave him” (33). “Quick leave him” effectively functions as a kind of trip switch: it returns the subject back to safer ground, where thinking “of a lower order” can resume. With this trip switch, it impossible to think or even to imagine something beyond or different: “In the same dark as his creature or in another. Quick imagine. The same” (24).

Company is the antidote to this horror—“The odd sound. What a mercy to have that to turn to” (12)—but in the end, it must be admitted that there is really no voice and no hearer, no “M,” no “W,” and no “Haitch,” but just the one on his back in the dark, who devises all these “figments” for the sake of company.

Deviser of the voice and of its hearer and of himself. Deviser of himself for company. Leave it at that. He speaks of himself as of another. He says speaking of himself, He speaks of himself as of another. Himself he devises too for company.

Leave it at that. Confusion too is company up to a point. Better hope deferred than none. Up to a point. Till the heart starts to sicken. Company too up to a point. Better a sick heart than none. Till it starts to break. So speaking of himself he concludes for the time being, For the time being leave it at that. (18)

Since this text proceeds “withershins,” the “devised deviser devising” will be replaced later on with the figure of the “crawling creator”: disappointed “at having crawled again in vain,” he asks, “Why crawl at all?” The question is answered some lines later: “little by little as he lies the craving for company revives. In which to escape from his own. The need to hear that voice again” (40). The pun seems deliberate: company is a “lie” that is both dreaded and longed for at the same time. With it there is a sense of splintering and alienation, but without it there is simply nothing at all. In another example, the voice is again paired with light, breathing and the motion of ebbing: “By the voice a faint light is shed. Dark lightens while it sounds. Deepens when it ebbs. Lightens with flow back to faint full. It is *whole again when it ceases*” (my emphasis). Company “devises” personhood—the body, the voice, the memories—but it is essentially fracturing. In fact, the very word “devise” originates from the same root as “divide.” Company necessitates divisibility.

In the end, the first person becomes the last person: “Who asks in the end, Who asks? And in the end answers as above? And adds long after to himself, Unless another still. Nowhere to be found. Nowhere to be sought. The unthinkable last of all. Unnamable. Last person. I. Quick leave him” (44). As a devise, company operates in a similar paradox; it defines personhood, but to do this it must ignore the aporia at the core being, or perhaps, rather, it must ignore the fact that the fiction, the stories that one

devises for company, is a fiction: in a line that Spivak quotes in “Echo,” Lacan writes of how the child jubilantly claims its reflection during the mirror stage, and how this “fictional representation...will forever remain irreducible for any single individual, or rather, that will only asymptotically approach the subject’s becoming, no matter how successful the dialectical syntheses by which he must resolve, as *I*, his discordance with his own reality” (76). This aporia is what undergirds and what will eventually undermine personhood: the reason that the “leave it at that” strategy will only work “up to a point.”

The speaker frequently invokes death, and even the early childhood memories take on its dreadful pallor. “You first saw the light,” the voice says, in a room that faces the direction of the setting sun and on the feast of Christ’s death, no less. One of the child’s earliest memories involves rescuing a hedgehog. Afterwards, the child says his prayers and goes to sleep, basking in the glow of self-importance at the good deed he has performed. The next morning however, “not only was the glow spent but a great uneasiness had taken its place.” He has the suspicion that “all was perhaps not as it should be,” that rather than do what he did, he “had perhaps better let good alone and the hedgehog pursue its way” (21). Much time passed before the boy could bring himself to return to the hutch: “You have never forgotten what you found then. You are on your back in the dark and have never forgotten what you found then. The mush. The stench” (22). Early experiences of company mostly cause pain. The hedgehog recalls Schopenhauer’s image of hedgehogs that so intrigued Freud: the idea that intimacy cannot occur amongst hedgehogs, and thereby humans, without the possibility of mutual harm. When the child asks his mother about the sun not appearing to be closer than it actually is, he is unable to fathom her “cutting retort” (6). This is an incident that also

appears in two other texts; in *Malone Dies*, we are told that the “cutting retort” was “It is precisely as far away as it appears to be” (268); in “The End,” we are told that she replied “Fuck off”.<sup>81</sup> But in *Malone Dies*, the very validity of this memory, apparently so formative, is questioned: “Perhaps it is just another story, told me by some one who found it funny. The stories I was told, at one time! And all funny, not one not funny” (268).

We are told many times that the one in the dark was born on Easter Friday, the day of Christ’s crucifixion. The action of ebbing and flowing, living and dying, negates the Christian idea of life as journey towards spiritual perfection: we are rather “nowhere in particular on the way from A to Z” (16). Having covered “some twenty-five thousand leagues or roughly thrice the girdle,” he finds that he “never once overstepped a radius of one from home. Home!” (44). The idea of following a senseless flat-line that is nowhere-bound is most consistently evoked in the “bee-line” in which he follows his father:

So many since dawn to add to yesterday’s. To yesteryear’s. To yesteryears’. Days other than today and so akin. The giant tot in miles. In leagues. How often round the earth already. Halted too at your elbow during these computations your father’s shade. In his old tramping rags. Finally on side by side from nought anew. (9)

Days are “other” but share a kinship with each other, as he does with his father. The pun on tot—short for “total” on the one hand, and “toddler” on the other—reinforces the sense that there is no ultimate progression in following the beeline from birth to death; in adulthood and old age, he is simply a “giant tot.” Similarly, “leagues,” a measurement of three miles (itself a significant number, redolent of both the Trinity (father, son, holy

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<sup>81</sup> Samuel Beckett, *The Complete Short Prose*, 81.

ghost) and also the voice, hearer, one on his back composite), stems from the French *legare*, meaning “to bind,” and shares this root with the word “legion,” which brings to mind the famous quote from Mark v.9 that seems oddly appropriate for *Company*: “My name is Legion, for we are many.” “Father’s shade” has a less immediately recognizable meaning and a more neutral connotation than “father’s shadow” would have. Presumably dead, he is finally “on side” (a cricket term) as well as “side by side,” and no different to his son who is still living: from nothing, nothing new comes.

The phrase “nought anew” surfaces many more times. Later on, when walking in the mountains has been replaced by crawling, he hopes that he is still crawling in a “beeline,” but the hope only lasts “up to a point”: “again with no dead end for his pains he renounces and embarks on yet another course. From nought anew.” The idea of there being no “dead end”—no finality, no death—leads him to the following statement: “Be that as it may and crawl as he will no bourne as yet. As yet imaginable. Hand knee hand knee as he always will. Bourneless dark” (36). The use of the somewhat archaic “bourne” is surely a reference to *Hamlet*: “The dread of something after death, The undiscovered Country; from whose Borne No Traveller returns” (III.i.79). At the same time, the pun on “born” suggests that if there is no real finality in death, then there is hardly reason to believe that there is such thing as birth either; all is in limitless, “bourneless,” darkness.

His father’s shade also appears in the scenes, or “dead stills,” of adult sexuality, which are evoked in cinematographic terms: “Your gaze descends to the breasts. You do not remember them so big. To the abdomen. Same impression. Dissolve to your father’s straining against the unbuttoned waistband. Can it be she is with child without your having asked for as much as her hand?” (30-31). This sequence has the effect of putting

the one who remembers at a remove from the scene in which he, at one time presumably, participated. It reinforces the sense of the remembering subject as the *auteur* of the memories, attempting to re-member disparate elements that can never quite come together completely: “A single leg appears. Seen from above. You separate the segments and lay them side by side.” This removed approach to the body and sexuality is in sync with how they are depicted throughout *Company*. The pasture that he walks through later is a vivid depiction of his association of the fertile, sexual body with abjection and death: “the white pasture afrolic with lambs in spring and strewn with red placentae” (25). His father, usually portrayed with sympathy, shares his son’s disaffection in this aspect. He waits in the car during the birth of his son due to his “aversion to the pains and general unpleasantness of labour and delivery” (8). After the birth, when the mother presents him with the newborn, the instinctual love that a parent is supposed to feel towards his progeny, the feeling that is supposed to be “natural,” is presented as deeply unnatural. Faced with the alien creature, his child, the father attempts to act as he is supposed to: “In his turn he murmurs to the newborn. Flat tone unchanged. No trace of love” (35).

Sex is what generates life, which is precisely the problem with it. Towards the end of *Company*, again on his back in the dark, he describes his body and genitalia with the detachment of a mechanic describing car-parts: “The thrust of the ground against his bones. All the way from calcaneum to bump of philoprogenitiveness” (37). Sex is simply another “device” to provide company, just as the invention M and W are “figments” (33). The one who, in the “bloom of adulthood” (28), felt his pubes “mingle” with another’s (30), will find himself eventually laid out like a corpse: “legs joined at attention. Feet played ninety degrees. Hands invisibly manacled across pubis.” A thinly veiled

description of masturbation ends with the lines: “You were born on Easter Friday after long labour. Yes I remember. The sun had not long sunk behind the larches. Yes I remember. As best to erode the drop must strike unwavering. Upon the place beneath” (24-25). Procreation is pushed into proximity with a gnawing away: the “place beneath,” perhaps an allusion to the earlier pasture that is strewn with the placentae from newborn lambs, is where the drop of sperm will “strike unwavering” in order to “erode.” “Erode” stems from the Latin *rodere*, meaning to “gnaw” and from which rodent is also derived, thus recalling the dead rat who earlier appears as possible company (19).

The final movement of *Company* finds the old man standing on the strand in the evening with his back to the wash: “no sound but its.” This “its” is an unusual formulation, and has more than one implication: to indicate “it” in the plural, signifying many ebbs, many flows; “its” for the onomatopoeic effect of the water; to imply that “it” exists in and of itself—rather than *has* a sound, “it” *is* sound. This last interpretation corroborates the mention of his eyes, here in this paragraph and also throughout *Company*. Though at the beginning of the paragraph he refutes the idea of light and dark (“No such thing then as no light. Died on to dawn and never died”), at the end of the paragraph he says that were his eyes to open, “dark would lighten” (39-40). The eye is the “mind’s pore” (15) in *Company*. It fills up the “whole field”: “The hood slowly down. Or up if down to begin with. The globe. All pupil” (14). The eye/ mind perceives and conceives the globe, the world, but it can never see itself. It is “all pupil”—the blackest part of the eye, a black hole. Like the waves then that have no sound but “its,” there is no light or dark but “his”—though he too may be conceived of as an “it.” The final word of this “fable” is “Alone” (46). “Alone” is the precise opposite of “company.” I say *precise*

because even though the words do not usually belong in the same grammatical category (to *be* alone versus to have/ keep/ etc company), in this context they are perfect antipodes: he *is* alone, just as he *is* company.

With every inane word a little nearer to the last. And how the fable too. The fable of one with you in the dark. The fable of one fabling of one with you in the dark. And how better in the end labour lost and silence. And you as you always were.

Alone.

And so *Company* ends, with the single word “Alone” centered in the page, just as the single word “Company” was centered as the title at the beginning of the text.

In *Ill Seen Ill Said*, the main character is an old woman who appears in the opening scene looking out of a window and waiting for Venus and the morning sun to rise. She too is bereft of company. The scene in *Company* has shifted to a cabin, which is located at the “inexistent centre of a formless place,” a barren landscape of stones and meager pastures, a “zone of stones” (53), where she sometimes goes to kneel and pray. She is clad all in black and is indeed entirely black save “for the white of her hair and faintly bluish white of face and hands” (50). She waits at the window, “rapt before the sky” (54): “Quick then still under the spell of Venus quick to the other window to see the other marvel rise. How whiter and whiter as it climbs it whitens more and more the stones. Rigid with face and hands against the pain she stands and marvels long” (51).

As she gazes at the moon-lit pastures the white stones that litter their surface, already suggestive of headstones, morph into lambs. The lambs are both innocent and sacrificial victims: their pasture is the “scene of its betrayals” (63). She counts them:

twelve. They are unshepherded and always “afar. Still or receding” (51). She cannot tell if they see her. They never allow her to get near them. They move to preserve their distance and to always keep her in the center (60). It is as if she forms the inky black pupil of an eye: “What then if not her do they ring around? In their ring whence she disappears unhindered. Whence they let her disappear. Instead of disappearing in her company. So the unreasoning goes. While the eye digests its pittance. In its private dark. In the general dark” (61).

She is tired of life and tired of her own company: “With herself she has no more converse. Never had much. Now none. As had she the misfortune to be still of this world” (53). Since life is not “possible any longer except as figment” (65), she concocts one: a “he” appears, an “imaginary stranger” (53). He knocks at the cabin door and receiving no response, he retreats: “She shows herself only to her own. But she has no own. Yes yes she has one. And who has her.”

Yet at other times she yearns to be alone, purely alone, “unalloyed” even by the annoyance of loneliness: “If only she could be pure figment. Unalloyed. This old so dying woman. So dead. In the madhouse of the skull and nowhere else” (58). The contents of skull are later referred to as “Vile jelly” (81). Like the one on his back in the dark, she would like to simply turn off its incessant ruminations. She is drawn to “a certain spot,” a rounded rectangular block of stone that is three times as high as wide. As the narrative progresses, this stone comes to form her longed-for tomb: “But when the stone draws then to her feet the prayer, Take her. Especially at night and halt her before it. There she too as if of stone. But black. But black. Sometimes in the light of the moon. Mostly of the stars alone. Does she envy it?” (53).

Out walking through the snowy pasture, her long shadow keeps her company. For some reason, she resists revealing her face to the lambs: “Now the moment or never. But something forbids. Just time to begin to glimpse a fringe of black veil. The face must wait” (55). Wait for what? In the next passage, the terms of this question change: “What is it defends her? Even from her own. Averts the intent gaze. Incriminates the dearly won. Forbids divining her. What but life ending. Hers. The other’s. But so otherwise. Nothing utterable. Whereas the other. How need in the end? But how? How need in the end?” (56). It is her face, then, seems to defend her against death: the face, the marker of identity, is the last piece of her body left exposed, the last piece yet to be shrouded by the black veil. She needs nothing—at least nothing that is utterable, but what of that which is not utterable, this “other”? If the face is the marker of her identity, that which stamps her as a subject, then what is the other that is not “her” or *hers*— her face, her identity and her life? Her face becomes the site and last gasp of life before death: “The face yet again in the light of the last rays. No loss of pallor. None of cold.” (78). Against the desiccated landscape, her face is laid bare, “defenseless evening and night,” eyes gaping but unseeing as “if dazed by what lies behind the lids,” and meanwhile the other that is not “her” “plumbs its dark. Then open in its turn. Dazed in turn” (72). Her face is described as an aging “ancient mask” (62), and at several points in the text appears petrified, a veritable *facies hippocratica*: “The long white hair stares in a fan. Above and about the impassive face. Stares as if shocked still by some ancient horror. Or by its continuance. Or by another. That leaves the face stonecold. Silence at the eye of the scream” (64).

As for the title: *Ill Seen Ill Said* is an inversion of the theological vision of the created earth. In Genesis, the “Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God

said, Let there be light/ and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good/ and God divided the light from the darkness” (King James Bible). But here in Beckett’s purgatorial vision, nothing that is seen is good, everything is ill seen, ill said. Beckett even invokes the image of God’s face reflecting upon the earth’s: “Then on its face over the pastures and then the stones the still living shadow slowly glides. Lengthening and fading more and more. But never quite away. Under the hovering eye” (76). Yet this is not quite a Supreme Presence:

Absence supreme good and yet. Illumination then go again and on return no more trace. On earth’s face. Of what was never. And if by mishap left then go again. So on. Till no more trace. On earth’s face. Instead of always the same place. Slaving away forever in the same place. At this and that trace. And what if the eye could not? No more tear itself away from the remains of the trace. Of what was never. Quick say it suddenly can and farewell say say farewell. If only to the face. Of her tenacious trace. (85-86)

The trace cannot be effaced. Playing on the homophone of “eye” and “I,” it seems as though the eye is a pro-noun in Levinas’s sense: it is the incarnate oneself that is anterior to the I and also spills over the I’s brim. This very excessiveness is what calls for the urgency of the urgency of “quick,” which foiled by the tenacious recurrence of the trace. The face might be bid farewell, but not the trace and not the eye in which the trace recurs.

The text ends on a strange note: “First last moment. Grant only enough remain to devour all. Moment by glutton moment. Sky earth the whole kit and boodle. Not another crumb of carrion left. Lick chops and basta. No. One moment more. One last. Grace to breathe that void. Know happiness” (86). Every moment can be considered as a “First last

moment” since the march of time, gluttonous time, ensures that each moment devours the last. It perhaps because of this that one must have grace to “breathe that void,” and if one were to have that grace, one might “Know happiness.”

*Worstward Ho* opens with the lines “On. Say on. Be said on. Somehow on. Till nohow on. Said nohow on” (89)—the repetition of “on” almost exactly replicating the murmuring sound of mmm. Some of the themes from the previous two novels are evident here. Namely, the feeling of having to endure, of having to live without any desire to live. Living on is to speak on, even if only to oneself, even though nothing seems to be worth saying. Speaking will continue “Somehow on” until “nohow on.” But the last sentence—“Said nohow on”—stealthily upends even that possibility. When the end comes and silence at last falls, it won’t last long. As with the incessant ebbing and flowing of *Company*, when silence at last falls it is immediately ruined by the observation that it is silent. This is an echo of the closing lines of *The Unnameable* in a different key, “I can’t go on, I’ll go on,” except with the crucial difference that personal, active will is removed: the first person pronoun is removed, but the speaker still resonates in the saying, in the middle voice.<sup>82</sup> The speaker is passive, caught in the position of both Echo—“Say for be

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<sup>82</sup> As Barthes describes it, to write is to deploy the middle voice: “In the case of the middle voice...the subject affects himself in acting; he always remains inside the action, even if an object is involved. The middle voice does not exclude transitivity. Thus defined, the middle voice corresponds exactly to the state of the verb *to write*: today to write is to make oneself the center of the action of speech; it is to effect writing in being affected oneself; it is to leave the writer inside the writing, not as a psychological subject but as the agent of the action.” Roland Barthes, “To Write: An Intransitive Verb?,” *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*, ed. Richard Mackey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1970) 134-45. Elizabeth Barry provides an illuminating discussion of Beckett’s use of the middle voice in “One’s own Company: Agency, Identity and the Middle Voice in the Work of Samuel Beckett,” *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 31, No. 2, (Winter, 2008), pp. 115-132.

said. Missaid. From now say for be missaid” (89)—and of Narcissus—“See for be seen. Misseen. From now on see for be misseen” (93).

Neither he nor she nor you and most definitely not I, the speaker, which/who is manifesting the words on the page, is referred to as “it” (92). It has no body, no mind, no place, though mere lines later it is admitted that there are bones, and that the bones cause pain, and that there is a dim light of “source unknown” (89-91). It is in extreme old age, so old it can barely stand. Its eyes are clenched. The image of clenched eyes recurs throughout the text: the eyes are the “Seat of all. Germ of all” (91). The germ ensures that something always coincides with it, some image or sound, so that even when “it” confirms that there is nohow on, “nohow on” is not allowed to rest, to be the final word, but is instead forced to echo itself, on and on. The “germ” is thus akin to Levinas’s idea of the oneself as that which supersedes the subject. Levinas uses the expression of being “too tight for one’s skin”: “In its own skin. Not at rest under a form, but tight in its skin, unencumbered and as it were stuffed with itself, suffocating under itself, insufficiently open, forced to detach itself from itself, to breathe more deeply, all the way, forced to dispossess itself to the point of losing itself” (110). This is a similar experience to the one evoked by Beckett in the “closed space” novels, which evoke an entity that both precedes the saying and goes beyond the said.

The old man and young boy from *Company* appear, as does the “kneeling one” (98) from *Ill Seen Ill Said*. Like the lambs of *Ill Seen Ill Said*, they “plod on and never recede”; when they “fade,” they come back “somehow changed” (94). Eventually, they disappear (113). The dim and the void remains, which do not change (96). But even the void is accompanied by “its” commentary: “Whose words? Ask in vain. Or not in vain if

say no knowing. No saying. No words for him whose words. Him? One. No words for one whose words. One? It. No words for it whose words. Better worse so” (98). It proposes to introduce blanks for words in order to stop the vile jelly from oozing its ooze: “Blanks for when words gone. When nowhow on” (112). It tries to efface everything. One by one, the images are made to disappear, only to return almost instantaneously: “Void cannot go. Save dim go. Then all go. All not already gone. Till dim back. Then all back. All not still gone. The one can go. The twain can go. Dim can go. Void cannot go. Save dim go. Then all go” (97).

It, the subject, finally succeeds in effacing them, but it can't quite succeed in effacing the effacer. To say is to secrete some from the vile jelly, but it is also to conceal. Hence the play on the word “secrete”: “Enough still not to know. Not to know what they say. Not to know what it is the words it says say. Says? Secretes. Say better worse secretes. What it is the words it secretes say. What the so-said void. The so-said dim. The so-said shades. The so-said seat and germ of all. Enough to know no knowing. No knowing what it is the words it secretes say. No saying. No saying what it all is they somehow say” (104-5). Again, there is the evocation of the “it”—what is “it” that is always missaid yet still somehow said? This is surely another way of expressing the “signifyingness” of signification. The ooze—signifyingness—oozes on: “Ooze back try worsen blanks. Those then when nohow on. Unsay then all gone. All not gone....Only words gone. Ooze gone. Till ooze again and on. Somehow ooze on” (110).

So, the vile jelly remains: “Remains of mind then still. Enough still. Somewhere somewhere somehow enough still. No mind and words? Even such words. So enough still. Just enough still to joy. Joy! Just enough still to joy that only they. Only!” (104).

What are we to make of this invocation of joy? We might recall *Molloy's* list of “theological questions,” particularly the one that asks “What was God doing with himself before the creation,” which is followed by the question: “Might not the beatific vision become a source of boredom, in the long run?” (167). There are reliably enough words left to still provide diversion, joy, and yet words are always far more than just words. The signifyingness that preceded the word and that is lost “as soon as logos interpellates, invests, presents and exposes it” (Levinas, 100). But that signifyingness also succeeds it, spills over its brim, in the form of the trace. The exclamation “Only!” is therefore ironic.

There is also a connection to be made between the invocation of joy and that of longing: “Longing the so-said mind long lost to longing. The so-missaid. So far so-missaid. Dint of long longing lost to longing. Long vain longing. And longing still. Faintly longing still. Faintly vainly longing still. For fainter still. For faintest. Faintly vainly longing for the least of longing. Unlessenable least of longing. Unstillable vain last of longing still”(109). We might recognize in this passage the longing of Narcissus for the reflection he cannot recognize and the similarly frustrated longing of Echo to speak. In the following passage this frustration is played out as a frustration with cliché: “The words too whosoever. What room for worse! How almost true they sometimes almost ring! How wanting in inanity! Say the night is young alas and take heart. Or better worse say still a watch of night alas to come. A rest of last watch to come. And take heart” (99). Even inanity is “wanting,” longing—that is inanity’s signifyingness. Signifyingness is this longing: as Levinas argues, the trace is both obsessional and an-archival. The speaking subject, the one who is articulated in cliché, is always delayed behind the present moment and unable to recuperate that delay, but the recurrence of the oneself

always leaves “a trace, which speech, in the pain of expression, seeks to state. But there is only the trace” (194, n.4).

The trace is again apparent in the fitful praying of the old woman in *Ill Seen Ill Said*, which in *Worstward Ho* is changed to preying: “Preying but what not preying? When not preying? Nohow over words again say what then when not preying. Each better worse for naught. No stilling preying. The shades. The dim. The void. All always faintly preying. Worse for naught. No less than when but bad all always faintly preying. Gnawing” (112). Praying is a form of longing that becomes preying, and then, just as seamlessly, becomes gnawing. We might be reminded here of the *journey* towards the nothing that Beckett mused about in his letter. With another homophonic play on gnawing and the word naught, we might think of this as a journey to the oneself. “All gnawing to be naught. Never to be naught” (115).

The recurrence of the trace cannot be stymied; the oneself will never be naught. It will always be in the process of becoming “some other thing.” The text duly ends as it began:

Enough. Sudden enough. Sudden all far. No move and sudden all far. All least. Three pins. One pinhole. In dimmest dim. Vasts apart. At bounds of boundless void. Whence no farther. Nohow less. Nowhow worse. Nohow naught, Nohow on.

Said nohow on. (116)

### III. The Face and the Facies Hippocratica

In this last section I want to suggest some ways in which we can read Beckett's use of the letter M and its companion figure of the face in his work. I have already mentioned that the face has been a recurrent feature in modern theorizations of allegory. Walter Benjamin was among the first to make the face the emblem of allegory. The face is the marker of identity, the representation, as it were, of representation itself. Benjamin's concept of allegory is a critique of representation and its emblem is thus the ruined face: the *facies hippocratica*. For Benjamin, allegory must be distinguished from symbol: whereas in symbol word and thing are fused and emanate a mystical aura, in allegory words are cut off from things and indeed have displaced things. In allegory, man has lost his naming power: it is now language that speaks, not man.<sup>83</sup> Allegory thus lacks all "freedom of expression, all classical proportion, all humanity," and this, ultimately, is what makes it the "form in which man's subjection to nature is most obvious" (*OGTD* 166). It "gives rise not only to the enigmatic question of the nature of human experience as such," whereby we are afflicted creatures, in control of neither what we say nor what we mean, "but also of the biographical historicity of the individual," through which our finitude, the most indisputable fact of our existence, nonetheless confronts us with an

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<sup>83</sup> In "On Language as Such and the Language of Man," which was composed in 1916, the same year he began thinking about the *Trauerspiel* (the dedicatory note of which reads "Conceived 1916 Written 1925"), Benjamin asserts that all language is based on the name, and points to Genesis, where the name is both creative and the thing created. This "absolute relation of name to knowledge exists only in God; only there is name, because it is inwardly identical with the creative word, the pure medium of knowledge" (68). With the Fall, comes the birth of the human word, which is no longer creative because it has lost its naming power. Human names, as mere imitations of the creative word, no longer have any natural correspondence to things. Words become mere signs and abstractions ensue. As a consequence, nature laments, and so does the subject.

unsettling air of unreality, because it is corrosive to reality as we know it and know ourselves within it—it precipitates us into the unreality of reality.

Beckett's performs the critique of representation by "worsening" language. He thus makes good on the aim that he stated in the letter that I quoted at the beginning of this chapter: "to bore one hole after another in [language], until what lurks behind it—be it something or nothing—begins to seep through." He also mobilizes the image of the ruined face: it is as though the recurring figure of the letter M, which marks the incessant murmuring of the "little birds of interpretation" and the continual pleating of representation in the "forest of symbols," gives way in the late works to a desire for the annihilation of the face, to bring about its shattering. In terms of imagery, much of what happens in *Company*, *Ill Seen Ill Said* and *Worstward Ho* involves the face, which is often reduced to a single eye. In both *Ill Seen Ill Said* and *Worstward Ho*, Beckett describes the face in ghoulish terms that suggest a *facies hippocratica*. In *Worstward Ho*, this suggestion is overt: the face actually peels away and leaves a skull behind. But even when the speaker succeeds in effacing its face, the eye still remains lodged in the sunken head: "Germ of all. All? If of all of it too. Where if not there it too? There in the sunken head the sunken head." (97). The skull remains: "No face. Skull and stare alone. Scene and seer of all" (100-1). And the eyes appear to be "All pupil. Dim black holes. Unwavering gaping" (103), which eventually become "One dim black hole mid-foreskull":

Stare clamped to stare. Bowed backs blurs in stare clamped to stare. Two black holes. Dim black. In through skull soft to soft. Out from soft through the skull. Agape in unseen face. That the flaw? The want of flaw? Try better worse set in

skull. Two black holes in foreskull. Or one. Try better still worse one. One dim black hole mid-foreskull. Into the hell of all. Out from the hell of all. So better than nothing worse say stare now. (114)

With “stare clamped to stare,” the passage begins with the predicament of Narcissus, but it gradually shifts to just one skull (“Two black holes”), and finally to just one eye (“Or one”). The black hole is the doorway to the “soft” within the skull, the vile jelly of the mind. It is “Agape in unseen face.” In a text with such a deliberately impoverished vocabulary, we cannot ignore the dual meaning of the word “agape”: the eye is wide open, but it also now suggests the site of Agape, Christian love or the love of God, a development not only of the earlier invocation of “joy” and the “Grace to breathe the void” in *Worstward Ho*, but also of the sacrificial lambs in *Ill Seen Ill Said* and the remembrance of Easter in *Company*. We might also recall here the speaker of *The Unnameable*, for whom “there is no face, nor anything resembling one, nothing to reflect the joy of living and succedanea, nothing for it but to try something else” (363).

The connection between the ruined face and Christianity also appears in Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*, where they advocate “dismantling” the face, deliberately rendering it a *facies hippocratica*, in order to emancipate oneself from the rule of representation, subjectivation, and other forms of authority, including that of Christian discourse. In “Year Zero: Faciality,” they argue that the face always points to Christ (176). They understand Christ as both an “ordinary everyday Erotomaniac”—an everyman—and as the abstract political force of the White Man, whose Christ-like face forms the loci “of resonance that select the sensed or mental reality and make it conform to a dominant reality” (168). One might say, using Levinas’s terms, that the face corrals

the oneself into the subject or being. The face is thus “a horror story” (168), the “inhuman in human beings” (171). It is formed out of two elements: the white screen of signifi-ance (the realm of signs) and the black hole of subjectivity (the locus of subjectification). Together, they form an “impasse,” with the black hole acting “as a central computer, Christ,” an “empty eye or black hole [that] absorbs or rejects, like a half-doddering despot who can still give a signal of acquiescence or refusal” (177). They advocate breaking the impasse of the face by breaking through the wall of the signifier: “Many people have tried since Christ, beginning with Christ. But Christ himself botched the crossing, he *bounced* off the wall” (187). Though he botched it, they argue, at least he tried. They suggest that art can help to create the possibility for “positive deterritorializations that never reterritorialize on art, but instead sweep it away with them toward the realms of the asignifying, asubjective, and faceless” (187), and that the novel, in particular, has always contained a “Christian education” (174) because it is about characters who continually draw lines of deterritorialization, but also continually lose their way and fall into black holes: though they botch it, at least they try.

When Deleuze and Guattari name both *Molloy* and the romances of Chretien de Troyes as “the beginning of the novel” (174), they are clearly thinking about “beginning” not in a chronological sense, but rather in a way that is akin to the Benjaminian sense of “origin,” which is opposed to “genesis”: “Origin is a stream of becoming, and in its current it swallows the material involved in the process of genesis. That which is original is never revealed in the naked and manifest existence of the factual; its rhythm is apparent only to a dual insight” (*OGTD* 45). The dual insight is dialectical: the one burrowing deeper into what is most vile, most creaturely, most profane, the other

constellating the past with the present and thereby leaping towards resurrection. The rhythm formed between the two moves is the syncopation of repetition, the resonance of the trace. Origin is not Genesis: Levinas is also careful to differentiate his understanding of the oneself from the theological understanding of the One. When he states that the oneself is a creature that is ignorant of its creator, he cautions that it “is not here a question of justifying the theological context of ontological thought, for the word creation designates a signification older than the context woven about its name” (*OTB* 113). Furthermore, the oneself may be dissimulated under the “outdated notion of the soul,” but it cannot and should not be reduced to or explained by an onto-theological schema: “The oneself is not the ideal pole of an identification across the multiplicity of psychic silhouettes kerygmatically proclaimed to be the *same* by virtue of a mysterious schematism of discourse” (my italics) (103). Just as what Echo repeats is never the same, and what Narcissus sees cannot be identified as himself, the oneself cannot be reduced to the totality of the One.

In Beckett, the “grace to breathe the void” may possibly turn into “joy,” or possibly into “Agape,” but it is most reliably guaranteed to carry on in the “gnawing to be naught.” In Levinas, the “*gnawing away*” (his italics) of the self by the oneself is not evidence of “the state of original sin; it is, on the contrary, the original goodness of creation” (121). In Benjamin, that gnawing away (of melancholy, of dispossession, of what Levinas might call the absolute exteriority of the oneself, or Beckett the “it”), becomes transformed into the possibility of resurrection: the allegorist’s “ultimate objects, in which it believes it can most fully secure for itself that which is vile, turn into allegories, and that these allegories fill out and deny the void in which they are

represented, just as, ultimately, the intention does not faithfully rest in the contemplation of bones, but faithlessly leaps forward to the idea of resurrection (233).”

It appears that no such transformation is possible in *Nohow On*; at least, it is not one that happens in the story. But it happens through image. Benjamin, in the Arcades Project, argues that the historical materialist must renounce the “epic element” of mythic time and expose history as that which is composed of “images, not stories” [N11,4]. Story gives a false sense of time, the illusion that events happen in a linear order of cause and effect, but in image, the event takes place all at once in the “flash” of now-time. It is a flash in which, as Benjamin will write in his essay on Surrealism, one realizes that the “best room,” the room in which word and image, text and figure, would seamlessly intersect, is missing: he thus praises the surrealists for drawing out the strangeness of language, for understanding that language “seemed only itself where sound and image, image and sound, interpenetrated with automatic precision and such felicity that no chink was left for the penny-in-the-slot called meaning” (SW2 208).

In the “flash” of the dialectical image, we are no longer held entranced under the spell of signification, but rather grasp the materiality of things, of words and of history. It is a linguistic insight. In “Berlin Childhood around 1900” Benjamin describes the effect on his childish imagination of an old nursery rhyme that featured a character named “Muhme Rehlen.” “The word Muhme meant nothing to me,” he writes, and so “this creature became for me a spirit: the mummerehlen” (SW3 374-5). Not knowing the meaning of the words, not knowing that *Muhme* is an archaic term for aunt, godmother and gossip or that *Rehlen* designates a proper name, the words entered into an entirely different set of associations for the child. The translator’s note is helpful: “the first

element of the child's word *Mummerehlen* echoes the German word *Mummer*, 'masquerader,' 'mummer.' *Mummen* means to 'muffle up,' 'to mask'" (410, n40). The word *mummen* word appears in the sentence that follows, where Benjamin also plays on the proximity between the German word for word (*Worte*) and the German word for cloud (*Wolke*): "Early on, I learned to disguise myself [*mich zu mummen*] in words, which were really clouds." Benjamin asserts that the word *mummerehlen* contains the whole distorted world of childhood," which now "lies hollow before me like an empty shell," which he places to his ear to listen. But he hears nothing: the *mummerehlen* is silent. It "confided nothing," and not only that, but it also averts its gaze: "Had that gaze fallen on me a single time," Benjamin writes, "I would have remained comforted my whole life long." He would have known the things that language disguises itself in order to represent; without that gaze, however, words are only themselves, disguises that, as it were, don't work. As Werner Hamacher writes, "Mummery, dissemblance, disguise of words, things and persons: these are not exterior to them but rather, as the exterior of their exterior, constitute their very interior"; the *mummerehlen* is thus allegory because it exposes the "dumbfounded interior of language" (Hamacher 148-9).

Beckett's M belongs to this mummery. The letter M is a fragment of a word and therefore not a signifier as such: it can be viewed as a wave of sound, or a wave of light; we might see a face in its arches, in the same way that primitive man saw faces in the stars.<sup>84</sup> Benjamin argues that the flash of the dialectical image hinges on both the visual form of language (the *Schriftbild*, word-image, or typeface<sup>85</sup>), what Benjamin calls the

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<sup>85</sup> In the *Trauerspiel* study, he states that not only is every word an image, every image is also a word-image: "alles Bild sei nur Schriftbild." Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen*

“mimetic element,” and language’s semiotic or nonsensuous element (SW2 722). The letter M is therefore a dialectical image because it is both text and figure, word and image, veil and veiled. In “Doctrine of the Similar,” Benjamin argues that the “flashing up” of the dialectical image is what constitutes the “if you will, magical aspect of language” (SW2 697). But this is no Romantic intoxication: as Werner Hamacher argues, it is a “critical, a dangerous moment,” in which reading “no longer blinks at an image but rather is itself a disruptive moment of an image in which it is exposed to its non-being. It is the moment, not lasting, of awakening. Now” (161).

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*Trauerspiels*, 190. Disappointingly, Osborne’s translation renders this phrase as “every image is only a form of writing” (214).

## Souvenir

The key figure in early allegory is the corpse. In late allegory, it is the “souvenir” [*Andenken*]. The “souvenir” is the schema of the commodity’s transformation into an object for the collector. The *correspondences* are, objectively, the endlessly varied resonances between one souvenir and the others.

Walter Benjamin, “Central Park.”<sup>86</sup>

In *Trust*, American philosopher Alphonso Lingis explains how he used to never travel with a camera. He had the usual objections: “it objectifies people with whom I wanted to interact...there is something false and delusive in trying to fix and stock up images and situations from the past...it was the changes in my heart I brought back home that were alone real” (49). However, when he was given a camera as a gift, he decided to try it out. At first he only shot images of buildings and landscapes, but one day, while focusing on some willows fringing a lake in Kashmir, he accidentally snapped some men bathing in a lake. To his surprise, the men smiled and called out “thank you!” Lingis writes that he then realized that taking photographs of people, especially those “who have no, and never will have, possessions, is the most innocent gift I could give them.”

There is much to feel uneasy about here: the implication that those without possessions are to be pitied, that they are the passive recipients of a gift, even though the gift in question is a photograph that will not in fact be given, but kept by the one who has transformed these people into an image for his own gratification, and, perhaps above all,

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<sup>86</sup> SW4 190.

the claim that this exchange between giver and receiver, perceiver and perceived, rich and poor, is “innocent.” This kind of discomfort accompanies the reader through many of Lingis’s recent books, which are part travel-memoirs and part philosophical meditations on the nature of encounters with strangers.<sup>87</sup> It is evident that Lingis wants to cut through the socio-economic and political determinisms and subjectivations in order to get at what it is for one thinking, feeling, breathing body to encounter another thinking, feeling, breathing body—not a subject-to-subject encounter, still less a human-to-human one, but rather a creaturely one, epidermis-to-epidermis.<sup>88</sup> In a different register, that of Deleuze and Guattari (who inform much of Lingis’s thinking), a person precedes and exceeds all markers of subjectivity: he/she/it is a site of pure expressivity that cannot be forced to represent, a singularity that cannot be made signify, a rhizome that cannot be arborified.<sup>89</sup>

Fine, one might say—but the discomfort remains, stubbornly. While Lingis often seems quite deliberate in soliciting such discomfort in his readers, this is not simply the discomfort of those he dismisses as “tight-assed liberals” who, out of “respect” for the people they deem Other, refuse to engage in the most primal and simple forms of social

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<sup>87</sup> Some of these books include: *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1994); *Foreign Bodies* (New York: Routledge, 1994); *Abuses* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1995); *The Imperative* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1998); *Trust* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2004); *Dangerous Emotions* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2005); *Body Transformations* (London: Routledge, 2005); *The First Person Singular* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2007).

<sup>8888</sup> I understand a “creaturely” encounter as one that is not mediated through the representations of and symbolic structures of consciousness and self-consciousness, which would position a person as subject over and against the world as object. For extended discussions of this idea, see Sigrid Weigel, *Walter Benjamin: Images, the Creaturely, and the Holy*, trans. Chadwick Truscott Smith (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2013) and Eric. L Santner, *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2006).

<sup>89</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987) 25.

interaction, such as bodily contact, erotic innuendo, dirty jokes and slapstick humor.<sup>90</sup>

Rather, the discomfort that Lingis activates for us—that is, for those who Pierre Bourdieu famously describes as “the dominated fraction of the dominant class”<sup>91</sup>—is the collective guilt of those who possess enormous privilege over those who have none and who are historically implicated by that possession. Guilt stems from a sense of responsibility, from the knowledge of the social and economic injustices that create privilege and distribute power, and this sense of responsibility is necessary for the exercise of ethical caution, a bulwark against further injustices. But guilt can also become a protective device for the guilty, operating on the principle that the more you feel bad, the less you are bad. It can lead to a smug sense of righteousness through which one resists certain feelings, such as the sorrow or pity or love one might feel for the plight of stranger, because those feelings stem from self-indulgent sentiment, they betray a moral narcissism, a lack of social awareness and sophistication, they are self-serving, trite and embarrassing. In the ultimate extension of this thought, empathy itself becomes an ethical transgression. Lingis relentlessly speaks up for empathy. At a very basic level, his work asserts, people need to care about each other, to love each other, and even if the ways in which this love is expressed can seem self-serving, trite or embarrassing, it is vitally important that we feel it.

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<sup>90</sup> For example, in an essay called “Transparency,” Lingis writes of the power of inappropriate or puerile jokes to undercut authority and provide relief from the repressive force of “Fuming, ranting bigots, haranguing zealots, prickly and tight-lipped, tight-assed liberals.” *Body Transformations*, 96.

<sup>91</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia UP, 1993), 196.

Another photograph is discussed in *Trust*. Lingis recounts a day in Ethiopia when he had to pay a visit to the bank in Addis Ababa. As he approaches the building, he sees a woman lying on the sidewalk with her two children. She is evidently dying of AIDS: her body is emaciated, her breasts shriveled, her skin pocked with dark blotches. When Lingis finishes his business at the bank and exits it, he slips between two cars and surreptitiously snaps a photograph of her. On his return to the United States, he develops the film roll:

there was only the thin bent smear of black on the silent paper of the photographic print. Yet I looked at the print and saw her and her children too as though she were there in front of me, in the aisle of the mall. I see her blinded by the midday Ethiopian sun, not seeing me, her wasted hand supporting her child in the last extremities of love. In writing this I know I am returning to her, though she is dead by now. This inability to depart from her, this desperate weakness, is perhaps also love. (106)

Lingis refuses context. He refuses to make the woman and her child, and his own position in relation to her, representative of the larger issues that have converged in the conditions that allow such a photograph to exist in the first place. What interests him is not, to use Roland Barthes's phrase, the photograph's *studium*, but only the personal, wounding quality of the photograph, its *punctum*.<sup>92</sup> The punctum of a photograph can be so strong

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<sup>92</sup> *Camera Lucida*. The *studium* of a photograph are all of its historical, political, and socio-economic significations, but the *punctum* is something less easily readable: it is what "breaks" or disturbs the *studium* by "wounding" the viewer. With the *studium*, one may view a photograph "as political testimony or enjoy them as good historical scenes"; with the *punctum*, what one sees is "that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)" (26-27). Like Lingis, Barthes is not especially interested in the *studium* of a photograph, but rather in its *punctum*: "I

that Barthes goes on to suggest that it emits “a kind of little simulacrum...which I should like to call the *Spectrum* of the Photograph, because this word retains, through its root, a relation to “spectacle” and adds to it that rather terrible thing which is there in every photograph: the return of the dead” (9).<sup>93</sup> The return of the dead is not a renewal of life, but rather the eternal return of dying, the infinite production of that which is finite. A slice of time, it functions as a souvenir in its strict etymological sense: from the Latin *subvenire*, meaning to “come to mind,” or in the *Andenken* of Benjamin in my epigraph, “to give to thinking.” When Benjamin posits the souvenir as the figure for late allegory, just as the corpse was the emblem for baroque allegory, he points to the unsettling temporality that marks the experience of living and all of its inadequate forms of representation: the souvenir presents an image of life at the same time as it presents life as an image. In allegory, the sign communicates only itself, not its signified, and in this communication we are denied the “mystical instant” of the symbol in which sign and signified appear whole and fused. In the staggered temporality of allegory we always arrive too late; hence, the allegorist is a brooder, forever arriving “at the solution of a great problem but then has forgotten it,” one who never coincides with himself because he typically “not only meditates a thing but also meditates his meditation of the thing” (J79a,1). In Benjamin’s essay on Goethe’s *Elective Affinities*, this condition of anteriority

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am a primitive, a child—or a maniac; I dismiss all knowledge, all culture, I refuse to inherit anything from another eye than my own” (51).

<sup>93</sup> Barthes here refers to the eidola of Democritus, the thin layers of atoms that sloughed off from the surfaces of macroscopic bodies and carried through the air, and to the simulacra of Lucretius: “a sort of skin/ Shed from the surfaces of objects, from the outer layer” (On the Nature of Things, IV.30-1). These images can ignite powerful emotions in the viewer: they can “make/ Our minds afraid when we encounter them while awake” (33-34), and while asleep “the weird and eerie effigies if those Lost to the Light...rouse us with a fright” (36-37).

is evidence of the postlapsarian condition through which word and thing are no longer fused, as they were in the divine order, and this, for Benjamin, is the reason why man cannot love. Love can only be fulfilled if “elevated above its nature, it is saved through God’s intervention” (SW1 345). But earthly love cannot be fulfilled, it cannot complete itself; rather, it is marked by its perpetual striving. It stems indeed from what Lingis calls a “desperate weakness,” which, in Benjamin’s register, “is not a naked foundering but rather a true ransoming of the deepest imperfection which belongs to the nature of man himself.”

For Benjamin, reinstating weakness as the principle characteristic of man had political importance: in the “Theologico-Political Fragment,” he writes that redemption and the “coming of the Messianic kingdom” depend on the intensification of creaturely experience, and that the “profane, therefore, though not itself a category of this Kingdom, is a decisive category of its quietest approach.”<sup>94</sup> The sacred can only be broached through a deepening of the profane. It is therefore a question of dialectics, of striking not a balance between the two elements, but going so deeply into one element that a second element is drawn out and redeems the first: “just as a force can, through acting, increase another that is acting in the opposite direction, so the order of the profane assists, through being profane, the coming of the Messianic Kingdom.” This movement between two

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<sup>94</sup> *Reflections* 312-4. The translation of this text that appears in the Selected Works unfortunately translates “profane” as “secular.” Jacob Taubes, in *The Political Theology of Paul*, describes the “Theologico-Political Fragment” as a virtual recasting of Romans 8 and “polemical through and through” (70). He recounts many more parallels between Paul’s thought and Benjamin. In his reading of First Corinthians 13, for example, he asks why, of faith hope, and love, should love be deemed greatest and answers: “Love is in the admission of my need...need consists in perfection itself...Telos, perfection, is a notion from mysticism, from the language of the Mysteries, but also from physics. And the punchline is: *en astheneia*, “in weakness”” (56)

extremes is again invoked in his essay on Surrealism where, writing on the tendency of the surrealists to veer towards a kind of Romantic intoxication, he argues that the purpose of such intoxication is to win “the energies of intoxication for revolution” (SW2 215), because “all ecstasy in *one* world [is] humiliating sobriety in the world complementary to it” (210).

When Lingis writes of “a desperate weakness, which is perhaps also love,” he is articulating a dialectical operation: out of the sense of desperate weakness love is produced and becomes its redeeming force. I understand this kind of love not as a self-valorizing Absolutism, but rather a “sober” Absolute; that is, an Absolute that has “forfeited its transcendence” and establishes itself instead amid the ordinary folds of immanence.<sup>95</sup> In what follows, I compare some elements of Barthes’s writing on photography with Benjamin’s concept of the “dialectical image.” According to Benjamin, the dialectical image opens up a specific mode of cognition whereby understanding is reached by way of a “flash” that arrests thought. In order to consider how this flash of the dialectical image can be understood as an experience that produces love, I turn to Spinoza’s concept of the third kind of knowledge, and in particular to Deleuze’s reading of Spinoza, in order to suggest that the dialectical image can be understood as a conduit for the third kind of knowledge, and since the affect of the third kind of knowledge is love, then the dialectical image can likewise be understood as the redemptive force that Benjamin argued it was. Both Spinoza’s third kind of knowledge and Benjamin’s

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<sup>95</sup> The “sober Absolute” as Rudolphe Gashé, notes, is the Absolute as the profane, the creaturely: it is that which has been “de-sacralized, de-divinized,” an “Absolute that has forfeited its transcendence” (65).

dialectical image depend on a specific experience of temporality in which the past collides with the present and the present becomes saturated with time: Benjamin articulates this idea in his concept of allegory and the flash of *Jetztzeit* or Messianic time in the dialectical image; in Spinoza, the apprehension of the total face of nature (*facies totius naturae*) can only take place under a species of eternity (*sub species aeternitatis*). In the final section I try to draw together these several strands through a reading of Deleuze's concept of *a life* as pure immanence: *a life* is the common skin we share, a creaturely skin that is the mark of our desperate weakness, which is perhaps also love.

### **I. The Photograph and the Dialectical Image: Barthes and Benjamin**

The connection between love and photography has been explored by Eduardo Cadava and Paola Cortés-Rocca in their article "Notes on Love and Photography," which is primarily a reading of Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida*. Since both love and photography transform their object into an image, they contend that for Barthes "the law" governing both photography and love is that which "interrupts identity by marking it with the sign of difference and transformations" (10). But more fundamentally, I would argue, what unites Barthes's discussions of both photography and love is *the problem of the image*. In *The Lover's Discourse*, the amorous subject attaches his desire to an array of different images, which together form a vast structure that Barthes calls the "Image-repertoire." The heart is "held, enchanted, within the domain of the Image-repertoire" (52), and if this Image-repertoire could have a language (that is, if it could be made to

signify successfully), then it would “be precisely the utopia of language; an entirely original, paradisiac language, the language of Adam” (99). The “utopia of language” is, in Benjamin’s register, the pre-allegorical state of language, which Benjamin invokes as the “language of Adam” in the fragment “On Language as Such and the Language of Man,” which was composed in 1916, the same year he began thinking about his *Trauerspiel* study. The language of Adam designates the pre-Fall, pre-allegorical state in which words had “naming power”: words and things were locked in the luminous fusion of the symbol, and the word was both creative and the thing created; post-Fall, the language of Adam becomes the language of man, and words are now abstract signs with no natural correspondence to things. We thereby enter into the condition of “overnaming,” which is the condition of allegory and “the deepest linguistic reason for all melancholy” (SW1, 73).

For Barthes, as for Benjamin, it is precisely due to this overnaming that love cannot be signified as such and thus cannot be fulfilled. The Image-repertoire may be forced into writing, but only at a cost: “What writing demands, and what any lover cannot grant it without laceration, is to sacrifice a little of his image-repertoire, and to assure thereby, through his language, the assumption of a little reality. All I might produce, at best, is a writing of the Image-repertoire; and for that I would have to renounce the Image-repertoire of writing” (98-99). Writing, in other words, although it is produced by the Image-repertoire, it cannot reproduce that from whence it came. It always somehow says both too much and too little, confined to everything that has already been said and named and therefore cannot express the particular potency of the Image-repertoire. The

lover is therefore trapped by the platitudes of love: “not managing to name the speciality of his desire for the loved being, the amorous subject falls back on this rather stupid word: *adorable!*” (18), a word that says essentially nothing, and at the same time “says everything” as well as “what is lacking in everything.” The lover “can never produce anything but a blank word, an empty vocable, which is the zero degree of all the sites where my very special desire for this particular other (and for no other) will form” (19).

In *Camera Lucida*, the photograph is also described as platitudinous: “The photograph is flat, platitudinous in the true sense of the word, that is what I must acknowledge” (106), and if it’s a photograph of a loved one, he writes, the photograph’s platitude becomes all the more painful (107). The Winter Garden photograph—a photograph of his dead mother taken when she was a girl—is said to have an *air*, an “expression” or a “look,” which is an “intractable supplement of identity” (109), the “luminous shadow which accompanies the body” (110). The air is “that exorbitant thing which induces from body to soul—*animula*, little individual soul, good in one person, bad in another” (109). For Barthes, the “air” of his mother that seems to be preserved in this photograph, suggests to him, somehow, that “the being I love, whom I have loved, is not separated from itself: at last it coincides. And, mysteriously, this coincidence is a kind of metamorphosis” (109). Yet this is a strangely static metamorphosis that manifests only at the level of the platitudinous surface of the photograph. For Barthes, the photograph ignites in him a grief that cannot be likewise transformed. The “air” of his mother that is bodied forth by the photograph “flows back from presentation to retention” and must be experienced entirely “on the level of the image’s finitude” (90). This is why Barthes

writes that he cannot *read* a photograph: “if dialectic is that thought which masters the incorruptible and converts the negation of death into the power to work, then the photograph is undialectical: it is denatured theater where death cannot “be contemplated,” reflected and interiorized; or again: the dead theater of Death, the foreclosure of the Tragic, excludes all purification, all *catharsis*” (90).

In “A Little History of Photography,” Benjamin also invokes the connection between readability and photographs. This is one of the first essays in which Benjamin mentions the “aura,” a concept that seems to correspond (at first blush, at least) to Barthes’s conception of the “air.” After naming the aura a few times in the essay, Benjamin pauses to ask, “What is aura actually?” and answers that it is a “strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of a distance, no matter how close it may be” (SW2 518). Like Barthes’s air, which immediately flows back from presentation to retention, the perception of the aura depends on both the illusion of distance and the uniqueness of the object. The “destruction of the aura,” an effect of capitalist commodity culture, is described as a “peeling away of the object’s shell” and as “the signature of a perception whose sense for the sameness of things has grown to the point where even the singular, the unique, is divested of its uniqueness—by means of its reproduction” (519). Just as Barthes asserts that he cannot read a photograph, Benjamin makes a photograph’s readability germane to the loss of its aura. The subjects of early portrait photographs had their aura intact, he argues, because newspapers were still a luxury item, “photography had not yet become a journalistic tool, and ordinary people had yet to see their names in print” (512). The first people to be reproduced as images

therefore “entered the visual space of photography with their innocence intact—or rather, without inscription” (512). Inscription is mentioned again in the closing paragraph of the essay when Benjamin argues, against Baudelaire (who “failed to grasp” this truth), that there are “lessons inherent in the authenticity of the photograph”:

The camera is getting smaller and smaller, ever readier to capture fleeting and secret images whose shock effect paralyzes the associative mechanisms in the beholder. This is where inscription must come into play, which includes the photography of the literization of the conditions of life, and without which all photographic construction must remain arrested in the approximate...Isn't it the task of the photographer—decendent of the augurs and haruspices—to reveal guilt and to point out the guilty in his pictures? “The illiteracy of the future,” someone has said, “will be ignorance not of reading or writing, but of photography.” But shouldn't a photographer who cannot read his own pictures be no less accounted an illiterate? Won't inscription become the most important part of the photograph? Such are the questions in which the interval of ninety years that separate us from the age of the daguerreotype discharges its historical tension. It is in the illumination of these sparks that the first photographs emerge, beautiful and unapproachable, from the darkness of our grandfathers' day. (SW2 527)

In the loss of the aura lies the potential of the photographic image to shock a person out of their “associative mechanisms.” While the gaze of the subjects of early portraiture instilled a sense of their enduring presence and caused viewers to feel a sense of sudden

proximity, the post-aura photograph, with its accompanying inscription, effects a temporal disjunction.

This temporal disjunction is what Benjamin articulates as allegory in the *Origin of German Tragic Drama*. There, he attacks Romantic “extravagance” for valorizing the symbolic construct in which “the beautiful is supposed to merge with the divine in an unbroken whole” (160). In contrast to the idealism of the symbol, baroque allegory is dialectical: it is “accomplished in the movement between two extremes,” and these extremes are nature and history.<sup>96</sup> The “mystical instant” of symbolic meaning is uprooted and a fragment is left in its place. Allegory piles up these “fragments ceaselessly”, and these allegories are, “in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things” (178). The “mystical instant” is the marker of mythic time: that is, history as an organic expression of time and of nature. In *Convolute N* of the *Arcades Project*, Benjamin maps out the difference between mythic time and historical time more explicitly. Mythic time takes the form of the epic, a story of man’s progression. The historical materialist must renounce the “epic element” of mythic time and expose history as that which is composed of “images, not stories” [N11,4]. History is in fact the ruin of time because when mythic time is abolished, fragmented, historical time takes its place. And as a human construct, history depends on citation: “To write history...means to cite history. It belongs to the concept of citation...that the historical object in each case is torn from its context” [N11,4]. The post-aura photograph, along with its inscription, is

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<sup>96</sup> It is “by virtue of a strange combination of nature and history that the allegorical mode of expression is born” (OGTD, 167).

therefore capable of shocking the viewer into now-time, of pointing to “the guilty,” and of blasting open the continuum of history.

History is denatured time in the same way that the inscription is denatured speech. Benjamin explains the difference between the spoken word and the written word thus: “The spoken word, it might be said, is the ecstasy of the creature, it is exposure, rashness, powerlessness before God; the written word is the composure of the creature, dignity, superiority, omnipotence over the objects of the world.” This idea of “composure” bears pausing at: in the original German, Benjamin uses the word *Sammlung*.<sup>97</sup> A *Sammlung* designates a collection; its secondary meaning would be composure, and the dual connotation is significant. A paraphrase of this sentence appears in “The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism” in which the “collected posture” (that is, composure) creates the appropriate conditions for reflection and a means to divert the ecstatic excesses of Romanticism towards the “sober light” of ideas: “As a thoughtful and collected posture, reflection is the antithesis of ecstasy” (SW1 175). Meanwhile, collecting is the activity of the allegorist of the *Arcades Project*, who “rummages here and there for a particular piece, holds it next to some other piece, and tests to see if they fit together—that meaning with this image or this image with that meaning” (J80,2; J80a,1). By themselves, the fragments are “quite incapable of emanating any meaning or significance on their own,” but in the hands of the allegorist, they can be transformed into a constellation or schema, and through this “he speaks of something different and for him

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<sup>97</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Verlag, 1978), 179. The full sentence reads: “Das Wort, so darf man sagen, ist die Ekstase der Kreatur, ist Bloßstellung, Vermessenheit, Ohnmacht vor Gott; die Schrift ist ihre Sammlung, ist Würde, Überlegenheit, Allmacht über die Dinge der Welt.”

it becomes a key to the realm of hidden knowledge; and he reverses it as emblem of this. This is what determines the character of allegory as a form of writing” (OGTD 184).<sup>98</sup> In other words, the inscription is not the key to knowledge, but the image of the key to knowledge. In inscription, the word is petrified in the image of the word: in other words, it is a dialectical image.

There have been many book-length studies devoted to explaining (or, in some cases, performing) what Benjamin means by the dialectical image, but I think that Anselm Haverkamp’s eleven-page article is one of the more astute interpretations because it foregrounds the importance of the inscription.<sup>99</sup> With some justification, Haverkamp complains of the “ongoing misreading” of the dialectical image in Benjamin, particularly the tendency to interpret the “flash” and “shock” of the dialectical image as some mystical recognition scene and to interpret the dialectical image as simply an

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<sup>98</sup> In the original German, the last sentence of this citation reads: “Das macht den Schriftcharakter der Allegorie” (161).

<sup>99</sup> Michael W. Jennings, in *Dialectical Images: Walter Benjamin’s Theory of Literary Criticism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1987) argues that Benjamin’s dialectical image is the result of a nihilist combination of mysticism and Marxism. Sigrid Weigel, in *Walter Benjamin: Images, the Creaturely, and the Holy*, trans. Chadwick Truscott Smith (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2013), focuses on the figure of the “detail” to establish a connection between *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* and the “Little History of Photography.” She argues that Benjamin “develops his method of reading as a saving critique in nuce: as the gaze of a philosophical critique that perceives the historical charge in the detail and is able to decipher the traces of history in remnants and fragments” (243). Susan Buck-Morss and Eduardo Cadava both have produced readings that tend to “perform” Benjamin’s understanding of the dialectical image: Susan Buck Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (MIT P, 1989); Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997). Cadava attempts “to understand Benjamin’s concept of history by analyzing his persistent recourse to the language of photography in his discussions of history” (xix). Unlike Cadava’s book, which produces a set of “photographs in prose,” Susan Buck-Morss reproduces actual photographs in her book, and comes under considerable censure from Haverkamp for doing so (see below).

image.<sup>100</sup> For Haverkamp, the dialectical image is, rather, a “readable citation.” He argues that “image” is the metaphor for citation and that the word dialectical has to be taken as reading: “Language is citation: language reused and reread” (71). According to Haverkamp, Benjamin used the term “image” in accordance with “a fashion of the time” (72), though he resisted the “mainstream application of the term,” and Benjamin draws attention to that distinction when he delineates between his idea of the dialectical image and the “archaic” image [N3,1]. The dialectical image, unlike the archaic image, is not essence in a mask but the monogram of essence. The difference between a dialectical image and an archaic image may be further characterized in the same terms in which we have discussed historical time and mythic time: the archaic image is a symbol or representation, whereas the dialectical image is produced through a historical perspective. He argues that what distinguishes “images from the “essences” of phenomenology is their historical index,” and this historical index “not only says that they belong to a particular time; it says, above all, that they attain to legibility only at a particular time” [N3,1]. This “now” depends on the moment of legibility:

And, indeed, this acceding “to legibility” constitutes a specific critical point in the movement at their interior. Every present day is determined by the images that are synchronic with it: each “now” is the now or a particular recognizability. In it, truth is charged to the bursting point with time. (This point of explosion, and nothing else, is the death of the *intentio*, which thus coincides with the birth of

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<sup>100</sup> He is particularly critical of Buck-Morss’s book (see above) in this respect: “Without more than the evidence of suitable pictures, Buck-Morss solves the mystery of the “dialectical image” much as Alexander solved another problem in cutting the Gordian knot. Why untie an obviously overcomplex theory if one can demonstrate so easily what it is about, and thus avoid the detour of too much thinking?” (72).

authentic historical time, the time of truth.) It is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words: image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is purely temporal, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: not temporal in the nature but figural <*bildlich*>. Only dialectical images are genuinely historical—that is, not archaic—images. The image that is read—which is to say, the image of the now of its recognizability—bears to the highest degree the imprint of the perilous critical moment on which all reading is founded. [N3,1]

An image can only be read according to the intellectual register of the particular epoch that accommodates it. Perhaps this would reduce history to mere relativism, but only if one were to insist on a linear history that can be narrated like a story, thus preserving its “epic element.” But Benjamin’s understanding of history is not as a continuous, linear story, but as a nonlinear series of images, ruins, and fragments. The photograph is Benjamin’s metaphor par excellence for the dialectical image because, in modern photography, the “camera is getting smaller and smaller”—*kleiner und kleiner*, and therefore the opposite of Kant’s Sublime, *die Große*—and it is now “ever readier to capture fleeting and secret images whose shock effect paralyzes the associative mechanisms in the beholder.”<sup>101</sup> The truth that the image presents is thus “charged to the

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<sup>101</sup> Shepherd Steiner draws attention to Benjamin’s use of the word “kleine” in the title of “*Kleine Geschichte der Photographie*,” a word that is reiterated in the opening sentence of this passage when the camera is described as becoming ever more *kleine*. Steiner points out that embedded within these suggestions of mechanical reproduction as a “technique of diminution” (523), is a

bursting point with time,” and these charged instants mark the “death of *intentio*,” an idea that is prefigured in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*: “Truth is an intentionless state of being, made up of ideas. The proper approach to it is not therefore one of intention and knowledge, but rather, total immersion and absorption in it. Truth is the death of intention” (36). Historical time—the time of fragments, ruins, and images—is the time of truth because, as Eric Santner has lucidly argued, it is through historical time that the material facticity of things and of creaturely life is exposed: “The opacity and recalcitrance that we associate with the materiality of nature—the mute ‘thingness’ of nature—is, paradoxically, most palpable where we encounter it as a piece of human history that has become an enigmatic ruin beyond our capacity to endow it with meaning, to integrate it into our symbolic universe.”<sup>102</sup> For Benjamin, truth can only ever lie in time. Archaic images are not historical, and neither do they represent any kind of “timeless truth.”<sup>103</sup> Time intervenes in the image at the precise moment that it is read: the “now of recognizability” is *produced* by the moment of reading. This moment is the *time differential* (“*Zeitdifferential*” <Q, 21>) of the present moment, and it is the present moment that produces history: “It is the present that polarizes the event into fore- and after-history” [N7a, 8].

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response to the Kantian aesthetic of *die Große*, otherwise known as the Sublime. If this is the case, then aura can be understood as an emanation of the Sublime. According to Steiner, for Benjamin the art of photography “domesticates or miniaturizes the absolutely large or ungraspable” (4), and this creates a corresponding empowerment of the subject, which would have been of great importance for a Jew living in Germany in the 1930s.

<sup>102</sup> Eric L. Santner, *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2006)

xv.

<sup>103</sup> Benjamin states his opposition to this idea very clearly: “Resolute refusal of the concept of “timeless truth” is in order” [N3, 2].

In reading, the inscription thus becomes an image. To make this point, Benjamin quotes from a “monologue-like essay” by “the brilliant Johann Wilhelm Ritter”: “The letter alone speaks, or rather: word and script are, at source, one, and neither is possible without the other” (OGTD 214). For Benjamin, Ritter gets to “the very heart of the allegorical attitude” with the theory that “alles Bild sei nur Schriftbild”—every image is only a word-image, or, as in the common German use of this word, a *typeface*.<sup>104</sup> In allegory, the image “is only a signature, only the monogram of essence, not the essence itself in a mask.” Not essence itself, but a *monogram* of essence, and allegory is a kind of monogram: it is “a schema; and as a schema it is an object of knowledge, but it is not securely possessed until it becomes a fixed schema: at one and the same time a fixed image and a fixing sign” (184). This word schema, the Latin for figure, is important. It appears in my epigraph, where Benjamin describes the souvenir as marking “the schema of the commodity’s transformation into an object for the collector,” while Barthes invokes the word schema in the preface to *A Lover’s Discourse*:

These fragments of discourse can be called figures. The word is to be understood, not in its rhetorical sense, but rather in its gymnastic or choreographic acceptation; in short, in the Greek meaning: *σχῆμα* is not the “schema,” but, in a much livelier way, the body’s gesture caught in action and not contemplated in repose: the body of athletes, orators, statues: what in the straining body can be immobilized. So it is with the lover at grips with his figures: he struggles in a kind

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<sup>104</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, 190. Disappointingly, Osborne’s translation renders this phrase as “every image is only a form of writing” (214).

of lunatic sport, he spends himself, like an athlete; he “phrases,” like an orator; he is caught, stuffed into a role, like a statue. The figure is the lover at work. (3-4)

Barthes suggests here that, at least in his understanding, schema is different from figure: schema is something frozen, petrified if you will, while figure is physical, active, dynamic. It is not clear if this distinction between figure and schema exists for Benjamin. About the inscription, he states at one point: “Ins Gelesene geht sie ein als >Figur<” (the inscription enters into the read as its figure), which does not suggest that he considers “figure” as either passive or active.<sup>105</sup> But of schema, he writes that it is both fixed and fixing, and this apparent contradiction is resolved in his concept of the dialectical image. Indeed, Haverkamp has argued that we should understand the dialectical image in terms of Benjamin’s use of the word schema: the dialectical image, for Haverkamp, is a “schema of figures” or a “constellation” (72). In the *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin famously states that “Ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars” (34), meaning that ideas, as verbal concepts, are as separate from the objects they seek to represent as the individual stars are from the patterns we read in them.<sup>106</sup> In “The Doctrine of the Similar,” he writes again about the concept of the constellation:

The perception of similarity is in every case bound to a flashing up. It flits past, can possibly be won again, but cannot really be held fast as can other perceptions.

It offers itself to the eye as fleetingly and transitorily as a constellation of stars.

The perception of similarities thus seem to be bound to a moment in time. It is

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<sup>105</sup> *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, 190. Osborne translates this sentence as: “It is absorbed along with what is read, as is its ‘pattern’” (215).

<sup>106</sup> Benjamin states that Ideas are “something linguistic,” and in support of this point, he quotes Hermann Güntert: “Plato’s “Ideas” are—if, for once, they might be considered from this one-sided viewpoint—nothing but deified words and verbal concepts” (*OGTD* 36).

like the addition of a third element—the astrologer—to the conjunction of two stars; it must be grasped in an instant. (SW2, 695-6).

This quotation touches on several elements that pertain to Benjamin's conception of the dialectical image, which, like the photograph, must be thought of as both image and inscription. First of all, recognizing the image—or reading the inscription—depends on the perception of similarities, what he will later call, in the essays on Baudelaire and Proust, correspondences. Second, this recognition is bound to a specific moment in time, an instant that cannot be willfully prolonged. Third, the similarities that one perceives depend on the perceiver: in this instance, the astrologer; in the case of baroque and modern allegory, the allegorist; in the case of the dialectical image, the reader.

When Barthes speaks of the “air” of his mother in the Winter Garden photograph, and when Lingis comments on the sense of sudden proximity to the subjects in his photograph, are they referring to something like the Romantic aura? Though there is some slippage of terms in their descriptions, I think that Lingis's photograph and that of Barthes function more like dialectical images, and Benjamin's essay “Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intellegentsia,” together with what we have explored so far in terms of the dialectical image, will, I think, explain why. For Benjamin, the Surrealists played at the threshold between waking and sleeping and thus drained reality of its power and power of its reality: the Surrealist dream undermines the “penny-in-the-slot called “meaning”” just as it undermines the self and “loosens individuality like a bad tooth” (SW2 208). André Breton's photographs, for example, made the streets of Paris seem like “illustrations of a trashy novel,” but he injected them with “the most pristine

intensity toward the events described” (211). He produced, in other words, citations, in which the true import was something *other* than what was superficially displayed or cited in the image itself. Benjamin describes this other of the image as the “long-sought image space...the world of universal and integral actuality, where the “best room” is missing—the space, in a word, in which political materialism and physical creaturliness share the inner man, the psyche, the individual, or whatever else we wish to throw to them, with dialectical justice, so that no limb remains untorn” (217). The feelings that the photographs excite in Lingis and Barthes uproot them from the subjectivated roles to which they are habituated. For a moment, the photograph changes the order of things, transforms who they are, and thrusts them into a sense of their creaturely state, a state of powerlessness in which the only sentiment one could feel for the other powerless creatures who inhabit the world with us is compassion and love. For a moment, indeed, this feeling appears to participate in some form of Romantic intoxication, but as Benjamin argues, it is the sober purpose of Surrealist intoxication was to win “the energies of intoxication for revolution” (215). “The dialectics of intoxication,” he continues, “are indeed curious. Is not all ecstasy in *one* world humiliating sobriety in the world complementary to it?” (210). The love that the photograph ignites for Lingis and Barthes might therefore be considered not as Romantic intoxication that conceals the smug transcendence of the subject or a dangerous impulse towards mastery but rather, as Rudolph Gasché puts it, an image of the “Absolute that has forfeited its transcendence.”<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Rudolph Gasché, “The Sober Absolute,” *Walter Benjamin and Romanticism*, ed. Beatrice Hanssen and Andrew Benjamin (New York: Continuum, 2003) 65.

## II. Deleuze's Book of Light

What is a camera lucida, actually? In spite of appearances, the means through which the camera obscura and the camera lucida produce images are markedly different.<sup>108</sup> In spite of sharing the word camera in their titles, the camera lucida, unlike the camera obscura, has no "chamber": as John Hammond and Jill Austin have demonstrated, around 1800 the word "camera" came to be largely associated with drawing (as in "drawing room"), so even though the "camera obscura" translates to "dark chamber," it was commonly understood as "drawing in the dark," whereas camera lucida was understood as "drawing in the light."<sup>109</sup>

Like the camera obscura, the camera lucida was primarily used as a drawing aid, but this is not particularly helpful for understanding why Barthes chose to name his book *Camera Lucida*. Indeed, in one section, Barthes overtly dismisses the idea that these drawing aids of artists were forerunners of photography. It seems that he chose "camera

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<sup>108</sup> See Erna Fiorentini, "Camera Obscura vs. Camera Lucida: Distinguishing Early Nineteenth Century Modes of Seeing, Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, 2006: "The Camera Lucida differs dramatically from the Camera Obscura, since the prism does not allow the observer to see a projected, steady image resembling a completed pictura. The image of the object toward which the prism is directed...is not projected on the drawing board, but reflected twice...by the mirroring plane surfaces into the observer's eye, which, due to the principle of double (or prismatic) reflection, perceives it in correspondence to direct observation, i.e. upright and true sided. The observer's glance is constantly directed to the drawing surface, and not to the object itself. Due to optical illusion, the retinal image produced by the prismatic reflection overlaps the sheet of paper on the drawing board, where the hand and the pencil of the draughtsman trace the perceived forms overlapping the paper, and fix shadows and colours. This means that the observer sees on the paper merely a virtual image corresponding to his or her retinal impression. It is not a projection existing outside the eye, but an image available only to the observer's perception, and invisible to others" (25).

<sup>109</sup> John Hammond and Jill Austin, *The camera lucida in art and science* (Bristol: Hilger, 1987) 13-14.

lucida” as a title because in it *light* is emphasized more clearly than in the word photography, though the etymology of photography actually means “light writing.”<sup>110</sup>

It is often said that it was the painters who invented Photography (by bequeathing it their framing, the Albertian perspective, and the optic of the *camera obscura*). I say: no, it was the chemists. For the *noeme* “That-has-been” was possible only on the day when scientific circumstance (the discovery that silver halogens were sensitive to light) made it possible to recover and print directly the luminous rays emitted by a variously lighted object. The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here; the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the missing being, as Sontag says, will touch me like the delayed rays of a star. A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed. (80-1)

Just as the camera lucida was named for its correspondences with the camera obscura, and not for the camera that it did not have, Barthes names his book *Camera Lucida* for the importance of light and not for its supposed connections to photography. It is through light that the photographic image is produced and through light that the viewing subject is touched or wounded by the image. Light becomes a “carnal medium,” a shared skin. As Cadava and Cortés-Rocca explain, Barthes here plays on the proximity between the French words of film and for skin: the “play between light and skin, between the

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<sup>110</sup> Hence, Eduardo Cadava names his book on Benjamin’s use of the language of photography to frame his concept of history *Words of Light*. See Cadava, *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1998).

photograph and emanations, can be registered in the French word for “film”: *pellicule*. From *pellis*, the skin, *pellicule* and “film” originally have the same meaning: a small of thin skin, a kind of membrane” (26, 17n).<sup>111</sup>

Light becomes a type of umbilical cord: it transports the special “air” of the the Winter Garden photograph. Multiple photographs are reproduced in *Camera Lucida*, but not that one: “I cannot reproduce the Winter Garden Photograph,” he writes. “It exists only for me. For you, it would be nothing but an indifferent picture, one of the thousand manifestations of the “ordinary”; it cannot in any way constitute the visible object of a science; it cannot establish an objectivity, in the positive sense of the term; at most it would interest your *studium*: period, clothes, photogeny; but in it, for you, no wound” (73).

This wounding quality of the photograph, this *punctum*, is what Alphonso Lingus sees when, some time after the event and thousands of miles away, he stares at the photograph he took of the woman in Addis Ababa. However, unlike Barthes’s Winter Garden photograph, Lingis reproduces his photograph in his book. Accompanied by Lingis’s inscription, it is an arresting image. The woman lies on the street with two children, one lying on the ground, his thin legs poking out from under a ragged blanket, one crouched and turned towards her breast. The expression on her face, half in shadow as she squints in the harsh glare of the sun, is one of both resignation and desperation. We know from Lingis’s inscription that she is dying. We know that she is probably dead now, and perhaps the children too. The photograph, this black smear on paper, is the trace

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<sup>111</sup> Barthes himself draws on this connection in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* when he describes the *pellicule* as a “skin without puncture” (54-5).

left behind by an event, by *a life*. It is truly a souvenir in Benjamin's sense: if the emblem for baroque allegory is the withered face or the dead body, then the emblem of allegory in the capitalist age are these souvenirs. This one—of a dying woman snapped by an American tourist leaving a bank—is not evidence of a trip from which one returns home wiser to the ills of the world and either guilty or grateful to inhabit a better-off part of it. Perhaps that would be the studium of the photograph, but its punctum is its carnality, the common skin we share. The woman who Lingis saw was living; now she is a photograph—swatted onto its platitudinous surface, a mute and nameless thing. And it is possible, I think, not only to understand, but to actually share in what Lingis describes as the “inability to depart from her, this desperate weakness, [which] is perhaps also love,” even though this love is may be useless, even though it helps no-one, even though one suspects that it might be self-serving, augmenting that western sense of vanity, and even though this is uncomfortable and embarrassing to admit. In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes argues that photography links us not only to madness, but to the “pangs of love,” not those pangs of a lover's sentiment, but “another music...its name oddly old-fashioned: Pity” (116). These emotions are not provoked by every photograph, but when it happens, it takes only an instant: the “reading of the punctum (of the pricked photograph, so to speak) is at once brief and active” (49). For Barthes, the photograph is therefore close to the haiku, for “the notation of a haiku, too, is undevelopable: everything is given, without provoking the desire for or even the possibility of a rhetorical expansion.”<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> The haiku and its proximity to skin/film is also mentioned in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (55).

The haiku and the photograph are schematic images: constellations. The constellation cannot be read star by star but only through the pattern that the stars form when viewed together all at once. We are thus back in the realm of Benjamin's dialectical image: "Where thinking comes to a standstill in a constellation saturated with tensions—there the dialectical image appears. It is the caesura in the movement of thought. Its position is naturally not an arbitrary one. It is to be found, in a word, where the tension between dialectical opposites is greatest" [N10a, 3]. The "dialectical opposites" are of time: the dialectical image is "a force field in which the confrontation between fore-history and after-history is played out. It becomes such a field insofar as the present interpenetrates it" [N7a, 1]. The present moment is the moment of cognizance, of perception, of reading; it "polarizes the event into fore- and after- history" [N7a, 8]. The dialectical image is "identical" with the historical object [N10a, 3] and is indeed, as Haverkamp argues, a "readable citation." History is nothing if not a series of citations: "To write history...means to cite history" [N 11, 3]. Furthermore, "It belongs to the concept of citation... that the historical object is torn from its context." Every dialectical image is therefore a form of souvenir. It is "that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation" (N2a,3). The "flash" is the critical now-moment when the image is read, a reading that in an instant both shatters and constellates its parts. This is the import of what Benjamin says in the first pages of the *Origin of German Tragic Drama*: the value of fragments of thought is all the more greater the less direct their relationship to the underlying idea, and the brilliance of the presentation

[*Darstellung*] depends as much on this value as the brilliance of the mosaic does on the quality of the glass paste.”<sup>113</sup>

It is a well-known but underappreciated fact that Spinoza was a lens-grinder by profession. This daily activity may have influenced his understanding of the human mind: just as a lens transmits or refracts beams of light, Spinoza approaches the mind as a material device that must be trained to become active or, in Deleuze’s terminology, “expressive.” In *Ethics*, Spinoza distinguishes between conceptions (*conceptus*) and perceptions, asserting that the “word ‘perception’ seems to indicate that the mind is in a passive relation to an object; but ‘conception’ seems to express an action of the mind” (2Def3Exp).<sup>114</sup> Later, he reiterates the point, cautioning against confusing thinking with mere “picturing”: “I understand by ideas, not images, such as those which are formed in the bottom of the eye and, if you wish, in the middle of the brain, but under conceptions of thought” (2P48S). These conceptions of thought are ideas, and all ideas, according to Spinoza, are adequate and true if they are related to God: that is, if they are derived from and express the *facies totius naturae* or *rerum concatenationem* (the concatenation of all things).<sup>115</sup> If the ideas are related solely to the individual mind alone, then they will be false and inadequate (2P28).

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<sup>113</sup> This translation is Osborne’s, but I have slightly modified it by using the word “presentation” for *Darstellung*, instead of his choice of “representation” (OGTD 29). In the original German: Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Verlag, 1978), 10.

<sup>114</sup> As G.H.R. Parkinson notes in his translation, “Spinoza may here be distancing himself from Descartes, who said that he took the word ‘idea’ to mean ‘whatever is immediately perceived by the mind’ (Ethics 330 4n.).

<sup>115</sup> For full discussion of this see Cesare Casarino, “*Marx before Spinoza*,” *Spinoza Now*, Dimitris Vardoulakis, ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 179-234.

The subtitle of Book V the *Ethics* is “On the Power of the Intellect, or, On Human Freedom,” and Deleuze describes it as an “aerial book of light, which proceeds by flashes” (“Spinoza and the Three “Ethics,”” 32-3). He arrives at this conclusion through a careful reading of the three forms of knowledge as presented by Spinoza in the *Ethics*. The first form of knowledge is that of signs and affects (*affectio*), and these pertain to one’s physical situation in a particular moment in time.<sup>116</sup> They constitute a “slice of duration (*durée*)” (22). Signs are effects of the affects, “shadows that play on the surfaces of bodies, always between two bodies...effects of light in a space filled with things colliding into each other at random” (24). However, the kind of knowledge produced from signs and affects “is hardly a knowledge but an experience in which one randomly encounters the confused ideas of bodily mixtures, brute imperatives to avoid this mixture and seek another, and more or less delirious interpretations of these situations”; when Spinoza speaks of it, says Deleuze, it is “only to be severely criticized, denounced, and sent back to their night, out of which light either reappears or in which it perishes” (26). The second kind of knowledge, what Spinoza calls “common notions,” are concepts of bodies or objects and constitute the “second aspect of light.” With the first kind of knowledge, light is reflected or absorbed by bodies that produce shadows and the imagination only grasped those shadows. In the second kind of knowledge the intellect can apprehend the intimate structure (*fabrica*) of those shadows, and thereby the relation between bodies. A common notion is the concept of the structure that is formed

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<sup>116</sup> He divides the “signs or affects” of the first kind of knowledge into four types of “scalar affections” (sensible indices, logical icons, moral symbols and metaphysical idols) and three kinds of “vectorial signs of affect,” which constitutes how a body either (1) increases his power in response to the scalar affections, (2) decreases it, or (3) both increases it and decreases it (21-23).

by at least two bodies; common notions are thus universals, but they are “more or less” universals depending on whether their concept takes in just two bodies or that of all possible bodies (*Facies toties Naturae*) (25). Deleuze then makes the following claim:

Understood in this way, modes are projections. Or rather, the variations of an object are projections that envelop a relation of movement and rest as their invariant (involution). And since each relation involves all the others to infinity, following an order that varies with each case, this order is the profile or projection that in each case envelops the face of Nature in its entirety, or the relation of all relations. (25)

In order to unpack this statement, we need to go back to Deleuze’s book on Spinoza, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, and to *The Ethics* itself. In *The Ethics*, modes are the third element of the classical triad of substance, attributes and modes: substance “is that which is in itself and is conceived through itself”; an attribute is “that which intellect perceives of substance, as constituting its essence”; a mode is that “which is in something else, through which it is also conceived” (I. Def. 3, 4, 5). The human being is an example of a mode, though a mode may also be a desk, a chair, a dog. One might go so far as to say that a mode is anything that exists, but that would be inaccurate: as Deleuze explains, not “only Spinoza’s physics, but Spinozism as a whole, becomes unintelligible if one doesn’t distinguish what belongs to essences, what belongs to existences, and the correspondences between them, which is in no way term for term” (207). Modes have essence and this essence is a physical, existing reality. However, though a physical reality, that modal essence may not actually exist as a mode. The modal essence has an

existence that is different from that of the corresponding mode, which is to say that the existence of the modal essence is different from the existence of the mode: “A mode’s essence exists, is real and actual, even if the mode whose essence it is does not actually exist” (192). However, Deleuze argues, this is not to say that modal essence is simply the “possible” or what tends toward existence. This is a major difference between Spinoza and Leibniz, and it is a difference that hinges on the role of *conatus*, which Deleuze understands as *desire*, in understanding modes. According to Deleuze, in the Leibnizian understanding “conatus has two senses: physically it designates a body’s tendency toward movement; metaphysically, the tendency of an essence towards existence” (230). For Spinoza, however, modal essences are self-sufficient: they do not lack anything and therefore do not necessarily tend towards existence. However, once the mode has begun to exist (that is, once “the extensive parts are extrinsically determined to enter into the relation that characterizes the mode”), then, “and only then,” does conatus constitute the mode’s essence. In other words, the modal essence only becomes conatus once the mode enters existence (230). Before coming into existence, a mode’s essence is its degree of power (191). It is intrinsic and intensive and singular. Where the attribute presents a *quality* of substance, a mode presents a *quantity* of that quality. In addition to a mode’s intrinsic essence, there will also be extrinsic or extensive parts, and it is through these that a mode is individuated. Deleuze explains the difference between intrinsic singularity and extensive individuation, which also underpins the difference between infinite modes and finite modes, by pointing back to the structure of the triad.

Substance is, so to speak, the absolute ontological identity of all qualities, absolutely infinite power, the power of existing in all forms, and of thinking in all forms. Attributes are infinite forms or qualities, and as such indivisible. So the finite is neither substantial nor qualitative. But nor is it mere appearance: it is modal, that is, quantitative. Each substantial quality [that is, attributive] has an intensive modal quantity, itself infinite, which actually divides into an infinity of intrinsic modes. These intrinsic modes, contained together as a whole in an attribute, are the intensive parts of the attribute itself. And they are thereby parts of God's power, within the attribute that contains them... Thus modes are in their essence expressive: they express God's essence, each according to the degree of power that constitutes its essence. The individuation of the finite does not proceed in Spinoza from genus to species or individual, from general to particular; it proceeds from an infinite quality to a corresponding quantity, which divides into irreducible intrinsic or extensive parts. (198-9)

The substantial essence of a mode is infinite and inseparable from every other modal essence; yet, it is also always singular. Deleuze explains this apparent paradox by invoking the white wall of Duns Scotus that Spinoza mentions in a letter: if one adds whiteness to whiteness, it will become indistinguishable because the quality (that is, the attribute) is always the same, though its intensity (that is, quantity) may vary. The individuation of a mode, however, rests on completely different criteria: "Individuation takes place only through a mode's existence, not through its essence" (195), and it is

because existence takes place within duration that modes have extrinsic individuation (196). In duration modal essence expresses itself through conatus:

Thus *conatus* is not in Spinoza the effort to persevere in existence, once existence is granted. It designates existential function of essence, the affirmation of essence in a mode's existence. Nor then, when we consider an existing body, can its conatus be a tendency toward movement...a composite body's *conatus* [is] only the effort to preserve the relation of movement and rest that defines it, that is, to maintain constantly renewed parts in the relation that defines its existence. (230)

So, not the effort to persevere in existence, nor the tendency towards movement, but only the effort to preserve the *relation* that defines its existence. If we return then to the statement we wanted to unpack, things are somewhat clearer. Modes—that is, existing modes—are projections or extrinsic individuations. But these projections *envelop* the relation of movement and rest that brought those projections into existence: in other words, they envelop their cause, which is God.<sup>117</sup> Every projection is therefore an invariant (something that is unaltered by transformation) and an involution (a function that is its own inverse) and is connected to every other relation and on to infinity to comprise “the relation of all relations” or the *Facies toties Naturae*. This is why Deleuze refers to Spinoza's philosophy as an “optical geometry”: each relation is formed by at least two bodies, each of which, in turn, is formed by two or more bodies and so on into infinity. When we encounter a a body that agrees with our own, joyful passive affections are produced, which become joyful active affections when can we form an idea of the

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<sup>117</sup> Deleuze's use of the word envelop is important here and gestures to his discussion of Leibniz and the various forms of envelops and folding that appear in *The Fold*, where the envelop becomes the figure for explaining the “pleats of matter” (9).

intrinsic structure that we share with that other body. A common notion is a relation, in this sense, and the accumulation of joyful affections helps us form that initial relation. Modes are “projections of light,” and therefore also “*coloring causes*,” which at their limit would merge with every other color as an infinite mode (“Spinoza and the Three ‘Ethics,’” 25).

It is towards this kind of knowledge—the kind of knowledge capable of taking in the *Facies toties Naturae* that Spinoza calls the third kind of knowledge, and which Deleuze calls the “third state of light,” that the whole of the *Ethics* moves towards.<sup>118</sup> According to Deleuze, this knowledge is composed “no longer signs of shadow or of light as color, but light in and of itself” (29). Deleuze argues that common notions, “insofar as they are projections, are already optical figures” (30) because they are *concepts* of relations. The first kind of knowledge presents a “logic of the sign,” the second a “logic of the concept,” the third, “a logic of essence”: Shadow, Color, and Light, respectively (33). One cannot begin with Light—God or the *Facies toties Naturae*. But, as Spinoza demonstrates throughout *the Ethics*, “one must reach it as quickly as possible” (29). For Deleuze, Book V is “a method of invention that will proceed by intervals and leaps, hiatuses and contractions, somewhat like a dog searching than a reasonable man explaining” (31). Its form is different from the other books because what Spinoza points to is the direct knowledge of essences: “*absolute and no longer relative speed, figures of*

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<sup>118</sup> In Bergson, there is a similar idea. In “Introduction to Metaphysics,” he distinguishes between two kinds of knowledge: “The first implies going all around it, the second entering into it. The first depends on the viewpoint chosen and the symbols employed, while the second is taken from no viewpoint and rests on no symbol. Of the first kind of knowledge we shall say that it stops at the *relative*; of the second that, wherever possible, it attains the *absolute*” (Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, 133).

*light and no longer geometric figures revealed by light*" (32). Where common notions always refer to relations of movement and rest (relative speeds), essences make themselves understood in flashes: "essences on the contrary are absolute speeds that do not compose space by projection, but occupy it all at once in a single stroke" (30).

In *Expressionism*, Deleuze begins the chapter on Book V, "Beatitude," by asserting that what separates the second and third kinds of knowledge is a "certain quality, a particular qualitative difference characterized by the degree of power or intensity of our own essence itself" (305). While common notions depend on "adventitious affections as their occasional causes" (307), ideas of the third kind are explained by our own essence. They are not dependent on signs or concepts, on shadows or colors, but only on essence and light. An adequate idea is an understanding that is accompanied by a knowledge of its cause, which, ultimately, is God; therefore, ideas of the third kind are not produced by "common properties, but God's essence, my essence, and all the other essences that depend on God" (309). We thus are capable of thinking as God thinks (308).

Two kinds of love are described in Book V. From propositions 14-20, we have a God who can neither love nor hate nor experience joy, and since God possesses infinite power, he neither can enjoy an increase from common notions; from propositions 32-37, God is joyful and loves us with the same love with which we love him:

The intellectual love of the mind for God is the love by which God loves himself; not in so far as he is infinite, but in so far as he can be explained through the essence of the human mind, considered under a species of eternity; that is, the

love of the mind for God is a part of the infinite intellectual love with which God loves himself. (V. Prop. 36)

As Deleuze admits, the chain of reasoning that leads to the third kind of knowledge is less self-evident than the others. The first kind of knowledge is derived from an associative chain of signs and affects. The second kind of knowledge is produced by an automatic chain of concepts and causes. But the chain for the third kind of knowledge, the final link, is missing: as Deleuze writes, it leads to a “double interval.” The term “double interval” comes from Plato’s *Timaeus*: in the midst of creating the Soul of the world, God needs to neutralize differences between divisible and indivisible Sameness, Difference and Being, so he forges two separate chains, one marked by a double interval (1, 2, 4, 8), the other by a triple interval (1, 3, 9, 27) (*Timaeus*, 35-37). In his commentary on this passage in *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze remarks that in his effort to “draw from the depths of an intensive *spatium* a serene and docile extensity, and to dispel a Difference which subsists in itself even when it is cancelled outside itself,” Plato’s God “dances upon a volcano” (234). Difference is singular essence, the multiple inequalities and differences that rumble beneath and threaten to fracture the auratic façade of the One. When the term “double interval” resurfaces in Deleuze’s discussion of Spinoza, it is to mark a specific point at which the pathway to the third kind of knowledge suddenly falls away. Deleuze takes proposition 10 as an example. Quoting Spinoza: “As long as we are not torn by affects contrary to our nature, we have the power of ordering and connecting the affections of the body according to the order of the intellect” (“Spinoza and the Three ‘Ethics,’” 32). Deleuze points out that the subordinate clause (bodies that agree with our

own and thus increase our power or joy) and the principle (that through this power we can form a common notion and from there we can ultimately move to an apprehension of the *Facies toties Naturae*) actually open up a rift: we are required to fill in the gap ourselves, and unless we do so, we will be “undecided about the fundamental question: How do we come to form any common notion at all? And why is it a question of the least universal of notions (common to our body and *one* other)?” Deleuze does not answer his question, but instead argues that Book V surpasses demonstration and decidability because its method depends on a form of thought that operates at absolute speed. With this kind of thought, leaps, lacunae, and cuts are positive characteristics. He compares the style of Book V to the thought of certain mathematicians:

When mathematicians are not given over to the constitution of an axiomatic, their style of invention takes on strange powers, and the deductive links are broken by large discontinuities or on the contrary are violently contracted. No one denies Desargues’s genius, but mathematicians like Huygens or Descartes had difficulty understanding him. His demonstration that every plane is the “polar” of a point, and every point the “pole” of a plane, is so rapid that one has to fill in everything it skips over. No one has described this jolting, jumping, and colliding thought better than Evariste Galois, who himself encountered a good deal of incomprehension from his peers: analysts “do not deduce, they combine, they compose; when they arrive at the truth, it is by crashing in from all sides that they happen to stumble on it.” Once again, these characteristics do not appear as

simple imperfections in the exposition, so that it can be done “more quickly,” but as powers of a new order of thought that conquers at absolute speed. (31)

This new order of thought depends on the interval to function and on a “speed of absolute survey” (*survol*) to draw together to the maximum degree terms that are distant as such (32).

Deleuze compares the expressionist philosophy of Spinoza and Leibniz in terms of light and dark: Leibniz is said to be closer to the Baroque, to darkness, his “*fuscum subnigrum*” is a matrix out of which color and light emanate, but in Spinoza all is light. He is therefore closer to the Byzantine, where “everything is light, and the Dark is only a shadow, a simple effect of light on the bodies that reflect it (affection) or absorb it (affect)” (“Spinoza and the Three “Ethics,”” 24). In his book on Leibniz, *The Fold*, Deleuze compares the camera obscura to the dark and windowless monad (31). The Leibnizian monad and the Spinozan mode are similar: both are individual centers of expression. But for Leibniz, the world that each monad expresses does not exist outside the monad that expresses it (*Expressionism* 42). Furthermore, Leibnizian expression is tied to concepts of creation and emanation, and expression is inseparable from signs. It is thus a “symbolic” philosophy, and equating signs to expression means that at times expression is confused and at other times it is distinct: “*Such a symbolic philosophy is necessarily a philosophy of equivocal expressions*” (329). Spinoza, however, separates signs from expression. The type of knowledge that comes from signs is inherently inadequate. However, we are capable of forming an adequate idea, which is to say “a distinct idea that has freed itself from the obscure and confused background from which

in Leibniz it was inseperable” (330). Where Leibniz operates in the realm of symbolism, harmony and analogy, Spinoza’s language,

on the other hand, hinges on univocity: first of all, the univocity of attributes (in that attributes are, in the same form, both what constitute the essence of substance, and what contain modes and their essences); second, univocity of causation (in that God is the cause of all things in the same sense that he is cause of himself); then univocity of ideas (in that common notions are the same in a part as in a whole). Univocity of being, univocity of production, univocity of knowing; common form, common cause, common notion—these are the three figures of the Univocal that combine absolutely in an idea of the third kind. (332)

To take this in, a special perception is required—absolute survey or overview. It is the momentary glimpse capable of taking in the *facies totius naturae* or immanence, the *flash* of the dialectical image. Indeed, Deleuze uses this very language: the glimpse of the plane of immanence is a “sudden illumination,” a “flash” (*Practical Philosophy*, 129); after which we return “with bloodshot eyes, yet they are the eyes of the mind” (*What is Philosophy*, 41).

Curiously, in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin attributes his understanding of the Idea to Leibniz:

The idea is a monad. The being that enters into it, with its past and subsequent history, brings—concealed in its own form—an indistinct abbreviation of the rest of the world of idea, just as, according to Leibniz’s Discourse on Metaphysics (1686), every single monad—the pre-stabilized representation [*Repräsentation*] of

phenomena resides within it, as in their objective interpretation. The higher the order of the ideas, the more perfect the representation [*Repräsentation*] contained within them. And so the real world could well constitute a task, in the sense that it would be a question of penetrating so deeply into everything real as to reveal thereby an objective interpretation of the world. In the light of such a task of penetration it is not surprising that the philosopher of the monadology was also the founder of infinitesimal calculus. The idea is a monad—that means briefly: every idea contains an image of the world. The purpose of the representation [*Darstellung*] of the idea is nothing less than an abbreviated outline [*Verkürzung*] of this image of the world. (47-8)<sup>119</sup>

The original German words are telling: the monad-Idea is a stabilized re-presentation. Deleuze agrees: in *The Fold*, he describes how Leibniz puts a great screen between the Many and the One, between chaos and order. This screen is the *fuscum subnigrum*, and “is like the infinitely refined machine that is the basis of Nature” (87). If chaos is the “sum of all possibles”, a “universal giddiness,” then it is the screen that makes it possible to “extract differentials [to be] integrated in ordered perceptions.” For Benjamin, the idea is an “image of the world,” but it is not a dialectical image because a dialectical image is marked by time, whereas Ideas are “timeless constellations” (OGTD 34). However, the *Darstellung* of the idea is a “contraction” (*Verkürzung*) of that image— it is what produces the dialectical image, which is the *image of an image*, or a citation of a citation.

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<sup>119</sup> The translation is Osborne’s, but with my modifications. Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998), 47; Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Verlag, 1978), 30.

As Haverkamp argues with marvelous succinctness, ““Legibility” is what cuts [the dialectical image] off from mere *imagerie* and mere imagination and turns it, dialectically, from what it contains, fossil-like, into the schema of what this fossil, flash-like, reveals” (74).

### **III. Love and A Life**

Considered in allegorical terms...the profane world is both elevated and devalued. This religious dialectic of content has its formal correlative in the dialectic of convention and expression. For allegory is both: convention and expression; and both are inherently contradictory.

*The Origin of German Tragic Drama, 175*

In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze states that paradox is “the pathos or the passion of philosophy” (227). Paradox is always opposed to the order of common sense. It breaks up the faculties and “places each before its own limit, before its incomparable: thought before the unthinkable which it alone is nevertheless capable of thinking; memory before the forgotten which is also its immemorial, sensibility before the imperceptible which is indistinguishable from its intensive.” It is what, in Benjamin’s language, brings dialectics to a standstill. However, at the same time, says Deleuze, paradox “communicates to the broken faculties that relation which is far from good sense, aligning them along a volcanic line which allows one to ignite the other, leaping from one limit to the next.” One part igniting the other, like the glass paste of a mosaic, or the jagged strokes of

lightning. “Objectively,” Deleuze continues, “paradox displays the element which cannot be totalized within a common element, along with the difference which cannot be equalized or cancelled at the direction of good sense” (227). This element is singular essence, which is to say, immanence itself.

In one of his final texts, Deleuze defines immanence as “A LIFE” (Immanence 27).<sup>120</sup> The indefinite article is of crucial importance: it is “the mark of the person only because it is determination of the singular” (30). Immanence is pure expression expressing. It is life itself, we might say; but it is, more importantly, *a* life. We must pay attention to the articles in this statement: “The transcendental field is defined by a plane of immanence, and the plane of immanence by a life” (28). The transcendental field is defined by *a* plane of immanence, which is to say the transcendental field is singular essence, the difference that cannot be equalized, the element that cannot be totalized; *the* plane of immanence is defined by *a* life, which is to say, *a* mode. Through its singular essence, through its difference that cannot be equalized, through an element that cannot be totalized, a mode expresses substance. But in order to express substance, one must not “faithfully rest in the contemplation of bones,” as Benjamin states in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*: the leap forward to redemption, to beatitude, means, for Deleuze, “to become active; to express God’s essence, to be oneself an idea through which the essence of God explicates itself, to have affections that are explained by our own essence and express God’s essence” (Expressionism, 320). “If we take the indefinite article as an index of the transcendental,” Deleuze argues, then no one “has described what *a* life better is than Charles Dickens”:

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<sup>120</sup> Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life, Trans. Anne Boyman (New York, Zone Books, 2001).

A disreputable man, a rogue, held in contempt by everyone, is found as he lies dying. Suddenly, those taking care of him manifest an eagerness, respect, even love for the slightest signs of life. Everybody bustles about to save him, to the point where, in his deepest coma, this wicked man himself senses something soft and sweet penetrating him. But to the degree that he comes back to life, his saviors turn colder, and he becomes once again mean and crude. Between his life and his death, there is a moment that is only that of *a* life playing with death. The life of the individual gives way to an impersonal and yet singular life that releases a pure event freed from the accidents of internal and external life, that is, from the subjectivity and objectivity of what happens: a “Homo tantum” with whom everyone empathizes and who attains a sort of beatitude. It is a haecceity no longer of individuation but of singularization: a life of pure immanence, neutral, beyond good and evil, for it was only the subject that incarnated it in the midst of things that made it good or bad. The life of such an individuality fades away in favor of the singular life immanent to a man who no longer has a name, though he can be mistaken for no other. A singular essence, a life... (28-9)

Shorn of the markers that would individuate him, the man becomes—momentarily—pure intensity. It is no longer *his* life, but *a* life: pure event, the absolute speed of a light that reveals in its flash the *Facies toties Naturae* in *a* life. It’s a moment that is lost as quickly as it arrives: returning to health, to waking life and reality, he is reminded of who he is and of life as it has already been defined for him. Deleuze takes care to say that this experience of *a* life does not only happen in extreme situations that dramatize the passage

between life and death: it can happen at any time, but only “between-times, between-moments”—empty time, in other words, time not claimed by the individual, or by the demands of “internal and external life,” or by “the subjectivity and objectivity of what happens,” time in which one is no longer the subject but an indefinite article, *a life*. In the realization of *a life*, life coincides with life, a momentary collision of presence with the present, pure event: “it doesn’t just come about before or come after but offers the immensity of an empty time where one sees the event yet to come and already happened in the absolute of an immediate consciousness” (29).

The intellectual understanding of a paradox does not lead to the beatific state. One must abide in paradox. What the man experiences as a stage towards his momentary encounter with beatitude, is this: “thought before the unthinkable which it alone is nevertheless capable of thinking; memory before the forgotten which is also its immemorial, sensibility before the imperceptible which is indistinguishable from its intensive.” In the very next moment, a “volcanic line” seems to ignite one relation to another, “leaping from one limit to the next,” and finally, though *at an absolute speed* that makes everything appear to have happened all at once, the relation of all relations, the *Facies toties Naturae*. This image, in Benjamin’s words, “flashes up at the moment of its recognizability, and is never seen again” (SW4 390). In a moment of acute physical weakness, desperate weakness, a sweetness and a softness opens up in him, which is perhaps also love.



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