



Kent Academic Repository

Gamache, Mylène (2017) *Brooding: The Inexperience of Reading and Other Psychic Bits*. Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) thesis, University of Kent,.

Downloaded from

<https://kar.kent.ac.uk/63583/> The University of Kent's Academic Repository KAR

The version of record is available from

This document version

UNSPECIFIED

DOI for this version

Licence for this version

UNSPECIFIED

Additional information

Versions of research works

Versions of Record

If this version is the version of record, it is the same as the published version available on the publisher's web site. Cite as the published version.

Author Accepted Manuscripts

If this document is identified as the Author Accepted Manuscript it is the version after peer review but before type setting, copy editing or publisher branding. Cite as Surname, Initial. (Year) 'Title of article'. To be published in **Title of Journal**, Volume and issue numbers [peer-reviewed accepted version]. Available at: DOI or URL (Accessed: date).

Enquiries

If you have questions about this document contact ResearchSupport@kent.ac.uk. Please include the URL of the record in KAR. If you believe that your, or a third party's rights have been compromised through this document please see our [Take Down policy](https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/kar-the-kent-academic-repository#policies) (available from <https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/kar-the-kent-academic-repository#policies>).

Brooding:
The Inexperience of Reading
and Other Psychic Bits

by Mylène Gamache

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of English
University of Kent

Word count: 88,342

©Copyright by Mylène Gamache 2017

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	iii
Proem	1
1. Mourning	15
2. Dreaming, Reading and Telepathy.	57
3. Brooding, Part I.	101
4. Brooding, Part II.	124
5. Swanning (to Utopia)	143
6. Psyche	172
Coda	220
Works Consulted	223

Acknowledgments

I'm grateful to Sarah Wood without whose nurturing counsels and suggested prunings this project would never have grown. Thank you for believing in the process. My capacity to read and write has been immensely affected by your ability to transpose images and thoughts in a way that renders them, all at once, more beautiful and strange.

Earnest thanks to Stella Bolaki, for her recommendations as second reader, and to Thomas Baldwin and Nicholas Royle, for their hospitable guidance as thesis examiners.

I extend gratitude for the infinite trust and support of closest friends and family members: Smita Misra, for tending to my heart and psyche since that first year of magic in Canterbury; Renée Martel, for the love you inspire and give unquestionably; David Seitz, for always knowing when to be fierce, when to be insistent, and when to be kind; Melanie Lewis, for gently spurring me to go where I was most reluctant; my sister Manon and my father Norbert Gamache, for the whimsical inclination which binds us to one another.

This thesis is dedicated with love to my mother, Paulette Carrière-Gamache, who is forever my most feeling, dedicated, and generous reader.

Proem

In writing this thesis, I'm moved by an experimental urge to yield to texts blindly, intuitively, honestly, openly. Texts seem expressly to happen to me under conditions of obscurity. It's as if idiomatic characters or letters occur to me without ostensible precedent or foreseeable outcome. If anyone can relent to what unexpectedly presents itself in life, I concede that a reader can similarly soften in the company of unmooring texts. Animated by a series of chance-readings, this thesis is written without recourse to a fixed outline or established itinerary. Out of a desire to re-enact the surprise of textual events as these discreetly happen upon and haphazardly happen to me, my writing can seem at times to move a bit errantly. A number of contingent events incite me to write about psyche as an unconscious body. This body's measure of responsiveness toward internal and external stimuli may be discerned in moments where fictional characters *extend* in states of erotic abandon or *fragment* in moments of grave loss and defeat. Rather remarkably and somewhat fortuitously, the fictional events to which I'm drawn tend to involve an inanimate material or a live remnant, such as a sheet of torn paper, a bit of flower, a strand of insect drifting. And while these 'psychic bits,' as I prefer to name them, inspire a taste for mournful contemplation, they also re-animate in readers an infantile curiosity towards a range of unknowable entities.

This thesis speculates that a reader approaches a poem or text without preparation for the wounding which this encounter precipitates (Derrida, 'Che cos'è la poesia?' 233). There is little in the realm of experience that can assist you in bearing the magnitude of these textual events. I write in the fourth chapter about Walter Benjamin's rejection of 'experience.' He finds the common application of the word to imply an irrelevant correlation between one's age and the stage of one's developmental progress. Conversely, the word 'inexperience' can be applied to moments where engagements or encounters with others cease to rely on any sense of 'expertise' or established 'know-how.' I borrow the word 'inexperience' in the thesis title from an essay Lisa Robertson writes on the 'intimate structure' of city soundscapes in a piece called 'Disquiet.' She writes there of feeling 'the extreme fragility of time' as if it were in unison with 'the inexperience of my attention' (Nilling 69).

Inexperiences do not keep with linear time. They derive their own disjointed senses of time based on the velocity and intensity of a reader's distracted habits of perception.

This thesis takes brooding as its most persistent activity. The noun stems from the Old English *bród* whose cognate, the Dutch *broed*, is associated with the Middle-High Germanic *bruot*, meaning, 'heat, warmth, hatching, that which is hatched, brood' (*OED*). The verb also conjures up the gestational senses of 'incubating or hatching' as of 'cherishing young under the wings' (*OED*). Brooders are infantile learners. Tender inexperiences, painful misrecognitions, and intimate failures incite them to learn, to read, to love, and on occasion, even, to write. Given their penchant for 'moody mental contemplation' (*OED*), brooders come to nourish the psychic bits which most inflame their melancholic predispositions. From an early age on, these small readers exhibit consonant tendencies for grave disappointment and wondrous possibility. A written image, whose relevance Thomas Baldwin more recently reminded me, expands the scope of this wistful position. The image comes into temporary focus in « *Du côté de chez Swann* », the first book of Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*. The narrator recalls there the immense pleasure he derives from the 'form of words' while driving towards and promptly away from two Martinville Church steeples (Proust 149). What remains hidden for him behind these bell towers—something analogous to a pretty phrase, as Proust writes—is the sensation he derives from the little piece of writing (« *le petit morceau* ») which he devotes to this very sighting (149). As a consequence of this written and creative achievement, Marcel feels that he can finally rid himself of the steeples along with whatever else they may conceal from him. As euphoric as a hen hatching an egg, he begins in this elevated moment to sing at the top of his lungs—« *comme si j'avais été moi-même une poule et si je venais de pondre un œuf, je me mis à chanter à tue-tête* » (150). Marcel—whose relationship to Albertine I study in the final thesis chapter—offers here a memorable and enchanting portrait of himself as an elated writer-brooder.

This project is written in tributary awe of reading and all its tender proddings and gentle instructions. I take subtle cues throughout from Hélène Cixous, Anne Carson, Sarah Wood, and Lisa

Robertson. I read these critical and creative writers to be labouring towards a ‘utopic’ dream in which their philosophical and literary contributions might no longer warrant nor need a ‘feminist’ stamp of distinction. The quality of their prose reflects a concerted desire not to be reduced, assessed, or set apart on the basis of such assignments. Their budding forms of creative criticism embolden me to yield to the capaciousness of an ‘in-between’—a transitional space and affective milieu where identity falters and indecision prevails. This project works to render uncertain the means according to which some binary systems of thought rashly dissociate inanimation from animation, femininity from masculinity, passivity from activity, response from reaction, and dreaming from knowing. Drawn to the fluent lyricism which permeates their texts, these thinkers have made the execution and performance of this oblique writing project possible. Their texts critically perform the *as if* of analogical or ‘speculative thinking, which is outside of knowledge’ (Robertson, *Nilling* 13). Their approach to writing incites this project to open out to the inherent chances which this tentative spacing offers. Their critical distrust of sovereign modes of knowing and seeing and apprehending make it possible for this thesis to summon unassimilable memories, to heed spectral *revenants*, and to explore the fractal processes of our psyches. *Fractal* summons here the Latin sense of *fractus*, the past participle of *frangere*, meaning, ‘to break’ (*OED*). The point of view from which this analysis proceeds is fractured. Neither continuous nor conclusive, it works to accommodate divergent and localised readings of texts which are themselves conditioned and punctuated by recurring states of ambivalence, devastation, and grief.

I’m drawn to texts of an unsettling genre. This thesis assembles a literary canon comprised of ‘peripheral’ or ‘non-mainstream’ texts by contemporary writers like Amelia Gray, Rivka Galchen, and Lydia Davis, alongside a scattering of works by more established authors like Proust, Kleist, and Kafka. I contend that these narrative structures, when read conjointly, reflect the oblique and unfinished qualities of psychical states so frequently engaged in this exploratory work; namely, of mourning, dreaming, remembering, and learning. The stylistic methods which these texts use to convey the forces of contingent and occasionally terrifying events, are gentle—even, hospitable.

Without promising readers any gain in personal edification, these writers confide in readers the courage and aptitude to venture polychromatic readings of their intimate and eccentric architectures.

This thesis honours the premise that inhuman creatures are able to inscribe, read, respond, and dream. It intimates that various psychical bodies peruse their environments while they similarly fail to make sense of it. This project wonders whether a text may be consumed by a reader and if a metaphor for literary comprehension may not also be conveyed in similar physiological or biological terms. If reading stimulates incorporative impulses to the extent that we bite or, at the very least, *graze* what we read, are we not, then, already traipsing amidst remainders? Are we not, in our attenuated states of melancholic deliberation, always working to re-assemble what little is left as we engage all these rests? A fictional encounter with a prehistoric cockroach narrated in Clarice Lispector's novel *A paixão segundo G.H.* (*The Passion According to G.H.*) informs my preoccupation with remaining bits. A craving to know a creaturely other, exacerbated by the narrator's innermost desire to *savour* the primordial itself, only intensifies in Lispector's narrative. It culminates with an oral act as the sculptor and narrator G. H., whose abstracted name imparts the '...nonderogatory reduction of a person to something weightless, to the point of having the least self possible designated by a letter' (Cixous, *Readings* 41), attempts to overcome her feelings of repulsion by taking the orthopterous creature into her mouth. Her effort to ingest the cockroach fails when she violently disgorges herself of this ancient creature. In an emetic instant, her body yields to a tacit understanding that an other cannot simply be converted into a substance of its own nature. This near-immediate response is significant because it suggests that even a strain of psychosomatic defiance can occlude the enactment of a biological drive.

Inspired by a notion of the mouth as both a sensual and destructive medium, this thesis seeks to approach various sorts of textual gaps and blanks as critical moments of indecision. As one such modest aperture, I have in mind a 'little space in the flowers' detailed in a young woman's dream which Freud recounts in the fourth edition of his *Die Traumdeutung* (*The Interpretation of Dreams*). Freud's prescriptive reading fills the little space with the dreamer's virginal shame. In an effort both to

loosen and to counter Freud's authoritative grip over the dream-space, I attempt in the second chapter a reading which dreams of less prescriptive spatial connotations. The thesis strives to keep interstices open which, on the part of a defensive desire for textual resolution and mastery, often risk becoming sealed shut. This experimental venture is spurred on by an engagement with the French word *béance*, referring either to a 'gaping hole beyond all possibility of reclosure' or to a 'kind of opening that cannot be closed again' (Kamuf, 'Béance' 40).

The adjective *béant* stems from '...a more archaic one that survives only in the modern French expression *bouche bée*, mouth wide open, mouth gaping, by which one gives a sign of astonishment, stupefaction, or dumb-foundedness' (Kamuf 40-1). Peggy Kamuf re-traces the use of this capacious word in a scene where Jean-Luc Nancy's 'chest or soul—it's the same thing' is revealed as already open to the other well before his heart transplant could be performed surgically (Kamuf 40). Kamuf explains that aside from the grammatical regularity of substituting *ouvert* (open) for *béant* (gape), there's an additional confusion in the French language whereby *ouvrir* (to open) 'tends to get crossed' with *œuvrer* (to work) and even, at times, with *opérer* (to operate) (Kamuf 42). A shop utilises the word *ouvrable*, which conveys both senses of 'workable' and 'openable,' to announce to the public that it's open for business (42). Kamuf moves quickly here. She declares that work is enacted in the context of a community or at the level of an individual, on the part of a 'self-relating plenitude and self-presence' (43). Work promotes the phantasy of an operation which can 'enclose the proper self within itself and without *intrus*' (43). She suggests that perhaps only Blanchot's concept of *désœuvrement* can exert pressure *against* the attempt to keep things from closing (43). Betwixt the 'inevitable proximity and overlapping of *œuvrer* and *ouvrir*,' Kamuf entreats this other word to open 'the opening beyond any closure in a possible work or operation' (43): 'In other words, *béant* and *béance* have to be called upon to force the opening out of its orbit with the work of closure' (Kamuf 43). And when Kamuf stipulates that the exigency to keep this non-figure open is not derived from the '...order of disorder, but of the order of suffering or of the wound, of that which demands (*exige*) without any right, authority, or force other than its condition of gaping, as one says of a *blessure*

béante, a gaping wound' (47), I'm reminded once again of the textual wounds which persist in spite of efforts to hem them in with interpretative seals.

This work also to challenge the notion that reading is enacted by way of a reductive association between page, eye, and brain. A brief yet purposeful digression: I'm reminded at the moment of Elizabeth Wilson's work on reticulation in *Psychosomatic: Feminism and the Neurological Body*. In the chapter 'The Brain and the Gut,' she insists that the 'nervous traffic' which circulates between the central nervous system and the enteric nervous system doesn't move about in a unidirectional fashion: 'Nervous innervation doesn't loop through the gut, spinal cord and brain like a car on a racing track' (41). Wilson enjoins us to conceive of the relation between peripheral and central nervous systems in terms of reticulation. Reticulation explains how various body-parts can coexist and communicate with others as they participate in the creation of various confluent networks (51). This analysis works alongside the possibility that psyche and body concur in accordance with a vastly disseminative reticulum. It also speculates that these netlike incommensurabilities are actively and intimately ensnared in moments of reading and writing. From a poetic angle, this thesis traces the ways in which psychical bodies are radically dispersed across narrative scenes of sleeping and dreaming, departing and arriving, loving and falling, living and dying, while never ceasing themselves to become bodies.

It's useful to return for a moment to the intellectual commitments of the writers I mentioned earlier. Carson's 'Every Exit is an Entrance (A Praise of Sleep),' Wood's 'Nightshift,' Robertson's 'Lastingness,' and Cixous's '*Die Ursache* – La Chose' bellow with intense feeling. Written from the heart, these pieces find a way to your affective *milieu* whether or not you are prepared to let them. Sarah Wood's reflexive writing recognises the reader as an intimate companion. Wood teaches that the reader, in writing, usually decides. In *Without Mastery*, she defers to the seemingly random unwilling effects of material and contingent forces which inform the processes of reading and writing. She notes there that an initial resistance to reading can beset any encounter with a text. The dense knot of a

conflict or a wringing tension may be felt inasmuch as ‘Sitting down to read, studying, is a bit like besieging or being besieged. You feel you are inside the tower, or outside the tower, at war, but then, when you are really reading, you have escaped’ (*Without Mastery* 45). My work explores the premise that, in the best of circumstances, reading can yield to a sinuous dream-escapade. Robertson’s prose cultivates a form of reading that is eminently concerned with the materiality of the page as with various compositional elements, including the spacing of text, arrangement of morphemes, and selection of graphemes. In reading Robertson’s prose, I extend seamlessly ‘into the elsewhere of chiaroscuro’ (*Nilling* 12). Robertson discreetly gives in to ink. She cedes to the disposition of light and dark whenever an ‘elaboration of shadow as a medium’ or a ‘lack of transparency’ in a text seems to betide.

This thesis is divided into six chapters. An aphorism in Sarah Wood’s ‘Some Scraps on Beauty-in-the-Ghost’ somehow informs this course of writing even as I encounter it belatedly. ‘Reading,’ she concedes there, ‘begins with bad closure’ (81). This thesis wonders whether the failure or refusal to *fully* integrate textual matter may be symptomatic of a larger inability to move on from reading. And if reading never really ends, future attempts at reading are perhaps destined to become outgrowths of previously unfinished readings. In the first chapter named ‘Mourning,’ I read Amelia Gray’s *Threats*. I engage there with various philosophical and psychoanalytical narratives about bereavement to arrive at the notion that mourning occasionally fails, at least for a time, in which case it gives rise to interesting textual effects. *Threats* tells the story of David suspended in the mist of his wife’s insoluble passing. David encounters posthumous glimmers of Franny’s personality in the form of menacing notes she scribbled and hid around their house for him some day to find. In this first chapter, I order these intriguing bits into ‘fits’ and muse over the impossibility of his mourning these little pieces of her. Derrida speaks in Ken McMullen’s film *Ghost Dance* about the assimilation or internalisation of the dead which ‘doesn’t develop naturally or normally, that is to say in mourning that doesn’t work’:

That is to say that the dead are taken into us but don’t become part of us, they just occupy a particular place in our bodies. They can speak for themselves, they can haunt our body

and ventriloquise our speech. So the ghost is enclosed in a crypt, which is our body. We become a sort of graveyard for ghosts. A ghost can be not only our unconscious but more precisely, someone else's. (qtd. in Wood, 'Foreveries' 69)

Derrida's voice-over attests to the overwhelming force of the crypt as a pocket-like fistula in which ghostly *revenants* are inspired. When the other speaks in our place, it's their unconscious and not our own '...which plays tricks on us. It can be terrifying but that's when things start to happen...' ('Foreveries' 69). Things start to happen in *Threats* when David begins to cede to Franny's threatening addresses.

Gray cultivates themes of immoderation, accumulation, and repression in her prose with keen efficiency. Such thematic preoccupations may already be detected in two earlier short story compilations named *AM/PM* and *Museum of the Weird*. The convergence of such ominous motifs in her works reflects coils of a darker sense of humour. An online video, the existence of which I was initially notified by Stella Bolaki, shows Gray spinning in circles around LA as she bellows out random written threats from the passenger-end of a motor scooter. I learn from another online video-interview that Gray compiled and intended the isolated threats as stand-alone performance-pieces before the idea of a novel occurred to her. This somehow fits with my impression that the first video is a deliberate staging of Gray's *Threats* as parody. Still, I read *Threats* in the first thesis chapter as an attempt to channel a foray against the phantasy of transparent love. An earlier story, 'The Vanished,' published in *The Museum of the Weird*, occurs to me later as an unexpected mirror to *Threats*. Published two years prior, the story deviates from *Threats* to the extent that it's narrated close to the perspective of an unnamed woman whose husband vanishes without notice. In the event of his return, and in spite of a desire to respectfully leave his affairs untouched, the wife's state of abandon compels her to eat all edible matter (canned food, expired food, cat food) and inedible objects (pages from his books, tiny computer screws) in their home. The woman ultimately renounces the possibility of love's attainment following a spectacle she witnesses outside her window of a boy and girl '...eating love right out in the open. They swallowed great handfuls of love, sticky tangled masses of it, standing nose to nose with one another' (156). In a state of horror, the woman '...rushed up to the people and

slapped the love out of their hands and said Don't eat that! That's poison!' (156). The story settles near the incomplete feeling of satisfaction which the woman derives from her defiant act: 'Look at what you did, the girl said. The woman looked [at the 'ruined pile of love' on the ground]. She felt relieved, but of course it wasn't enough' (156).

If marriage is the sort of conjugal promise to love one another against all extrinsic and intrinsic odds, Derrida writes elsewhere that 'a promise must always be haunted by the threat, by its becoming-threat, without which it is not a promise' ('A Certain Impossible Possibility...' 459). A promise is always beset by the possibility of its becoming a betrayal. Franny hid aspects of her indisposition from David while he concealed parts of his identity from her. The spectral manifestations of Franny's death-notes in *Threats* impairs the assurance of her and David's ever-lasting love. Derrida writes in *Rogues* that this '...double bind of threat and chance, not alternatively or by turns promise and/or threat but threat *in* the promise itself' is a torsional situation intimately linked to the notion of *autoimmunity* (82). Autoimmunity infects the self, the *ipse* and *autos*, to the point where it destroys '...the very thing within it that is supposed to protect it against the other, to immunize it against the aggressive intrusion of the other' (*Rogues* 109, 123). Yet Derrida also explains, by means of another alogical turn, that autoimmunity necessarily preserves the incalculable chances of the other's arrival. A vestige of autoimmunity resonates across Franny's threatening dispatches where it ruins the phantasy of perpetual love while also working, somehow, to accentuate it. And while *Threats* forbids the reader from assembling an idealised portrait of hers and David's reciprocated love, it provides space for another style of address to take form through which David culls glimmers of recognition while also beginning, in the process, to lose himself.

The second chapter 'Dreaming, Reading and Telepathy' examines an inability to move beyond the text as part of a larger investigation concerning the interminable process which reading is. Reluctant to come to terms with the inevitability of ending, this chapter starts out from a failure to understand the signification of a blank image at the end of Gray's *Threats*. It gathers all kinds of

paper-scrap and end-bit alongside which it tries to write elliptically. Because the bit of paper at the end of *Threats* is presented in such a way as to suggest a cut, the chapter unfolds around textual instances where lifelines, flowers, and written sentences similarly cut out. A cut may be felt as a caesura, an unexpected interruption, or a disruption of what is sequential and linear. In drawing discreet parallels between dreaming and reading, this chapter approaches the text as if it were the fragments of a dream which return to you in passing, from a distance, and also, belatedly. Dream-events tend to interrupt the succession of narrative lines, *lifelines*, and of genealogical threads. And since scraps of a dream can affect the dreamer long after the event, I reflect here on the aftereffects of reading *Threats*. This chapter puts Derrida's essay 'Telepathy' in conversation with Gray's *Threats* and reads a number of texts by Freud, Pontalis, and Weil, to help us think about intertextuality.

The third chapter, 'Brooding: Part I,' focuses on Claire Nouvet's reading of Ovid's Narcissus. Nouvet offers an intriguing portrait of Narcissus in her *Enfances Narcisse* in a pre-conscious and pre-subjective state of entanglement with the other (ie. Echo). This chapter posits that a brooding figure emerges out of Nouvet's reading. From a literary vantage point, the 'brooder,' whose position is interchangeable with 'reader,' is left to piece-together the fragments of Narcissus' ruined constitution. This sort of depressive textual approach is informed by Elizabeth Bowen's short story 'Daffodils,' Gray's *Threats*, Kafka's 'A Cross-Breed,' and Rivka Galchen's 'Wild Berry Blue.' This first section is followed by the fourth chapter, 'Brooding: Part II,' which works to establish brooding from a psychoanalytical purview. In 'Leonardo da Vinci and A Memory of his Childhood,' Freud isolates a moment in the child's development where logic fails. In this biographical *précis* of Leonardo da Vinci, Freud reads in his 'curiosity for knowledge' an ability to 'pursue research with the same passionate devotion that another would give to his love, and he would be able to investigate instead of loving' (77). To sustain the argument that Leonardo was only able to make inventive contributions after having sublimated his earlier sexual aims, Freud reflects upon the dimensions of a period he names '*infantile sexual researches*' (78). He argues that this investigative spell is prompted by the child's construal of 'a threat to his selfish interests,' usually, as a consequence of a sibling's arrival (78).

Freud understands the child's growing interest in biological origins as an attempt to forestall 'so undesired an event' (78). And when adults attempt to temper the child's curiosity through the narration of fables and parables (with their 'wealth of mythological meanings'), Freud expresses astonishment that the child can proceed so 'energetically' to 'reject' these 'bits of information' (78-9). Already sensitive to the adult's deceptive techniques, the child deduces on its own the presence of the infant inside the mother's body as the probable result of an ingested act, yet remains puzzled by the 'obscure part played by the father' (79). Various factors, including the child's age, prevent it from acceding to the missing pieces for which it desperately longs. As a result of these failed attempts at deduction, Freud foresees a melancholia of a lasting kind to eventually preside over the child's intellectual future.

When this infantile period of sexual researches reaches an end, Freud outlines three different possible outcomes. In the first case, the inhibition of curiosity and intelligent activity renders the child more amenable to neurosis or neurotic illness. The third possibility, of which Leonardo is deemed a 'model instance,' is characterized by the libido's evasion from repression to the extent that it's 'sublimated from the very beginning into curiosity' and research itself comes to develop into a compulsive substitute for sexual pursuits (80). In these two chapters, I focus on a second type, according to which 'the suppressed sexual activities of research [eventually] return from the unconscious in the form of compulsive brooding' (80):

Here investigation becomes a sexual activity, often the exclusive one, and the feeling that comes from settling things in one's mind and explaining them replaces sexual satisfaction; but the interminable character of the child's researches is also repeated in the fact that this brooding never ends and that the intellectual feeling, so much desired, of having found a solution recedes more and more into the distance. (Freud 80)

The chapter explores the effects of this supposition upon the child's subsequent reading efforts. Brooding, initially based on a stage in Freudian psychosexual development, coincides with a lasting depression which stems from a failure to understand where babies come from. And because this depression lasts, it can become a useful model for thinking about what happens in texts where characters fail to understand themselves and what is happening to them. The fourth chapter engages Marion Fayolle's graphic tale 'In Pieces.' In retracing her illustrations of a modern-day Narcissus, this

chapter rewrites the durable problem of the mirror as a reflective medium through which the child, upon first encountering it, recognises an ‘other’ and eventually confounds itself with this image of alterity. As an exemplary medium through which otherness is initially recognised, the mirror is a planar structure which persuasively deceives and entraps.

The fifth chapter, ‘Swanning (to Utopia),’ moves idly between Lisa Robertson’s and Valzhyna Mort’s prose-poetry. The chapter reads two poems written by Mort and Robertson named ‘Utopia.’ When considered as a derivation from the ancient Greek *οὐ* meaning ‘not,’ and *τόπος* meaning ‘place,’ ‘u-topia’ translates to ‘no-place.’ In beginning with a couplet from Lucretius’ *De rerum natura*, the chapter works to constellate the unexpected points which conjoin the ectopic ‘out of place’ to the utopic ‘no-place.’ It connects this notion of failing to meet or achieve closure with the disjointed ways of living together as imagined by Roland Barthes in *How to Live Together: Novelistic Simulations of Everyday Spaces* (*Comment vivre ensemble: simulations romanesques de quelques espaces quotidiens*). It argues that poetic sentiments flit across the page and swan to readers at their most inattentive. It tries to foster commodious conditions in which the reader can listen and respond to poetic texts which, at once, wound and enchant. The chapter also insists that part of the inexperience of reading poetry is that, while it may never recover anything to anyone, still, it carries with it the possibility of ineffable transformation.

The last chapter, ‘Psyche,’ continues to think about reading. The details of a scene I’ve been covertly reworking all this time are finally disinterred and re-examined here. I turn in the last chapter to an unfinished scene found at the very end of Jean-Luc Nancy’s book *The Birth to Presence* in which a mythical and psychoanalytical figure named Psyche gradually disappears. Of interest to this chapter is the near inhumation of Psyche in a coffin which Nancy leaves slightly open. Her forthcoming entombment in Nancy’s text provides a small spacing through which the possibility of psyche’s continuous extension and inchoate conversion can continue to materialise off-scene. As the significance of her capitalised name wavers, we gradually begin to lose sense of *her* predetermined

nature. At the end of Nancy's scene, I argue that *Psyche* converts from an origin-myth into a *psychically* diffuse body. In texts written by Cixous, Proust, Kafka, and Lydia Davis, I trace parallel figures—a cat, Albertine, Josefina the mouse-singer, and a caterpillar—whose extended bodies suggest a new understanding of psyche, not as an internal mental apparatus but as a radically disseminated body; at once, animal and human, both inanimate and animate. In reading this interstitial opening at the end of Nancy's piece, an aperture opens out into a place where writing and reading seem infinitely to happen by way of rather innocuous swerves and fortuitous deviations.

This thesis hopes to render imprecise the distance which separates 'humans' from 'non-humans' while also carefully attending to difference. My analysis turns to inexperienced children, non-human creatures (worms, caterpillars, swans, and cats), organic life-forms (daffodils, trees, and lakes), and inanimate entities (stones and mirrors). Chanced upon in both poetic and fictional works under examination, these bodies inspire the numerous paths and digressions which this exposition takes. This analysis construes our susceptibility to varied psychical vicissitudes, bodily whims, and subterranean crosscurrents as an impossible position. It recognises that as we grapple to see past what we want to see, human animals are consciously and unconsciously drawn towards mineral, non-human animal, and environmental forces which beckon from within and without. This work is captivated by the sort of reading which fails; even in instances when a misunderstanding forecloses the reader's capacity to continue reading. The child is conceived in this analysis as an exemplary brooder. Citing from Geoffrey Bennington's *Late Lyotard*, the following passage from Jean-François Lyotard's *Lectures d'enfance* describes the affective range of a child's difficult yet privileged position:

The effect of childhood, which knows all about *as if*, all about the pain due to impotence and the complaint of being too little, about being there late (compared to the others) and having arrived too early, prematurely (for its strength), who knows all about broken promises, bitter disappointments, failings, abandonment—but also day-dreaming, memory, question, invention, obstinacy, listening with the heart, love, truly listening to stories. Childhood is the state of the soul inhabited by something to which no response is ever made, it is led in its enterprises by an arrogant fidelity to this unknown guest whose hostage it feels itself to be. (Lyotard, *Lectures d'enfance*, 65-6; qtd. in Bennington, *Late Lyotard* 9)

There is vulnerability at the heart of Lyotard's disclosures. The other is already lodged within the adult-child's psychical constitution. The child who is eternally beset by grief, remains ever faithful to an unknown force despite being unable to respond to it. This thesis invites you to roam past your most comfortable enclosures and to traipse around tenebrous psychical regions. It dares you to remember to dream as you read, to recall the vast landscapes of your childhoods, and to take care to remember death too; not simply by confronting 'the rearview mirror of an expecting-death at every moment' (Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally* 16) but to attend to those textual gaps which carve out a bit of silence for you to bear, and to feel, and to love ever so deeply.

1. Mourning

...the 'symbolic' is very difficult, truly impossible to delimit in this case, hence the enormity of the task, its essential excessiveness, a certain unclassifiability or the monstrosity of that *for which we* have to answer here...

Jacques Derrida, 'Eating Well'

It's as if a fiction occasionally begins with a fit. Some fictional tellings are more sensitive than others to the variations of a fitting. Lewis Carroll's 'The Hunting of the Snark,' a long poem told as 'An Agony in Eight Fits,' offers one such narrative instance. The characters in the poem (the Bellman, the Baker, the Beaver, the Broker, the Barrister, the Boot) chase after an imaginary Snark, convinced that the creature's death would ultimately spare their own lives. In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the verb 'to fit' suffers from the constricted sense of becoming 'seemly, proper, or suitable,' as 'to agree or to harmonise with,' whereas the noun more often connotes a conflict or a struggle. What seems to rattle in the middle of these dichotomous 'fits and starts' is as much the longing for a life as the persistence of a death. According to the sixteenth-century iteration of the word, a fit affirms a bodily state of 'mortal crisis (whether painful or not) that betokens death' (*OED*). The *OED* shortly thereafter revives a paroxysm, conceived in ancient Hippocratic and Galenic medicine, as the 'severe *fit* of a disease' and in later use of the term, as an 'attack' of a 'periodic or constitutional ailment.' In moments of hyperbolic intensity, one may scream, throw, or beat oneself into a state of frenzy (*OED*). Like a child in distress whose gaping mouth wails that it wants what it wants: the fit wants *life*—the fit wants *death*.

A Story Begins...

The French title of Maurice Blanchot's short story *L'Arrêt de mort* (*Death Sentence*) suggests that life and death are materialised in the urgency of a joint telling. A sentence which brings with it death takes some time, however little, to affirm it. Stealing a bit of time past death, then, a sentence defers from immediately arriving. Cixous extends a connected remark in her *Three Steps on the Ladder to Writing* concerning 'Life [a]s difficult to live if one thinks of death not as a threat, but as another relation to life' (Cixous 98). *Life death* preserves an interstice for the interspersing of decay and the inspiration of new breath to transpire. We are very near *life death* with Cixous; her writing reminds us everywhere of death's torsional relation to life. To speak of a relation in the context of a fitting is to measure a thing relative-to something, as when a garment is tailored to appropriate size. And just as the seventeenth century iteration of 'fytte' suggests a partition (*OED*), a way of structuring the poem or song by sundering it into stylistic bits, this story too will be told in 'fits.'

This chapter offers a segmented reading of Amelia Gray's *Threats*. Gray's writing moves about circuitously. Without settling anywhere for too long, it touches the surface of impenetrable enigmas and brushes across them with an air of neutral indifference. The narrator in *Threats* practices diagnostic restraint: only impartial observations inform the discreet portraits of characters in this work. This anecdotal approach opens up possibilities for the reader, where ambivalent feelings towards textual events and figures seem more able to coincide. And because the work addresses disquieting material with non-judgmental agility, Gray entrusts readers with the capacity to bear the magnitude of unbearable events. Alongside the soft reminders she issues concerning psyche as an itinerant, iterative, and intricate body, her novel channels large to small-scale instances of misplacing and losing. With the aim of confronting the phantasy of our harmonious coexistence, Gray's storyline both limns the complexities of hoping to find what one has lost and touches upon the subtleties of not quite knowing oneself nor the other one loves. To this end, she incites readers to brush against the absurd in death as often as she encourages them to graze the unknown in life. I argue that the novel's indirect tone, non-

interfering style, and ambiguous content gently mitigates the reader's instinct to voraciously consume. *Threats* discourages an assimilation of textual bits by way of devouring because, in these commodious textual circumstances, reading happens slowly, and in the form of a reluctant sampling, cautious nibbling, or tentative grazing. Barthes offers the possibility of such a textual relation in *Le plaisir du texte* when he elects grazing (*brouter*) as the most pleasurable approach to reading (21). Inviting readers to take small, tentative bites of compositions, Barthes advocates for a scrupulous approach (« *tondre avec minutie* ») so that we might presently restore for ourselves the leisure of ancient readings (« *...retrouver, pour lire ces auteurs d'aujourd'hui, le loisir des anciennes lectures...* ») (21).

I feel the need to warn you, dear reader, that the writing in this chapter occasionally emulates the ambling movement of Gray's supple prose. In the interest of tending to the manifold 'fittings' which populate Gray's novel, this chapter takes occasional detours to engage various thinkers on the topic of mourning. Gray's fictional tale of mourning begins with a death-fitting. The reader senses *something* flitting around like a common housefly which the scene labours to hasten away. A package arrives by post 'striped with waxed string' tape (Gray 3). David greets it with a slow attempt at clawing: 'He didn't want to go to the kitchen for a knife, and he spent an extra piece of time examining the entire package to find the loose end that could be pulled up' (Gray 3). Encountering David for the first time is sensing in his reluctant fingers an unwillingness to face what the parcel conceals. In this ambivalent scene, the obscure content of the package sticks to the reader. This is a measure of its adhesive nature. Packaging tape fashions smooth edges and cordons off the secret of this parcel's innermost contents: 'Inside the package was a Styrofoam carton, sealed with another kind of thick tape' (3). Dressed with stickers of a wine glass in shattered bits, the surface of the parcel arrests the reader as if to say, *something has already been broken* (3).

Gesturing to the need for a careful handling, the fractured glass induces a tiny crystal dispersion and scatters with it the impossible notion of 'unsalvageable leftovers' (Krell 172-3). This notion of unassimilable remainders appears in David Farrell Krell's extensive draft-notes on the

seminar « *Rhétorique du cannibalisme* » taught by Jacques Derrida in Paris from 1990 to 1991. In this manuscript of Derridean residues which Krell names ‘All You Can’t Eat,’ mortal bodies are interred and incinerated to make space for the circulation of still other remains (172-3). Derrida writes elsewhere about ‘the rest’ as that which

... ‘is’ always what can radically disappear, without remainder [*reste*] in the sense of what would remain permanently (memory, a memory, vestige, monument). The rest can always not remain [*rester*] in the classic sense of the term, in the sense of substance. This is the condition for there being any remainder. (Derrida, ‘*Istrice 2*’ 322-3)

The rest, if *it* can be anything at all, is constituted by the threat of total dissolution. Cinders are summoned by Derrida as remainders. In the aftermath of a fire, cinders are always susceptible to further diffusion, and so too, to further effacement. It’s because nothing threatens to remain that luminous flashes, hissing sounds, and persistent warnings can continue to warm or else wring our innermost private cores. Cinders are without gender, without name, without identity. They remain unspeakable, and in most circumstances, even unreadable. At stake here is the terribly delicate, the very *fine*, and finite consistency of searing remainders. The play of cinders renders possible the dissemination of anonymous bits. The package in Gray’s novel conceals the traces of Franny’s embodied existence just as it rouses her unintelligible specter to life. The arrival of the package reminds David of her morsellated endurance. Some ‘thing’ neither present nor absent, in the form of a buried secret or an unresolved enigma, still burns in the mist of her cremated matter.

The whole surface of the package in *Threats* heralds death. The parcel is dispatched from a funeral home and the receipt tacked onto its exterior bears a cremation charge. Readers eventually bear witness to it as a *souvenir* of a perplexing death. Already, on the first page of the novel, we sense the beginnings of a delay. A death arrives with the parcel and is postponed when David sets it aside:

David placed the package on the coffee table between Franny’s cooking magazines and a stack of old newspapers. Some of the crosswords in the newspapers had been completed weeks earlier, perhaps months. Franny would read the news, and David would complete the crosswords. David took the newspapers into the basement and stacked them in a far corner. (3)

Gray’s work is parcelled into bits and the above passage marks the end of the first of seventy-seven chapter-bites.

The ‘bit’ (le *mors*) and the symbolic ingestion of the dead thumps at the heart of mourning’s impossible work (‘Eating Well’ 112). In cases of ‘high mourning,’ the life-drive of the bereaved organism assumes a detour from its own death to consume the loss of those it loves. In spite of its freshly impoverished condition, the bereaved organism betrays a biological tendency to survive. Partaking in the symbolic ingestion of flesh renders us, the ‘we’ of mourning, exorbitant-gluttonous types. Without a means to arbitrate or to classify what is ‘truly impossible to delimit in this case,’ Derrida reminds us in the epigraph to this chapter of ‘the enormity of the task... of that *for which we* have to answer here’ (‘Eating Well’ 112). Given the absence of any calculable system in which one could hope to measure or regulate the magnitude of this sort of voracious behaviour, Derrida signals a need to respond particularly in cases where unconscious impulses motivate us to behave so rashly.

Never one to abstain from impossible pursuits, Derrida responds to these with eminent caution as with an appetite for risk and a keenness for infinite play. As readers slowly piece together the various facets of David’s lifeline, the text invites them to suspend condemnation of his hopeless state of attrition. It would be impossible to answer for him; a claim I dream Derrida would similarly endorse and not only because it concerns a fictive character. Rather, it’s that without recourse to a measurable means through which we might determine and weigh the implications of David’s wild incorporative gestures, *Threats* nonetheless presses us to consent and to empathically *begin* to take note of its disenchanting bits, to trace the textual effects of various graphic abrasions, and to generate a reading which works to follow tenderly, yet always, incompletely. *Threats* requests from the reader a sensitivity to its narrative exigencies and a receptivity to its mystical and enigmatic intimations. How else to respond, then, to the ‘enormity of the task’ for which Derrida insists we must repond to *here*? How else but to continuously *read*, and to re-read, well?

The Fit of the Mouth

Threats chronicles the circuitous events which predate and follow Franny's inconclusive death. All sorts of holes are woven into the tale's achronological conceptualisation of time and space. The gap-toothed structure of the fiction suggests that much passes below, above, and around the reader's purview. With every textual omission, there emerges a haunting in the form of an insistent question. The curious reader sits at the edge of Gray's text, near the margins, where speculations quietly accumulate. The narrator relays details with sharpened sobriety. The story speaks to memories never simply extinguished in death. It resuscitates, among others, the lives of David's institutionalised mother who speaks only in numbers and his deceased father who speaks only in pithy axioms (90-1). Franny becomes the abstract referent-shape for all that remains unknowable within the fiction. It's as if her nemophilic specter continues to seek barefoot solace in the woods behind the house where her traipsings could know no limit (37). An habitual recluse, David seldom ventures out of his home. A calm and unusual man, he exhibits a curious penchant for excessive rituals. On one such occasion, he concocts a freezer-burnt feast comprised of expired potpies, ground beef, and meatloaf. When Franny comes home one evening to find him drinking old apple juice from her mother's sterile vase, she sits down without question and proceeds to attend this modest meal (35). Some time after her death, an exorbitant David applies heavy doses of her professional care products to his chin, eyelids, pubic hair, testicles:

He sprayed her perfume on the back of his tongue. It made him retch, and he gripped the sink, coughing and spitting toward the drain. The perfume's fragrance was of flowers and some kind of light powder, but it tasted like cheap gin. It coated his tongue and cheeks and sank into his body. He splashed water into his mouth, but it served only to spread the flavor. He regarded his face in the mirror. Red welts were rising on his eyelids and neck. He resisted the urge to touch them. (Gray 46)

Franny's searing remains extend and sink into a chemical disturbance which David's body somehow welcomes and endures.

Buried well below the enigma of this hollowing loss swells the drowning of David's two-year old sister at the hands of his unfit mother. The officer, now investigating the details of Franny's

passing, was a young detective at the scene of this earlier crime. He culls his longstanding affiliation to the family when he recognises his mother from a photograph displayed in David's own home (114). A number of similar events take place in the novel, where a seemingly unrelated character is later tied to another. Marie carries out her cryptic practice as trance-regression therapist from David's wasp-infested garage and claims to have received Franny's permission to do so sometime before her passing. The act of Franny withholding this sort of arrangement from her husband only gains currency in the fiction until it becomes one of many secretive tendencies of hers. David is later tormented by the sighting of his deceased wife setting up house with a man who could be his very copy. Aileen, a beautician, former coworker, and close friend of David's wife calls out 'Franny!' to a woman whom she alleges to have been her late friend's mirror-image. The woman disappears on a bus without paying the slightest regard to Aileen's call. These belated sightings nourish the riddle of Franny's passage into death which the text leaves undecided. Consenting to this book entails succumbing to a psychical nexus in which absolutes like Time, Logic, and Death begin to rend and come apart. Readers are dragged along the narrative's jagged lines where they are led to retrace a mourning whose sources seem capable of infinite replenishment.

The Fit of the Specter

The fourth-century BCE classical Chinese thinker, Chuang Tzu, relays his philosophy of death in a personal anecdote about his wife's passing. He writes of first mourning her absence as would 'everyone else! However...' (*The Book of Chang Tzu* 151). And with this adverbial turn, Chuang Tzu purports that dispassionate thinking moved him to accept the conditions of her passing. He comes to infer his wife's existence as a sequence of categorical transformations beginning '...before the time when her body was created' (151). Through this impartial and rational lens, mourning is deemed an indulgent practice because it licenses the bereaved to ignore 'what is given' (24). In advocating for the inevitability of death, Chuang Tzu offers the following counsel against grieving: 'The constant

transformation of all forms of life is like a beginning without end. What is there in this to disturb your heart?' (180).

In his twentieth essay 'To philosophise, is to learn how to die' (« *Que philosopher, c'est apprendre à mourir* »), Montaigne claims death as both the goal of our vocations and the necessary object of our aims (« *Le but de nostre carrière, c'est la mort, c'est l'objet nécessaire de nostre visée* ») (112-3). To this effect, Montaigne urges our heads to become preoccupied with death more often than it should be preoccupied with nothing (116). In his *Reflections on War and Death*, Freud notes our 'civilised' tendency to overlook death, to put it aside, and even, 'to eliminate it from life' (41). The Viennese psychoanalyst also proposes that 'in the unconscious, every one of us is convinced of his immortality' (41). We are unable to imagine our own deaths, remarks Freud, for a mere exercise in cognition requires that we, as spectators, survive it (41). Freud conceives of fiction, alongside literature and theatre, as classic *aide-mémoires* in the sense Montaigne may have appreciated. Fiction, he claims, is the apposite space in which the realities of death are saved, because

There we still find people who know how to die, who are even quite capable of killing others. There alone the condition for reconciling ourselves to death is fulfilled, namely, if beneath the vicissitudes of life a permanent life still remains to us. It is really too sad that it may happen in life as in chess, where a false move can force us to lose the game, but with this difference, that we cannot begin a return match. In the realm of fiction we find the many lives in one for which we crave. (Freud, *Reflections on War and Death* 46)

Our engagement with fiction prolongs for Freud the phantasy of our unique existences. And there, through the characters we encounter and the fictional traits we temporarily entertain, we too become, for a time, the potential of many.

Freud concludes our devotion to grief to be a rather 'striking' phenomenon: 'We bury our hopes, our wishes, and our desires with the dead, we are inconsolable and refuse to replace our loss' (*Reflections on War and Death* 44). The analyst often writes of time needed for the work of reality-testing to unfetter the libido's attachment so that mourning can finally come to pass. Chuang Tzu conceives of mourning as a primitive response which requires mindful mitigation. The extent to which Chuang Tzu undermines the specter's claim on us may seem striking, at first, particularly if we

consider the injunction Derrida issues in his *Specters of Marx* (*Spectres de Marx*); that something of the spectral must be learnt even if it remains without essence and isn't present *as such* (14). A specter for Derrida is always a *revenant* (32). There can be no origin, in the sense of an originary first, if the specter arrives and begins by way of returning (12). Before it can be said to exist, then, this *living death* makes its presence known without corresponding to an actual material form: 'it is also, no doubt, the tangible intangibility of a proper body without flesh, but still the body of *someone* as *someone other*' (*Specters* 6). Specters are interstitial entities for Derrida towards whom we exercise a certain liability. And if we are to learn from them, we must attempt the near-impossible act of speaking to them in recognition that we too, occasionally, are being spoken to (14). The specter's ethereal presence must be recognised and respected if we are ever to grant a serious place to that which is, at once, fictive and real.

Mourning, or what Derrida names *le demi-deuil* ('half' or 'partial-mourning,' as in, an 'incomplete' mourning) is an unconscious investment in the preservation of the specter's *life death*. The mourner displays hospitable concern for the specter. Grieving occurs as a retroactive process in which the body immerses itself in an intimate reading, not unlike a mutual exchange, a bilateral murmuring, or a quiet conversing. *Threats* speaks of an inhibition. A tight constriction in David's throat submits to an ambivalent feeling as it accommodates the existence of an indigestible 'bit.' David partially accepts the reality of Franny's passing, only because death doesn't preclude for him the possibility of her surviving, somewhere, somehow.

The internalisation of the dead in cases of 'normal mourning' happens as a precursor to idealisation. *Introjection* occurs as a process of phantasmic transposition through which the dead are assimilated and accepted into oneself *as one's own* (Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis* 229). Laplanche and Pontalis recall in *The Language of Psychoanalysis* how the language of oral instincts allows Freud to distinguish projection, what I desire to spit and to keep out, from introjection, what I desire to ingest and to take into myself (230). While Laplanche and Pontalis

remark that Freud often conceives of introjection and incorporation as ‘synonymous expressions’ (230), an inhibition in the ‘normal’ process of grieving is thought by others to occur once the mourner refuses or proves unable to introject the lost object. In the event of such a refusal, Maria Torok and Nicolas Abraham consider the mourner to be unconsciously vested in the project of *incorporation*: ‘The crucial move away from introjection [...] to incorporation is made when *words* fail to fill the subject’s void and hence an imaginary thing is inserted into the mouth in their place. [Hence, t]he desperate ploy of filling the mouth with illusory nourishment’ (Abraham and Torok, ‘Mourning or Melancholia’ 128-9). The mourning host takes in the lost ‘bit’ with an immediacy which mimics an infant’s unthinking mouth; only now, the ‘bit’ behaves as if it were lodged inside the mourner’s throat or wedged in the narrow spaces between its teeth. *Mors*, the French word for ‘bit,’ already intimates for Derrida a kind of severance and separation from the whole. Derrida writes in *Glas* that ‘...all these morsels cannot, naturally be bound. The object of the present work, and its style too, is the *morsel*. Which is always detached, as its name indicates and so that you don’t forget it, by the teeth’ (118). He insists in this same text that all these morsels resist a neat gathering: ‘The toothed matrix [*matrice dentée*] only withdraws what it can, some algae, some stones. Some bits [*morceaux*], since it bites [*mord*]. Detached. But the remain(s) passes between its teeth, between its lips. You do not catch the sea. She always re-forms herself’ (205). The ‘bit,’ like the sea, is as evasive as it is potent. An aspect of mourning which interests Derrida concerns these unassimilable pieces; how tenaciously they cleave onto those who grieve while they evade more conventional channels of assimilation and idealisation. On account of a loss of control over one’s psychical responses in the presence of that which already imposes itself from within, the mourner’s world is never simply a product of its own making.

Valzhyna Mort’s prose-poem ‘Aunt Anna,’ which I retrieve in her volume *Collected Body*, speaks of aphonic specters who address others without speaking. She writes there of the ‘dead’ who ‘keep quiet as if they had been buried facedown, and decompose with grace and decency’ (Mort 18). She writes of infant bodies being sewn by their mothers to the soil like buttons (Mort 21). It’s nearly as if the Belarusian town-soil from which these bodies emerge, and in which they are ultimately interred,

prevents these specters from acceding to an unruly *afterlife*. I wonder if some specters know how to stay dead, and if others, as a result of unsettled and unfortunate circumstances, are perhaps more adept at roaming wild and insistent. I speculate that the difference between the two could be a matter of chance and privilege. Freud reminds us that the reality of death often intensifies in moments of contingent crisis; death shifts in such instances from a consciously deferred point to one of increasing and looming certainty. He writes in his *Reflections on War and Death* that ‘People [in war] really die and no longer one by one, but in large numbers, often ten thousand in one day. It is no longer an accident’ (Freud 47). I follow this sinister Freudian chance for the time it takes to muse over Franny’s death as a possible ‘accident,’ should her mouth also remain wide with expectancy, only ‘dying to produce a sound...’ (Mort 18).

The Fit of the Tooth

The human mouth is braced for separation at the onset of life. The loss of deciduous dentition coincides with the growth of the jaw and face (*Ten Cate’s* 3). When the size of milk-teeth prove inadequate to the increasing burden of mastication, these are naturally uprooted to make room for permanent dentition. Larger teeth, more suited to grow from the nests of those now absent predecessors, begin then to emerge. These narratives are extracted from *Ten Cate’s Oral Histology*. In probing and describing the relevant membranes, tissues, glands, and bones, the textbook exposes the mouth as a site of numerous ejections and sheddings (3). A hard glossy substance, the enamel, coats and equips the tooth with a resilience against acidic and bacterial intrusions. Ameloblasts are cells involved in the formation of the tooth’s surface-enamel. These protective cells are lost without substitutive or regenerative potential once the teeth erupt. And where the tooth is brittle as a biologically dead tissue, it’s supported by dentin, a hardened tissue capable of generating repair and renewal (4). Emergent teeth are prone, as such, to natural erosion. As these brief histological digests attest, the body produces selectively resilient tools which it instinctively expels in favour of larger,

better-fitted implements. The mouth is vulnerable to intractable mournings, even at the level of a budding tooth.

The tooth is the ideal remainder-bit: lodged in the skull like a shimmering gift to the paleontologist and forensic scientist for whom the task of identification is preeminent (*Ten Cate's* 4). But before it can become the waxed object of a postmortem examination, the tooth is placed in the latex-clad hands of dental care. Dentists protect teeth from lapsing into furthering states of decomposition. As *Threats* compellingly notes,

When medical science evolved to carry the lives of individuals past their eightieth birthdays, dentists were the ones tasked with maintaining the appearance of healthy teeth against the mounting years. They became architects in those last thirty years and artists in the last ten, describing the curve of a tooth and its natural pigment with molds and materials. They were cosmetic artists, sculptors, possessing an accomplished level of imagination and skill. (Gray 148)

David was once a dentist by trade.

In the fifty-second chapter of *Threats*, the reader is told a story about the aesthetic influence of an ancient Sumerian fallacy concerning tooth decay as symptomatic of advanced worm-spoilage (Gray 192). From the 'glut of beautiful worm-related art' which this fallacy inspired, one French ivory carving exerts a pull on David. The ivory-sculpted molar, the size of a human tooth, conceals the ravenous body of a worm that can be seen only when the molar is forced apart into two halves. The worm in the carving comes to glisten for David as if it were a demonic serpent hemmed around one of Hell's fires (192). The encounter proves especially harmful to his career for he remains convinced thereafter that his patients' teeth concealed similar demon-worms (193). His license as a dentist is revoked after a malpractice case involving an infant of nearly ten months whose 'soft nubs,' David is resolute, 'pulsed with the worm' (193). David draws a circlet around each endangered tooth. A worm-infested tooth might compromise the health of the oral 'whole' once infected. A specter might similarly compromise the psychosomatic life of the mourner once administered 'inside.' But Franny was not the type to make conspicuous gestures or sounds. David posits somewhat fortuitously, 'She was the type to employ the silent treatment' (37). Some time after the event, Franny makes a *veiled* appearance in the

form of a threat. Typed on one half of an index card, David finds the first vestige of its kind taped to the back of their home coffeemaker reservoir (67).

The Fit of the Worm-Hair

The half-index card found behind the coffee reservoir conceals the exact location of Franny's specter. At this formative stage of the fiction, David is not yet able to hear Franny's voice. Neither does he seem to detect her signature in the materiality of the index card, nor to discern her style in the arrangement of its typewritten words. Derrida writes in 'A Silkworm of one's own' of *voile* as an infinite braid which interlaces the semantic motifs of 'revealing' and 'unveiling' and 'unburying' (*Veils* 56). Derrida insists that this 'not always invisible' word-braid can never be completely conveyed 'outside the so-called French language' because the French *voile* offers itself instinctively to the ear (56). Audibly, then, it conjures up a host of 'formal and phonematic motifs' which include, yet are not limited to, the plural *voiles* (which converts in English to both the masculine *veils* and the feminine *sails*), the registers of *savoir* (knowing), *vouloir* (willing), *la vérité* (truth), *la voix* (the voice), and *la venue* (the coming), as in, « *me voici* » ('here I am') or « *me voilà* » ('there I am') (*Veils* 56). These words '...and many others [...] set each other off endlessly along a chain of echoes, in a beam of light whose power is increased by the mirrors it hits on its way...' (*Veils* 56). The unveiling of Franny's script prompts a ricochet-effect which intensifies with each novel discovery. These bits of uncovered writing meld the chance of her being, at once, '*here*' and '*there*,' and doubly forestalls the possibility of anyone retracing the steps of her infinite comings-and-goings. Each threat flaunts a secret through the presentation of its muddled and disjointed rays of expression. And though she seems occasionally to appear, either in the semblance of a living person or in the reflection of a muddled statement, Franny remains unfound. David's reflective approach to reading is fueled by his animistic wish to somehow catch up to her.

In response to Cixous who writes in *OR* that ‘it is necessary to catch the ghost by a wisp [*mèche*] of life,’ Derrida offers the following riposte in *H.C. for Life, That is to Say... (H.C. pour la vie, c’est à dire...)*: ‘this *mèche* is a lock of hair, of course, a piece given or kept of the other’s body [...] but the wisp of life also resembles the flame of a candle that holds on to the soul of the departed who is named...’ (80). The manifestation of hair in *Threats* functions as a reminder to readers that mourners are subdued by the forces of their cherished attachments. Freud acknowledges in ‘On Transience’ that the ‘...libido *clings* to its objects and will not renounce those that are lost even when a substitute lies ready to hand’ (178, emphasis mine). As an outgrowth which sprouts from most surfaces of a creature’s bristling body, hair remains susceptible to being torn out. And when these fibers are uprooted, they seem to exhibit a volitional tendency given that they drift and sway *as if* of their own autonomous accord. The presence of flitting hair in *Threats* insulates David from the possibility of imminent ruination. He weaves the remnants of Franny’s hair into an insulating bird’s-nest which grants him some measure of consolation: ‘Two willing partners could make a home with the shedding. It had seemed unlikely to David, but now he seriously considered living in a comfortable room lined with the product of years of naturally fallen hair’ (33). David retreats into the soil-bed of his and Franny’s disheveled bits where an existential rift between the two ceases to hold. The consistency of their compiled leavings of skin, dust, and hair is the blended residuum in which he permits himself restfully to live:

After Franny was gone, a layer of dust and skin particles and hair built up over the wood floor. It mixed with the oils in David’s feet as well as the dirt from his shoes and his visitors’ shoes and gummed together, creating a thin layer of grime that gave the floors a softness. Sticky wafers of grime and hair layered behind doors. (Gray 223)

The loss of shared hair can be gathered from the opening passage of Derrida’s ‘Telepathy.’ In the first few lines of this piece published in the second issue of *Furor*, and again, twenty-six years later, in the ninth chapter from his first volume of *Psyche: Inventions of the Other (Psyché: Inventions de l’autre)*, an unpalatable premonition occurs to Derrida out of which an attempt to recollect a word-worm grows. The dream-like succession of his tractable thoughts culminates, for Derrida, in the loss of nondescript hair:

July 9, 1979.

So, what do you want me to say? I had a premonition [*j'ai pressenti*] of something nasty [*quelque chose vicieux*] in it, like a word [*un mot*], or a worm [*un ver*], a piece of worm that would be a piece of word, and that would be seeking to reconstitute itself by slithering [*en rampant*], something tainted [*vicié*] that poisons life. And suddenly, precisely there, only there, I started to lose [*perdre*] my hair [*mes cheveux*], no, to lose some hair that was not necessarily mine [*les miens*] perhaps yours [*les tiens*]... (Derrida 226)

The worm (the French *ver*) is a live piece of word in Derrida's thinking. While considered alive at the root-site of the follicle from which it grows, hair is referenced in *Threats* primarily as a deadened mass of homogenous fibrils. A stray hair is not unlike a word, or a worm, in that it belongs to no one. A worm-hair—'something tainted that poisons life'—brings us to the point of dissolution where the bits which are 'yours' are no longer discernible from the bits which are 'mine.' Perhaps it never matters to whom these bits belong seeing as these viral contaminants are always already in rampant circulation. A detachable word or a worm can always occur to you without rehearsal or foresight. And when it persuasively happens to you, it can startle your line of thought or influence your line of conduct beyond your wildest expectations. A word-worm infects, parasites, and taints 'you,' to the extent that it also taints 'life' itself, even if no one affected remains conscious, exactly, of these tainting effects ('Telepathy' 239).

In Derrida's reading of Plato's *Phaedrus*, the *pharmakon*, initially considered a healing parasite, is later deemed synonymous with writing which, in turn, is accused of 'repeating without knowing' ('Plato's Pharmacy' 75). And because it errs on the side of 'myth'—itself, measured disparagingly in Plato's text against the sanctioned faculties of *logos* and dialectics—writing too betrays an investment in the dissemination of distortions and lies ('Plato's Pharmacy' 75). Writing is consequently deemed a threat to the 'internal purity and security' of those who admire its legible products and preserve its modes of inscription (128). It's on the basis of these allegations that writing is considered a drug or a 'philter, which acts as both remedy and poison' (74, 70). And because it poisons as much as it is putatively soothes, writing can also make 'one stray from one's general, natural, habitual paths and laws' (70). Franny's notes invoke everywhere a familiar 'you.' For David, it's precisely because of these intimate evocations that her dispatches seem to carve out textual pleats

intended, only, for him. And as he begins to discern around him traces of her written voice, he is quickly made aware of the extent to which his microcosm has long been deteriorating. Franny's encrypted calls of distress summon the kind of expedited and expediting letter, of which Derrida writes in his 'Telepathy,' '....that after the event seems to have been launched toward some unknown addressee at the moment of its writing, an addressee unknown to himself or herself, if one can say that, and who is determined, as you very well know how to be, on receipt of the letter...' (228).

Less likely to become incarnate substance or matter, a specter is perhaps all the more uninhibited, then, when it wanders the corridors of psychical life. The burning memory of Franny's misunderstood lifeform flails around in David's psyche. And in spite of his every attempt to catch, ensnare, surprise, and attain *her*, his discovery of these unkempt and ever-emergent pieces encourages him to assemble an uncombed portrait of her. The infinite veil-braid 'knotted out of sight' which Franny 'is' remains, for David, 'a thing of myopia and blindness' (*Veils* 56). After a late night discovery of a second menacing note, David lays down to sleep. But the refracted glow of the bathroom electric shaver prevents his seamless drift into the night (Gray 75). The emanation of 'green' (in French, the word is *vert*) reminds him of Franny's body which he remembers once, as it slithered out of the bathroom towards him, 'her skin a reflected emerald shade that inspired in him a vision of her rising from some stagnant pond and approaching him, robe flowing, eyes empty' (75). Her vacant lifeless gaze is met in this recollection by David's blindness to the nematode-specter she is always in the habit of becoming for him. Towards David, Franny writhes green, like an hair-eel, a kind of 'filiform worm' (*vers*) whose habitat, the *Oxford English Dictionary* reminds me, is stagnant water (*OED*). Derrida tells us that mourning consists first and foremost in '...*identifying* the bodily remains and [in] *localizing* the dead [...] One has to know it. One has to have knowledge [*Il faut le savoir*]. Now, to know is to know *who* and *where*, to know whose body it really is and what place it occupies—for it must stay in its place. In a safe place' (*Specters of Marx* 6). This evanescent vision announces to the reader one possible site where David transposes her mutating form. But the dead pond also evokes the memory of a dull pool of water in which David's youthful sister once drowned. Such a curious

superimposition has the effect of washing over two secrets with one verdant hue, as of sealing the muted concourse between two otherwise unrelated *life deaths*.

With the aim of expanding here the worm-woman connection, I want to yield to a short detour in consideration of Freud's 'fictive avowal' of the origin of writing. Inspired by the braiding of women's pubic hair, Freud formulates this fiction in a piece entitled 'Femininity' which he publishes, in 1933, in his *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (Derrida, *Veils* 61). In her book on the poetic writings of Franz Kafka and Clarice Lispector among others, Cixous notes the humorous implications of Freud's hypothesis (*Readings* 69). Because hair comes out of the body and also detaches from it, Cixous explains how Freud aligns the originary sign of writing as much *on* the side of the body as on its *out-side* (*Readings* 69). Derrida interrogates the gendered implications of Freud's supposition in a text entitled 'A Silkworm of one's own.' According to Freud, the technique of braiding is devised by women who sought unconsciously to conceal the deficiency of their sex (*Veils* 59). Derrida, 'looking more closely, over Freud's shoulder,' points to women who haven't really discovered anything except how to manipulate the growth of pubescent hair (*Veils* 59-60). In learning to thread these unruly hairs, women merely participate in the act of proliferating and reenacting organic trends. This prompts Derrida to wonder: can this technique (*tekhnè*) be called an art, or should it be called instead an artifice, or perhaps, a discovery still? (60). Derrida posits these technical questions in an attempt to determine whether, as an 'imitative extension' of nature, this gesture may also confirm 'a certain animality of woman' (60). When Derrida attributes to the feminine weaver-writer an animal affinity, he posits a link between two creatures who seem to model their life's work in accordance with a greater natural 'order.' Derrida reminds us that for Freud, however, the art of woman's weaving requires that she somehow veil her animal nature:

A woman would weave like a body secretes for itself its own textile, like a worm, but this time like a worm without worm, a worm primarily concerned to hide in itself its non-being. What the woman would like to veil, according to Freud who, of course, does not mention the animal here, is that she does not have the worm she perhaps is. (Derrida, *Veils* 60)

And so, following Derrida's reading of Freud, David can perhaps glean in Franny's written addresses a

desire to conceal the slithering worm, which she does not have, but somehow becomes.

David's vision never confirms whether Franny finally reaches the bed. Gray's twenty-fifth chapter ends as David replays the memory in 'a loop' and eventually falls into a dreamless sleep (75). The stillness of the pond from which Franny emerges is the zone where David's dreams are sent to stagnate. His capacity to dream is stilled by the ambiguities of her transiting life, in part, because she remains for him grossly unreadable. Franny is mysterious and wondrous like the silkworms in Derrida's childhood recollections whose weaving of mulberry materials into silk he once considered the product of their own invisible passage (*Veils* 88-9). The memory of Franny's partial emanation from a pool of standing water recalls her scent on their wedding night, which 'was of a wet rock, as if she had been created from the stream that ran behind his childhood home' (Gray 50). David finds in Franny's odour a familiar solace which summons him back to the stale stream outside his earliest home. Amid the family of *ver*-related words which Derrida lists in 'A Silkworm,' he also sews in the term 'virus': that '*little perverse and pernicious worm* [un petit ver pervers et pernicieux] *neither living nor dead, which carries delayed death in its self-multiplication*' (90-1). Franny's specter multiplies in *Threats*. She defers the finality of her death through the ubiquity of these worm-like permutations. And it's among these slender cilia and strands of printed text that David yearns, ever so simply, to disappear. Built upon the compounded dregs of a lasting secret, this contaminated site registers to David as the most natural environment in which he could hope to subsist. It's also the kind of ecological setting where all kinds of virulent organisms, both dead and undead, seem more suited to thrive.

Fore-tastes of life death

The most beautiful word among the list of *ver*-terms mentioned in *Veils* is the last one which occurs to Derrida in spite of being the first for which he was scouring; '*from vérir, 'to vary, change color,'* the word *vérason* connotes an abyssal gap in Derrida's memory. *Vérason* refers to the intractable zone of

a certain psychical ripening (*Veils* 86). For it's defined by Derrida as '*...the moment of maturation. Fruits, especially fruits of the vine, begin then to take on the color they will have when they reach maturity. The berry starts to grow again, the grape becomes translucent in white vines, red in black vines*' (*Veils* 91). Growers often mistake the vibrant change in colour as an indication that the grapes are finally primed for cultivation. But the conditions under which these fruits are considered fit for harvest are less than ideal at this time. The details of Franny's death, while initially muddled, eventually ripen over the duration of Gray's text. The very first scene is re-played near the end of the work where its narrative priority assumes a different center. But, at the beginning of the story, the colour of Franny's scarf smears the flesh of red berries into an urgent death-scene (Gray 8).

The details leading up to Franny's death are silenced by her ambiguous admission that 'Something has happened'—and it clings to her. The cause of death, which Franny's oblique revelation barely grazes, is never ascertained in the book. 'You've been tromping berries,' David responds from a place of ostensible knowing. Quick to resist the edge of his asserted confidence, Franny launches a corrective: 'It's blood.' She vomits, as if the instinct were informed by the sudden awareness that the blood is her own. Her fingers hug the rail upon which David's hand incidentally rests. 'Could you call for help?' she asks. 'Of course,' he responds (8). And while David verbally complies, his mode of conduct is more telling than the retort he instinctively confers: 'He commanded his body to find a telephone and determine its use. "What's the problem?" "God, damn it," she said. "What did you do?" he asked. "What happened?"' (8). David's body evinces a stumbling incertitude. As her body buckles onto the stairs, Franny rescinds her former request for external assistance: 'Forget about it.' David sits down next to her. 'I love you,' she says (8). David inquires for the last time, 'What did you get into?' and Franny circumvents, 'That's your problem' (9). A hollowing tenderness shrouds the moments where they share their final exchanges: 'They were quiet for a long time. He listened to her breathing so closely that he forgot to breathe, himself. He gasped for air. He prodded at her with his elbow [...]. David sat next to his wife for three days. They leaned against each other and created a powerful odor. In that way, it was like growing old together' (9).

The arrival of Franny's ashes at the beginning of *Threats* creates a small fistula in the narrative where her insipid body matures over time. David receives this gift by post as if it were an exsiccated mourning fruit drained of all its nutritive potential. Freud plays with an idiom in the short work 'On Transience' to which *Threats* perhaps unknowingly responds. The brief piece was inspired by a conversation Freud shared with two men, a poet and a friend, during a summer's walk through the Dolomites in 1913. In spite of alleged suspicion that this walk took place three years prior to the publication of Freud's text, the short walk referenced in this 1916 piece feels, then, appropriately 'aged.' Astonished that the 'smiling countryside' could fail to elicit anything but joy in either the poet or the 'taciturn friend,' Freud attempts to ascertain which vicissitudes could account for their mutually expressive refrains (176). He concludes that there are two kinds of impulses which the beautiful may spur. While the poet, with his 'aching despondency,' exhibits a trace of the first, Freud paraphrases the sort of sentiment which might motivate a second kind of impulse with a despairing 'No! it is impossible that all this loveliness of Nature and Art, of the world of our sensations and of the world outside, will really fade away into nothing...' (176). In both impulses, Freud detects a common resistance to decay. He fails to convince his interlocutors that the value of a thing increases on the basis of its impermanence. Freud suspects that the inability to experience marvel and awe in the presence of organic ephemera is the product of an unconscious opposition to the pangs of mourning ('On Transience' 177): 'The idea that all this beauty was transient was giving these two sensitive minds *a foretaste of mourning* over its decease; and, since the mind instinctively recoils from anything that is painful, they felt their enjoyment of beauty interfered with by thoughts of its transience' (177, emphasis mine). The 'foretaste of mourning,' to which Freud's poet and friend both unknowingly bear witness, is a tender bite which commemorates with its teeth an event from an ancient time and place. Grief and mourning precede the loss of every subsequent passing inasmuch as they begin, for Cixous, 'long before the event,' and even, 'on the first day of life' ('What is it o'clock' 59). The event of Franny's death-receipt by mail transudes of a common yet unfamiliar flavour. The verified confirmation, 'Your wife is dead,' appears only in the fifth chapter of Gray's work. David is the one who utters it from the mouth of a blond ponytailed firefighter (Gray 10). When the police arrive to

investigate the scene of their two bodies askewed in a withering embrace, David slips out of his own, in what appears to be a fit of grief-stricken shock, and assumes the firefighter's body: 'His lips felt thin, and he watched her, as him, sitting on the stair. His face had sunk around its bones like soft earth, and the oxygen mask protected his mouth like a clear carapace sheltering his organs' (10).

In the twentieth chapter of the first volume of his *Essais*, Montaigne confesses to the adopted ritual of purling death around in his mouth. The practice is informed by an ancient Egyptian rite involving a skeletal death-image that was ushered into a banquet hall with the aim of startling the audience into a collective state of mortal awareness (Montaigne 121). Montaigne writes of indulging this custom not only imaginatively, but actively, which is to say, physically and psychically. With a fondness for repetition, Montaigne insists on a palatable performance. The conscious exercise of tasting death involves acclimatizing oneself to death's size, as to its weight, texture, and import. Suctioning the lower quadrant of his face, the plastic net which shields 'his mouth like a clear carapace sheltering his organs' cuts David off from the chance of tasting death (Gray 10). In a flight of phantasmagoric dissociation, David unconsciously disavows his own embodied reality: 'David wasn't sure how to tell her what needed to be said. He needed to be brave and gather his emotions for the sake of professionalism. It wasn't the first time he had called upon this professional bravery, though it always felt like the first time and in fact currently felt like the very first time. "Your wife is dead," he said' (10-11). David assumes the sort of bearing a firefighter might assume were she to relay an untransmittable sentence to her patient's surviving kin. And in those tenuous moments where he becomes re-acquainted with the dimensions of his own body, David encounters the residue of Franny's corpse on the stairs where his frame once served as a faithful prop. He reads the vacated outline of her decomposing matter as proof of 'bacteria feeding on itself and fading' (11). *Threats* counts on instances where David's bits blend and become indiscernible from Franny's own. This tale of mourning is transmitted through the textual viscera of consonant meetings, crossings, and other such ambivalent pairings.

The Fit of the Pear

As a close relative to the apple with its parsed biblical connotations, the pear in *Threats* appears as an object of alternate suspicion and desire. Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle writes in *Divine Domesticity* of medieval literary works in which the pear registers as a carrier of erotic sentiment. Boyle recalls the husband in Geoffrey Chaucer's 'The Merchant Tale' who secretly observes from 'the vantage of the pear tree [...] his wife's adultery beneath its foliage' (Boyle 12). She also points to Messire Thibaut's *Roman de la poire*, an adaptation of the tale of Adam and Eve, wherein the 'succulent bite' of the forbidden pear causes prurient and lustful desires to overtake (Boyle 12). The pear in Gray's *Threats* is initially recalled by David's mother as a 'chunk of Styrofoam' she once ate in the psychiatric institution she calls home (Gray 51). David's mother remembers how its 'texture was of a wet sponge soaked in chemicals' (51). Aileen offers David a pear one afternoon (141). She entreats him to eat it almost immediately but her hospitable pretense does little to assuage his distrust of her. After a second provocation, David once again declines her offer: 'The fruit's colors seemed too bright against her hand' (141). Aileen's pears 'seemed different [to David] from the ones he had just bought, somehow smoother and more perfect, as if they had been created in a laboratory' (144). Despite his attempt to soften his resistance to her impassioned lure, Aileen extends an underhanded compliment when, upon remarking on David's 'beautiful home,' she adds: 'What a *treat* to live in a place like this' (144, emphasis mine). When she leaves, David promptly discards Aileen's synthetic pears in the woods behind the house (145). The imminent discovery of a threat engraved vertically 'like a totem display' on the back of his basement television incites him, shortly thereafter, to devour one of his own pears (210). The filling of David's mouth with the pear, as a kind of edible surrogate-breast, suggests an initial effort on his behalf to quell the overstimulating threat of seduction which Aileen poses and to restore, in its stead, an amniotic state of quiet stillness.

David finds the television in the basement under layers of sedimented dental X-rays admixed with strata of Franny's mother's old recipes which 'tore like tissue paper when he moved them' (209).

He brings the television upstairs, places it next to the package of Franny's ashes on the coffee table, where he also happens to plug it in. He watches the silent television as the evening news eclipses a family gameshow, a plane-crash broadcast, a woman brushing a horse, a weather forecast: 'The picture changed again, this time to a dark screen, and David leaned forward to adjust the contrast and then realised that it was his house, filmed at night. The caption read 'Police Question Husband'' (209). As he follows '...his own shadowy figure moving behind the curtain of one of the illuminated front windows,' David hatches a plan to construct a physical barrier between himself and the external world (210). His focus shifts, just then, from the 'incised grooves' he had carved as an eight-year-old boy along the television's side to a fresher inscription, one whose upper case characters—'I COULD DEVOUR YOU'—causes David suddenly to leave the room:

In the kitchen he ate a pear. It occurred to him that, though he had eaten hundreds of pears in the past, if not thousands, this pear was different from every single one he had ever eaten, wholly unique, and, in fact, as he ate it, he was opening parts of the pear that had never been experienced by anyone, human or animal. When his maxillary incisors pierced the skin, which first protected the fruit as it had against rain and sun and then yielded to the invasion, he was oxygenating particles that had never even been open to oxygen. The wet fruit and seeds had existed in darkness for their entire lives until he tore them out with his teeth. (Gray 211)

The engraved 'I COULD DEVOUR YOU' posits a conditional to which David responds with oral immediacy. His primitive act of devouring animates the spectral threat. His is an eating which tastes itself tear and takes pleasure in the primal experience that is teeth piercing succulent flesh. The object-relation theorist Melanie Klein and the Hungarian psychoanalyst Sándor Ferenczi insist that the object is never an accessory to an impulse as it is for Freud. The object, for them, is the thing which co-inheres *with* the impulse, such that one hungers *for* the breast and never simply for its own sake. For Ferenczi, '...the actual activity of the newborn infant is limited principally to sucking at the mother's breast. Indeed this first love-object is forced upon the child from the beginning by the mother, so that one may speak in the case of the child of a primary "passive object-love"' (Ferenczi 21). But prior to its introduction to the breast, Ferenczi reminds us that the vertebrate foetus feeds on its mother endoparasitically (21). After birth, the ectoparasite develops an intensifying aggression towards the mother from whom it draws continued sustenance: 'It emerges from the period of harmless oral eroticism, sucking, into a cannibalistic stage; it develops within the mouth implements for biting with

which it would fain eat up, as it were, the beloved mother, compelling her eventually to wean it' (Ferenczi 21). Teeth are 'implements' by Ferenczi's standards which the eager infant exploits to 'bore' its way back 'into its mother's womb' (21). Ferenczi refers the organism's primeval tendency to strive for an 'aquatic mode of existence' as the 'Thalassal regressive trend' (52). He formulates an extensive analysis entitled *Thalassa* in which he tracks the motivation of a species '...to bring about the reestablishment of the aquatic mode of life in the form of an existence within the moist and nourishing interior of the mother's body' (54).

In her reading of Freud's *Das Unheimliche*, Cixous intimates that the maternal body incites for Freud an awareness of the limits of desire. She explains that the desire to worm one's way back into the primordial site of the womb relies on the 'obliteration of any separation' between mother and child, as between life and death ('Fiction and its Phantoms' 544-5). The biology of any organism compels it to eat if it is to survive. And yet, David's instinct to tear into the pear could, in part, be stimulated by a desire to know the temporary relief of a tasteful death, especially if we consider the urge to burrow oneself back into the maternal cavity as a sort of occult death-wish. The second threat in Gray's work presages this, for it claims to have sent the placental mammal back to a moist quiescence which it can no longer consciously recall: 'YOUR FATE IS SEALED WITH GLUE I HAVE BOILED IN A VAT. I SLOPPED IT ON AN ENVELOPE AND MAILED IT TO YOUR MOTHER'S WOMB' (67). Aileen's unreliable pear stirs in David a desire for 'a sort of inverted birth' (Cixous, 'Introduction to Lewis Carroll' 238). David dismantles the pear into bite-size pieces so that he may funnel his way back into a conceptual-antenatal space, 'where there gather together all the fantasms of devouring and being devoured' (Cixous 'Introduction' 238).

It may be apt to recall an incorporative phantasy here, which, on the mourner's behalf, '...involves eating the object (through the mouth or otherwise) in order *not* to introject it, in order to vomit it, in a way, into the inside, into the pocket of a cyst' (Derrida 'Fors' xxxviii). Cherished bits of the internalised dead are subsumed by the mourner into a secret space: 'an "artificial" unconscious

lodged like a prothesis [*sic*]’ operates, then, somewhere inside the mourner’s body (Derrida ‘Fors’ xiii, Marder 242). The internal construction of this memorial functions to ‘deny the very existence of the entire problem’ of death (Torok and Abraham 129). And, as Sara Guyer writes in ‘Albeit Eating: Towards an ethics of cannibalism,’ this ‘monument’ is ‘so excessive that it tarnishes and interrupts one’s sentences, even if this occurs in only the most obscure and almost indiscernible ways’ (67). In the foreword of Torok and Abraham’s *Wolf Man’s Magic Word*, Derrida poses the question ‘What is a crypt?’ which he then repeats as if to quietly appeal, in his writing, to a structure of anasemic displacement (xiii). This textual repetition works to insist that an answer will not be extracted from the *lieux* whose tendency it is to hide (‘Fors’ xiv). On this topic of ‘anasemic relation,’ Derrida writes in the first volume of *Psyche: Inventions of the Other* that it requires going back to the source while moving beyond it, ‘...to the pre-originary and pre-semantic source. Anasemic translation does not deal in exchanges between significations, signifiers and signifieds, but between the realm of signification and that which, making it possible, must still be translated into the language *of* that which it makes possible, must still be repeated, reinvested, reinterpreted there’ (135). The crypt—the formal name which Abraham and Torok bestow upon this phantasmic site—is a trans-verbal form of communication which precedes, traverses, and extends beyond the spoken word. Yet there remains a need to translate these enigmatic functions into linguistic signs if we are to sustain a way of conversing about them which neither banalises nor reduces their meaningful forms.

Following the death of his wife, David finds a total of thirteen threats dispersed throughout what was once considered their shared home. Franny’s threats intervene to expose the fissures of an eroding substructure. Transmitted through the baleful wire of an English-script, these timely aphorisms materialise as if they were telegrams dispatched from another astral realm. At the moment of one such finding, David detects the outline of a word peering out from the corner of peeling wallpaper which Franny and him had put up some seven years prior. He rips the thin sheet back to expose the eleventh threat to date, typed on a page ‘yellowed with wallpaper glue’: ‘I WILL STAPLE MY ADRESS TO YOUR WINTER COAT, LITTLE ONE. THEY WILL SEND YOU TO ME NO MATTER WHAT YOU

CLAIM' (223-4). After sharing with David the discovery of a twelfth threat, Aileen pinpoints Franny as the only possible composer: 'One of the girls saw her writing it. I found it in my coffee cup months ago and asked around, and one of the girls saw Frances do it. That area is employees only. We don't let anyone else in there. She wrote it' (227). David isolates himself in the kitchen with the threats following Aileen's departure. He treats each like a prosthodontic utensil ranging from new to antique: 'The pages were all different shapes and colors. Some looked as if they had been around for years, while others were crisp and new. The new threat was stained across one edge with coffee' (229).

For years, it seems, Franny carefully planted these immature berries while David lived under the pretense of shared accountability. Suffused in text, her signature bears little recognition to the person David thought to have married. And so he resigns himself to the task of reading her and takes great care to examine the media and typescript of her letterings:

The threats were on different types of paper. There was the craft store receipt, the fortune cookie scrap, the computer paper, the thin sticker-tape strip, the index card, the pages torn from a notebook. The words were typed in the same style, as if they came from the same machine. He let his eyes unfocus until the words became symbols. (Gray 220-1)

If David imparts doubt concerning the legibility of her character—I don't know what seems like her' (190)—he also displays paramount devotion when it comes to re-tracing the graphic channels of her ever-evolving name. In a final letter he addresses to Franny, he writes: 'MY DEER IN THE WOODS, I'M LOST, I FOUND A NOTE WITH YOUR NAME...' (272). Ultimately, the split-pair fostered their own disparate secrets. At a later point in the narrative, David confesses a solemn afterthought to Officer Chico:

She was hiding things from me [...] There were financial problems at the salon, and she didn't want to let on. She was losing her grip and creating elements of danger around the house in order to snap herself out of it. [...] She got caught in her own trap. It snared her and she lost her mind. I don't think she meant to... (Gray 235)

Love is what happens when the blind sense each other unknowingly and fail to understand (Cixous, 'What is it o'clock?' 67). Cixous writes in a piece from *Stigmata* called 'What is it o'clock? or The door (we never enter)' that 'Not understanding is a way of holding myself in front and of letting come. Transverbal, transintellectual relationship, this loving the other in submission to the mystery. (It's

accepting, not knowing, forefeeling, feeling with the heart)' (Cixous 67). Love happens when two lovers fail to recognise one another yet affirm each other, in tender closeness, without presuming familiarity (Cixous 67). David's lasting affection for Franny derives from this renewed capacity to fail to recognise her. By nurturing this im-paired ability, he continues, through these 'great activities of feeling,' to cultivate his ability to love.

The Fit of the Ring

Mourning for David and Franny is a confected nest braided into the story of an impossible pairing. A constitutive unit severed into two singular entities, the pair inherently splits from itself and its parts. When Marie, the trance-regression therapist, asks the inveterate laundromat-occupant, Shelly, if she knows about 'you,' whether she could 'imagine the history of the world without "you,"' Shelly responds with an overtone of appreciation (Gray 263). She misconstrues existential validation from Marie who was orbiting around the literary genealogy of 'you' as a simple general pronoun. 'More devastation has been linked to 'you' than anything else,' explains Marie. 'The research is conclusive. I've researched the full canon. Since it was 'thou.' We're talking over six hundred years of devastation. Heartbreak. Accusation. And worst, worst? False promise' (263). A note in the glossary of Derrida's 'Envois' scans over the ambiguity of the syllable and pronoun 'you' in the proposition 'I write to you,' which reads in French as « *je t'écis* » (xiii) which can mean both 'I write *to* you' and 'I write *you*' (xiii). Because the expression oscillates between the dative and the accusative, it begs a question which Alan Bass, the translator of 'Envois,' affirms with respect to '...whether indirection and sending are [not] always operative...' (xiii). The indecision of the pronoun 'you' twirls alongside Derrida's 'postal principle' which maintains that the letter can always fail to arrive. An intercepting agent may at any given point cut the letter off from reaching its intended destination or assigned addressee. Such a possibility resonates at the level of the letter which promises to return a bit of meaning or truth to you, even as it fails mostly to do so. The devastation of never quite getting *you*, of never quite understanding, possessing, getting *to* nor of reaching you, constitutes the historical eventuation of 'A

lifetime of plans, dissolved. Each of them linked to “you.” Tied there in the history of the world’ (Gray 263). And all of this, Marie implies, is tied there (« là ») at the *border*, at the *shore*, or at the *fringe* of a ring whose cycle it is to repeat itself in every attempt to save, and so, to write *something*.

In an explanatory preface to Derrida’s *Cinders*, Ned Lukacher traces the ring as the symbolic presentation of a border that graces the universe with its annular shape. This portrait of an endless arched figure is inspired by Nietzsche’s notion of ‘eternal recurrence’ which Lukacher conceives as ‘...an image in a mirror, an image of the finitude of self-reflection and thus also of its limits. At its limit, in the place of the tain of the mirror, lies the ‘nothing,’ which ‘rings’ into spatial form, between inside and outside, between a world and its concealed essence’ (Lukacher 4). According to Nietzsche’s thought, a ring without intent or will encloses ‘...a defined space in which a defined quantity of energy, heat, and light works its way through incessant cycles of creation and annihilation. It is the voracious appetite of the world within the ring that Nietzsche calls “the will to power”’ (Lukacher 5). As ‘the unreflective foil on the other side of the mirror,’ this ring names for Martin Heidegger a *khorismo* which Lukacher translates as a ‘gap’ ‘between Being and Becoming’ (6). Cinders ‘are’ the infinitely finite bits which subsist somewhere between the inside and the outside of this metaphysical periphery. The cinder is an eternally ‘non-present’ thing which comes *before* the letter, enables the transmission of the letter, and which arrives, at times, instead of the letter. The French *lettre* preserves the phonetic inflections of the epistle, the alphabetical character, and *l’être*, the profound nature and ontological question of all that is animated, individuated, and sentenced at some point to die. In *Cinders*, ‘Envois,’ and ‘Telepathy,’ Derrida intermittently plays with the title of the 1982 text « *Feu la cendre* » and the phrase « *il y a là cendre* » (‘cinders there are’), where the French « *là* » (‘there’) remains virtually indiscernible in sound from the definite feminine article « *la* ». The cinder, for Derrida, has always ‘already burned’ inasmuch as *feu* (fire) is also the French homonym of *fût*, the past definite-tense of the verb ‘to be’ (Lukacher 11). The cinder eludes any and all sensible or intelligible efforts to impose a classifiable order. Yet it continues nonetheless to ring, that is, both visually and audibly, as the burning sign which writing takes intimately to heart even as it remains unable ever to

fully capture it.

David removed his ring in the fifth year of their marriage,

a time of great stress in his life. He had lost his dental license the year before, and they had just moved in with his father. He found he had been fussing with the ring, turning it round and round on his finger until his skin flamed, the distressed red band suggesting allergy. (Gray 44)

The ring forms a worm around his irritated finger. His skin's arousal suggests an aversion to the ongoing excoriations of life. The ring becomes the annular trap which binds him to a state of professional and personal disintegration. Franny slipped her nuptial band off when she massaged the scalps of clients at work, and eventually, she too would come to leave it at home: 'No domestic dispute between Franny and David had inspired the removal of their wedding rings' (42). Both Franny's indifference and David's allergic response presage the event of their inevitable ending. The ring's promise to sustain, honour, and safekeep the life of their union from all perceived ailments and threats is already compromised by the straining pressure of what, intrinsically, can never be kept out. Because in spite of any attempt to close itself off from the menacing outside, the spread of an integrated lesion already attests to the ring's invariable disbanding.

During the course of a brief visit in David's garage where Marie happens to be researching, Shelly manages to unlodge from the washer's agitator a 'pale pink ribbon' knotted around two wedding bands: 'She put one of the rings between her teeth and made an impression in the gold' (263-4). According to the law of discarded remains, these rings are perhaps destined to become the malleable objects of someone else's oral fancy. If Shelly's gesture hints of an impulsive nature, it also suggests a budding curiosity, on her part, concerning the solidity of the ringbearers' love. Shelly attempts to measure with her teeth the authenticity of Franny and David's laboured love. Her tooth-mark on the ring is as much a violation as it is an act of inscription. Her attempt at writing is one whose faint indentation requests the possibility for a different kind of reading. Her bite communicates an attempt to gauge the validity of a pledge two consensual others intended to honour by reflecting and returning a set of vows to one another. It's as if her teeth probe the material to confirm whether it glints

with prosperity or tastes of sour milk. It's as if her mouth hopes to feel the warmth of a fused spark as felt, perhaps, on the day of the pair's ring-fitting, on the eve of their wedding, or on the dusk of their being sundered a-part by death. Her mouth takes almost naturally to assessing whether their love is as genuine as the gold of their conjugal bands and whether it weathered time more or less disastrously. While Shelly appraises the metal with her teeth, Marie, the inexperienced analyst, watches nearby. As this oral exercise takes place, the reader may note a withdrawal on the narrator's behalf from certain claims to mastery along with a repudiation of certain contractual investitures around which Franny's discordant threats continue tenuously, as well as elliptically, to swivel.

I'm reminded, at the moment, of an intriguing reference in Derrida's *Glas* to Jean Genet's *Funeral Rites*. What compels me to include this reference here is a speculation that the restricting bind of the ring in *Threats* might have something in common with the Freudian binding of psychical energy. Derrida writes somewhere in *Glas* that the annulus is too tight (« *L'anneau est trop serré* »). This particular citation evokes the other posterior ring-end or anus of the alimentary-digestive canal. But what Derrida searches to write with his 'gl' is not a structure, *per se*; not a system of the signifying or of the signified, as in, a thesis, a novel, a poem, a law, a desire, or even, a machine, but rather, what passes more or less by way of the rhythmic restraint of an annulus (« *...c'est ce qui passe, plus ou moins bien, par la stricture rythmée d'un anneau* ») (*Glas* 125/109). Derrida's 'gl' channels the bodily rhythms and transitions of a binding mechanism. Freud writes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that '...the function [of binding...] would be concerned with the most universal endeavour of all living substance—namely to return to the quiescence of the inorganic world' (76). The inactive state towards which the death-drive tends is one which terminates with a muffled cessation. It induces the sort of lasting wish which pines to return to a state of inanimate stillness. The pleasure principle is concerned with the conservation of the organism via the maintenance of a level of psychical constancy. It's a tendency in whose service binding works, though binding is considered a function more primordial than the principle which it introduces and the mastery which it serves nonetheless to preserve (*Beyond...* 75-6). David's epidermal abrasion leaves the insidious mark of an auto-destructive drive

which weakens any principle operating in the service of organic preservation. Instead of enlivening the will to survive, the choking ring rather inflames the organism's readiness to die.

The Fit of the Milk

In the event of her impossible return, David writes a note for his wife which he leaves on her bedside table: 'IF YOU'RE HERE, DON'T LEAVE. I'M HERE IN THE HOUSE. IF YOU'RE HERE, I WILL FIND YOU' (Gray 231). Because it seems quite reasonable for David to infer

...that Franny was somewhere in the world. If it was possible for her to be contained within a canister of ash on the table, it seemed equally possible that she was taking a walk in the neighbourhood, or that she was out for a drive, or perhaps standing in line at the grocery store with faceless individuals who might fail to recognize the miracle that stood beside them holding a gallon of milk. (Gray 149)

David and Franny meet on a wintry day. While walking directly behind her, he witnesses her fall outside the grocery store and crouches down immediately to assist her: 'Their grocery bags were mixed in the confusion, and he loaded his items with hers into the cart' (43). David offers to replace the carton of milk which split from the impact of her fall. 'I've never had a man buy me milk,' Franny comments. And in response to her mild state of incredulity, David quips: 'I'd like to be the first' (43). The commemorative reality of their childless union germinates in his offer to exchange her ruptured gallon of milk for another which might remain imperforated and intact. But already, the narrative seems silently to remember a Kristevan state of abjection; a tenuous transitional moment according to which the infant begins to separate from the mother. This event proves to be constitutively inhibiting and perhaps even damaging, to the extent that the gradual loss of the mother and child's symbiotic union haunts the developing ego for the ongoing duration of its autonomous life. Derrida writes of *glas* as a 'kind of poisoned milk' (15). And much later, he cautions that « *Lait de deuil* » is already the encrusted ring out of which mourning is constantly spilling (225).

In a passage from « *Batons rompus* » in *Derrida d'ici, Derrida de là*, Cixous offers a catalogue of speech-sounds which include « ...le laid, le lais, le lé, le legs, le lai, le lait, mais ce n'est pas le legs

(« jambes », en anglais), le legs viendra... » (183). Phonetic constituents in this list include the ugly (« le laid »), the ford (« le lais »), as the shallow place in a river which one wades across (*OED*), the strip (« le lé »), as perhaps the band or the width of a material which is measured between two borders, the legs, as the locomotive limbs which are utilized by animals, but also, as the legacy which Cixous notes remains always *to-come* (« le legs viendra... »). In 'To Speculate: On 'Freud,'' Derrida dedicates a section to Freud's athetical step as the « *pas* » (the 'not') beyond the pleasure principle which Freud insists on taking despite it leading ostensibly nowhere (293). There, Derrida exposes Freud's own legacy (his legs) as the longstanding attempt to establish a reputable field of psychical analysis. Freud reels his inheritance (and himself) in, like a spool, sending it out only to reel it (and himself) back in again (302). He unwinds it in accordance with the repetitive pull and release of a *fort-da*; the bobbin-and-spool game Freud's eldest grandson, Ernst, would play to remediate the temporary leave of his absenting mother. *Threats* introduces us to David's parents as two destabilising presences who continue to influence the ongoing development of David's manic and depressive ego. The milk of mourning which binds Franny to David long predates the staging of their own spoiled fiction.

Still, I wonder if the *milk* which anoints the ground of their first meeting bespeaks a longing for a silent telling: where the gestures of lips, in the absence of any vocal release, could persist, as they try to siphon a telepathic transmission which might support the illusion, if nothing else, of an ideal state of collusive understanding. Klein attests elsewhere that a 'longing' which exacerbates one's state of loneliness stems from 'the depressive feeling of an irretrievable loss' (Klein, *Envy and Gratitude* 301). She writes in 'On the Sense of Loneliness' that 'However gratifying it is in later life to express thoughts and feelings to a congenial person, there remains an unsatisfied longing for an understanding without words—ultimately for the earliest relation with the mother' (Klein 301). Franny's threats supplant in David a regressive desire to draw from her ciphers a kind of milky sustenance which he comes both to anticipate and to rely upon. And yet, her destructive specter prevents David from resting comfortably amidst a falsified notion of love as it's ideally shared between a husband and his wife. Her aggressive calling is not redemptive but unsettling. There's an effort on her behalf to communicate a

psychical torment which words serve only further to obscure. Her threats disclose a renewed source of infestation, particularly if a squirming trace of the inarticulate worm which she somehow is may also occasionally be discerned. Her writing seethes with the pain she endured in a previous state of embodiment where communicative channels were inoperative, resolutely knotted, or simply, inadequate, because language is not always able to compact nor to render expressible what defies such normative channels of communication.

‘Death made more sense in the winter,’ Gray writes, ‘in the same way that doing the dishes made more sense in the evening, after a big meal. *There was glut in death.* David remembered a certain sagging and expanding, a feeling to which he could not assign an image’ (Gray 102, emphasis mine). A kind of floating and extending crypt without assignable image or name already initiates here David’s forthcoming reading-ritual. We are nearing the end of the novel. We are slowly approaching the moment where an insatiable David will respond to the delivery of Franny’s threats with the ply of his reflexive jaw.

The Fit of the Wasp

The root of the German word for weaving, *Weben*, forms the German word for ‘wasp’ (*webh-*). Women (*Weib*) are also conveniently the ones who braid according to Freud’s fable on the origins of writing. The female-worker wasp is also the one who stings (*OED*). Oron Catts and Ionat Zurr give a brief narrative on the ‘female parasitoid wasp’ in their piece entitled ‘Disembodied Livestock’ (102). The female wasp feeds herself and her youth by transfixing her prey into a ‘living larder’ (102). In this climactic scene, the lure to kill takes time. Once capacity for movement is impaired, the wasp escorts her obliging victim to the site of her nest. Only in the confines of her domicile does the wasp then lay ‘an egg which hatches and feeds on its host’s organs’ (102). This vicious tale revives something of Franny and David’s carnivoro-parasitic love which is as ‘dangerous and blind’ as ‘a wasp that swarms around the house’ (Mort 41). As Franny’s cockroach, David is her most satiating food receptacle. He

always consents to her penchant for spectral feeding. Her foreboding presence drains the bareness of his existence and, in this process, sustains her own.

The wasps in *Threats* are carriers of failed transferences and transmissions. David consents to a therapy session with Marie which takes place in the sixty-fifth chapter of *Threats*. The session is unplanned. Marie asks David to close his eyes and to lie down with his hands by his side (238). She encourages him to release his breath through the manifold orifices of his body: ‘Your body fills like a cylinder and presses out through not only your mouth but your ears and skin and eyes’ (239). As David listens to her voice which occurs to him as if dubbed over the static buzz of darting wasps, he becomes increasingly drawn into the soma of his ‘heavy breath’ (239-40). The calm of an oxygen mask suddenly reminds him of the ‘constant and essential truth,’ that his lips, lungs, and teeth are discreetly present to the passage of breath. ‘Your breath feeds your mind, of which you consciously become less aware, pushing it away, watching it float like a paper boat on a still lake’ (240). Her meditation guides David to the top of the stairs where he stands, bracing himself before he begins his descent into the basement. ‘Your mind is folded into the folds of a paper boat’ (240). David slowly lowers his body down the stairs towards the cold ‘lapping’ water (240). ‘The lake is so still that placing your mind in it causes three ripples that extend farther than your eye can follow. The lake beyond is still. You push a paper boat away and watch it float like a float, like a paper boat, a boat on a still lake’ (240-1). He awakens from the trance as he feels Marie’s hand pressing lightly on his chest. Yet he opens his eyes to find her sitting in a chair with both hands on her lap (241). Marie tells David that he was ‘down there for a while’ (241) and that the iteration which he repeated to himself, ‘paper boat on a still lake,’ had a ‘very lovely’ ring to it (241). A confused David thanks Marie for her help. And as he turns to leave, the bite of a wasp on his collarbone forbids a safe departure (241).

While the wasp burns David’s clavicle with its sting, the need to devour already takes uncertain hold of him. It’s already *too* late. The seventy-fifth chapter of *Threats* attests to this. It reads like a police transcript where an unfamiliar voice documents the state of David’s residence after a

search warrant was issued and conducted on April 11. The tone in this chapter registers as if it were issued from a different narrator. The appeal to the dative here is intriguing because *Threats* doesn't otherwise tick with such calendrical precision. The general time in *Threats* is impossible to specify. David's memories are not extracted from the bedrock of an annual daybook but relayed, rather, in varying mood-strokes. Mere references to clocks in *Threats* suggest that they've been broken or else tampered with: '[David's] bruised body and brain were confused by the darkness outside and the smell of coffee. It had felt as if it was still evening until he started making the coffee, when it began to feel like morning. He didn't have a clock to check' (65). In comparison, the report in the seventy-fifth chapter unfolds like clockwork: 'The stairs to the basement were deemed impassable by the officers due to a buildup of discarded books, print media, and containers filled with the above' (270). David's basement is clogged with flammable material. It's only now that readers are apprised of the magnitude of David's condition. *Surely*, there are traces of a progressive piling everywhere throughout the work prior to this very instant. Surely, readers are made aware of a spectral growth lodged in David's system like an intolerant ringworm which he cannot purge without in turn sacrificing a part or the whole of him. Unlike the ring which once vexed his wedding finger, the suffocating conditions of mourning are not those David can easily shed. Yet, his impulse to stack items and to occlude rooms throughout the house suggests resignation on his part. David desists from the faintness of his will which compels him to barely keep afloat. All this time, he has been pining to be sent back to Franny regardless of what's transpired between them. Just as his final letter to her attests: 'I HAVE ANOTHER, I HAVE ANOTHER ~~HO~~UR BEFORE YOU FIND ME' (273).

A wasp bite on Marie's palm instigates a reflection on the 'sweet bastard' in the fifty-eighth chapter of *Threats*. She laments an injustice in nature's will. Bees 'remove a portion of their own abdomen' whereas wasps never incur such distress when they sting: 'Marie couldn't imagine being so angry that she would be willing to give up part of herself like that. The wasps had it easy. They could punish without consequence' (215). Marie works in an environment where wasps flourish. While she finds reprehensible their blind mode of conduct, she gains from their sting a deliberate pain she both

values and desires: 'The wasp stings swelled less each time. The initial pain was the same, but the aftereffects were more manageable. She speculated that her natural allergy to the venom was slowly decreasing' (215). Mourning is the dose David seeks for it promises Franny's interminable return, with each passing ripple, and his own forthcoming release, with each of her returns. Shelly murmurs to the once carnivorous wasp whose hairless legs distinguish them from pollen-seeking bees, '*There's nothing wrong with you*' (262). Her murmuration extends to others, perhaps to mere humans who, in various automated scenarios, seem compelled by the motor of a wasp's predatory body. Mourning, for Freud, is a riddle which consumes itself once all its losses are successfully renounced ('On Transience' 178-9). Because mourning in *Threats* is as normal as it is ubiquitous, it never ends for David nor does it ever really begin. And while it may register differently to him 'each time,' mourning simply happens as a pre-condition to living.

The Fit of the Saint

Somewhere inside David's body, Franny swells with the vigour of a benign crypt-tumour. She reveals herself mid-novel to David in the laundromat as Apollonia, the deified specter and patron saint of dentistry (63). With her 'saint's smile skewed,' Franny raises 'an incisor in an oversize antique gold tooth extractor' in both hands as if this 'bleeding diorama' were orchestrated for David's eyes only (154). His childhood collection of silver and tin coins pressed with the silhouette of Apollonia's figure grew from his 'abiding reverence' for the conditions of her martyrdom. The architecture of Apollonia's teeth suffered in 249 A.D. from a brutal demolition at the hands of Christian persecutors:

Apollonia was supposed to be burned toothless at the stake but instead launched herself into the fire, an act pardoned by Saint Augustine, who noted the suicidal action of Apollonia's leap and forgave her and similar martyred individuals, for they acted on God's command. (Gray 63)

This vision is later moderated by images of Franny eating 'like a large, hungry bird' on the morning before her death: 'Mostly seeds' (275). Elsewhere, he recalls her eyes, 'an animal's dark eyes' and how he could live 'in the place where he saw her eyes' (275). David feels unassuming pride for his ability to value every flawed mouth as an intended schema or perfect design (148). He continues to apply this

perceptive aptitude to Franny who so often sauntered through the woods only to emerge hours later with webs in her hair. And while she confronts him with the darker truth of her foraging spirit, David faithfully retaliates by consecrating her nonetheless (37).

As one might anticipate, David's apotheosis of Franny is not attenuated by the event of her death: his idealisation of Franny only assumes then a rather vibrant life of its own. Klein's schizoid-paranoid and depressive positions are perhaps useful in considering the alternating stages of development which take hold at variable rates and intensities in one's life. The earliest schizoid-paranoid stage is characterised by the infant's slotting of objects into 'good' or 'bad.' This stage includes phantasies of an Other's haunting presence which the child deems at first to be persecutory (Klein, *Envy and Gratitude* 61-2). But once the infant succeeds in sustaining an ambivalent approach towards good-bad objects, one which integrates their evaluative aspects into a more cohesive portrait, the child is initiated into the interminable depressive labour that is mourning. David's character is fictively caught in a mourning-state further sustained by the death of his '*Sweet Franny*' whose sweetness only intensifies with the persistence of her spectral bites (13). His mourning catalogues the growth of an abscess which agitates in David a need to oscillate between restraint and excess. With gradual swaying motions, David tries time and time again to direct his paper boat towards a shore where Franny's bitter-sweetness might sear a tongue with all its sugar. The chance of mooring upon a shore as capricious as Franny's never seems implausible to David and increasingly becomes nothing short of unavoidable.

In the fourth chapter of *Touching Feeling*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick engages the currency of the psychoanalytical term 'paranoia' as it's associated in Freudian metapsychology with 'the repression of specifically same-sex desire' (126). From a historical vantage point, she follows Guy Hocquenghem's proposal in *Homosexual Desire* that paranoia tells us more about the diffuse functions of certain discursive systems of oppression, specifically, about heterosexism and homophobia, than it tells us about the operations of gay desire. In an effort to approach a paranoid style of criticism as one 'kind of

cognitive/affective theoretical practice among other, alternative kinds' (126), Sedgwick engages the critical prospects of Klein's paranoid-schizoid and depressive-reparative positions. With this in mind, she writes: 'The flexible to-and-fro movement implicit in Kleinian *positions* will be useful for my discussion of paranoid and reparative critical *practices*, not as theoretical ideologies (and certainly not as stable personality types of critics), but as changing and heterogeneous relational stances' (128). In her reading of Klein, the envious, hate-filled and intensely defensive position that is the paranoid locality must always be sought within the 'oscillatory context' that is the depressive position (128). As such, the process of reparation which Klein deems synonymous with 'love' is also considered a fleeting 'anxiety-mitigating achievement' which one 'inhabits' in infancy, as in adulthood, 'only sometimes, and often only briefly' (129).

The hallucinatory byproducts and symptoms associated with various characters in *Threats* are nowhere given as evidence of psychotic or paranoid activity. Because characters are not presented as pathological specimens to be probed and dissected by the reader's analytical gaze, I'm reminded of Jean-François Lyotard who writes of the analyst's position in Freud's 'Emma'-case. The analyst is one who observes 'the chromatics' with 'a delicacy both specific and severe' and whose attention 'floats on the water without prejudging the important from the anecdotal' ('Emma' 33, qtd. in Nouvet's 'Inarticulate Affect' 241). A paper boat floating on a still lake teaches something about the implicit benefit in suspending hurried motion, deferring judgment, and in swaying without immediately projecting a fixed reading. *Threats* preserves narrative gaps wide enough to dissuade readers from reaching any sort of conclusive interpretation. This text doesn't endorse the sort of paranoid-schizoid strategy which promises to insulate the reader from painful encounters as from occasions for transformative change. Anyone can submit to a 'bad' anticipatory reading, as when one reads with the intent that a text reflect back to oneself their own assumptions and meditations. A paranoid reading is often mitigated by a defensive request for a text to affirm whatever the reader thinks himself to know. Such an approach attempts to numb itself to the invariable wounds and challenges which the text

gently imposes. *Threats* invites the reader to move beyond its own protective bearings while it also compounds the reparative recognition that a text can and always *should* defy expectation.

An Oral Reading

Mourning swishes David around in *Threats* until he's nearly reduced to a singular autogenetic oral mechanism. One day, when he lays down to rest, David finds the letter he wrote—and set aside in the event of Franny's improbable return—an obtrusive mass pressing against his neck (231):

He held the page to his chest and sensed his body alive under it. He felt a great sadness, which caused him to tear off a sliver of the page and put it in his mouth. He packed the sliver into his right anterior molar and tore off another, a thin strip, which he rolled into a ball and pressed into his left anterior molar. He packed the paper into his teeth again and again until each molar was stuffed full, plus the spaces within the single divots of his premolars and behind the deep divots in his maxillary central incisor. David ran his tongue across the newly smooth teeth. It tasted like he was holding a small book in his mouth. He longed to read his words to Franny again but had eaten them. (Gray 231)

Eight narrative bits later, David finds a pair of woolen socks interred in a shoebox behind his house.

The contents of the box were an anniversary gift he had offered Franny years prior. He recalls feeling 'a secret sense of relief' when she stopped wearing them (225):

There was a page in the sock, but he was tired of knowing how to read, so he opened his mouth and inserted the page. The paper he had packed into his teeth rolled up and allowed for the new intrusion. His jaw popped and widened farther. The page was warm on his teeth and felt natural against his tongue. His lips cracked and bled into it, but he kept opening his mouth wider, pushing it toward the back of his throat, twisting the paper to corkscrew it further, breathing hard through his nose as it reached the back of his throat, pushed against his soft palate, caressed his palatine uvula. He gagged and clenched his teeth, and the page compacted and became a part of him, there in his mouth. (Gray 256-7)

Dry paper quenches the moisture of his mouth which, once filled, turns it into a kind of desert. David's dessicated locality becomes parched or singed, as if in the aftermath of a fire. The paper calcifies in his mouth and morphs from foreign matter into an appendage, now, a part of him. And yet, following the course of a Derridean thought expressed in his 1990 lectures on cannibalism and which Krell conserves in his abridged note-version, Franny's sweetness resists total assimilation (Krell 142). A 'glucotropism' amounts for Derrida to a sweetness which the mouth cannot swallow because it

can only be savoured, if even, partly. Just as dessert is always an ‘eating for eating’s sake, beyond all need,’ the taste of Franny’s writing carries David to ‘the space of excess, where all the rest gathers’ (Krell 147, 165). This is how Franny can become for him the saccharine taste of *restance*—the ash-food which can never be eaten: ‘*Restance* implies an irremediable *resistance* in all the rest [...]. A residue resides in all things that will not be homogenized or even formalized, a residue that refuses every in-formation’ (Krell 142). An impervious Franny lingers outside the register of possession. Readers are again reminded near the end of the novel of her ability to elude captivity given a secret yearning she savours with the expiration of her final breath:

She felt a desire to touch her nose to his nose, such a pleasurable desire, and not acting on it made it a secret, which made it even more of a pleasure. He watched her. She was too tired then to express the desire aloud, and the secret became even more perfect. It became the most perfect secret she had ever experienced, as close as she was to him at that moment. Her heart pounded with pleasure. (Gray 277)

I’m prompted to draw an implicit parallel here between Franny and Novalis’s beloved *fiancée* Sophie, who, in failing to recover from consumption at the tender age of fifteen, incited Novalis to seek recuperation through an ‘impossible spectral love’ (Krell 153). After Sophie’s death, Novalis confronted ‘...the altar he had constructed for the adoration of her, [and] dallied [at that moment] with the idea of suicide...’ (Krell 153). The Apollonian altar which David constructs for Franny suggests comparable signs of auto-destructive distress (Gray 97). At the near-end of the novel, David’s cataleptic body is discovered in the master bedroom, doused in her ashes, and hemmed in by an assortment of decomposing paper-bits (271). The officers pry open David’s unwilling mouth. They find as the cause of his obstructed breathing his final letter to Franny compressed in paper pellet-form. David’s attempted suicide, the ‘all you could no longer eat, the point of ultimate *dégout*, the *dégustation de la mort*’ (Krell 153), reads like a near-consummate rejoinder to Franny’s threats.

Death rests for David on the promise of his and Franny’s uncertain reunion. If the moment of extinction is also a moment where a match is stricken and everything is consumed by way of being consumed, Krell asks, following Derrida’s instruction, whether death might not also carry with it the

promise of restoration: ‘consume it in letting it consume you, and so, losing it all, win it all back again?’ (Krell 153). But if the whole (*le tout*) can be restored for Derrida, it’s only at the cost of forever losing the beloved (Krell 153). The mystery of Franny is withheld from David in life as in death which is how he can love a good riddle and name her the best (Gray 273). Lamenting the stillness of her breath, still, he impels their love in the form of a paper boat wading: ‘DID I ALREADY COMB YOUR ~~HAIR~~ OH MY SWEET DEAR, WE NEVER DID ~~TRY~~ TO HAVE OUR TIME DID WE, OUR ~~SOULS~~ WAVE FROM ACROSS THE WATER, THE WAVELESS WATER, BETWEEN US A PAPER BOAT FLOATS BY WHICH I MEAN TO SAY, BY WHICH I STILL MEAN, BY WHICH A STILL LAKE/’ (274).

By way of an alchemical transfer between reader and writer, a piece of fiction can be said, then, to ignite something (Wood ‘Center-piece’). In licensing this kind of perilous play, literature issues unbridled flames without cause to contain them. If a tongue bears a wound from every reading it tastes, textual memories sealed in those wounds could continue there heatedly to live. And since these searing wounds would not presumably heal well, each textual encounter would risk infinitely re-opening them. David’s interminable reading of Franny fails and yet it continues to fail well: ‘He thought of her still. He thought of holding her absolutely still. He loved, he loved her. He loved her, still’ (Gray 277-8). And since this chapter gestures towards the possibility that there can be no clear end to this ‘bit’ by ‘bit’ reading, whenever we might recall this: ...*an interminable burning*.



2. Dreaming, Reading and Telepathy

(This morning's decision: upon waking, take notes on what remains of certain of my dreams, before they sink back into oblivion. Retain in particular those—they are finally rather rare—that already have a verbal consistency. This promises them an ideal identity, an autonomous existence of sorts, at the same time lighter and more solid. For me, the duration of these words is like the solitary persistence of a wreck. Its form run aground is stabilized in the sand. One might see it surge up through the morning fog in the manner of a damp ruin, jagged, covered with algae and signs. A chance as well for the deciphering to come when the thing resists. The promise of work and reading, at least for a little while. On Saturday, day of rest, distraction, or meditation, I will reassemble these remains while reflecting them a little. Filtering and ordering. We'll see what can be saved of them. But to float on the surface [*survager*] does not necessarily mean to survive [*survivre*] . . .)

Jacques Derrida, 'Biodegradables: Seven Diary Fragments'¹

At the end of Amelia Gray's *Threats*, a bit of paper floats to the surface. A slender leaf of paper hovers on the last page in a state of quiet desolation. It's a bit difficult to describe what seems to happen when I arrive there. Yet I feel the need to impress upon you to what end the image washes over and washes me out. The end of Gray's novel takes me away from myself to the extent that, if, in some tattered capacity, I'm still able to write to you, it's only while some part of me remains fastened to the edges of her work. A bit of paper draws me away from my *noyau*, which is to say that it takes me away from the kernel, the nucleus, the core, the very stone of my 'I.' By way of distancing, it carries *me* away from *myself* while it animates a small part of me which desires to be still, so absolutely still, to the point where there may be no more *I*, nor any traces of this 'I' left...

¹ Peggy Kamuf's translation of 'Biodegradables' appears in *Critical Inquiry* 15, Summer 1989 (812).

Spurred by the inexperience of reading *Threats*, this chapter maintains that reading extends beyond the book's end. I speculate that reading exceeds one's phenomenal involvement with a work, in part, because other textual bodies and conceptual trajectories beyond this tangible frame of reference seem able to intertwine as to summon one another, unofficially, and somewhat telepathically. While this chapter proposes that these subtle and startling interchanges can expand the definition of what constitutes 'reading,' it also suggests that the failure to end and the inability to ever be done with reading necessarily involves two antithetic whims: an instinct to persevere and a desire to respectfully retreat. This urge to disappear, it seems to me, is not always discernible from the desire for self-effacing sleep. Jean-Luc Nancy writes of sleep as a state of 'absolute detachment' in which the 'I' falls away from itself (*Fall of Sleep* 4, 6): 'I vegetate, I become a vegetative self, almost vegetable: rooted in its place, only traversed by the slow processes of respiration and other metabolic processes with which organs that take their ease in the relaxation of sleep are occupied' (5-6). Freud elsewhere concedes that the 'condition of sleep' resembles that of illness, which, in turn, induces '...a narcissistic withdrawal of the positions of the libido on to the subject's own self, or, more precisely, on to the single wish to sleep' (Freud, 'On Narcissism' 83).

If the guiding impetus is to disappear, it may 'not necessarily [be] in order to die *there*'—as Derrida writes in his bewitching 'Telepathy'—but perhaps, 'to live *there* concealed' ('Telepathy' 234, emphasis mine). '*There*,' for Derrida, refers both to a place carved out by the letters and words embroiled in the French « lac » and to the *lack* that is to remain his unfulfilled suicidal phantasy of ever drowning in a lake. If not amidst the letters and tendencies of Derrida's « lac », then to become concealed somewhere between the end and the ending of Gray's novel: this is perhaps where I desire to live. Arriving at the end of her work, the same part of me which longs to disappear also denies the possibility of the end and adamantly refuses the end from arriving. Reduced to the most primordial urge to prevent the book from closing, *I* become, in these middling instances, wholly preoccupied in this need to postpone the end from ending. Freud concedes elsewhere that an organism's instinct to survive is 'overcome' in instances of melancholia ('Mourning and Melancholia' 246). I'm speculating

that a primitive instinct of the sort which drowns in cases of depression could nonetheless inform my resistance to ending, in which case a creature actively attached to life might still be felt somewhere inside...

There's a moment in Gray's fiction where the trance regressive therapist Marie looks on as David secures a partition between himself and an intrusive public. David resolves to do so after witnessing on the evening news, under the caption 'Police Question Husband,' a moving picture of his somber figure lurking behind the curtain of his window (Gray 209-10). This televised incursion on his privacy compels David to board up his windows with plywood panels. Marie reasons that the attempt to assemble such a barrier betrays the internal work of a creature still intent on living: 'She saw David's action as the good sign that he still needed to feel some security in his world. When the loss of privacy was still felt, the self was still known to exist' (216). Derrida tells us that this sort of drive for protection is, itself, a sinuous threat: '...an aggression differing from itself, which then twists and tortures us in a spiraling movement' ('Paper or Me' 59). This threat 'does certainly put us in a twist,' he continues, 'it tortures us—but it is also funny, even side-splitting; it threatens nothing and no one. Serious as it is, the war sets only fantasies—in other words, spectres—against each other' ('Paper or Me' 60). In an effort to stave off perceived intruders and persistent spectators alike, David spray-paints the words 'I am still here' across the four boards tacked onto the front of the house (Gray 217). The words prompt two sisters passing by to reflect on the course of their lives: 'One of the ladies thought about the word "still," and the other thought about the word "here"' (219). Neither one pauses to linger over the word 'I.'

I dreamt last night that you and I were assembling bits left over from Gray's novel 'while reflecting them a little' (Derrida, 'Biodegradables' 812). I woke up this morning; you weren't there. *Threats* was propped up in an open tent-like configuration beside me. The book concealed from view the page upon which it was resting. I sensed that it was keeping my place in the book and urging me, first thing in the morning, to return to the page where I've stalled all this time. A frail bit of paper left

at the end shifts its inconspicuous weight onto me. Without my noticing, it seems to have been drawing itself out, stretching, and attracting to itself pertinent matter until it's morphed over time into a ponderous sponge drenched with all sorts of references to paper. Various textual indicators can explain why this image incites me to err on the side of water. At one point in the novel, David finds a threat taped behind a frame in his home which reads: 'I WILL LOCK YOU IN A ROOM MUCH LIKE YOUR OWN AND FILL IT WITH WATER' (Gray 130). A later reference to a puddle of water fails, as one might expect, to submerge the form of a ballooning secret: 'As an old woman, David's mother felt ineffective at most things. She remembered her daughter floating in five inches of water, stretched in it, fluid seeping into her little lungs' (Gray 243).

The lifeless body of David's two year-old sister floats here to the surface. In truth, she buoys in and out of the narrative like a bloated signifier. As a nameless entity, this small infant body is the unspoken word-thing which drifts around the borderline of the reader's frame of visibility. A disturbing water-stain on the pages of a perturbed family history, her death etches a wraith-like gap in the underside of *Threats*' belly. A 'wraith,' the *Oxford English Dictionary* claims, is a 'water-spirit' or an ethereal apparition capable of portending a person's death. Following Otto Rank's work on the 'reflections in mirrors, with shadows, with guardian spirits' in 'Der Doppelgänger,' Freud speculates that a 'double' can sometimes register as 'the uncanny harbinger of death' ('The Uncanny' 235). The premature death of David's younger sister functions as a natural precursor to the passing of David's wife. Franny may not succumb to a death by drowning yet she suffered quietly, and for a long time, as if life had taken gradual steps to immerse her underwater. And while she dies at the hands of her own destructive measures, death is perhaps not the end she privately sought. Mere moments before passing, she asks David to call for help: 'Could you call the fire department?' As if moved in that same moment to accept the circumstances under which the end for her was both imminent and inescapable, she repeals the request: 'You don't need to call anyone,' she said. 'Forget about it. I love you' (Gray 8). A mirror sits between David's sister and Franny where it reflects the solemn possibility that neither of them chose their own ends.

When forced to disengage from the book's generous framework, I sometimes feel as though I were sinking. My instinct at the end of an engaging read is to steady myself upon something buoyant and light. I approach the final image in *Threats* as if it were a flotation device. I remain convinced that this taped-in insert of paper adjures me to stay with it, in spite of an inability to maintain an exact focus on it. I tell myself that the image discourages close attention. I become lost in its delicate lines, as if it were the lasting effects of a natural disaster. I forget, sometimes, that a slender piece of tape across the left corner suggests that a creature once cut, arranged, and taped this venal scrap before taking its own leave. A copy of this phantom-image can be examined on the page prior to this chapter: can you spy a faint streak of *life*—or rather *light*, as I meant to write—along the upper left corner, where a slanted piece of tape appends the image to another blank surface? Derrida reminds us near the end of the opening citation in this chapter that whatever floats up to the surface doesn't necessarily live on (812). This pensile bit of dead-weight and suspended 'no-thing' preserves a host of pending questions concerning what remains, what lasts, and what, *if any-thing*, in the end, survives.

The 'commonsense view' of paper, as outlined by Derrida in an interview with *Les cahiers de médiologie* entitled 'Paper or Me, You Know... (New Speculations on a Luxury of the Poor),' defines paper on the basis of its utility. Paper is conceived there as an underlying support (the Greek word is *hypokeimenon*), a neutral canvas, and a subjectile material upon which letters and figures are inscribed (Derrida, 'Paper or Me' 42). According to this view, the technological and material history of paper is so entangled with the 'invention' of the human body along with the evolution of corresponding characteristics thought to define humans as distinct from other creatures, that paper tends to be reduced to a 'body-subject' (43). As a consequence, paper can no longer be dissociated from traditional theories of subjection, with '*being-beneath*,' nor from 'the submission or subjectedness of subjectivity in general' (43). The discreet and furtive work of a human 'I' 'who can sign or recognise [its] name on a surface or a paper support' compels the conflation of paper *with* the human body and ego (43). As in, 'Here I am, this is my body, see this signature on this paper—it's me, it's mine, it's me so-and-so, I sign before you, I present myself here; this paper that remains represents me' (57). Bits of engraved

paper are occasionally kept as a way to safekeep little pieces of a beloved other. This common phenomenon can be evinced in the event of a difficult passing, as when a strip of paper brushed by the tinge of a precious other becomes a sentimental relic or a momentary supplement for one's loss. Exceptional bits can be kept and cherished simply because traces of 'you' seem embedded within a paper's frail shell.

But a paper upon which nothing is written, 'a blank,' no longer offers itself as mere 'backing [*support*] for writing' (Derrida, 'Paper or Me' 43). When paper is no longer 'associated—like a leaf, moreover, or a silk paper—with a veil or canvas,' Derrida explains, '...writing's *blank white*, spacing, gaps, the "blanks which become what is important," always open up onto a *base* of paper' (53). Once paper loses 'this intended use or this dignity' as 'surface, support, and substance (*hypokeimenon*),' it's perceived as either 'the body of an irreplaceable copy' or 'the throwaway object' (43, 53). What collapses the distinction between the two is their shared susceptibility to decay, neglect, destruction, and loss (43-4). This threat is also what haunts the dream-image. Some unsalvageable morsel can always trail off before it might be recalled or transcribed. A related 'formula' considered by Jean-Bertrand Pontalis in his *Frontiers in Psychoanalysis*, touches on this problematic as when he writes: 'I had a dream last night, but only scraps of it remain...' (28).

I begin ever slightly to wade away from Gray's image. I tell myself that it's by forfeiting a close engagement with this bit that another textual approach can begin to present itself. A negligible paper-bit impresses upon me a desire to trail a reading practice which remembers how to dream. The end suddenly compels me to piece together the book as if its fictive parts were the remains of a protracted dream. I distance myself, then, in order to better receive 'live information' (« *des informations en direct* ») (Derrida, 'Telepathy' (« *Telepathie* ») 238). In an interview with Adrian Heathfield held in Paris and named 'Writing Not Yet Thought,' Cixous streamlines an Old French reference to 'communication by a divinely inspired messenger' (*OED*) where she speaks of writers who extend themselves towards the voices of angels on the telephone, coming from afar, '...from so

many friends that we don't know or on the contrary [...] it's paying that hearing attention which is also a way of opening one's heart [...] or] that part of the body to different musics so that we can receive messages' ('Writing Not Yet Thought'). Receiving, for Cixous, is '*the* precondition of all preconditions in order to create' ('Writing Not Yet Thought'). Reception of this kind could necessitate a predisposition to telepathic transmissions where 'telepathy,' as Freud defines it, is '...the alleged fact that an event which occurs at a particular time comes at about the same moment to the consciousness of someone distant in space, without the paths of communication that are familiar to us coming into question' (Freud, 'Dreams and Occultism' 36). Freud hesitates to discuss the relation between dreams and telepathy despite conceding, in his lecture 'Dreams and Occultism,' that '...the state of sleep seems particularly suited for receiving telepathic messages' (Derrida, 'Telepathy' 241; Freud 37).

I want to nurse this notion that a telepathic state of responsiveness can subtend one's dream-state and even inform one's writing-state. To read and to write is to open oneself up to a range of communicative possibilities, where, by a twist of absolute necessity and chance, an address somehow falls to you or it finds you; perhaps it even summons you without your noticing or it intending to. Writing, reading, and dreaming are altered receptive states in which things are constantly arising and befalling and happening. When we read and write, we seem very close to the realm of dreams: in drifting between the here-and-there of textual lines, we're incited to engage, often unknowingly, with a mass of angelic creatures, poets, readers, birds, trees, and insects alike. What readers and writers inherit from these idiomatic messengers is a world where lines cross and converge, occasionally, with some vexation, and mostly, without protest, issue, question, or complication. Dream-spaces and writing-spaces are expanses through which feelings and thoughts, ethereal bodies which belong to no-'one' in particular, transit in search of an expressive medium or a receiver. This chapter asserts that all sorts of aleatory impressions and desires are constantly darting across channels, between bodies, and amidst texts. Derrida kindles this textual effect in *Glas*, as indicated by the formation of two separate columns on each page. One column engages Hegel and the other Genet while each has little to no obvious relation to the other. Yet both work together to disturb the conventions of reading. Both columns at

times divaricate into further textual tendrils wherein bits of offshooting text convey short points of citational interest or tiny bursts of developing thought. Derrida's stylistic resolve to double and even to redouble the textual remains on the page encourages a kind of transversal approach to reading. The reader of *Glas* zigzags back-and-forth; intermittently crosses the unmarked spaces dividing both structures as if to challenge the unspoken rule that each side must be considered in their own time and at their own pace. The reader approaches the text 'by *à-coups*': in sudden blows, it bounces left to right, and again, from right to left, as if compelled by '...fits and starts, jolts, little successive jerks, while touching, tampering with the borders' (*Glas* 5).

To read as one dreams is to acquiesce to untold affinities and oddities as they concur in between or across the lines of at least *two* unassuming works. Another approach towards the end is able to emerge, then, when readers are incited to slip between the lines of two ostensibly unrelated texts. I'm suggesting that lines in Gray's *Threats*, for instance, intermittently reroute the reader towards lines in Derrida's 'Telepathy.' To read as one dreams is to remain open to the strange pulls and magical calls which inform a work 'outside' as much it does from the 'inside.' A dream-reading doesn't care to establish an exact relation to points. It exhibits little concern for an overarching structure. It roams without a given itinerary. It travels often. It brims with the risk of losing sight of itself, as of losing sight. Cixous issues the riveting solicitation to 'read as one dreams,' and summons readers in her 'Introduction to Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* and the *Hunting of the Snark*' '...to enjoy losing and relosing the game in many different ways' (231). The *Oxford English Dictionary* reminds us of a cluster of common idioms when it concedes that *to lose one's head* is to lose balance or to go to pieces; *to lose one's nerve* is to become frightened or to lose courage; *to lose sleep* is to agonise; *to lose heart* is to relinquish hope; where *to lose breath* is to die. To lose the memory of a dream is to be deprived of an unconscious telling, and so, to feel that some thing is either missing or has been irremediably missed. A line of advice to you, dear reader, as you get going: try not to anaesthetise what threatens in the dream-text to efface you. In recognition that it's perhaps more natural to resist than it is to give in, try relenting—see if it helps anything.

A Book Dreams

To glean the significance of this occult end-bit, I want to return to a moment in *Threats* where a dream-book figures prominently. David, a recent widower, is incited at this point in the novel to draw a line between two isolated events concerning the recurrence of ‘paper.’ While waiting to meet Detective Chico in the lobby of the police station, David witnesses a woman tear ‘a sliver of paper on the edge of her notebook’ and pack it into her mouth (Gray 159). Once admitted inside the detective’s office, the particulars of Franny’s autopsy are narrated to him. While the detail that a piece of paper, or cloth, the size of a small berry found inside Franny’s stomach suddenly registers to David with heightened import, the detective counters: ‘I doubt the two events are related.’ David remains unable to discern between two iterations of the same action. To further discourage David from feeding the connection, the detective adds: ‘It’s important to think about potential meaning’ (161). Challenging the assumption that public servants always recoil from mystical explanations in favour of more established scientific methods, the detective ‘...flashed the cover of the book at David, who saw only the gold-trimmed stars and half-moons before Chico turned it back’ (161). Consulting what appears to be an ancient oneiric work, the detective quickly parries that it always contains ‘some truth’ (161): ‘The oracles say that dreaming of blank paper means grief. That could mean worrying about grief, anticipating grief, progressing through grief. Dreaming of paper with words on it means great joy concerning a love affair’ (161). The detective pits two affective classes against one another: mourning versus pleasure, and melancholia versus *jouissance*. Yet the two are hardly indissociable for Freud who writes in ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ that the tormenting gestures to which a melancholic patient subjects itself is not *without* enjoyment, even if pleasure here suggests ‘...a satisfaction of trends of sadism and hate which relate to an object, and which have been turned round upon the subject’s own self’ (251). Rather than skirting in the direction of a presiding ambivalence, David remains discomfited by Chico’s conflicting set of readings: ‘That’s it?’ he responds: ‘Either grief or an affair? [...] Those two options seem to be kind of in opposition [...]. Does all printed paper suggest one or the other?’ (162).

The ability to discern between a paper replete with signs and a paper devoid of marks will become, for David, something of an inchoate skill. As he comes to unveil a scattering of Franny's sinister dispatches, he strains each time to ascertain, as if from a distance, which bits of paper seem marked by her defining typeface and which ones seem not. In this aleatory game played by himself only, it whittles down to an ability to rapidly scan as he reads. When detective Chico advances his own reductive reading, David wants simply to return to a bit of paper or *two*, as both mutually orbit his localised purview. His psyche comes naturally to confuse two crumpled morsels administered inside two discreet bodies at varying times and places. And because David witnesses one incident only then to be apprised of another, he mechanically strings them together as if they were elements of the same continuous scene. He insists on a correlation between two paper pellets; one found inside Franny's stomach and another wedged inside a stranger's mouth. Not only would it seem curious to David that a bit of folded paper could remain lodged like a 'foreign body' inside Franny's perishable body but further, that a piece of 'live information' could be transmitted to him through a most unusual act of mimicry. For mere moments before the detective could relay to him the findings of Franny's autopsy, a voluble woman in a waiting room had already debriefed David through the performance of an unwitting oral maneuver. The ingenuity of this fictive moment as it's scripted by Gray is that the courier of a trans-occult phenomenon or 'telepathic warning' assumes the shape of a most insidious character. Neither David nor the reader seems able to foresee this.

Even if Gray never openly concedes to such hypothetical interconnections, some events in *Threats* appear, in retrospect, as if they had been influenced by a Freudian position or even inspired by Derrida's aberrant work on mourning. In a chapter from *Taking on the Tradition* which seeks to divine Derrida's telepathic sources, Michael Naas points to the peculiar exclusion of 'Telepathy' from Derrida's text 'Envois' (79). 'Envois' is written and assembled as a series of romantic addresses privately and publicly destined for a beloved. Derrida alleges that the dispatches in 'Envois' were written on reproductions of a unique and fateful post card which he had once happened upon in

Oxford's Bodleian Library. He recalls in 'Envois' how this remarkable first chance-meeting overwhelmed him with such a 'feeling of hallucination' (9). The post card preserves for Derrida an unbelievable scene: Plato is seen to be standing *behind* Socrates who is seen to be writing with 'both hands' (Naas 80). By reversing the established order whereby Plato is apparently no longer the one who records and Socrates is no longer the one who discourses, the post card catastrophically subverts the foundations of Western philosophy ('Envois' 211). Both the mood and tone of 'Envois' are matched by those in 'Telepathy.' Naas himself remarks that since 'Telepathy' was written between the ninth and the fifteenth of July in 1979, it should have been first published as a constituent of 'Envois' in *The Post Card*. But instead, by some 'semblance of accident,' it was published in *Furor* a year later (Naas 79). Naas notes that a 'little lacuna' in Derrida's 'Envois' is thus preserved where a foreign body 'should have found its place' (Naas 79). Freud's writings on the relationship between dreams and the occult inspire this allusion to telepathy as a 'foreign body.' The 'theme of telepathy' would be pronounced by Freud, in a letter to Ernest Jones, as 'in essence, foreign to psychoanalysis' (qtd in Derrida 'Telepathy' 256). As an extraneous body lodged well within psychoanalysis, telepathy exhibits an ability to torment and to command from the inside-out. Naas argues that our common conception of telepathy is altered once Derrida incites readers to experience '*writing as telepathy*' (Naas 86), such that it involves '...not simply the correspondence between an internal event and an external one, the foreseeing of an event and the event that is foreseen, but the animation of both source and reception from some unfathomable depth and distance already within' (Naas 92). And in virtue of our inherent receptivity to such remote channels of communication, Naas conjectures that telepathy may also be construed as '...a more complex and refined version of the telegraph, or the telephone, except that the receiver could never really be taken off the hook' (Naas 85).

Freud often seeks to distinguish 'thought transference' (which translates in French to *transfert de pensée*, or in German, to *Gedankenübertragung*) from telepathy, '...firmly believing in the former and for a long time dancing the hesitation-waltz around the "telepathy" that would signal a warning as regards an "external" (???) event' (Derrida, 'Telepathy' 237). And though Freud vacillates in

determining, as in divining or deciding whether or not to further his investigations of ‘thought-transference,’ David innocently yields to a parapsychological hunch in *Threats*, without noticeable strain. When David witnesses a stranger ingest a discarded bit of paper, it reminds him of Franny who, without his then knowing, consumed a small dose of paper on the evening of her death. These correlated events dispatch a precarious echo or rippling-effect in *Threats* where, from this point on, David’s psychical constitution will be compromised by no shortage of occult omens and things seemingly out-of-place.

In the absence of any verbal potential or quality, the image of a blank cut-out nonetheless persists at the end of *Threats*. A bit of paper falls short of addressing a name or any semblance of a word, with the intent, it seems, of saying nothing. Gray’s work ends with a tail-piece drawn in the shape of a narrow rectangular box. In staying with it, I become convinced that it exposes itself to me, not as a base for textual reproduction, but as the site of an anonymous grave. Following Derrida who writes in *The Truth in Painting* that ‘everything will flower at the edge of a deconsecrated tomb’ (81-2), I intimate that Gray traces the edges of a poetic opening as a way of inciting the end, infinitely, to bloom. The textual opening which I’m following at the end of Gray’s *Threats* offers an occasion for readers to gradually begin to let themselves go. A spatial gap in the composition invites us to amble without direction, without instruction, and also, without prevision. The event of our becoming entangled in the textual whirlwind and errant *rêverie* that is reading this rectangular monument happens neither here nor there but in the buoyancy of a somewhere in-between.

The solicitation that reading extend beyond the end of Gray’s book is supplemented by an increasing urge of mine to conflate the lasting image of a ‘lack’ with a waterhole or a lake. I admit to floundering a bit here, as I write. But in the midst of such turbulent reflections, I’m guided by an impulse to waver between the semblance of a ‘lack’ and the plenitude of a ‘lake.’ I muddle these reference-points to the point where the etymological lineages of both words seem to converge in the noun ‘lacuna,’ as it’s derived from the Latin *lacus* or English ‘lake.’ A ‘lacuna’ is defined by the

Oxford English Dictionary as a gap, a small anatomical bone cavity, an air-space in the cellular tissue of plants, or an obvious compositional break (*OED*). Just as Derrida takes care to note, one morning, what barely remains of a former night's dream, I remain drawn to the connections and recollections which this image resuscitates. And while it abstains from offering any written mark, this bit of paper could easily '...surge up through the morning fog in the manner of a damp ruin, jagged, covered with algae and signs' (Derrida, 'Biodegradables' 812). Brimming silently with incalculable hints and subdued insinuations, I propose that this image encrypts an approach to dream-reading. As the finite remnant of a devastating structure, it summons the memory of a dream-reference whose dichotomous character it emends and then escapes. In the manner of biodegradable matter, an insignificant bit of paper is on the verge of becoming '...hardly a thing since it remains a thing that does not remain, an essentially decomposable thing destined to pass away, to lose its identity as a thing and to become again a non-thing' (Derrida, 'Biodegradables' 813). Nearly nothing remains but the echo of an empty 'tomb' which wafts around, mid-air, without a referent or a body to hold onto. And while this sheet of paper could dissolve at any moment or aimlessly float away, as of now, it remains somehow curiously *still*.

In-Between

I want to draw your attention to two short lines in Derrida's 'Envois.' Both lines are written as if they were meant to protect the gaps inscribed before, after, and in-between them. The first line begins without introductory lead-in, as if the bit of syntax which should precede it was either burnt or deliberately cut out:

8 July 1979.
 during all the time that I spent cutting out these two little
 flowers for you.
 follow the line of my drawing, my life line, my line of
 conduct. (202)

Vulnerable and open, these lines work neither to disclose nor to close in upon a range of intended meanings. And yet, they seem to encrypt a code intended for only one other person. I dream that I

might be the sole addressee for whom these lines were meant to be translated. Just as a poet might cut out lines only to leave in the half-finished bits he prefers, I dream that the cutting of these two botanical specimens is posed here as an analogy for editing. By inciting a following, Derrida requests these lines to be thoughtfully recited; as if to commit their essences to memory for him could lead to a deeper understanding. Of these flowers which are cut for a singular 'you,' his last command entreats his admirer and conversant not simply to sort through all the lines of his written texts, neither to imitate nor to initiate them, but very literally, to come after them. Derrida's exercise in cutting is intercepted by a plea that his steps be not only retraced but also be surpassed. This is an incisive moment in Derrida's writing: he dares to solicit from his beloved correspondent what could never be determined; in short, the unknowable. In asking that she follow him, he issues the impossible demand that she also outlive him. To this end, he writes at the end of June in 'Envois' that he is 'Afraid of dying, yes, but that is nothing next to the other terror, I know no worse: to survive, to survive my love, to survive you, those whom I love and who know it, to be the last to preserve what I wanted to pass on to you, my love' (199). While the transmission of 'live information' hangs for Derrida on the continued existence of this nameless confidante, an infinite desire to want to confer everything to this other, ideally, without wires and where possible, without letters, continues here to enchant.

Derrida imparts a suicidal dream in 'Envois' eight pages and thirty-nine days earlier, on May 31, 1979, when he writes: 'I'd like to die. In the mountains, a lake, long before you. This is what I dream of... Before my death I would give orders. If you aren't there, my body is to be pulled out of the lake and burned, my ashes are to be sent to you, the urn well protected ('fragile') but not registered, in order to tempt fate' (196). The breakable urn seems directly to summon the memory of Franny's ashen remains at the very beginning of *Threats*. Shattered glass adhesives strewn across the package notify the carrier, receiver, and reader of its fragile contents. The absence of Franny's name on the urn and package suggests that 'an end' can always be adjourned for those who are not yet named or pronounced as such. Not knowing what to make of it, I hesitate now to share with you the end of Derrida's dream given that it succumbs to a rather curious narcissistic veering: 'And then you would

enjoy mixing my ashes with what you eat (morning coffee, brioche, tea at 5 o'clock, etc.). After a certain dose, you would start to go numb, to fall in love with yourself, I would watch you slowly advance toward death, you would approach me within you with a serenity that we have no idea of, absolute reconciliation. And you would give orders While waiting for you I'm going to sleep, you're always there, my sweet love' (196).

David writes a final letter to Franny. Near the end of the work, the paramedics find him prostrate in his disorderly basement with the contents of Franny's ashes dispersed across his bedridden body. The paramedics work to unlodge his last address to Franny from his mouth where it interferes with his ability to breathe. Once extracted from his mouth, the address discloses a tangled and disjointed confession concerning an altar in the woods which we learn David had once discovered: 'IN THE LONG TIME AGO WHEN I WAS ALL ONCE GIRLS IN THE FOREST ONCE I MEANT TO SAY I FOUND AN ~~ALTAR~~ THERE IN THE WOODS...' (Gray 273). David deduces that Franny habitually retreated to a designated area in the woods where she lost herself in private ceremonial worship. He derives this speculation given the arrangement of stones and bricks and things he allegedly finds around an indistinct center-piece. Initially, he posits at this center the word '~~BOLUS~~,' derived from the Greek *βῶλος*, meaning a 'clod' or a 'lump of earth.' The *Oxford English Dictionary* tells us that 'bolus' is a drug which rapidly enters the blood stream by way of a singular dose. Of a rounder form, this 'medicine' was eventually 'adapted for swallowing' despite it being 'larger than an ordinary pill' (*OED*). And since the horizontal mark across the word indicates that 'bolus' was meant to be edited out, the ensuing line works to supplement our reading of the effaced word: 'OF SWEET SKULL AND TISSUE, AN OWL SAVING A FINE CHEW FOR LATER, THE PERISHED CREATURE PRESENTS ITS ~~HISTORY~~ THERE TO FIND OR NOT FIND, FOR US TO THINK OR NOT THINK THAT SOMEDAY WE MIGHT BE SUCH' (273).

David insinuates in these statements that the remains of a 'perished creature' both confirms *and* withholds the truth of its own narrative history. Something like a lateral response to a passage found near the end of the preface in G.W.F. Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* also emerges, then, on

David's behalf. In the preface to *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel affirms that philosophy, which he renders synonymous with 'the thought of the world,' can only be acceded to once 'actuality' has come to eventuate itself (12-3). History teaches that '...only when actuality is mature that the ideal first appears over against the real and that the ideal apprehends this same real world in its substance and builds it up for itself into the shape of an intellectual realm' (13). Hegel ends this passage with a poetic reference to the 'Owl of Minerva' who 'spreads its wings only with the falling of dusk' (13). Philosophy's conciliatory work can only be enacted for Hegel late, at the end of the day, that is, after the facts have had time to appropriately settle. Otherwise put, historical events must come fully to pass if philosophy can ever work to objectively reflect them. David scratches out the word '~~HISTORY~~' and perhaps unintentionally revises the philosophical claim that mortality is an undeniable historical fact. Instead, he seems to propose that 'the end' remains only ever *a possibility*—even for those who find themselves in the very vicinity of the cadaverous thing which *should* ratify for them death's irrefutable actuality.

A snuffed out bolus becomes for David the mystifying cause of Franny's death. Inverted parallels may also be drawn between Derrida's dream of 'absolute reconciliation' and David's reunion-phantasy inasmuch as each letter-writer longs to merge with their most desired addressee. Derrida entreats his addressee on August 30th 1977 to fall asleep (« *Endors-toi* ») by taking a piece of him, of (t)his « *envoi* », inside her mouth (« *en le prenant dans ta bouche. C'est une part de moi que je m'adresse à toi* ») ('Envois' 51). While Derrida only dreams of watching his beloved die as she regales on his own incinerated remains, David is moved in Gray's overturned staging of the same scene to eat the medium of his own epistle. This oral incident recalls the ancillary bit of paper found in Franny's stomach after the event of her own passing. David too consumes his own symbolic leftover. In copying Franny, he hopes perhaps either to flatter or to tempt her into presiding over the event of his own attempted suicide, as if only this death-sentinel could ensure that he crosses over to her safely. As a consequence of this oral simulation, David ingests an ill-fated dose which turns out to be much 'larger than an ordinary pill.' He takes into himself the dose upon which the bare residuum of his identity happens to be inscribed. In preparation for an unimaginable end, he holds onto a psychic bit, a

paper boat, which becomes for him the last vessel of hope upon which his dream of reuniting remains, ever tenuously, afloat.

At various points in Derrida's writing, everything seems to unfold *between* two correspondents, two columns, two flowers, two worlds. In 'Paper or Me, You Know...' Derrida writes of life drawn-out as if it were a string linking two shores (« *deux rives* ») or two dreams (« *deux rêves* ») to one another (Naas, *Derrida From Now On* 223). The first of two dreams, driven by a nostalgic grief concerning the impermanence of paper, involves the impossible desire to 'save everything' ('Paper or Me' 47). Derrida reminds us that the very existence of the unconscious depends on the desire to 'give nothing up' ('Paper or Me' 47). This desire for conservation can be expressed in the urge to safeguard all those precious and trifling bits of paper, each identified by '...color or weight, the thickness and the resistance of a sheet—its folds, the back of its recto-verso, the *fantasies* of contact, of caress, of intimacy, proximity, resistance, or promise' (Derrida, 'Paper or Me' 62-3). Against this freighted and cluttered phantasy, Derrida's second dream involves a 'paperless' existence. No longer burdened by the weighted consumption of paper, this 'lighter' dream would unfold 'without machines, conventions, or repetitions,' and even, 'without writing' (Naas 223). This second dream is what sometimes occurs to Derrida as the definition 'of the living part of life' according to which pen and paper are abandoned or occasionally forgotten in the bustling enactment of everyday activities ('Paper or Me' 65). This chapter affirms that while reading extends well beyond its own end—touching as much on the living part of a dream as on the dreaming part of a life—it continues nonetheless to rely on the intimacy of sustained textual contact, irrespective of whether reading is enacted on- or off-paper.

Start Again

I have the impression that this may be the start of something. It took time for this collation to suggest itself to me, as for two mirror-images to float up to the surface simultaneously. The sliver of paper which barely appears at the end of *Threats*, as if it were meant to be forgotten, is not the first of its

kind. Already, you see, it's the shadow of another, a retral alter, a double, and the last of two open-ended parentheses ('] [' or ' [') as if the duration of this entire piece of fiction could be wedged between two rectangular inversions. A piece of tape pressed along the upper right-hand corner of the final insert is arranged in such a way as to suggest a reversed ordering: a piece of tape, equal in both length and width, already appears on the upper left-hand corner of another copy. I'd forgotten this. I must have been absent from the page to have continued until now to miss it. As if only an image produced by reflection could spur this sort of retro-spective fixation, I return here to the *first* of two images. A rectangular sheet of paper, with the same dimensions as the last, greets readers on the second page of Gray's work. It's impressed there with the typewritten words 'THREATS' and followed below by the author's name 'AMELIA GRAY.' If it were not for this key difference, that the first insert introduces the work while the last remains 'virginal, both sensitive and impassive, both friendly and resistant' to interpretation (Derrida, 'Paper or me' 62), both sheets would be exact copies of each other. As an experiment in dream-reading, I hold the first of Gray's images up to a mirror: 'THREATS' inverts to 'STAERHT.' My mouth takes an awkward turn towards a nearly illegible word-'thing.' The *Oxford English Dictionary* suggests that if traced back to the Middle Dutch *staert* (with a silent 'h'), the word could refer to the handle of a broom, the tail of an animal, the stalk of a plant, the stem of a candlestick, or to an 'outgrowth, a projecting point or spur; *esp.* a point of a stag's horn' (*OED*). A stem and a stalk are long cylindrical parts distinguished from the head and which often support the entity's whole body. They are the legs: the locomotory appendages or bodily limbs via which balanced steps and transits and shifts are commonly persuaded to occur. Things are perhaps beginning to move a bit quickly...

Maurice Blanchot begins *L'espace littéraire* (*The Space of Literature*) with a succinct note on the center of the book which attracts it: « *Un livre, même fragmentaire, a un centre qui l'attire* ». Blanchot writes that the book conceals its source from the one who writes. Those animated by a desire to write are blind or ignorant of this center. Of interest, then, is not necessarily a starting-point but a diverting effect which takes place at the end—as when the end of a work is able to start or startle

something. Blanchot writes that the dream is something of the same which eternally reflects back the same (282). We search for an originary model and desire to be sent back (*renvoyé*) to an origin, the source of a beginning as to an initial revelation, despite there being none (Blanchot 282). A looking-glass offers an endless reflection of the same and maintains the illusion of a limitless depth whenever it happens to face another mirror. But a blank image interrupts this seamless continuity. And while it partly simulates the effect of a mirror whenever it reverses the conditions of a preceding image, it fails nonetheless to reproduce an exact copy. Between two images, Gray's reader encounters a sameness which *swerves*.

Gray's configuration of the novel often honours this sort of refracting effect. The last chapter, for instance, reframes the particulars of an earlier scene where the same details are suddenly ensconced in a warmer, more nuanced light. The fourth chapter in the book offers the bare bones of the final conversation held between Franny and David. Franny's last utterances to David are complemented by his offhand responses: 'What did you get into?' She tips her head to the side and back, squints at him, while resting against the wall. "'That's your problem,'" she said' (9). The conversation reproduced in the last chapter of the work is infused with the sort of sentimental tincture that's precisely missing in the earlier rendition: 'He sat beside her, a helpless observer, his only power in witness, some bleak ability to watch and record the event in his own brain, which sent the order to his lungs to breathe with her while she still breathed, channels rising, sparks of interior electrical connection fading with the mind's fool hope that it could create some kind of measurable response, to provide some worth or warmth' (277-8). The conclusion diffuses an expansive breath into David's and Franny's otherwise shallow attempts at communication. It protracts the pauses which extend between their spoken addresses and imbues them with expressive feeling. Their exchanges take here a wholly different form. As an instance of sameness, the last scene becomes radically traversed by these slight, tender differences. As in the case of a blank image, Gray reminds us that a reflection of the same can produce startling differences.

Between the Flowers

I'm partial to the possibility that a dream can indirectly and unknowingly entreat another creature. I hesitate to know whether it's ever appropriate to relay a dream-event that isn't mine. And yet, I'm moved at the moment to relay to you the details of a young woman's dream, which conjures me a little. This dream begins with a center-piece which emerges from a nodular preoccupation hidden in a girl's unconscious. It's deceptive to insist that a dream can reveal anything to anyone who hasn't dreamt it. Still, something in this young woman's dream seems infinitely to part open. The dream welcomes the possibility of being read without eliciting an exact interpretation. I present this dehiscent dream to you as it informs this chapter's approach to dream-reading. It inspires the chapter to idle amidst at least two points of views and two inconceivable points in a girl's projected future. It invites an approach to reading, which, rather than subscribing to the need for an interpretive conclusion, honours ambivalence and practices indecision. Freud initially records the girl's dream and yet refrains from offering the case-reading in the first publication of his *Die Traumdeutung (Interpretation of Dreams)* in 1899. He reserves the telling for the fourth edition of his extensively revised and embellished structure which he publishes in 1914, some fifteen years after the first edition is printed. Freud concedes that he is later motivated by an interest in publishing the dream-content so that he might corroborate the presence of 'simpler, more perspicuous and more characteristic symbolism' in the dreams of 'normal persons' (385).

'I arrange the centre of a table with flowers for a birthday' (Freud, *Interpretation* 385). A girl 'of a somewhat prudish and reserved character' begins, as such, to recount her dream to Freud. Her telling focuses initially on the '*center of the table*' which Freud remarks to be an unusual way to begin a dream. While Freud assumes that symbols in the dreams of 'normal persons' are more amenable to interpretation, the 'powerful workings of the censorship and of the consequently more far-reaching dream-distortion' in neurotics is thought to produce more obscure and opaque symbolisms (385). To avoid neglecting the dreamer's own associations, Freud warns against ascribing too much importance

to the work of symbols in dreams (372). His reading, in any case, seems to make rather liberal use of them:

‘Popular’ symbolism made it possible for me to translate the dream unaided. It was an expression of her bridal wishes: the table with its floral centre-piece symbolized herself and her genitals; she represented her wishes for the future as fulfilled, for her thoughts were already occupied with the birth of a baby; so her marriage lay a long way behind her. (Freud 386)

Freud notes that he ‘carefully avoided suggesting the meaning of the symbols to her’ (*Interpretation* 386). But in failing to consider telepathic by-products as potential sources of interference, Freud forgets that the simple act of thinking a word as of formulating a thought or question *could* potentially intercept the patient’s anamnesis. She tells him that the flowers in her dream were ‘*lilies of the valley, violets, and pinks or carnations*’ (386). Freud moves briskly from *lily*, as a symbol of purity, to *valley*, as a ‘frequent female symbol in dreams,’ so as to ratify here again ‘the preciousness of her virginity.’ And as he capers over to *violet*, the word prompts in him the immediate association to the French *viol*. He reasons that a surprising evocation of ‘violate’ on her part subsequently validates his own and further secures his interpretation that this dream concerns ‘the violence of defloration [...] and possibly also a masochistic trait in her character’ (386). Carnations are the flowers her *fiancé* gave her, and often, ‘in great numbers’ (387). Despite asserting that pink carnations initially incite to mind the idea of *colour* for her (386), the girl quickly confesses that ‘...what had occurred to her had not been ‘*colour*’ but ‘*incarnation*’—the word I [Freud] had expected. Incidentally ‘*colour*’ itself was not a very remote association, but was determined by the meaning of ‘*carnation*’ (flesh-colour)—[and] was determined, that is, by the same complex’ (387). The word which Freud himself had either anticipated or precipitated can be understood in the figurative verb-sense of ‘to make fleshly or carnal; to degrade from spiritual nature, [to] despiritualize,’ or, to noun, as a ‘conception (in the womb)’ (*OED*). It seems possible to suppose that the analyst transferentially interjects the word into a latent precinct of the girl’s unconscious. But instead, Freud discerns that ‘This lack of straightforwardness showed that it was at this point that resistance was greatest [...], that this was where the symbolism was most clear and that the struggle between libido and its repression was at its most intense in relation to this phallic theme’ (387). According to Freud, the flowers which

were thought to have been expensive, the kind ‘*one has to pay for* [...] express her expectation that her husband would know how to appreciate its value’ (386). Freud construes this expression to mean that she had ‘to pay with her life for being a wife and a mother’ (386). ‘The gift of flowers,’ here, ‘an exciting factor of the dream derived from her current life’ is used, according to Freud, ‘to express an exchange of sexual gifts: she was making a gift of her virginity and expected a full emotional and sexual life in return for it’ (387).

Freud flutters around a gap in the girl’s dream: ‘*I decorate the flowers with green crinkled paper.*’ While she shares her association of the colour green with ‘*hope*’ (388), Freud instead infers from this verdant reference ‘another link with pregnancy’ (388). The dictionary tells us that the pigment ‘of grass, foliage, [or] emerald’ conveys the sense of desiring ‘earnestly,’ as in, ‘to yearn’ or to ‘long *after, for, or to* do something’ (*OED*). She adds that the green crinkled paper was ‘*fancy paper*’—of the sort used for uncovering common flowerpots—and meant, as such, ‘*to hide untidy things, whatever was to be seen, which was not pretty to the eye; there is a gap, a little space in the flowers. The paper looks like velvet or moss...*’ (388). Skimming effortlessly across the gap, the girl settles instead on the descriptive texture of a familiar green paper. Resolved to fill the little gap with her shame, Freud’s voice-over once again projects a symbolic reading: ‘The horizontal attribute of a table must also have contributed something to the symbol [of her virginity]’ (387). He adds, a page later, that ‘She was making herself beautiful for him and was admitting physical defects which she felt ashamed of and was trying to correct. Her associations ‘*velvet*’ and ‘*moss*’ were a clear indication of a reference to pubic hair’ (388). Freud reads on the dreamer’s part an hysterical identification with her fiancé whom he believes to be the one arranging the flowers in the dream; who, in truth, is preparing and placing *her* at the center of *his* table. And while the dream summons in her such a memorable ‘*feeling of happiness*’ (385), Freud is quick to rationalise the floating heart of her dream into a rigid shape:

Her shame put forward as an excuse for the signs of sensuality the fact that its purpose was the production of a baby. Material considerations, too, alien to a lover’s mind, found their way to expression. The affect attaching to this simple dream—a feeling of

happiness—indicated that powerful emotional complexes had found satisfaction in it.
(388)

Freud's insistent reading prods the dream away from a most intimate center. And in the interim of this confident sweep, a piece of the dream as silent as a little hair continues nonetheless to seize.

The dreamer admits that she 'saw herself like a table, without projections' (387). Freud fails to consider that this self-portrait is perhaps the confected product of her own rising anxieties and fears concerning a paucity in texture or depth as it pertains to her own character. He turns his attention instead to an admission made concerning 'her physical deficiencies' and the way she 'overcompensated for them by an overvaluation of her virginity' (388). He makes his way back to the only feasible 'center,' or focus-piece, which he takes to be her virginity (387). His reading inevitably comes short of reaching the little space which she solemnly confides to him. Very tentatively, he considers the horizontal line of the table without engaging the potential purpose and utility of this precise piece of furniture. Nowhere does he strive to account for the significance of the table's lateral extension beyond the genital and reproductive nuances which he rather commonly detects. Nor does he think to call attention to communal activities—eating, conversing, writing—so often enacted around and upon this site of combined nourishings. Freud surmises that 'In a deeper layer of the dream, the phrase *I arrange...*' must no doubt have an auto-erotic, that is to say, an infantile, significance' (387). Rather than musing over the dynamic properties of a framework she unconsciously projects as an image of herself, he doesn't think to wonder whether *she* too is *arranging* her own conflicted feelings concerning an impending modification in her lifeline. The space between two flowers is not the place, according to Freud, where the girl may have rooted out a slender piece of exuberant hope for herself. He overlooks any preoccupation on her part with the impossibility of knowing how to live, of knowing how to act, as of knowing how to feel. He fails to consider the unconscious order according to which she lists certain floral types as an attempt, perhaps, to resist her own unclassifiable state of existence. The dreamer appears in Freud's transcription more as the vacuous shadow of an expectant figuration than as an anxious body in the midst of a life-altering transition.

A ‘little space in the flowers’ reminds us that the non-dreamer’s attempt to fill the gap with their own analytical presumptions closes what was never theirs initially to seal. The robust framing of Freud’s interpretation smothers the buoyant affect which radiates from the center of the girl’s dream. Pontalis writes about a gap which manifests between ‘...the dream put in pictures and the dream put into words—sometimes one might even say *put to death*’ (*Frontiers in Psychoanalysis* 27, emphasis mine). The ‘dream put in pictures’ refers to the visual product of a dreamer’s imaginary. The ‘dream put into words’ recalls the significance of a dream as it’s converted into linguistic terms. In *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, Cixous writes of Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams* as an expectorant which ‘wants to make the dream cough up’ (107). And while she praises Freud’s *œuvre* as a ‘marvelous book,’ she condemns ‘interpretation’ as the enemy of the dream, as the ‘plant lice’ which ‘devours’ ‘the flesh of the dream’ such that it’s, suddenly, ‘no longer there. This is the great danger’ (107). An unassuming dream-space falls somewhere between the content offered and the interpretation given, and there, it defies any efforts to over-determine it. To try to fill the hole with an interpretation is to attempt to make an end of it, and this effort is one which this little open-spacing works continuously to obviate.

End-Lines

It’s nearly the end and I can’t let go. I admit to a tiny abiding hope of grazing upon a steering sign somewhere along the edges of Gray’s retreating hand-work. Unable to pull away, I refuse to *see* the work come to an end. I yield instead to this venial scrap as if it were a gateway into the book’s unexplained recesses. When the book draws to an end, its ability to draw ‘you on’ and to draw ‘on you too’ perhaps draws to an end too (Wood, *Without Mastery* 95). But even after a connective wire between reader and writer has long been fused, a text can continue to in-form you. If the end of a persuasive book initially incites you to awaken from its fragrant dream, vestiges of it no less persist and continue, episodically, to wash over you. The end of a book is no more a final point than it is a scintilla reflecting the narrative’s unanswered questions back to you. The end flashes to a near-close where it re-casts a few sparing lines in the book from which you remain unable or unwilling to

disengage. Still, the end cuts all the same. If the image of a blank cut-out is, as I suspect, too much for either one of us to bear, it may be safer to proceed as a pair. It's perhaps inconsiderate of me to request this of you, or worse still, to expect it, and yet I extend a *linea vitae* out to you all the same, should there develop between us a way to rejoin the formations of all these varying 'cuts' and 'ends.'

An occult reading-practice performed under the name of 'palmistry' or 'chiromancy' relies on hand inspection to divine the ambit of one's past and future. According to this 'art,' a lifeline is the supposed furrow which curves from the base of your palm towards your thumb. It's an incredible idea: the notion that the tale of your life can be deduced from the appearance of a skin fold, where the chains, crosses, cuts, stars, dots, and breaks discerned along the way might betray a range of instructive meanings. Presumably, it's important not to discount the possibility of significant variations in the line's figuration given that the topography of one palm is never an exact mirror of the other. Without avowing or disavowing the magnitude of this fortune-telling custom, I choose the possibility of your striated palm without knowing if you will think, or not think, to return the gesture. To await the grasp of your hand like this, without desire to persuade or to insist that you do the same, is to exercise radical acceptance in the presence, or non-presence, of what cannot be mastered between us. This is my cut; my solemn lot to bear, the one which writes itself on me and which compels me to go on writing. It is my fortune—at once assigned and hastily precipitated by a swarm of disconnected forces. I've been determined since before the very beginning to send for *you*, dear reader, to both address and to keep watch for you, even as it always falls on you to choose whether or not to engage. This sense of a 'cut' as the allotment of one's destined and divined bits beseeches me to acquiesce to the inevitability of a fated course which remains beyond my capacity to either fore-see or fore-know. It has to do with resigning, then; with accepting what comes and even of accepting the possibility of what may never come. In some sense, my lifeline is already cast interminably in your direction. This simple fold simulates the function of an extendible fishing line as it strains to reach you. As in a dream, then, this fishing line would be '...an apparently simple line, without a reel, without the interposed machine turning and fishing all by itself' (Derrida, *Truth in Painting* 157). As such, it could continue to extend

itself towards you, this end of my line, in addition to all these lines which write and which continue, here, to be written.

Writing for me is akin to shipping little pieces of myself towards the possibility of a recipient—which happens to be *you*—all the while hoping and praying that this line of contact will not at some point falter or abruptly cut out. As a defense, perhaps, against the possibility of being interrupted, I'm reminded of a number of texts in which the writer requests for their reader's hand. Derrida, for instance, writes at the end of 'Telepathy,' 'Will you give me your hand? no more time to lose...' (261). In 'What is it o'clock?' Cixous writes:

Writing is the movement to return to where we haven't been 'in person' but only in wounded flesh, in frightened animal, movement to go farther than far, and also, effort to *go too far*, to where I'm afraid to go [...] When I write I ask for your hand; with your hand I'll go too far and I won't be afraid anymore of not coming back. Without my knowing it, it is already *love*. (62)

G.H., the trembling sculptor of Clarice Lispector's *The Passion According to G.H.*, musters the courage to write her memoir-piece by enjoining her absent reader to 'Hold my hand, because I feel that I'm going...' (54).

Holding someone's hand was always my idea of joy. Often before falling asleep—in that small struggle not to lose consciousness and enter the greater world—often, before having the courage to go toward the greatness of sleep, I pretend that someone is holding my hand and I go, go toward the enormous absence of form that is sleep. And when even then I can't find the courage, then I dream. (Lispector 9)

At a critical moment in the fiction, a *lifeline* or a hand line can reel the reader back in towards a narrative's dimming light. Naas writes about a *lifeline* in *Derrida From Now On* as '...a safety line, a cord or rope thrown out to save us from disaster or death, from drowning, for example, a link or line that comes to our aid at a critical moment, attaching us to life and keeping us alive' (Naas 224). A line cast in a work of fiction could always malfunction, as when it begins to wear thin or fails to animate, in a character or a reader, the requisite will to go on. The event of Franny's suicide drags a dotted line through the algal culverts of Gray's wayward narrative. Her hand, which seldom extends towards the reader, is as slippery as a wary invertebrate. To brush against it is to watch her promptly glide back into the aqueous source where her secrets are also fed. And as her hand recedes from view, details of

her *life death* intermittently spring back to the surface. In this way, perhaps, narrative bits of her continue to be saved.

Lifelines

A short poem written by Derrida first appears in the publication *Orange Export Ltd., 1969-1986*, under a section entitled ‘Monostiches/ One-Line Poems’:

Petite fuite alexandrine (vers toi)
 Prière à desceller d’une ligne de vie
 Jacques Derrida.

When submitting two versions of this poem for publication to *Cahier de l’Herne*, Derrida sent a typed version to the editors of the volume. In the letter sent, which included a copy of the poem, he wrote ‘Petite *suite* alexandrine...’ instead of ‘Petite *fuite* alexandrine...’ This marginal detail is relegated to an endnote in a chapter Naas dedicates to his reading of this same poem in *Derrida From Now On*. A ‘suite’ implies that the poem was meant as a sequel, a next installment, or as a continuation of something which came prior to it. (I’m precipitately compelled, without obvious explanation, to recall now the only line to constitute the opening verse of Derrida’s first published poem. But you’ll have to patiently wait for it, as it’s not yet time...)

In the direction of an unspecified ‘you’ (« toi »), Derrida distends a solemn request. The French verb *desceller* conveys a desire to ‘tear out what was sealed in [...] in the sense that one speaks of loosening or working loose a stone (*pierre*)—Littré’s example—from a wall’ (Naas 217). The poem detaches itself, as pollen wanders in chance of a receptive stigma or a reader. An alexandrine verse with twelve fleeting syllables and a metrical break in the middle (between *desceller* and *d’une*) transfers a well-kept secret without saying a word of it (Naas 214). It spaces the chance for a veiled request to cut through the silence of a prayer. Following Naas’ instruction, the poem may issue an appeal to become unsealed from a lifeline, to become untethered from a destination, as if a life could somehow slip through a crevice by way of an emitted *fuite*, a seepage, a little leak, a poetic flight. I

read in Derrida's poem a preoccupation with drawing out the most of life in the least amount of lines. Every line written might correspond to another line, as in any of the three arterial lines—the headline, the heart line, or the lifeline—incised along the palm's interior scape. Of all the possible technological and textual lines we might be able to conjure up here, it's as if Derrida admits to a curiosity concerning his own lines, when they might finally taper off, and whether this event would perhaps coincide with the instant when 'everyone will be there, and me, I will have to leave' (Derrida, 'Envois' 61). It's as if his writing resolves to cede, at an appropriate time and place, where it might make the most suitable cut: 'The virgin vine has now covered the entire pane [*vitre*], the entire life [*vie*], the room is in darkness, one might say algae, a twilight, I have the impression of floating in a glass coffer, between two waters, long after we' (Derrida, 'Envois' 61).

The preceding passage is uprooted from Derrida's 'Envois.' The elliptical cut takes place just after two bodies meet where 'we' intersects ever so briefly. Derrida intimates that whatever is to follow this 'we,' whether it be a 'long after' or an 'ever after,' will not regretfully last: 'There is immortality between you and me, whom we shall see die. Translate: we shall see us die' (Derrida, 'Writing Proofs' 43). Derrida insinuates that the notion of an eternal life, as it's ignited and sustained by the cosmic convergence of two singular bodies, will be consumed at the instant when their fated end—the end which watches over them—outlives them. In death, the dying one, the one who carries 'the impression of floating' in a glass chest, also takes with him the image of the one he loves. Whereas, on the other side of life, the interminable span of mourning nearly consumes itself in a singular effort to immortalise what is loved and lost. But Derrida suggests that such a commitment could perhaps be parried by the honest desire to no longer desire immortality, '...neither for ourselves nor for the others who might still preserve us *in them*' (Derrida, 'Writing Proofs' 43). Derrida confronts the impossibility of resigning to death with his idiomatic writing. He writes to hold himself accountable before another. In carefully setting in front of you these written poetic lines, he concurrently entreats his own lifeline to relent its mortal hold of him, hoping, as such, that this verse might unseal him or else entirely free him from the biological impulse to cling desperately to life, and even, to cling onto the improbable chance

of an afterlife. Derrida signs his name as a promise to see through this defiant act of resignation. At least, this is how I read him. When Derrida greets the end of three poetic lines with a singular dot, he seems poised, at least for a short time, to decisively cut the line with a tiny stone. The inclusion of a prayer nonetheless betrays, on his part, a lasting struggle, a lack of *savoir-fair*, as well as an abiding search for a responsible place to cut: out.

Decreation

On June 6, 1977, Derrida recalls briefly in 'Envois' an exchange which took place in Balliol College at Oxford after presenting a seminar on *La différance*. A young student at the time who was well-acquainted with Derrida's private and public engagement with questions of finitude asks him, to provoke and possibly to seduce him 'a bit,' why he doesn't kill himself. Concerning this memorable event, Derrida retrospectively writes in 'Envois': 'In his eyes this was the only way to "forward" (his word) my "theoretical discourse," the only way to be consequent and to produce an event. Instead of arguing, of sending him back to this or that, I answered with a pirouette... And what proves to you, I said to him if I remember correctly, that I do not do so, and more than once' (15). The possibility of a certain fictional flair with which Derrida presents this anecdote to his readers in 'Envois' cannot be overlooked. But since this chapter spins around a variety of fictive tellings, it seeks to evaluate the content of a dream with the same sort of commitment and consideration as it would offer the recitation of any autobiographical detail. Derrida responds, then, by reminding the young student that there are plenty of spaces to snuff oneself out, insofar as reading and writing are concerned. There are, for instance, spaces in between grammatical letters, as well as a lag time in which one may begin to lose oneself while awaiting the arrival of a letter. There are so many interludes and interstices where we may hope to disguise ourselves in order to 'dissimulate' whatever it is we believe ourselves to know (Derrida, 'Telepathy' 234). These disappearance-acts can, in themselves, elicit rather immense pleasure. Yet there remains in Derrida's response to the student the necessary inflection of an 'I' who would still be needed to avow to itself, as to another, the desire to end its own life: 'And what proves to

you, *I* said to him if *I* remember correctly, that *I* do not do so, and more than once.’ Or rather, the inflection of at least *three* ‘I’s’ is needed here to signal to another, and always ‘more than once,’ the force of this brimming urge.

The term ‘decreation,’ designated by Simone Weil, connotes the saintly initiative meant to undo to the point of ruination the ‘I’ or ‘the creature in us’ (Carson, *Decreation* 167). This sort of creative undertaking reminds me of Franny’s notes in which traces of an identifiable ‘I’ are concealed, and also, of Derrida’s ‘wish for a writing from which the writer would be absent’ (Kamuf, *To follow...* 125). Decreation’s striated course is delineated by Anne Carson in a contemporary work which bears this name as its title and which engages spiritual neophytes as diverse as Marguerite Porete and Sappho. Weil’s ‘decreation’ belies a commitment to ‘a sort of dream of distance in which the self is displaced from the centre of the work and the teller disappears into the telling’ (Carson, *Decreation* 173). Her obedient project of self-effacement and detachment requires that each action result from an expression of spiritual necessity. The wiles of our imagination are suspended through the practice of an uprooting into ‘absence.’ Weil writes of it as a state of intense contradiction through which a greater reality that is itself ‘a void’ and ‘a nothingness,’ can finally be contemplated (*Gravity and Grace* 39, 84). Decreation is a project of austere abasement and difficult manual conditioning: ‘The strict carrying out of ordinary human duty is a condition which makes my withdrawal possible. Little by little it wears away the ropes which fasten me to the spot and prevent me from retiring’ (Weil 41). Her project requires the kind of attention that a compelling text at times requests of readers, namely, ‘that attention which is so full that the ‘I’ disappears’ (118). This consecrated quest is guided for Weil by a desire to access a more direct communion with God. The ‘I’ interferes with this sacrosanct pursuit because it brings with it too many distractions, disturbances, and longings. The ‘telling’ is held particularly suspect by Weil because it betrays the mediated efforts of an ego acting *outside* the bearing of a holy union, and thus, of its own accord. Despite wanting to hollow out the untamed ‘creature’ within the ‘human,’ Weil’s writing necessarily fails to purge itself of its own ego. In each of her compositions, live traces of Weil’s ‘I’ survive regardless of her vigorous entreatment that they be abandoned and

overcome. While this may, in some way, erode for Carson the validity of her transcendental initiative, I continue to discern in Weil's project an ability to propel her spiritual advances further than far. It's as if she dreams of a psyche able to thin itself out so completely that no abiding folds or creases would be left in which the 'I' could hope to hide. While reflecting on the 'operation of writing,' Weil writes that 'the hand which holds the pen, and the body and soul which are attached to it [...] are *things* [...] *infinitely small in the order of nothingness*' (*Gravity and Grace* xiv, emphasis mine). Writing is an infinitely small medium through which Weil is able to convey her aspiring need to become a floating 'void.' What concerns Weil is the exercise of an anonymous toiling. With immeasurable difficulty, she demonstrates how a pliable blank can labour to decreate itself. It would have to learn to withdraw, to evacuate, and to divest itself of all the distinctive traits and habits which define it, so as to carry out a receptive and quiescent 'death' *in life* with the aim of arriving gracefully 'at God...'

It occurs to me now that the wordless gap at the end of *Threats* might whisper a small case for 'decreation,' albeit one that would need to be partially excised from Weil's more spiritual underpinnings. I wonder if, during all this time, a paper stratum at the end of Gray's novel had been left there precisely to veil the fabulous remains of a suicidal dream, and whether such a phantasy may perhaps animate the reader's urge to disappear into the text... Tugging us along and past the edge of the book where she issues a forlorn bit of paper, Gray dares her readers to yield to the delightful possibility of ceasing, for a time, to assert one's 'I' and to submit instead to the kind of ebbing clearing which dreaming and re-reading occasionally give way to. This tenuous hypothesis is ratified, as I hope to illustrate now, by the image's natural ability to revive occasions throughout the text where David is himself reduced to a blank.

One such instance takes place during the rehashed version of David's and Franny's last conversation in the final chapter of *Threats*. As David happens to gaze at Franny, the musing that 'His face was a panel' besets her just then. The *OED* defines a panel, among other things, as a piece of cloth, 'a rectangular pane of glass in a mullioned window,' a fence, the rectangular section of a wall, a

wooden or a thin board (*OED*). At the same instant where David occurs to Franny as a partitioned unit, a consummate desire to graze her nose against his bubbles up in her and sweeps her away. And while she refrains in the end from enacting this desire, the mere act of withholding it from him renders the secret 'even more perfect' for her (277). Another incident involving David as a blank begins, here, to intercede. It takes place mid-way in the novel as Marie meditates in David's company over the question mark that is his and Franny's undecidable union. She suggests to David that their intersecting lifelines blend to the point where Franny's image projects an enigma and David's refracts a blankness: 'I can see why she decided on you,' she said once the wasps lost interest. 'You're kind of a blank slate yourself, aren't you? It takes the right kind of woman to get a man like you. To understand...' (Gray, *Threats* 166). While casting a pensive eye on David's figure just then, she works to tease out the enigma of their imperfect joining. She reminds him that an induced trance would help to flatten out any impenetrable grooves in their narrative and perhaps even to rustle David's memory of the moments leading up to Franny's passing. She encourages him to accept that Franny occasionally made decisions without consulting him: 'That's normal in any relationship. The moment one fully realises this truth can lead to a difficult transition' (190). She advises him to admit to himself that deceit gnawed at the heart of their marriage. But instead of acknowledging Marie's counsels, David announces to her Franny's recent visit with two of his childhood friends. David claims Franny informed his friends, sometime after her death, that she had been learning a new language. Mary drily retorts with a salient reminder: 'What was once of your wife is currently located in a box on your coffee table' (191). After she reaffirms to him Franny's irrefutable whereabouts, she extends a consolidating hand. David remains motionless. His decision not to mirror her gesture may reflect an empathic deficit on his part or a tactlessness when it comes to simulating appropriate etiquette. To either end, when David eschews with social formalities, he conveys himself to Marie as an inscrutable 'blank'; importantly, then, not as an obliging 'I' but as the semblance of an *I* who could at least be felt or seen to resist something.

In time, David comes to accept Marie's counsel. He allows Marie in the sixty-fifth chapter of *Threats* to offer him a guided meditation in which her (or his) voice leads him with a strange incantatory pull:

A paper boat, on a still lake. Your mind is a paper boat on a still lake, floating away. Your mind is floating away. You see a still lake, you are a still lake. On the still lake is the still in which you place your mind. Your mind is folded into the folds of a paper boat. The lake is so still that placing your mind in it causes three ripples that extend farther than your eye can follow. The lake beyond is still. You push a paper boat away and watch it float like a float, like a paper boat, a boat on a still lake. (Gray 241)

Ultimately, he admits that his and Franny's duplicitous natures were partly responsible for the slow attrition of their vows. A line in his final address to Franny seems, at least partly, to communicate this: 'IN THE END WE'RE ALL HOLDING VEILS WALKING IN A LINE WE'RE ~~HOLY~~ VEILS WALKING IN A LINE OF ANTS' (273). Such that, in the end, the blank sheet of paper registers as a measure of his growing acceptance through grief while reflecting back to the reader, at the same time, David's conflicting desires to *remain still*, to float away, and to disappear.

A Dream-Stone

Still absorbed by the cut of this strange image which inspires in me such a plethora of dream-readings, I return again to its shallow site. The image rests as if it were being slightly drawn up and away from the center of Gray's final page. Not to overlook the gradual wearing-effects of atmospheric forces which may, over time, have contributed to its calcified-like impression, the image hints of a creature's touch. It would seem to have been traced or drawn and positioned by a creature who was capable both of grasping a sheet of paper and of appending it with a piece of tape onto another surface. Still, the image draws this creature away from its center to enact a more nuanced scene. Between the inorganic and the organic, it offers a dimmed glimpse of a neglected landscape all too often left unframed. The image portrays what tends to gather little notice or perhaps none at all. It makes a center-piece out of the 'nonliving, sometimes dead, but always, in principle,' of that which remains 'unfeeling and inanimate, without desire, without intention, without spontaneity' (Derrida, 'Typewriter Ribbon' 72). A spectral pendant in the shape of a rectangular bit of paper waves without moving. Without intention,

and so, only by virtue of ‘being’ what it ‘is,’ namely, the faint by-product of the pressing and drying of wood pulp, of whatever remains, then, after the wound-up matter has been dried, coated, calendered, and cut up into smaller web rolls or into precision paper-sheets, the image saves a tiny strand of its genealogy. Given that it doesn’t offer itself as a base or a stage intended for the animated play of grammatical characters, this right-angled leaf doesn’t qualify as a piece of writing—at least, not in the formulaic sense of the term which involves the penning and forming of letters and words in compliance with a certain literary or compositional style. It imparts only the inorganic stillness of manufactured remains; of all that is animated *by* a line and *at* the line, in addition to all the connections and possibilities which steal or sidle along this line, without demonstrable sound or sign.

What befalls the last page of Gray’s book is a lineament. This outline of a body and wordless contour of a *rebus* is one you may or may not be able to keep. The image reminds you that the trace-effects of a surface or a medium or a channel or a vellum can always steal past the final word. If I could request something of you, it would be to disentangle a little the narrative threads which this mute silhouette offers, in silence... I am pilfering here, or rather, gently misquoting a line in Derrida’s ‘Telepathy’ where he entreats his reader to ‘Untangle a little the hairs of my dreams and what they are saying, in silence’ (234). To disengage from this image would be to miss all the feathery wires and whimsical threads which this muted frame evokes, along with all the unseen filaments, all the hairsplitting vine-like creatures which climb the trusses of the narrative and compel it to unfold towards its manifold directions. In the end, then, what outlives the book or the dream is perhaps only a bit of paper, a rectangular cut-out, the vestige of an oblong figuration which promises, for a short time, to remain.

The cut of a certain scrap of paper at the end of *Threats* involves, as we have seen, the narrative memory of a dream, or rather, the consultation of a dream-book concerning the doubling insistence of paper. A woman in the waiting room of the police station issues a little reminder to David despite never being directly spoken to: ‘Depends on how you define “missing,” depends on how you

define “dead” (159). Gray magnifies the fear that at any given moment, the beloved other may vanish or take deliberate leave. At the early onset of their relationship, David senses in Franny a spirit who is always on the verge of leaving: ‘It seemed to David as if she could leave at any moment. She would get that look in her eye’ (7). Some things can still be missed. Minor details can always be neglected or overlooked. The recognition that the beloved other is flawed could attenuate our rose-coloured perceptions and incite us to feel that we’ve been misinformed or misled by our own romantic desires. The other within us, the unconscious, can always trick or compel us to cave into the imaginary holes we’ve contrived for ourselves.

The image at the end of *Threats* slips out of the narrative like a rattling dream-stone. Perhaps, it’s the kind of stone which ‘still resonates and vibrates’ and which ‘emits a kind of painful and indecipherable bliss, one no longer knows whose or for whom’ (Derrida, ‘Unsealing’ 119). This peeling stone recalls a melting point in *Threats* concerning the semblance of a tower in the book as, itself, ‘a rather unwelcoming or trapping kind of home’ (Wood, ‘A dream-hole’ 374). Franny and David transplanted their lives into his childhood home during their fifth year of marriage to tend specifically to his father, ‘a strange older child, with his stubbed toes and occasional tears and oversized diapers’ (88-9). David later visualises in *Threats* the metallic apparatuses in his home—utensils, clock faces, faucets, zippers—coagulating into a singular boiling cauldron: ‘The mixed alloys would create a speckled bubble, like a stone he once found on the beach and kept in his jacket pocket for years, touching it gently with the tips of his fingers, until one day he put on his jacket and reached for the stone and it was gone’ (Gray 170).

A Fire

Any reader of Derrida’s texts will have noted, at some point or other, that a line can always cede to fifty-two beats of unmarked space. An obscure ‘cut’ of this sort can be said to animate parts of both ‘Envois’ and of his consonant piece ‘Telepathy.’ Derrida tells us that this calculated clearing cuts into

the text to indicate that the passage in question, whatever its ‘original length,’ was destroyed by fire (‘Envois’ 4). He summons his reader in the preface of ‘Envois’ to think of these letters as the remaining fragments of an immolated correspondence: ‘Destroyed by fire *or by that which figuratively takes its place*, more certain of leaving nothing out of the reach of what I like to call the tongue of fire, not even the cinders if cinders there are [*s’il y a là cendre*],’ (‘Envois’ 3, emphasis mine). The spirit of fiction envelops Derrida’s preface to ‘Envois.’ Whether he fabricates it or not, traces of a burning seem nonetheless to endure there. The reader is led to believe that the letters in ‘Envois’ have been rescued from the flames of a promise to ‘burn-everything’ (« *brûle-tout* »): this ‘correspondence,’ Derrida entreats his addressee, ‘immediately got beyond us, which is why it all should have been burned, all of it, including the cinders of the unconscious—and “they” will never know anything about it’ (7). These lasting burning-effects permits Derrida to put the flammable potency of letters to a ringing test, in all senses of the word, which include the missive (or letter), the question of ‘being’ (in French, *l’être* is also a homonym of *lettre*) and any of the twenty-six ‘characters’ (or *lettres*) of which Latin-based alphabetical systems are comprised. Bits of passionate graphemes here and there coalesce in ‘Envois’ and ‘Telepathy.’ But everywhere, there are ‘signs missing from the interior’ of the letters (‘Envois’ 5). Fifty-two ‘mute spaces’ to suggest, perhaps, that these addresses were scorched inside-out by the kinds of burning admissions no one seems able, nor willing, to say (5).

While it briefly reappears in the prelude to ‘Envois,’ « *il y a là cendre* » may simultaneously register to one’s ear as ‘cinders there are’ and ‘there is her cinder.’ In his introduction to *Cinders*, Ned Lukacher traces the vast textual dissemination of this half-finished line, as it involves ‘cinder,’ this ‘old gray word,’ which Derrida himself avows is imprinted somewhere within him as ‘...a place sheltered [*au centre défendu*] but ready for silent ecstasy [*mais préparé pour la jouissance muette*],’ (Derrida, *Cinders* 33). Lukacher notes that the expression, « *il y à la cendre* », first appears in Derrida’s *La dissémination* while motifs of it are later amended and revived in other texts, including ‘Plato’s Pharmacy,’ *Glas*, *The Post card*, and ‘Telepathy’ (Lukacher 3, 7). At the moment, I’m consulting « *Feu la Cendre* », the brief module which appears in Lukacher’s edition of *Cinders*. Because « *il y à*

la cendre » preserves the phonetic confusion between the feminine article *la* and the adverbial place *là*, Derrida writes in this same text of a feminine phantom, *la*, as the trace of a signatory, still trembling in the miasmatic smoke of an inexpressible and untranslatable tale (31). Right before your eyes, the phrase does what it says, Derrida writes, for it ignites itself in the direction of an unsettled future. It sets fire to itself or it sets itself on fire. After remarking that ‘it immediately incinerates itself,’ Derrida notes that he takes grave exception to his use of the verb ‘to incinerate’ here, for he finds in it ‘no affinity with the vulnerable tenderness, with the patience of a cinder’ (35). The verb ‘to incinerate,’ for Derrida, cuts too much: ‘The verb is active,’ as well as ‘acute’ and ‘incisive’ (35). A cinder, by comparison, is gentle. In knowing ‘how to keep itself from showing’ (35), it retreats and separates itself without revealing to you its secret. It consumes itself, no longer because it performs what *it is*, as Derrida now explains, but rather because it says what it once was [*fut*] (35). Derrida sidles between the *passé défini* of ‘to be’ (*fût*) and the French referent for fire (*feu*) which enables him to situate the contingent force with which the cinder burns in the past. And if this catch-phrase burns in the past of what is yet to come, it does so without promise of rebirth: no sign anywhere of a phoenix rising from its ashes nor of a sacred monument to be elevated in its place (Derrida, ‘Istrice 2’ 322-3). There is, for Derrida, no ascension, no resurrection, no phallic erection: nothing but a re-cindering effect which is, perhaps, none other than a re-scinding or a voiding that is itself expedited by a combustion without flames: ‘the cinders love me,’ Derrida writes, ‘they change sex, they re-cinder themselves, they androgynocide themselves,’ as if the transmuted conjunction of ‘androgyny’ and the suffix ‘-cide’ were meant to kindle the vivacity of the cinder’s autodestructive drive (*Cinders* 61). The cinder disbands or comes undone between the difference of what there is and of what remains (*Cinders* 39). Whatever happens in between, if anything can ‘be’ felt to transpire as such, is only the incensed *affect* of a cinder’s heat. Something of the cinder, despite never really remaining or being-here, nonetheless subsists, and this something *burns*.

The first letter of every word in « *il y a là cendre* » forms a code: I.L.Y.A.L.C. Appearing only one time in « *Feu la cendre* », it seems to murmur a kind of cryptic ‘key,’ the French word for which is

clé (51). Derrida appeals to it under the pretense of a lie in *Cinders*. This fib is initially accredited to an anonymous ‘he,’ the one whom Derrida names ‘the counterfeiter’ (« *le contrefacteur* »). But Derrida acknowledges shortly thereafter that this ‘he’ could just as well be a ‘she,’ as in the feminine character from Charles Perrault’s tale *Cendrillon, ou la petite pantoufle de verre* (*Cinderella, or The Little Glass Slipper*) who appears, there, doused in ashes (*Cinders* 49). Or perhaps it’s no longer quite someone in the sense of a ‘she’ or a ‘he’ but some-thing akin to the particle *la* which silently seizes and constitutes the adverb *là* in « *il y a là cendre* ». Nonetheless, Derrida questions the place of both a ‘real secret at the bottom of this sentence’ and of a ‘determined proper name’ (51). He resolutely denies the possibility that the first letter of every word could form an ‘entirely different statement’ in another language, as it was once suggested to him, or even that it could encrypt the counterfeiter’s proper name; ‘in truth his ciphered signature’ (51). I suspect this unnamed liar is a sort of double, a proxy, or one of the many ob-versions of Derrida’s prismatic graphic persona. The speculation of a duplicitous nature, one that is caught from the side as if it were the profile-view of a self who is both vexed and intrigued by the persistence of its own lies, hints again of the Freudian *unheimlich*. The vestige of a doubling-effect is preserved in one of Freud’s most renowned biographical anecdotes. In this little tale which Freud confines to a footnote in ‘The Uncanny,’ he confuses his own reflection in the looking-glass of a ‘wagon-lit compartment’ with that of an intruder who, he reasoned, must have ‘taken the wrong direction and come into [his] compartment by mistake’ (‘The Uncanny’ 248). Freud defends this editorial cut with the argument that the initial failure to recognise his reflected double, in turn, fails to activate the heightened class of aesthetic feeling typical of most cases of *unheimlich*. Rather than provoking the more ‘dreadful, horrifying qualities of feeling’ which are expected in such cases, the appearance of his match only elicits ‘thorough dislike’ (248). Freud’s ‘thorough dislike’ perhaps mirrors the distateful aversion Derrida expresses towards the counterfeiter, as when in « *Feu la cendre* », he writes: ‘I believed none of it, he had just invented the hoax (*il venait d’inventer la supercherie*), he can always lie or not even be certain of what he claims to know (*ne pas même être assuré de ce qu’il dit savoir*)... ‘ (51).

I seem as if wedged between the ‘magnified letters adrift’ of I.L.Y.A.L.C and, at once, unmoored from them (Derrida, ‘+R’ 161). Lacking a sense of fixedness or place, I feel myself coming undone—*je suis décalé*. If ‘A.L.C’ were suddenly to capsize and form the beginning of the verb « caler », it would additionally touch upon the varied nuances and senses of « cal » which include ‘to stall,’ ‘to prop up’ as with a shim or a wedge, ‘to sink into the water,’ ‘to retreat,’ ‘to run out of steam,’ ‘to settle oneself’ (*se caler*), ‘to give up,’ ‘to stabilize or to halt’ in the sense of stalling a vehicle’s motor, or ‘to tune into something’ as in, *se caler sur quelque chose*. The French idiom « *un cal vicieux* » recalls the kind of vicious wound as it’s inured by the aphoristic sentence ‘to have a callus [*cal*] in one’s heart.’ Derrida recalls this expression in ‘Telepathy’ from a letter Gustave Flaubert wrote to Louise, ‘(ah those two!)’ (235). With the terse directive—‘Read all’—he entreats his reader to peruse their correspondence at their earliest convenience. Derrida’s ‘Telepathy’ seamlessly welds together the gaps of Flaubert and Louise’s letters in failing precisely to mention whatever it is he happens to be overlooking. He does so by skimming, gliding, and sailing:

And the next day, after recalling: ‘I told you, I believe, that it was your voice especially that I loved,’ without telephone, this time he writes ‘lake [*lac*] of my heart’: ‘You have come with your fingertips to stir up all that. The old sediment has come back to boiling point, the lake of my heart has thrilled to it. But the tempest is made for the Ocean!—Ponds [*étangs*], when you disturb them give off nothing but unwholesome smells.—I must love you to be able to say that...’ (Flaubert qtd. in Derrida 235)

Another line from an unrelated fiction interferes with this passage from Flaubert’s letter, or rather, with my ability to engage it. I seem reduced, momentarily, to the function of a medium where the singular purpose is to gather the specifics of an incoming dispatch and relay its details to you. The impressions received are of a short scene in Gray’s *Threats* where David accepts a cup of water from Aileen, Frances’ former employer. While visiting the salon where his deceased wife used to work as a beautician, he brings ‘...the cup to his lips. A pond smell in the liquid stopped him from drinking. He imagined hidden microbe’ (109). Before he leaves the salon waiting-room, David leaves the undesired cup of water on a bar composed entirely of mirrors (110). A tale of two copies will soon evert the sequence of events by which a dead body can *seem* to survive. If David’s decision to place a serving of water upon a mirrored ledge makes a memorable impression upon the reader, it’s perhaps because

another story yet untold will soon appear as if it had been provoked by the meeting of two reflective surfaces.

There are two separate occasions in *Threats* where David meets his mirror. The encounter unfolds the first time, without remarkable disturbance, at an otherwise empty bus stop: 'He wore the same ivory and blue ski jacket as David, the same reading glasses with the same band of electrical tape circling the center bar. The same speckled gray hair tufted loose over his ears' (196). It's not simply that they resemble one another but that only a small deviation in their choice of attire, 'the strange man wore socks,' is used to differentiate them (196). David offers his twin a piece of toast wrapped in a napkin which the twin accepts. David watches on as his unmistakable double eats: 'The man ate toast in the same way David did, first chewing the upper arch of crust, tonguing the butter, holding the mass in his cheek while talking. The man held the mouthful in his left cheek while David typically favored his right, but it was otherwise a precise duplication' (197). They have an odd conversation where his mirror-image acknowledges the near-perfect parallels in their shared countenances and appearances. Without intimation of either shock or terror, both David and his copy exhibit symptoms of a latent paranoia, evinced by their need to establish to one another that neither poses a threat to the other's welfare. When the bus arrives, the double stays behind: 'I am on the next instance of this bus,' he tells David, and adds the following recommendation: 'I think it would be best if we avoided seeing each other' (198). And while there is hesitation on both sides to let their unusual dialogue draw to a close, David eventually drops his quarters into the coin slot: 'Outside, the man finished the piece of toast and shook out the napkin [...]. David thought he saw words written on the napkin, but the bus door closed between them...' (199).

The second run-in with his double involves another ghostly sighting. David notices the shape of a familiar body in the window façade of a home nearby, recently sold and bought, while taking a walk one day around his neighbourhood. At the instant it registers to him that the proportions of the silhouette in the window are the same as Franny's, his double steps out of the home:

He held his hand up to shade his eyes from the sun, and David realized he was also holding his own hand in the same way. He lifted his other hand and waved once. A nerve ending fluttered over his lower left rib. He thought of the time he and Franny stayed in a cabin in the woods and walked until they found a pond and looked at it, not holding hands or even standing near each other, so a stranger approaching from the trail would see two additional strangers, three strangers total meeting at a pond and looking into it.

The man waved back, and the woman was gone from the window. The man walked forward and David felt himself walking back as if pushed, as if the world's balance now required that the two men remain a precise distance apart. The man had opened his mouth and was saying something, gesturing; David was gesturing behind himself toward the road, and with no small effort he turned away from the man and walked briskly and then jogged and ran, slipping on the slush and startling another deer that had been prodding leaves with its snout, sending the deer bouncing into the woods, ash trees falling away by the time David reached the road and kept on running, the wind's chill mixing with the sun on his face and in his eyes. (Gray 247)

Gray never clarifies whether this scene is an elaborate psychic delusion or a real event within the context of the fiction. The reader is left to infer that David's twin has made a home for himself with Franny's twin or that someone from a distance who looks just like her is now living with someone who looks just like him. In this case of another repetition of the same, we meet '...characters who are to be considered identical because they look alike. This relation is accentuated by mental processes leaping from one of these characters to another—by what we should call telepathy---, so that the one possesses knowledge, feelings and experience in common with the other' (Freud, 'The Uncanny' 234). Freud offers an invaluable aesthetic evaluation of the 'double' when he explains that it's initially conceived by the ego, in accordance with a primary phase of narcissistic development, as 'an energetic denial of the power of death' (235). When this stage of development is overcome, however, '...the "double" reverses its aspect. From having been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death' (Freud 235). Yet none of this superficial strata, as Freud continues a page later, enables us to account for '...the urge towards defence which has caused the ego to project that material outward as something foreign to itself' (236). While the double imposes a magnetic strain upon him, David is repelled by the possibility of their unification. In maintaining 'a precise distance' from him, he splits from himself too. Because suddenly unable to preserve or present a cogent version of himself, the double, as a previous source of comfort in childhood, returns to David near death as 'a thing of terror' (Freud, 'The Uncanny' 236).

The excerpt above also refers to a time when David and Franny met at a pond where they did not hold hands. The ‘unwholesome smell’ of pond-water stalls David from drinking in an earlier scene, perhaps because he remains unsettled by the familiar smell of a creature he is in the habit of missing. David seems prone to conflate differences. As a force of habit, he turns dissimilarities into instances of the same: ‘His wife’s scent [on their wedding night] was of a wet rock, as if she had been created from the stream that ran behind his childhood home’ (50). At some point or another, the wet rock melts for him into a pond which cascades into the lone stream that once dribbled behind his home where it remains ‘...dry most of the year or covered in snow or leaves from the ash trees or ice, forming a thin line of flowing water when it warmed up enough for the snow to melt’ (Gray 37). There is, as of now, nothing more foreign and perturbing to David than this rill which trickles behind his childhood home, just as there is nothing stranger to Derrida than this « lac », this timeworn scion of ‘alc,’ which remains still ‘too far from the landscapes of [Derrida’s] childhood. Maybe it’s literary instead?’ (Derrida, ‘Telepathy’ 234).

The dream-scenario of an innermost death-wish lurks below the surface of what is ‘sometimes a pond but usually a lake’: ‘...for a long time already I have drowned myself. Remember. Why, in my reveries of suicide, it is always drowning that imposes itself, and most often in a *lake*...’ (Derrida, ‘Telepathy’ 234). This reverie forks towards the memory of another written line—‘where, since ever, I must have known how to put myself to death....’ (*Truth of Painting* 161). Derrida writes the last line in a piece entitled ‘+R (Into the Bargain).’ The line refers to the ‘back of a stage [*au fond d’une scène*]’ initially consolidated in *Glas*. Derrida writes in ‘+R,’ while still referencing *Glas* that ‘...the drowned woman [*la « noyée »*], floats between two waters, a little up from the bottom, a cord relaxed far from its anchorage in the sentence, magnified letters adrift, dilated image...’ (161). Within this passage, the potency of still another line can be felt which Derrida takes great care to revive ‘...from the bottom of the sea, a vivid, straight native seaweed, or a shipwrecked galley, an immobile and monumental wreck, a line already “quoted” in *Glas*, here fished up from way back, in inverted commas, angles, crochets too without a stave [*des noires aussi sans portée*]’ (161). He concedes that this line is the first to appear

in a ‘bad poem’ written at the age of seventeen and published ‘in a little Mediterranean review since gone under’ (161). Again in ‘+R,’ but this time, a few pages later, Derrida writes that this ‘sentence seems to last’ given that it both continues and concurrently cuts itself off: ‘first of all in itself, from left to right, breaking its own movement and then reconstituting itself, with a leap above the binding, above the domestic margin or the articulation’ (157). The poetic line Derrida has been trying, all this time, to extract from the depth of *Glas* concerns the *gl* of the angle which, at the bottom of his throat, cuts him off (« *me coupe* ») and breathes him (« *me souffle* ») into all of the rest (*Glas* 195-6/ 219). ‘I forgot (*J’oubliais*).’ Forgetting what it was that he was fishing for in the manner of wanting, perhaps, not to finish nor to ever be done with it, Derrida finally pulls this little poetic line *as if* out of a thalassic depth: ‘The first verse (*vers*) I published: « *glu de l’étang lait de ma mort noyée* » (‘glue of the pool milk of my drowned death’) (*Glas* 195-6/ 219). Derrida affixes a glutinous substance resembling ‘bird-lime,’ the kind spread upon twigs with the purpose of ensnaring small birds (*OED*), to ‘(étang lait [pond milk], entity [*étant*] become milk [*lait*] again, *étranglé* [strangled] without the *r*, etc.)’ (*Truth in Painting* 161). As concerns the nucleus, the pit, the very core of his suicidal phantasy, a death which sticks or which cannot die, which binds itself in the manner of strangling or impeding speech, re-surfaces again. Perhaps it re-emerges as the sort of inclination or predisposition which afflicts those at greater risk of succumbing to its wishes. A drowned death or a drowning desire floats back up to the surface at the moment where an ‘I’ is not exactly there to affirm it, and *still*...

Ash

In the interview ‘Counter-Signatures,’ we hear from Derrida that the proper name, when inscribed directly in a text, is ‘obviously’ not a signature,

it is a way of making the name into a work, of making work of the name, but without this inscription of the proper name having the value of any property rights so to speak. Whence the double relation to the name and to the loss of the name: by inscribing the name in the thing itself (whether one is talking about the poem or the poem become a thing or the thing become a poem), by inscribing the name in the thing, from one angle, I lose the signature, but from another angle, I monumentalize the name, I transform the name into a thing: like a stone, like a monument. One has to lose the name in order to

make it become a thing, in order to win for it in some way the value of thing, which is to say also a survival. (Derrida 365-6)

Gray is ‘the colour of ash, lead, flint, an overcast sky’ (*OED*). The dictionary speculates on the etymology of ‘gray’—stating, as such, that if an original ‘shining’ is assumed, the colour would share the same Indo-European base as the Old Church Slavonic *zīrěti*, meaning, to see or look, and the ablaut Lithuanian *žerėti*, meaning, ‘to shine, sparkle, [or] glisten’ (*OED*). A glistening takes place in *Le plaisir du texte* when Barthes wonders if the most erotic zone of the body is not the area an article of clothing parts open to reveal (17). Barthes writes of skin which glistens (« *la peau qui scintille* ») between two pieces of clothing (the pant and the knitted sweater) as between two sides (a half-opened shirt; the glove and the hand). The erotic is conceived by Barthes as ‘what intermits, ceases for a time,’ comes at intervals, or operates by fits and starts (*OED*). It’s this intermittent glimmer (« *ce scintillement* ») or, more specifically, the *mise en scène* of an appearance-disappearance which interests him (17-8). I’ve been gesturing towards a need to move away from the certainty of knowing by way of dreaming. The shimmer diverts one’s ability to rely on the center of one’s ‘I’ as one might for epistemic or ontological support. A reader approaches Gray’s paper cut-out akin to the way a dreamer awakens, you see, with ‘that sweet, throbbing uncertainty’ of which Pontalis writes in the first chapter of his *Frontiers in Psychoanalysis* (28). We glimpse a shimmer of Gray’s name at the end of *Threats* where the ashen outline of her signature draws readers in, momentarily distracting or else inciting them to ‘err in conduct or belief,’ as one submits to a hypnotic trance and eventually, gives in to sleep (Derrida ‘Telepathy’ 21). By inscribing the colour of her name onto this ‘no-thing,’ she might lose the signature from one angle but from the perspective of another, she monumentalises the name. Reduced as she is to the outline of a burnt leaf of serrated paper, Gray solemnly requests that the work be carried away and kept alive in spite of the book’s imminent and invariable closure. It is, perhaps, a way of surviving.²

² I offer an extended reading of Jean-Luc Nancy’s ‘Psyche,’ the final piece to appear in his *Birth to Presence*, in the last chapter of this thesis. I wish only to note here that Nancy inscribes his signature in the French translation of a Freudian aphorism he makes a point of repeating. He translates Freud’s line as « *La psyché est étendue: n’en sait rien* », presumably intending « *n’en sait* » to register to a reader’s ear as the phonetic cognate of ‘Nancy.’ His proper name hums where the smallest bit of him re-signs from a scene of writing which touches on the erotic survival of psyche’s impassive body.

3. Brooding. Part I.

‘There are lots of things,’ she said rapidly, ‘that you only feel because of people. That’s the only reason things are there for, I *think*. You wouldn’t notice them otherwise, or care about them.

It’s sort of—’ she stopped. Her ears glowed crimson underneath her hat.

‘Association,’ they sighed, ponderously.

‘That’s exactly what’s the matter,’ cried Miss Murcheson.

‘We’ve got all the nice, fresh, independent, outside things so smeared over with our sentimentalities and prejudices and – associations – that we can’t see them anyhow but as part of ourselves. That’s how you’re — we’re missing things and spoiling things for ourselves. You — we don’t seem to be able to *discover*’

Elizabeth Bowen, ‘Daffodils’³

Elizabeth Bowen’s ‘Daffodils’ tells the story of a chance-meeting between a teacher and three students in a way that’s interesting because it allows us to investigate the textual effects of failed human connections, missing links, and misunderstandings. This chapter is the first of two parts in which a reciprocity between the experiential and the textual is embellished. Derrida asserts in *Of Grammatology* that since ‘there has never been anything but writing,’ there can be no ‘outside-text’ (158-9). This chapter introduces brooding as an infantile response to a state of psychic morsellation. Such instances of coming-apart are generated by vulnerable encounters with texts, others, and with oneself. I work gently to remind the reader that a condition of brooding or misunderstanding abides in most instances of loving and learning. Following Nouvet’s re-reading of the Ovidian myth about Narcissus, this section probes the possibility that there exists such a thing as an infantile condition of mourning in which things and bodies have been pre-consciously or unconsciously torn into pieces.

³ From Elizabeth Bowen’s *The Collected Stories* (26).

Even as the infant repeatedly fails to make sense of these morsels, an ability to endure what was torn apart as well as a capacity to cope with what can't be entirely digested can still burst forth to take meditative and curative hold of the brooder. I posit in this chapter that an infant's natural propensity to misrecognise itself in the mirror informs its future attempts at reading all these 'others,' including, 'language, the other subject, [and] the unconscious' (Nouvet 156, translation mine). The primary interest lies in the fictive supposition that the child misidentifies its image, and much later, misinterprets a meaning in the reflection of a text which compels it to go on re-reading. Philosophical and psychoanalytical efforts to narrativise tender moments of infantile brooding set a deliberative tone and contemplative mood to this little investigation.

The bit of conversation in Bowen's 'Daffodils' which opens this chapter unfolds shortly after the teacher summons the three girls, 'their three pink faces of surprise, which broadened into smiles of recognition,' while passing by the window of her sitting-room (Bowen 21). The invitation which Miss Murcheson extends in great haste, at first, bemuses her: 'Why had she asked them in, those terrible girls whom she had scarcely spoken to? They would laugh at her. They would tell the others' (24). When Millicent, Rosemary, and Doris assume a 'bewildered' seat at the edge of the ottoman, the sitting-room becomes for Miss Murcheson suddenly '...full of them, of their curiosity and embarrassment and furtive laughter' (24). The anxious teacher lets a premeditated hint slip: 'It's cruel, isn't it, to lie in wait for you like this and pull you in and lecture you about what you don't feel about daffodils!' (24). Her engagement with the three girls only reaffirms for her the scale of their 'cinema-bred romanticism' and the mechanical miming of their indolent minds (26). Doris reflects this assumption when, in the opening extract, she overlooks the flower's singularity in defense of the position that we '*only feel because of people*' (26, emphasis mine). Doris seems to forget that the daffodil exists, not as an extension, but as a discreet entity from herself. The teacher probes her students to conceive of the daffodil in terms which prioritise the plant's distinctive particularities. 'No, but [have you] looked at one?' the teacher implores: 'Not just heard about them – "Oh yes, daffodils:

yellow flowers; spring, mother's vases, bulbs, borders, flashing past flower-shop windows"—but taken one up in your hands and felt it?' (24).

Miss Murcheson considers 'shaking off' this 'terribly official and instructive' stance but settles instead on correcting the complacent attitudes of her students (Bowen 24). Her desire to share an honest discovery with them is compromised by a competing desire for their recognition and acceptance. Despite her efforts to receive appraisal from this band of three, the teacher's abstract idealism falls short of them. They decline her request to stay for tea and sticky buns 'in honour of the daffodils!' and as they promptly turn to take leave, she receives the sound of their feet 'clattering down the steps' with a nuanced sense of 'disappointment and relief' (27). A difference in investigative priorities sets the teacher apart from her three pupils. While their sprightly form assails her sense of order and resolve, her efforts to expand their research interests occur to them as both an inconvenience and an impertinence. Their reticence to learn from the teacher suggests that the girls, as antagonists of education, are rather taught by their own oppositional natures (Benjamin, 'Karl Kraus' 452). Since educators demand that the child's libidinal energies be sublimated, the girls' 'distaste for learning' could perhaps be attributed to an unconscious reluctance on their parts to re-test, as Melanie Klein proposes elsewhere, the 'mobility' of their libidos ('The Role of the School' 59-60). But the woe of the situation for Miss Murcheson is that her attempts to nurture an auspicious alliance with the three girls is of little avail: 'Tomorrow they will be again impersonal; their three pink moons in a firmament of faces...' (Bowen 27). The story ends just then, as 'The three, released, eyed one another with a common understanding. "Miss Murcheson has never really *lived*," said Doris. They linked arms again and sauntered down the road' (27).

Bowen's narrative hinges on a wound. A harrowing gash settles in between two opposed positions of knowing. Both sides withdraw from one another, uncomfortable and a bit hurt, with the teacher exasperated that her edifying attempts are so boldly dismissed by her pupils who are themselves disparaged by the teacher who sought to challenge what it is they think they know. An air

of remorsefulness contours the scene. It's as if the meeting were unfolding as a matter for regret, an unfortunate disappointment, or a pity. This event is marked by the residual traces of a 'remorseful' spirit, in part, because its 'bitting or cutting force' can still be felt (*OED*). This is also to say that the effect produced here is inherently textual. Derrida explains in "'Freud" and the Scene of Writing' that psyche is a kind of text without which there would be no such 'domain' (250). As an attentive commitment in which body and psyche are incommensurably implicated, reading produces textual effects which graze, and occasionally bite, readers. In the twelfth chapter of *The Mother in The Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Elissa Marder reminds us that a bit of the 'bit' bites. Suspended between the past-tense of a verb and a noun, the tenacious 'bit' confuses passive and active registers of meaning (229). Marder notes that while the French word for 'bit' (*mors*) is also a homophone of death (*mort*), it shares the root of the French words 'to bite' (*mordre*), 'a bite' (*morsure*), 'morsel' (*morceau*), and 'remorse' (*remords*) (230). This notion of the 'bit' as a leftover and vulnerable remainder is broadened by another definition of the 'bit.' Marder extracts this definition from the *Oxford English Dictionary* as '...the "bite" or "sting" of death or disease or *anything else* that threatens to destroy me from without' (229, emphasis mine). Not only death, then, but a pervasive and insidious kind of threat afflicts those sheared in life by the teeth of disaffection, disappointment, devastation, and defeat.

An enduring tear manifests in Nouvet's *Enfances Narcisse*. Nouvet's reading of Narcissus is compelled by a wound which inscribes itself in the fissure of a foundational trauma (Nouvet 56). Nouvet reminds us that Tiresias—the 'literary prophet' who frames the myth in question and whose blindness secures his gift of foresight—predicts that Narcissus would live should he never come to know himself (Nouvet 149). Tiresias gives depth to a knowing which pretends to understand what Narcissus cannot; namely, that the mirror-encounter promises him a certain death (Nouvet 21). The measure of Tiresias' clairvoyance confirms that knowledge of oneself kills (« *que la connaissance de soi tue* ») (Nouvet 151). Without explicitly saying so, Nouvet suggests that a trace of the originary disaster, as it happens to Ovid's Narcissus while his 'I' cannot consciously remember it, lives on in

each and every one of us.⁴ She conceives of this event as both an agony and a chance since it reminds the ‘subject’ of his originary state of entanglement with the other before any copulative act can ever take place (29). And since this traumatic occasion cannot consciously be lived by the one who experiences it (48-9), Nouvet remarks that this event can only be received as a fictive supposition (14).

This fictional event unfolds in Ovid’s re-telling between two scenes which are mirrors of one another (Nouvet 29). The first scene culminates in Narcissus’ rejection of Echo’s amorous body which she extends in response to his unsuspecting invitation. Narcissus requests the resounding voice in the forest to *Veni!* (‘Come!’) and follows it by the incitation *Huc coeamus* (‘Let us re-unite’). Of the second assertion, Echo only repeats *coeamus*. This auditory reflection revives both the senses of assignation and copulation which Narcissus’ initial solicitation conserves (Nouvet 38-39). Echo responds with the vulnerable emergence of her body. In approaching him, she insinuates with her form that a question can always generate an inconceivable response (Nouvet 40). Of interest, then, is not what Narcissus *means* to say but what Echo conveys when she returns to him his own allusive speech-fragments. As a figuration condemned to repeat bits of others’ sentences without any determination of her own—far from restoring the repetition of the same, however, as Maurice Blanchot argues in *L’Écriture du désastre*—Echo produces the kind of difference which unsettles. Echo marks for Nouvet the place where an other is already approaching a « moi » (40, 34-5). ‘Narcissus is narcissistic,’ Nouvet writes, not because he says the same and cannot ‘give anything so that he may love another’ as Blanchot believes but because ‘he refuses to love the other which Echo inscribes in the *creux* of his own “proper” voice’ (35, translation mine). J.B. Pontalis openly prefers the word « creux » to the

⁴ Elsewhere, Nouvet offers a reading of ‘infantile affect’ as an inarticulate psychic state which remains without referent or signification, and without addressor or addressee (‘The Inarticulate Affect’ 233). She binds ‘affectivity,’ the Lyotardian term for ‘sexuality,’ to the Freudian speculation that primary narcissism is pre-egoic because this romanticised state is considered to take place, at least in some Freudian texts, prior to the ego’s constitutive split from the external world (233). ‘Affectivity’ doesn’t concern itself with the ‘I,’ she explains, because it originates in a time and space where the ego is not yet able to form (233). And if an affect cannot yet be processed by this ‘I,’ then it follows that there is no one to address it, to send it, nor even, to receive it. ‘The affect that seizes and cripples the “grown up,”’ Nouvet thereafter notes, ‘sends this grown up back to this condition of infancy, of non-addressedness’ (233).

Lacanian ‘lack’ (the French « *manque* ») in *En marges des nuits*, because he deems the latter to have become the object of a ‘veritable cult’ (54). Yet the word « *creux* » resists an easy translation. In the spirit of indefiniteness, it connotes both a shallow depression and a deeper impression through which an echo continues to reverberate. The strangeness with which this profound hollow may resound suggests a different materiality than might be conventionally expected or associated with the voice. The furtive work of the trace contours this decanting voice whose auditorial emanations are felt more often than they can be visually affirmed.

Echo’s body gives shape to what Narcissus refuses to hear: namely, that his voice utters within it so many others (Nouvet 43-44). As soon as he begins to speak, his speech is already divested of all claims to identity, consonance, authority, and intention (43-44). Narcissus repudiates Echo’s desirous advances because this auditory re-doubling provokes in him a recognition that he is losing his speech (56). As Narcissus attempts to protect his porous entity from the murderous invasion marked by the coming of the other, his attempt to distance himself suggests that the threat of dispossession has already taken effect (48). ‘The others are (already) in place,’ Nouvet writes: “‘I’ do not speak, we speak. A multiplicity of others recast and alter the itinerary of each word. So many others inhabit this “I” which wants to be alone because it is not”⁵ (48, translation mine). By fleeing others, Narcissus attempts in vain to escape the other within (57). Nouvet’s insightful reading suggests that an intolerance to otherness traverses all narcissistic rejections (56). Narcissistic injuries are woundings which offend the arrogance of an individual who wants to believe himself to be ‘one’ (« *...qui veut se croire ‘un’* ») (58). But when Nouvet writes « *Elle l’entame* », she means to suggest that Echo is the first to cut him. She imperils his mortality, and in that same instant, establishes Narcissus’ ill-fated character (58).

⁵ Nouvet writes about these numerous others: « *Les autres sont dans la place. Et ils parlent. ‘Je’ ne parle pas; nous parlons. Une multiplicité d’autres captent et détournent le moindre mot. Tant d’autres habitent ce ‘je’ qui se veut seul parce qu’il ne l’est pas* » (Nouvet 48). All of the English in-text translations of Nouvet’s work are mine.

In the second Ovidian mirror-scene, Narcissus becomes enamoured with a reflection he catches in a fountain despite misapprehending the image not as his own but as the *body* of another. Nouvet remarks, against common interpretations of the myth, that what Narcissus instantly loves is *not* himself but the statuesque work of art, or the collection of beautiful ‘resemblances’ which he perceives himself to have become (Nouvet 92, 95). Narcissus’ analogical gaze projects infantile, feminine, and divine traits onto the beautiful (self-)image he encounters. In front of the mirror, we are never, as Nouvet insists, one nor two, but always three: namely, the image of myself which I see, the other whom I mistake myself to be, and « moi »—the French pronoun which lapses somewhere between the English ‘I’ and ‘me,’ and falls incidently between psychoanalytical and phenomenological spaces of inexperience and thought (94-5). The interaction of these three shapes for Nouvet what I see in the « creux » of my gaze (94-5).

Nouvet traces a muted inheritance in psychoanalysis to the Latin poet Ovid. She remarks that this Ovidian figure remains surprisingly absent from psychoanalytical treatises written on and around narcissism. For instance, Nouvet detects a silent Ovidian legacy in Lacan’s use of the word *imago*. She argues that Lacan honours the term’s derivation from Latin because he preserves the word’s associations to ‘statue’ and ‘ghost’ (Nouvet 103). She offers a definition of the term *imago* near the end of her work as that which ‘...certainly signifies a representation, a portrait, an imitation, as well as the portrait of an ancestor, the waxed effigy which is placed in the atrium and then carried for the procession of a funeral, and finally, the image or the shadow of the dead, a ghost’⁶ (134). In the process of pursuing this unspoken Ovidian debt, she uncovers, following Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, an undisclosed allusion in Lacan’s work to Henri Wallon’s *Les origines du caractère chez l’enfant* (82-3). Both Lacan and Wallon describe the child who outstretches its arms towards its reflection for the first time as an elated creature (116). If the infant is portrayed in a state of giggling jubilation, it’s because the *imago* registers to it as an occasion for body and ego to wondrously unite (117). Nouvet explains

⁶ « Imago signifie certes une représentation, un portrait, une imitation, mais aussi le portrait d’un ancêtre, l’image en cire qui était placée dans l’atrium et qui était portée pendant les funérailles, et enfin l’image ou l’ombre d’un mort, un fantôme » (Nouvet 134).

that the child's exultation is a symptom of its triumph over the body's fragmented entity which it nonetheless feels itself to be (86-7). The *imago* serves both visually and psychically as a means for the child to integrate disjointed parts of itself. On an unconscious level, while the child's tumultuous and fragile sense of embodiment momentarily submits to this idealised portrait of unity and totalised stability, the threat of corporeal fragmentation continues to weaken the 'fortress' which the *imago* so persuasively institutes (87). The child fixes upon the illusory image which promises a future where it ceases to depend on others and sets its sights on maturing as an unaided, composed, and autonomous creature (117).

According to Lacan, as early as six months of age, an infant is able to identify with its perceived mirror-image (Nouvet 86-7). As this passage towards self-recognition enacts itself, Lacan reminds us that the infant is not able yet to sit up or walk on its own (85). Lacan maintains that the child visually entertains the illusion of its independence, while in reality, the child is being held up to the mirror by another (117). The child misacquaints itself precisely as it embraces this phantasy of self-reliance and self-containment. The 'beautiful statue' discerned in the mirror is so compelling as to persuade the child to incorporate it, likely because illusion offers a more reliable destiny than the child's current condition of dependency. Nouvet further proposes that children can only be transformed by the images which they ingest⁷ (100). She shores up this proposal with the injunction that an incorporated image exacts a provocative hold over the one who consumes it, in spite of the fact that it remains, for the duration of this creature's existence, only a 'mirage.' The persuasive assimilation of this 'mirage' speckles « *une ligne de fiction* »—to borrow a term from Lacan—across the child's life (117). For the infant's identification with the *imago* marks the beginning of a future in which the ego becomes alienated and motivated by the consolidation of this most remarkable and stubborn piece of fiction. The child henceforth spends the duration of its lifespan grappling to reconcile itself with this primal *imago* as with its deceptive impossibility. Nouvet notes that every creature forever carries within it the 'infant' or 'child' whom it persists somehow in being (118, 119). No adult is immune to

⁷ « *Le sujet qui assume l'image, l'ingère, se conforme à ce modèle, et s'en retrouve transformé* » (Nouvet 100, emphasis mine).

« *les chutes de l'enfance* » (119), as Nouvet terms it. Vulnerable to repeat their own tottering slips and failings, 'The adult, as the child, never ceases to stumble, to fall, to be at fault, for it remains incapable of ever coinciding with the stable *imago* of itself which it carries inside'⁸ (119).

Nouvet positions Narcissus at the border, or entrance, of the mirror stage (Nouvet 97). Following Wallon, she articulates this position as a tension between two phenomenal bodies which the infant senses itself to be; where one body feels itself to be 'here' while another remains as if caught inside a mirror 'over-there' (97). For the child to have self-recognition, as implied by Lacan's mirror-stage, the schism between both psychosomatic entities must soften until the two are seen as consonants. Wallon maintains that prior to the mirror-stage, a child is in the process of creating an 'ideal space' according to which the speculative image will be able to return to the interoceptive body (98). If both bodies are understood by the child to occupy two different localities, eventually, the two come to correspond to one another by way of inhabiting the same 'ideal space' (98). Nouvet suggests that the initial moment where Narcissus' reflection fails to occur to him as his own is a transitory one. What emerges between these two apperceived corporealities is, as Nouvet understands it, the recognition of a witness or of a bearing witness (99). For, in that quick instant of a flash when the mirror-image happens to co-exist with the sensation of the interoceptive body, the body that Narcissus feels himself to inhabit suddenly occurs to him as 'a visible object' (99).

Narcissus comes to see himself as others see him (Nouvet 99). He also comes to identify himself as the catastrophic victim of his most ill-fated desire. At the onset of Ovid's tale, Narcissus avoids ascribing to himself a « moi », a rhetorical instant which should, under any other circumstance, coincide with the autoreflective encounter that would grant him self-consciousness but which, in this case, already promises death as a consequence of Tiresias' mantic sentence (17). '*Iste ego sum*' is the

⁸ « *Le futur ne préservera pas l'adulte des chutes de l'enfance, de son instabilité, et de son insuffisance. L'image « salutaire » qui promettait de sauver l'enfant de son instabilité le voue en fait à la chute. L'adulte comme l'enfant, ne cesse de trébucher, de tomber, d'être en défaut, incapable qu'il est de ne jamais coïncider avec la stable imago de lui-même qu'il porte en lui* » (Nouvet 119).

last declaration Narcissus declares to himself as he faces his fluent reflection in the final moments of Ovid's tale. Nouvet translates it as 'this child, it's me' (« *cet enfant, c'est moi* »), following George Lafaye's translation of Ovid's work (17). Prior to this declarative instant, Nouvet explains that Narcissus was riveted to the precipice of subjectivity. Narcissus, the proto-subject, remains from the onset of Ovid's tale a « je » without a « moi », *in statu nascendi*, barely even an emergent infant (17). And in that fleeting moment where he identifies his reflection with « moi », the child in him is finally incited to live, albeit much too briefly. Narcissus, the one who spurns love in order to chase stags (74), drowns in the snare of a fountain which humiliates him to the very end (96). But for Nouvet, an instructive kernel in the Ovidian tale glimmers at the moment when he prostrates himself. The visual reflection compels him to bend over the stream of water so that he may meditate upon his eyes which resemble two stars (« *deux astres* »), his hair, deemed worthy of either Bacchus or Apollo, his ivory neck, his smooth cheeks (« *les joues lisses* ») and even his graceful mouth. It's only in assuming a supine position amidst the surrounding grass that Nouvet is moved to discern a physical as well as a psychical regression on Narcissus' part, for he devolves then to the paralysing helplessness so characteristic of childhood (91). That he is compelled to abandon an upright stance suggests the persistence of infantile predilections in him⁹ (91). The constitution of Narcissus' ego falters in Ovid's rendition given an auditory and visual lapse in perception. Because the young man is neither able to hear himself speak nor see himself as he appears, a narcissistic error would seem to underline, then, a difficulty in learning (« *L'erreur narcissistique souligne la difficulté de l'apprentissage* ») (81).

I consult Nouvet's work throughout this chapter because it complements the reclamatory aims of my own project. Her engagement with 'narcissism,' for instance, works to loosen and expand the entrenched significance of this psychoanalytical term. Her reading of Narcissus invites us to contemplate occasions in his psychical development which continue to affect and (in)form our own.

⁹ « *Des vestiges de l'enfance persistent néanmoins dans ce corps apparemment mûr et autonome. La contemplation de son reflet l'oblige en effet à abandonner la station debout. Il se penche d'abord sur la fontaine, puis s'allonge sur l'herbe qui l'entoure. Il régresse, en d'autres termes, à l'impuissance paralysante de l'enfance* » (Nouvet 91).

It's as if these occasions in the myth also channel the effects of a mirror—a reflective surface onto which we project further imagined sightings—through which Narcissus' earliest inexperience with self-awareness coincides with his recognition that others (entities which are 'not-him') must also exist. As a result of these foundational occasions eventuated by his contingent and brushing encounters with other bodies, Narcissus submits to a difficulty in learning (Nouvet 81). Because this thesis ventures a gentle approach towards the unsuspecting and unexpected occasions in narrative works for which we are never fully prepared, ongoing engagement with such nuanced and freighted inter-psychical moments is critical, then, for our experimental purposes.

Nouvet reminds us to gradually come back to narcissism. In order to return, we must first consult Ovid's text where we re-acquaint ourselves with Narcissus as a confounded infant, a frightened conversant, a young man, a petrified flower. The implications of the final floral conversion are rather startling. Nouvet notes that no one is present to witness the transformation of his liquified body into a white flower at the scene of his death (Nouvet 150). Following John Brenkman who also argues in 'Narcissus and the Text' that the flower cuts out all possibility of a narrative voice (150), Nouvet posits the additional note that to '...replace a subject with a flower, it's to make a figure out of a subject who was originally lacking in subjectivity' (136). Narcissus is simply too fragile, too porous, too fragmented to be the sort of subject who could boast of pathological self-interest. Narcissus reminds those who count on a grounded sense of 'I' that they too remain vulnerable to the risk of infinite regression. At any given moment, an adult may fall into a 'mythical childhood,' leaving them to grapple with an incapacity to ever perfectly coincide with themselves (Nouvet 285). Against the current misconception of narcissism as an overdose of noxious self-centeredness, Derrida asserts the need to pursue 'a movement of narcissistic reappropriation' (Derrida, *Points...* 199). Without this reclamatory movement, as Derrida predicts, 'the relation to the other would be absolutely destroyed' (*Points...* 199). We are certainly not 'done' with narcissism if our earliest interactions with others are already mediated by our mistaken recognitions of ourselves. If, as Nouvet insists, 'the other can but only advance itself within the frame of narcissism,' it's because Narcissus only ever comes to see

himself as others see him (Nouvet 142, 144).¹⁰ The other shapes our own self-perceptions. In returning to narcissism, we revisit the subsistence of alterity as it contours the event of our earliest misunderstanding.

I'm intrigued in this chapter by the vastly creative ways in which small creatures scan their environments for instructive hints and warning signs. In the article 'Some Unconscious Factors in Reading,' James Strachey imagines reading to be a child's 'first intellectual activity' (322). As an activity which this small creature learns 'systematically,' Strachey declares reading to be more primal than writing even if the child doesn't pursue it as instinctively as he labours to talk (323). As in the case of a child who mouths the words out loud while reading, Strachey notes that a strong assimilative mechanism motivates this vocal experience (326). For he writes there that reading '...is actually a method of taking someone else's thoughts inside oneself. It is a way of eating another person's words' (326). On account of its psychic requirement and absorptive intensity, reading is also considered by Strachey to be derived, to some extent, from 'unconscious trends' (324). He initially posits the nature of these trends as having been driven by 'anal erotic impulses,' yet quickly sidesteps this suggestion in consideration of '...the important and perhaps even predominant part playing in the unconscious background of reading by the *oral* components' (324). Traces of orality can be found in the metaphors we apply to reading: as when we 'devour' a work, find it 'indigestible,' or occasionally refer to 'voracious' or 'omnivorous readers' (324). Strachey traces an affinity between 'the behaviour of an infant enjoying its meal' and a reader's pleasurable and immersive absorption into their book (325). Should these examples fail to justify an affiliation between orality and reading, Strachey proceeds to invoke 'other books—the ones that we have to get our teeth into and chew up before we can digest them' (326). In response to the kind of text which somehow discourages instant assimilation, he proposes two possible stages; namely, 'a preambivalent one where everything seems to go smoothly and easily, and an ambivalent one where difficulties arise at every step' (326).

¹⁰ « Croire que le moi est un autre, comme le fait Narcisse, implique en effet que l'autre puisse faire figure de moi » (Nouvet 144).

Should the reader be beset by the second attitude, as Strachey notes is often the case, ‘a number of sadistic and destructive impulses’ would also be released in the process (Strachey 327). When the sublimation of textual matter appears ‘unstable or incomplete,’ every word may be felt by the reader as inimical to itself (327). Reading involves biting, that is, the tearing of *words* into pieces one masticates or lovingly rolls around in one’s mouth, to the extent that words, for Strachey, occasionally become part of readers (327). As long as ‘obsessional readers’ are governed by the paranoid belief that a particular word imposes upon them such an uncertain threat, Strachey reasons that they remain driven by a need ‘to turn back, to read and to re-read’ (327). Neurotic oral readers, intent on discerning whether their symbolic enemies have been entirely ‘disposed of,’ dedicate themselves to the effort of determining whether these contrarian word-figures are still ‘lurking somewhere, overlooked between the lines perhaps, or missed by some other mistake’ (327). Strachey maintains that what compels them to re-read is a persistent need to locate their semantic adversaries with the aim of acquiring a fixed understanding of them.

An insatiable curiosity compels brooders to re-read. This chapter proposes that a brooding figure emerges with Narcissus. This affective position materialises once the natural disaster of narcissistic mis-identification begins to settle its irretrievable losses. The propensity to ‘brood,’ associated with a capacity to ‘cherish in the mind’ as one nurses ‘the wrath (or the like) to keep it warm’ (OED), marks the incipience of a melancholic situation interspersed with glimmers of radical acceptance. As this wounding condition sets in, the brooding adult-infant becomes an embodied point of reference for those who are left to contend with what Narcissus could not. Brooders are those who, in returning to certain insoluble challenges and disorienting memories, gradually become accustomed to equivocal and painful states of not-knowing. Narcissus could not bring himself to confront the destructive morass which subtends his encounter with himself as already ‘othered.’ But brooders are those who bravely submit to unknowable bodies and textual forces, and fail, in such moments, to attain mastery.

*N. pseudo-Narcissus*¹¹

Nouvet remarks in *Enfances Narcisse* that, contrary to mistaken belief, ‘*narcissus poeticus*’ is not a yellow flower but one whose red center is hemmed in by white petals (Nouvet 126). This botanical misconception tells us something about the interlocutors in Bowen’s narrative. Both teacher and pupils are covertly invested in parrying the threat of narcissistic injury. Unable to harmonise their poetic evaluations of the flower, neither side appears willing, nor interested, in conceding to the other’s position. ‘Only, if I could be able,’ Miss Murcheson struggles to clarify her intent, ‘I’m always trying to make you care about the little fine *things* you might pass over, that have such big roots underground’ (Bowen 26). She bemoans her students throughout the narrative for being ‘so horribly used to *things*’ and for lacking discernible innovation of their own (23): ‘That’s why you’re so lazy; you’re using *my* brains; just giving me back what I gave you again, a little bit worse for the wear’ (24). She repines a bit earlier in the text: ‘Why can’t they see *things* for themselves, think them out?’ (23, emphasis mine)—if only they would let themselves be carried away by spontaneous affect and instinct, ‘But spontaneity is beyond them at present. They’re simply calves, after all, rather sophisticated calves’ (23). Her attempt to convey the lively temperament of these *things* to her audience of three fails to impress them: ‘But she had told them *nothing*, given them the stone of her abstract, colourless idealism while they sat there, open-mouthed for sentimental bread’ (26-7, emphasis mine). Her receptivity to the daffodil’s address animates their romantic curiosities in a way which breeds in them a bit of hostility: ‘She was encouraging them to outrage the decencies of conversation. It was bad form, this flagrant discussion of subjects only for their most secret and fervid whisperings’ (26). Daffodils are deemed by them to be pretty things offered by suitors who intend to convey affectionate sentiment. Their aspirations to become the future recipients of such floral gifts is troubled by what they perceive to be Miss Murcheson’s cloistered and unconcerned attachment to *things*. Unable to imbibe the nutrients of what could otherwise have been a fertile exchange for them, the students leave Miss Murcheson more

¹¹ *N. pseudo-Narcissus* is the yellow daffodil’s Latin referent (*OED*).

convinced than ever of a paucity in her erotic and emotional life given her seeming dedication to the most ‘paltry’ of things.

With the exception of one reference to a ‘subject,’ Bowen’s seven-page tale makes no mention of ‘objects.’ Instead, there are fourteen references to ‘things.’ Derrida writes of ‘things’ and their impressive abilities to address us inasmuch as each ‘other-thing’

gives mean order or addresses an impossible, intransigent, insatiable demand to me, without an exchange and without a transaction, without a possible contract. Without a word, without speaking to me, it addresses itself to me, to me alone in my irreplaceable singularity, in my solitude as well. I owe to the thing an absolute respect which no general law would mediate: the law of the thing is singularity and difference as well. An infinite debt ties me to it, a duty without funds or foundation. I shall never acquit myself of it. Thus the thing is not an object; it cannot become one. (Derrida, *Signéponge/Signsponge* 14)

It would seem, according to Derrida, that a thing cannot be an object since it requests from its beneficiary a level of recognition and attention which can neither be predetermined nor comprehensively assessed. A thing implicates *you*, to the extent that it re-orientes and sends fresh bits of memories and inexperiences back to *you* only to enliven as much as to simultaneously mute you. A thingly imposition is as much an occasion for brooding as it is an occasion for transformation. While some things remain impervious to human scrutiny, others can scratch and scuff to the point of spurring a recollection or other forms of psychical disturbances. From the Latin *tendēre*, meaning, ‘to stretch out’ or ‘hold forth’ (*OED*), Bowen too compels her readers to *tend* to the accreting bits, pieces, trinkets, and things which reoccur throughout her text. Readers are perhaps not always aware of it, but already, the manifestation of things in her story requests that we diminish ourselves a bit in size, muffle the preponderance of an all-knowing ‘I,’ and give ourselves over to the chance of all these undecided others.

Things, in Bowen’s writing, seem at once able to transform the feeling of a room and to interrupt the circuit of a character’s thought. In the second paragraph of her story, ‘A gust of wind [...] whirling [Miss Murcheson’s] skirts up round her like a ballet-dancer’s, and rustling the Reckitts-blue

paper around the daffodils...' invites a more common suspicion to permeate the surface of what is otherwise inscribed: 'She felt as though she had been enticed into a harlequinade by a company of Columbines who were quivering with laughter at her discomfiture; and looked round to see if anyone had witnessed her display of chequered moirette petticoat and the inches of black stocking above her boots. But the world remained unembarrassed' (21). Bowen endows the daffodils with animistic traits. The flowers take on such aureate and flirtatious personality that their light and jestful arrangement seems to taunt Miss Murcheson. Prior to summoning her students and so, in a state of solitude, she addresses the daffodils with a cheekiness that prefaces the tone with which she will come shortly to address her three students: "'How tight-laced you are, poor Columbines,'" she said, throwing away the paper and seeing how the bass cut deep into the fleshy stems. "You were brave above it all, but—there now!" She cut the bass and shook the flowers out into a vase. "I can't correct," she sighed, "with you all watching me. You are so terribly flippant!"' (22). To the point of impeding her discretionary ease, these daffodils are already 'things' lodged inconspicuously within Miss Murcheson's psyche (Brown 11). And when she cuts the 'bass' in order to relieve their 'fleshy stems' from their fibrous states of constriction, the cut is intended not as a violation but as an act of love.

Little Fine Things

In the second volume of *The Principles of Psychology* and under the heading '*Appropriation or Acquisitiveness*,' William James writes: 'The beginnings of acquisitiveness are seen in the impulse which very young children display, to snatch at, or beg for, any object which pleases their attention. Later, when they begin to speak, among their first words they emphasise are "me" and "mine"' (James 422). Young children are perhaps the most obvious inheritors and custodians of subject-object relations for they seem naturally to behave as if they were very tiny masters. Children impulsively reach for and snatch whatever is within their immediate vicinity which they either claim as their own, endow with certain functions, or conceive as mere extensions of themselves. Shipley's *Dictionary of Word Origins* explains that 'subject' and 'object' are first opposed to one another in logic and

grammar (*Dictionary of Word Origins* 341). The word ‘object’ is the conjunction of the Latin prefix *ob*, meaning ‘in the way of,’ and the Latin suffix *jacere* whose English verb-equivalent is ‘to throw’ (*Dictionary of Word Origins* 341). An object, conventionally defined on the basis of its perceived utility, has a way suddenly of appearing in front of the subject as if it had been violently catapulted towards him. Cixous comments in *L’amour du loup* on the use of the word, specifically, on its transition from *objekt* to *Gegenstand*, insofar as the second comes, over time, to take a certain precedence in the German language (122). The term is composed of *stand*, as in, the ‘being-there’ or the being who stands, and *gegen*, which Cixous translates as ‘against,’ in the proximal sense of abutting or nearly touching another, but also, in the contrarian sense of being positioned opposite-to something (122). She notes that *gegen*, as a spatial term, also connotes a certain towardness or closeness which she refers to as « le vers, l’environ, l’alentour » (122). According to *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, the 19th-century adoption of the German *objectiv* preserves the sense of the ‘object’ as what ‘is external to the mind’ (620). Subjects psychically apprehend objects in ways where these register, irrespective of proximity or distance, as foreign and external to them. The entry on the ‘subject’ in the *Dictionary of Word Origins* also reinforces the sense of the object as a matter pro-jected because there, the etymology of the French *jeter* (to throw), is thought to prefigure a later reference to the term *jettison*, meaning, ‘to cast overboard so as to lighten a ship in peril’ (341). Already inscribed within the etymology of these correlated terms, then, is the object’s rather precarious fate to be cast aside; or more decisively, to be jettisoned overboard. And while a ‘subject’ shares the same suffix as an ‘object,’ this tensive relation tilts disproportionately in favour of the one who names and chooses when to abandon it.

Peter Schwenger suggests in ‘Words and the Murder of the Thing’ that ‘things’ are subject to change. He concedes that these unique and singular entities become estranged from themselves once names are assigned to them. In support of this position, Schwenger consults Heidegger’s ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’ where it’s written that language is not ‘in the being of stone, plant, or animal’ (qtd. in Schwenger 137). To confer a name onto a ‘thing’ is to subsume the alterity of this non-human other

‘into the terms of the human subject’ (Schwenger 137). This reductive process allows us to define ourselves in contradistinction to others on the basis of what we are not. The process of naming reduces a ‘thing’ to an object of knowledge, wherein ‘All of our knowledge of the object is only knowledge of its modes of representation—or rather of *our* modes of representation’ (Schwenger 137). To resolve the issue that ‘things’ are so contorted by words as to have been figuratively put to ‘death,’ thinkers are invited in Schwenger’s text to advance one of two positions: either that the contemplation of ‘things’ is conditioned on the basis that words are ‘things’ too, or that things themselves are ‘hollowed out by an awareness that they can never be seen as anything but signifiers in a psychic space’ (138). Still, Schwenger is able to concede that something of the ‘thing’ always exceeds semantic capture seeing as what ‘shadows the object’ is still the ‘unknowable otherness to the thing’ (137).

I wish to present a lasting way of engaging with ‘things’ where the intention is neither to pare these entities down, turn them into objects, nor bracket them off into linguistic units. In a chapter in *Philosophical Hermeneutics* called ‘The Nature of Things and the Language of Things,’ Hans-Georg Gadamer urges a thinking of ‘things’ as they ‘...really are, namely, not a material that is used and consumed, not a tool that is used and set aside, but something instead that has existence in itself and is “not forced to do anything,” as Heidegger says’ (‘The Nature of Things’ 71-2). This thesis follows Gadamer’s approach to ‘things’ in recognition that these entities exist without effort to be or not to be otherwise. Gadamer writes about the linguistic experience of the world as ‘absolutely prior’ to both ‘things’ and to ‘the human mind that avails itself of the instrument of linguistic understanding’ (78). Of principal interest to him is how ‘things bring themselves to expression in language’ (81). If we are reticent or unwilling ‘to hear things in their own being,’ it’s because ‘the language of things’ attunes us to the way ‘things’ are ‘...subjected to man’s calculus and to his domination of nature through the rationality of science. Talk of a respect for things is more and more unintelligible in a world that is becoming ever more technical. They are simply vanishing,’ Gadamer laments, ‘and only the poet still remains true to them’ (71-2).

Buttercups

In her unique compendium of thoughts and scribbles published posthumously as *La pesanteur et la grâce* (*Gravity and Grace*), Simone Weil writes that ‘desire’ is impossible because it can only destroy its ‘objects’ (94). She conceives of desire as a blinding force which alters our perceptions of the objects we want. To combat the dominion of this inherent weakness, Weil settles on looking as a more graceful and less harmful alternative to eating: ‘Man’s great affliction,’ she argues, ‘which begins with infancy and accompanies him till death, is that looking and eating are two different operations. Eternal beatitude is a state where to look is to eat’ (100). In contrast to Narcissus’ eye in Ovid’s *mise-en-scène*, portrayed there as an insatiable mouth whose thirst is not appeased by the recognition that it’s only ‘an illusion without body’ (Nouvet 101, translation mine), Weil purifies the act of looking by estranging it from the body’s libidinal whims and erotic urges. When faced with his reflection in the fountain, Narcissus is affected by what moves so many others before him to want him (Nouvet 118). What Narcissus desires is the other’s Desire which, as Nouvet puts it, is to come to know his own body’s *imago* (Nouvet 118). And while Nouvet writes that he falls in love with the work of art which he perceives himself to be (Nouvet 95), the issue, as Weil identifies it, is that Narcissus cannot be two, just as ‘Lovers cannot be one’ (94-5). As an antidote to desire’s destructive affinities, Weil leaves us, then, with the provocation to simply ‘desire [...] nothing’ (95).

A scene in Marcel Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu*, in which Leo Bersani discerns the unusual work of a non-sadistic object-relation, complements Weil’s position on seeing versus eating. Bersani discerns a tender affinity in Marcel’s approach to « *les boutons d’or* »—to this flower, then, as ‘yellow as the yolk of eggs’ and whose appearance Marcel often admires during his walks along the Guermantes Way (*Caravaggio’s Secrets* 67). Bersani insists that Marcel’s approach to the buttercups contradicts ‘his most characteristic relation to the external world, which is a devouring one’ (*Caravaggio’s Secrets*, 68). If an oral appetite ‘initiates the process,’ Bersani notes that it remits with the awareness that his gustative desire cannot be consummated. His desire to eat the buttercups is

sublimated into a desire which intensifies inasmuch as it makes perfect and gentle contact with the illuminated surface of their golden petals. This approach for Bersani diametrically cuts into the appropriative phantasy that the ego can literally ingest its environment (70). Marcel's seeing-without-eating is the corollary of a 'disinterested contemplation' (Bersani 70). For while he derives a narcissistic pleasure from this seductive encounter, the flower's utility is considered to him of marginal interest. Rendered useless, the buttercups become to Marcel uselessly beautiful. 'Beauty, then,' Bersani writes, 'is a mode of relationality, a manifestation of the subject's implication in the world' (70). Bersani, the literary theorist, becomes animated by Marcel's understated ability to convert the yellow flower into a work of art (69). Bersani does concede that a degree of violence is implied by 'Marcel's attentive presence coercing the flowers to be themselves' (70). But the curious pleasure which connects Marcel to the buttercups' splendor is precisely what intensifies for him their distinction. An 'inviolable distance' isolates Marcel, the human onlooker, from the natural world to which he remains an exulted witness; and the distance and the disinterest is what sustains for him the flower's difference (70).

Marcel is moved by a sense of aesthetic marvel each time the buttercups occur to him. The instance of a 'first time' is unprecedented in that it happens only once, even when the impression which it invokes appears to be of an enduring kind. 'Each time,' it's *as if* the buttercups happen to Marcel for the first time precisely because they elicit in him the kind of delectation which, far from satisfying itself in the pursuit of pleasure, only inflates his desire (*« un sentiment qui ne pourra pas trouver dans le plaisir sa satisfaction mais qui s'ajoute au désir »*) (Proust 2021). As his desire magnifies, it cleaves to the swelling sensation which the pleasure of their mere sighting accords (Proust 2021). The sort of exaltation which subtends Marcel's recognition of the uselessly beautiful buttercups could perhaps be reflected in the child's initial encounter with the world as an ever-expanding mass. In a psychoanalytic book-chapter on 'The Notes on the Mind-Body Question,' Eugenio Gaddini discerns the child's first step as an initial 'confrontation with unlimited external space' (Gaddini 133). Prior to taking his first steps, the child is not yet aware of the extent to which external space immeasurably exceeds him. I wish to propose, then, that this tender occasion of a first-time, in a way that perhaps

simulates the vicissitudes of learning, can warp into a moment of sweeping incertitude. For we can imagine how the child's elation in the face of such a novel discovery could cede to sudden feelings of unguardedness and distrust. I'm suggesting that wonder can easily morph for the child into an awful feeling of unknowing. In inexperience of this sort, fascination can always twist, at any given instant, into a foreboding sense that one has perhaps been tricked. How soon, then, until the child's earliest assumptions about walking as an uninhibited and autonomous mode of travel, turn out to have been fallacious? And if the child's 'first step' or the beholder's 'first time' begins with startling wonder, how soon until it's marred by the incursions of an untrusting outside?

A Crossbreed

Wonder and trickery converge in a strange phantasmic scene from Amelia Gray's *Threats*. David discovers, buried under a rock by his mailbox, a scrap of paper wrapped inside a 'Christmas themed baggie' with the ensuing threat imprinted upon it: 'MY TRUTH WILL BRING ATOMIC SNOW UPON YOUR SWEET-SMELLING LAMBS AND CHILDREN' (101). In response to the conjunction of these lambs and children, David contrives a detailed image of a crossbreed. He imagines even the sorts of pre-verbal sounds which these creatures might be inclined to make:

The words spoken by the lamb-child sounded more like the noise a baby might make to himself while discovering a box of wooden toys crafted to fit into one another, the baby realizing in his discovery that things beyond his control had been created for his amusement, that there was in fact a world beyond the walls of his home, and if the world had created such an object as a wooden star that would fit into a star shape on a board, what other wonders might it hold? In this way, the child is tricked... (Gray 101-2)

With the scattered emission of pre-linguistic noises, David dreams that a deceptive and formative event in a crossbreed's life could perhaps be felt to unfold. The scene cuts out too soon to know, and yet: imaginably, at some point or other, the infant-creature would confront the shortcomings of his own sense-perceptions. The pretense of a world filled with immeasurable possibilities would begin, I gather, to erode the creature's naïve confidence in his own deductive capacities. And as his broadening worldview continues to flourish, the small lamb-creature would accordingly feel his 'self' depreciate in

worth and in function. And yet, this defeat could bear an instructive quality; especially if we consider the possibility that this stage in the lamb-child's unusual development suggests the onset of an interminable brooding.

A silent reference to 'A Crossbreed [A Sport]' (*Eine Kreuzung*) shimmers in Gray's text. In this two-page story, Kafka's narrator introduces readers to 'a curious animal, half kitten, half lamb' (426). As the last one of its kind, this domesticated creature—who used to be 'more lamb than kitten'—remains more or less a balanced hybrid of the two. Kafka's creature maintains a certain closeness to its owner, in part, because of a sacred attachment to the narrator's paternal family. The narrator explains that it was in accordance with the father's will that compound-creatures of his kind were traditionally bred, reared, and protected by his family. Akin to Gray's lamb-children, Kafka's lamb-kitten is not entirely deprived of its capacity for speech, where, occasionally, it would 'muzzle' up to the narrator's ear 'as if it were saying something to me,' 'turn[ing] its head afterwards and gaz[ing] in my face to see the impression its communication has made. And to oblige it I behave as if I had understood and nod. Then it jumps to the floor and dances about with joy' (Kafka 427). Without imparting the meaning of this saying-without-saying, both narrator and creature in Kafka's story seem to understand-without-understanding the pre-condition of their intertwined heritage. A mirror crystallises at the very intersection where their two creaturely reflections meet. As tears stream from the crossbreed's 'huge whiskers,' the narrator asks: 'Were they mine, or were they the animal's?' (427). His inability to detect a lachrymal source affirms the entangled circumstances of their dishonourable births. An unspoken game and playful sport adjoins these two orphans who tarnish their father's legacy on account of their mutual aberrations and deficiencies. Each remains unable to live up to the father's austere memory. Near the end of the story, the narrator honours his word never to put down the lamb-kitten, '...even though it sometimes gazes at me with a look of human understanding, challenging me to do the thing of which both of us are thinking...' (427). Kafka's parable blends two bestial origins to the point of ambiguity. As the source of tears and surly gazes intermingle beyond any traceable source of origin, the ability to delineate which creature belongs to which species also suffers

irremediably. The later reference to a spectacle—a literary trope which Kafka wields elsewhere as in ‘The Hunger Artist’ and ‘In the Penal Colony’—is posited there in the spirit of interconnection: ‘Naturally it is a great source of entertainment for children. Sunday morning is the visiting hour. I sit with the little beast on my knees, and the children of the whole neighborhood stand around me’ (426). Through the eyes of other spectators, the lamb-kitten and narrator are branded with the same aberrant status. They both separately come to introject, as a result of this communal sentence, a sense of depreciated self-worth. The possibility of ending their lives as of never fulfilling the parent’s expectations fuse into the fountainhead of a silent amusement made all the more pleasurable because it remains, somewhere between them, unrealised and unspoken.

4. Brooding. Part II.

*I love to find new founts
and drink; I love to gather fresh new flowers
and seek the laureate's crown whence Muses never
ere now have veiled the brow of any man;
for, first, I teach of weighty things, and work
man's heart free of religion's garrotte-knot,
and next I turn the bright light of my verse
on darkness, painting it all with poetry.
This, too, I think, is not without good reason.
For just as doctors, whom must give vile wormwood
to children, start by painting the cup-lip round
with sweet and golden honey: thus the child,
young and unknowing, is tricked and brought to set
the cup to his lip; meanwhile, he swallows the bitter
wormwood, and though deceived is not infected,
but by this trick grows well and strong again*

Titus Lucretius Carus, *On the Nature of Things*¹²

In his treatise on 'Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood,' Freud concentrates on a particular failing which mires the future of most children's meditations. This stage of development which occurs around the third year of life is designated by Freud the period of '*infantile sexual researches*' ('Leonardo da Vinci' 79). Characterised by their 'untiring love of asking questions,' children at this stage are mottled by endless 'circumlocutions' which obscure the real questions they are not yet able to put into words, let alone apprehend (79). A child's curiosity towards sexual processes appears to be mitigated by its concern for the origins of creaturely life. A cloud of intrigue shrouds the biological secret of 'where babies come from' (79). A parent, Freud notes, may try to abate their child's precocious musings by offering an explanatory tale. But unlike Lucretius who likens the ease of his poetic faculty with the medicinal properties of wormwood in this chapter's epigraph, the

¹² Lines 3-17 in Book IV of Lucretius' poem.

adult's recourse to fiction is not the sort of trick which Freud associates with healing. When Freud gives the example of the 'fable of the stork,' he confesses to a certain 'astonishment' felt when the child is seen to reject the adult's explanatory narrative (78-9). Because even at this preliminary stage of development, the fable dawns on the child as an egregious fib. Freud discerns a 'serious opposition' to adults to result from this, who are then '...never afterwards forgive[n] for having deceived them here about the truth of the case' (79). Jean-Bertrand Pontalis writes in his *Frontiers of Psychoanalysis* that children often detect adults' myth-yarning maneuvers by intuition and come to conceive of the fable as '...a form of knowledge distorted by adults, and in this sense, a deceptive illusion' (Pontalis 79). This chapter, once again, concerns itself with the child-brooder's narcissistic course of development. In re-tracing the infantile desire for recognition from a teacher, parent, and on occasion, from a desired other, we limn stories of orphans who submit to a range of destructive and creative desires and come, in the process, to flourish on their own.

Pontalis writes of the child's impressive ability to construct theories '...put together with bits and pieces provided by perceptions, instinctual components, and privileged zones of the body, their sources are anything but arbitrary' (Pontalis, *Frontiers* 79). At this early stage of sexual development, children reach a point where their careful conjecturings must be 'abandoned as insoluble' (Freud, 'Leonardo and a Memory of his Childhood' 79). This preliminary stage of maturation prevents them from accessing what they so desperately long to know. The child succumbs to frustrations concerning its own forestalled investigations in spite of resourceful tactics it managed to cultivate along the way. As Freud concedes in 'Leonardo and a Memory of his Childhood,' the effect of this 'first attempt at intellectual independence [...] appears to be of a *lasting and deeply depressing kind*' (78-9). Or, as he writes in 'The Sexual Theories of Children,' since this moody mental ineptitude 'becomes the prototype of all later intellectual work directed towards the solution of problems,' it proves to have 'a crippling effect on the child's whole future' (79). This chapter explores how 'brooding and doubting' haunt at least some children's assays into reading and learning.

Psychoanalysis revisited

Melanie Klein begins a chapter in *Love, Guilt, and Reparation and Other Works* named ‘The Role of the School in the Libidinal Development of the Child’ with an axiomatic statement: ‘It is a well-known fact in psycho-analysis that in the fear of examinations, as in examination-dreams, the anxiety is displaced from something sexual on to something intellectual’ (59). Of interest to this analysis is her claim that the ‘stern’ reality which education promotes causes the sublimation of children’s ‘libidinal instinctual energies’ (59). Miss Murcheson’s lectures in Bowen’s ‘Daffodils’ can be seen as attempts to refine her students’ sensual curiosities in recognition of the ‘finer’ things; of things ‘cherished’ for their refined intricacies in part because they invoke some kind of higher angelic order. Klein asserts that a child’s responsiveness to learning presages the general ‘attitude’ which the person in question will come to assume in life (Klein 59). And yet, some time during or near the end of this assiduous stage of growth, while the phantasies and desires of young learners are ‘clamouring for recognition,’ she writes that ‘the repressing forces of the ego tax [their] strength excessively’ (Klein 56). In the most agreeable of circumstances, then, ‘the embattled elements achieved a kind of balance’ but in instances where the integrative functions of the ego suffer and repression fails, ‘problems and inhibitions of every kind, including overt illness’ threaten to abound (Klein 56). As speculated at the end of the previous chapter through the narrative engagement with David’s ‘lamb-children,’ Gray incites us to consider the kinds of insurmountable adversities which might hamper a creature’s explorative researches. The lamb-children are misled, whether or not they are made aware of it, when an unimaginable blow assails their fragile constitutions and psychological temperaments. I speculate there that in such textual circumstances, a brooding, perhaps, has *already* seeped in.

‘...first that kind of love...’

Hélène Cixous writes of reading as an enchantment potent enough to ensnare the reader back into the dreams of her many childhoods (‘Philippines’ 277). ‘And that’s what I *want* above all,’ she writes in a

magical text she names ‘Philippines,’ as if the desire for a book to transpose her amidst the dreamscapes of her many childhoods *alone* for her chooses. A desire for a reading enacted from the place of a fumbling child somehow ushers me towards the nine-year-old girl in Rivka Galchen’s short story ‘Wild Berry Blue.’ By chance, then, this piece in *American Innovations* moves me to write here because it addresses the condition of feeling negligible and small with such gentle and presiding compassion. This retrospective tale, told from the perspective of an unnamed character who revisits the pain of her first love—a fast-food employee and recovering heroin addict named Roy—unfolds around the girl’s ever-shifting states of infantile desiring. Her youthful attention in the story darts from one irregular surface to another: as from the corner of a yellow Scotch taped bill to the ‘little blue-black lattice’ design of a tattoo she follows along Roy’s wrist (81), from the tawdry recollection of his white tooth (85) to a magazine scrap affixed to the mirror in her household bathroom:

On my dad’s shaving mirror in the bathroom, old Scotch tape holding it in place, is a yellowed bit of paper, torn from a magazine. For years it’s been there, inscrutable. Now I feel certain it carries a secret. About love maybe. About the possessed feeling I have because of Roy.

It says, *And human speech is but a cracked kettle upon which we tap crude rhythms for bears to dance to, while we long to make music that—* (86)

The morsel in ‘Wild Berry Blue’ recalls the taped-in bit of paper at the end of *Threats* which stalls the end of the book from instantly arriving and incites reading to occur as a continuous unfolding. In comparison to Gray’s blank insert, Galchen’s bit of torn magazine relays an encoded message which ends too soon. The promise of expressive continuity, which the girl presumably relies upon to spur some self-reflection or some semblance of an understanding, cuts out at the instant it would seem to proffer a formative lesson.

Mostly left to her own devices, the girl immerses herself in a range of benign activities as if to teach herself to distract the involuntary ‘habits and ways of the heart’ (Galchen 88): ‘Roy. Taking a wild berry candy from my pocket, I resolve again to focus on a candy under my tongue instead of on him’ (Galchen 89). On the eve of the Medieval Fair, she decides to relocate to the ‘brightly lit bathroom’ from her bedroom in which the presiding ambience seems to her ‘alien and lurksome’

(Galchen 91). Cocooned there by the ‘whirring fan noise: it was like a quiet,’ she sits in the bathtub where she wills herself to become absorbed by a demanding page in her maze book—when, out of the corner of her eye, the ‘yellowed magazine fragment—*cracked kettle*’ suddenly diverts her attention ‘and it was like a ghost in the room with me, though its message, I felt sure—almost too sure, considering that I didn’t understand it—had nothing to do with me’ (91). She tongues the textural components of the letters, ‘*Human speech is like a cracked kettle*’ (92) as if to discern in the spaces between the words the twining formation of a muted code (92). Things start to happen as the girl begins slowly to cull from the fragment the crippling impossibility of her own longing. A brooding reflection sets in as her desires begin to chase away from her (92). To the extent that Roy has become for her, her ‘whole world,’ she is no longer able to take comfort in the simple pleasures of eating couscous with butter or of falling asleep on the sofa next to her father while random fulgurs of light dance across the TV monitor (87). The sweetness of these once uncomplicated pleasures relent as the bitter intensity of her desire for Roy begins further to distend. The story culminates in a depressive reconciliation with the pattern her desires seem destined to repeat: ‘I never got over him. I never get over anyone’ (95).

An intriguing conversion takes place in Galchen’s narrative. The nine-year old girl who once dreamt of procuring herself a crown at the annual Medieval Fair will later renounce the object of her desire for a tragic puppet, as if this simple exchange could elicit from Roy the recognition she so desperately craves. Initiation for this tailored fancy can be traced back to the fast food restaurant where Roy works and where she participates every Saturday in a shared ritual alongside her father who reads the newspaper over coffee while she eats her cookies and finishes his creamers. On one such Saturday made peculiar by the occurrence of an exchange with Roy at the fastfood counter, the girl blurts out her intention to attend the Medieval Fair the following weekend. Roy shares with her a fondness for ‘those puppets they sell there—those real plain wood ones,’ without naturally anticipating that such an innocent disclosure could cause the commodity of his choice to supplant her own: ‘all I wanted was that puppet because that puppet was going to solve everything’ (94). It becomes the thing she wants

above all—to the extent that she finds herself loitering in front of the puppet stand on the day of the fair. And when her father swiftly acquiesces to her wailing demands in spite of her mother’s disparaging ‘It’s so ugly’ (94), she immediately begrudges him: ‘His alliance struck me as misguided, pathetic, even childish; I felt like a villain; we bought the puppet’ (95). And later, when the girl notices a defect on the puppet’s cracked hand, she ratiocinates: ‘That wasn’t the only reason I couldn’t give the puppet to Roy. Looking at that mute piece of wood, I saw something. A part of me that I’d never chosen, that I would never control’ (95). The girl in Galchen’s narrative channels a sentiment expressed in Nouvet’s *Enfances Narcisse* concerning desire ‘as never simply mine but as this other within me which escapes ‘my’ control and ‘my’ conscience’...’ (156, translation mine).

The girl’s identification with the surrogate puppet works to unfetter the pointedness of her own limerence: ‘An image of Roy came to my mind, particularly of that tooth. I felt my love falling off, dissolving’ (95). What she encounters in the doll’s muted reflection is the stubborn passivity of her own desires. And what she reads between the melodious lines of a ‘*cracked kettle... crude rhythms... bears to dance...*’ is a kind of seduction where a creature named *desire* fizzles out just as it barely skims its mark. The girl is not yet aware that this tattered passage is derived from Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*; nor that the passage in Flaubert’s work conserves the echo of an expressive failure. For it follows the scene where Emma Bovary professes the intensity of her attachment to her *paramour* Rodolphe and avails herself, in so doing, to rather lurid expletives: ‘I am your servant and your concubine! You are my king, my idol! You are good! You are beautiful! You are intelligent! You are strong!’ (Flaubert 265), where each iteration registers more stale and unconvincing than the former to Rodolphe who so happens to take grave exception to their overuse. Galchen appeals in ‘Wild Berry Blue’ to Francis Steegmuller’s 1957 translation of Flaubert’s work. And while the excerpt in Galchen’s story cuts out, Steegmuller’s version ends with music ‘...*that will melt the stars*’ (180, emphasis added). The girl never has the chance to profess her feelings to Roy. And in some way, the unfinished reference to Flaubert’s text in Galchen’s work presages the impossibility of her ever conveying herself to anyone else. ‘Wild Berry Blue’ traces the nostalgic afflictions of a stumbling psyche as it returns to

the source of its first desire and fails, in the process, to glean any substantive resolution from it. The frustrated girl who cannot garner the answer for which she longingly pines, begins to glean the contours of a fated blueprint: 'I still think about a stranger in a green jacket across from me in the waiting room at the DMV. About a blue-eyed man with a singed earlobe that I saw at a Baskin-Robbins with his daughter. My first that kind of love' (95).

In Pieces

Marion Fayolle's *In Pieces* persuades adult-readers to approach her work with a jolt of inexperience. As Paul Gravett writes in the illustrated story-book's introduction, the silence in which these images simmer '...seems naturally to suit the experience of dreaming, where purely visual reveries can unfold before our eyes. It also returns us to a child-like, pre-literate mental state where our only choice is to look attentively and read what we see' (3). The story-book imparts tales of unique and silent human-animal figures who come together only to come-apart. In Fayolle's book where muted scenes of disappointment, competition and fragmentation concatenate, whimsical encounters adorn blank sheets of paper with affective flair and intensity. Generally sectioned off into iterative rows of four, Fayolle's drawings feature phlegmatic figures who weather distressing events with no demonstrable change to their expressions. Their indifference suggests that any conceivable possibility carries the risk of becoming a reality. Fayolle's scenes are fanciful yet literal: humans can split into halves; legs, arms, and heads can recede into the body or fall off without causing any obvious impairment or imminent death; the force of a handprint can stain a cheek blue or red; women's dresses can extend into tablecloths or tents designed for parting and peering under; and inflatable dolls can function as ideal dinner companions to counter the solitude of dismal nights. In the absence of 'speech balloons and narrative captions' (3), her titles provide textual pointers concise enough to inspire vast combings of unconscious possibilities. Her illustrations lend themselves to an intuitive kind of reading, where, in sensing that something in the drawing has been deliberately withheld, the reader may begin to colour in

the spaces between; never to smother the gap to a knowing close, but rather, to nourish something like a pulse or colour, occasionally as bold as a wild berry shade of blue.

The Death of Narcissus

A timeless mythical character re-appears in a three-part drawing series from Fayolle's *In Pieces*. As featured on three sectioned pages respectively entitled '1. The suitors,' '2. The mirror' and '3. Fragments,' the series opens with the figure of a modern-day Narcissus. Fayolle veers away from classical tradition to draw three female suitors in pursuit of his unassuming countenance. The gorgon-like caricatures fail, importantly, to entice him. And despite remaining steadfast in his rejections to their advances, he becomes moved instead by his own mirrored-reflection. At the moment his lips would seem nearly to touch those seen in the glass facing him, the first of three unrequited suitors cuts in: she catapults a stone towards the mirror, the effect of which shatters 'Narcissus' who is nothing if not the product of his own captivated image. The emergence of narcissism as an early developmental stage in childhood takes place for Jacques Lacan when the infant recognises itself to be *trapped* inside the other's image. The identification is not unique to the mirror-experience since it can also register in the encounter with another child. And yet, to either end, the child's intrusive encounter with itself *as* 'another' coerces it to come to terms with the truth of its own mimetic situation. In encountering its simulated double, the child begins to process the repercussions of being caught, as such, in the other's reflection.

Fayolle's suitors are left to assemble their own portraiture of 'Narcissus' who has since been reduced to a mound of discontinuous mirror-bits. Each of their discordant images evades the likeness of his former appearance. Their artforms communicate a blind technique, a labouring process, and an alienation which seizes at the heart of every primal identification. Lacan suggests that the ego '...is constituted by an alienating identification, based on an *initial lack* of completeness in the body and nervous system' (Leader 23, emphasis mine). The ego would then compensate for this 'initial lack' by

investing in the semblance of a congruent self-image. In a short chapter from his *En marges des nuits* entitled « La source souterraine » which I'm tempted to translate here as 'The Underground Spring,' Pontalis suggests that it's only by consenting to a *creux*, by approaching this silent abyss as to brush up against it (« *au risque de frôler l'abîme* »), that one may hope to discover a subterranean life-source from which the capacity to love and dream, alongside a penchant for melancholic contemplation, might continuously flow. Otherwise put, Pontalis identifies in the depth of this *creux* the elementary effusion of all those capacities which Narcissus precisely abandons and obviates in the moment when he repudiates the other (54). Narcissus doesn't immediately recognise himself when he happens upon his own reflection in the spring. While the suitors perhaps remain unaware of their silent longings to restore a space in the form of a *creux* within themselves, they, unlike Narcissus, nonetheless learn to love. Forced to grapple with the consequences of this unravelling encounter, the suitors work to re-assemble the images of their most fervent desire. Their collated stories can be read as scenic reproductions of their own narcissistic failings, where their inability to garner the required attention and care from the chosen love-interest is attenuated by their effort to actively destroy this newly resented and hated thing. But in splintering Narcissus, the suitors also disassemble the illusion of wholeness and coherence which he epitomises. His disintegration offers them a chance to explore the art of misrecognition which is how the partial, if not, uncoordinated images of their own desires are reassembled into portraits which they, as a result, are more suited to bear.

Fayolle rewrites the narcissistic course of self-love. She enacts through the grace of her receptive figures an alternative response to the trap of identification. The phantasmic bubble of sustained affection is pierced by the arrow of the suitors' destructive inclinations. The failed romantic encounter shatters the impossible phantasy of requited love and yields instead to a particulate style of reading. The suitors engage with their bodies in a practice of detachment and gesture towards potential acceptance of the bits and pieces which seem to remain. Defined by their own splintered relation to ruin, they come to note that their desiring pursuits fix the *denouement* of each of their illustrated stories. A recognition occurs in them at the moment of creative dispersal. What they come to discern in

those fissured artworks is not the presence of Narcissus as much as the fabricated memory of their own failed desires. The act of assembling a portrait accords them, ultimately, with a splintered view of the beautiful. Weil conceives of beauty as ‘the fruit we look at without trying to seize’ (*Grace and Gravity*, 150). Whereas we long to eat all the other desirable things, the beautiful for Weil is what we desire, simply, that it should be (149). In Fayolle’s ‘3. Fragments,’ beauty is the quality reflected in the incongruous bits which gather imperfectly. It remains suspended in front of the suitors like an unprocessed scene in the aftermath of a natural disaster. The beautiful becomes for them the raw difference which cannot be assimilated. The refracted light of ruination invites the suitors to come to terms with their desires and to settle somewhere in the vicinity of what they learn, within themselves, to bear witness to.

The Tree

To live and to write is repeatedly to tend to the thing which threatens to drain you. ‘The tree’ in Fayolle’s *In Pieces* illustrates a woman whose essence appears wholly invested in tending to the growth of a single perennial plant. Her body takes every precautionary measure to ensure that this particular tree subsists. She waters, prunes, examines, and tends to its burgeoning height with every threadlike fibre of her hollowed form. As it’s often the case in graphic fiction, time is condensed into quick successive spurts to give the illusion of velocity: the seed morphs quickly into a small treeing and sprouts shortly thereafter into a sturdy pillar with blossoming branches. The last four frames are magnified as if to slow down narrative flow. In the first, she looks up toward the tree with what could be either an air of indifference or faint admiration. She carries a wooden ladder towards the tree in the second frame and in the third, climbs the ladder which rests against the fruit of her toiling labour. Her creative investment comes to an abrupt close with the sight of her limp form suspended from one of its branches. Her face is craned towards the skyline as the pull of gravity bears down the weight of her unresponsive body. Her arms trail behind the curvature of her chest. Her feet remain two stiff planks

dangling under bent knees. The noose around her neck alone binds her to the source of her life's most meaningful work; and this monument outlives her.

Weil writes about the human tendency to die for what is loved: 'They differ only through the level of the thing loved and the concentration or diffusion of their love. No one loves himself. Man would like to be an egoist and cannot. This is the most striking characteristic of his wretchedness and the source of his greatness' (60-1). Weil seems to suggest that an orientation towards otherness is more insistent, or else, more true to nature than the child's earliest autoerotic impulses. The desire to be an egoist is destined to fail on account of the ego's inability to tend uniquely to its own impulses. The work of an expansive love wrenches the ego towards the thing it cannot appropriate. Notwithstanding the numerous projections and thoughts which the ego might naturally displace onto this other thing, this sort of encounter necessitates, at once, a stillness and a quiescence on the part of the 'I' if it is to be *worked* over by the thing's disorienting charm. The imposition of a guiding love-force directs us towards something other than the whims and inclinations of our own egos, and Weil understands this as both a despairing and a blessed thing.

The Orphan

Nouvet compels us in *Enfances Narcisse* to '...remember that [Narcissus'] mother, Liriope, was a nymph, and that his father, Cephissus, was a river' (80-1, translation mine). Narcissus, who doesn't want to lose himself in the other, fears expanding and blending to the point of succumbing to his own undoing (Nouvet 46). In an effort to conserve his vital energy and affirm his sense of identity, Narcissus resists water and, by extension, his mother and father, despite being swallowed in the end by the source of his aquatic provenance (Nouvet 46). Rather than welcoming Echo and accepting himself as an 'other,' he inadvertently chooses death. His fear of becoming vitiated and completely emptied out may be characterised as a resistance to learning. Brooders conversely venture to fail, and in so doing, chance to learn.

Fayolle repeats another variation of 'The tree' under the series 'The carnivorous plant.' There, she illustrates the formation and transformation of a ravenous orphan. The scene begins with a pregnant woman whose partner delivers their infant. As primary caregiver, the mother holds the child after his birth only for a consolidated span of time. The benefits of her embrace are promptly renounced in favour of her partner's watering technique. Not unlike the woman in Fayolle's tree, the father is also equipped with a watering can. With this instrument, he oversaturates the child with a stream of unwavering attention. The child, unlike his parents, appears for the duration of the series in a perturbingly naked state. And while his physical characteristics remain unchanged, his body begins to grow so precipitously that he surpasses his mother and father in both stature and size. As a result of his overindulgent upbringing, the spoiled child is overcome by the sudden need to revolt. The once gentle and seemingly unaffected infant morphs into a grotesque monster who crushes his mother's back under the sole of his giant foot and consumes half of his father with his rapacious mouth.

A carnivorous child eventually materialises in Walter Benjamin's essay on the Austrian writer Karl Kraus. Prior to appearing, Benjamin works first to introduce Kraus' variegated personalities as Viennese editor and main contributor to the publication *Die Fackel* [The Torch]. He opens his piece with Kraus's rebuke of journalism on the grounds that it makes liberal use of the 'empty phrase' while disseminating 'news' to a public it deems incapable of making informed judgments (433). When naming an event, Kraus maintains that the journalist derives a sense of security and renewed vitality from his ability to draw correlations between corresponding historical and political incidents. Inherent in Kraus' portrait of the journalist—as per Benjamin's astute observation—is the projection of a negative image of his own self (434). Benjamin rhetorically insists on this because who but Kraus '...could have shown a more burning interest in himself and in his own existence than the writer who is never finished with this subject?' (434). Kraus affirms, then, his own self-interests when he brings 'together all his energies in the struggle against the empty phrase' on the basis that it registers to him as the most 'despotic' form of expression through which journalism can wish to assert and maintain its

‘dominion over things’ (434). And yet, concealed within Kraus’ scathing review of the press is an intriguing objection against the assembly of things where the primary aim is to manufacture events. For, as Kraus himself comes to define it, a journalist is ‘...a person who has little interest either in himself and his own existence, or in the mere existence of things, but who feels things in their relationships, above all where these meet in events—and only in this moment becomes united, substantial, and alive’ (434).

Nicola Gess argues that ‘...the child here stands (in Benjamin’s reading of Kraus) for an idea of primeval purity, the cannibal or man-eater for a principle of the destruction of the mythic order—a destruction from which modern civilization emerges’ (685). In the third section of Benjamin’s piece entitled ‘*Unmensch*’ (‘Monster’), Gess explains that ‘the concepts of original purity and of destruction come together as a necessary purification’ to produce the ‘*Ursprung der Kreatur*’ as a vanishing point of creaturely origin (685). Benjamin’s dialectical reading is premised on an understanding of the child as an angelic monster who ushers in a new order by eclipsing the human interests which precede it (Gess 686-7). The various personas assumed by Kraus in his own writings reflect to Benjamin the purifying qualities of a monstrous child. ‘For in each of his roles,’ Benjamin writes, ‘the actor assimilates bodily a human being, and in Shakespeare’s baroque tirades [...] it is as if the actor’s lips were dripping blood. So Kraus, following Shakespeare’s example, wrote himself parts that let him taste blood’ (450). The developing human-child is nominated by Kraus as the figure through which Marx’s materialistic humanism is able to become manifest (455). According to this Marxist view, the child ‘...actually takes form not within the natural sphere but in the sphere of mankind, in the struggle for liberation, and [...] is recognized by the posture which the fight with exploitation and poverty stamps upon him’ (455). There may be a sense in which the child in Fayolle’s visual rendering of ‘The carnivorous plant’ attempts to free itself from the old, ‘not to preserve but to purify, to tear from context, to destroy’ (Benjamin 455). I cite this last sentence from Benjamin who is referencing here Kraus’ later appraisal of citation—itself, considered an influential form of textual assimilation—as ‘...the only power in which hope still resides that something might survive this age—because it was

wrenched from it' (455). The purifying and destructive qualities attributed to the child as a cannibalistic agent would seem to find its ideal poetic expression in Benjamin's portrait of Kraus as an angelic monster-writer.

Benjamin writes of the child, in another text, as the one who 'long[s] for a world in which they can make [...] pure and decided use of their poverty' (Benjamin 'Experience and Poverty' 734). Far from discerning an impoverishment in the child's resources or abilities, Benjamin's 'poverty of experience' liberates the potential of those who refuse the common supposition that human development progresses only by way of experience (Benjamin 'Experience' 734). There is a depth to this position, qualities of which are mirrored in Nouvet's deployment of the French word *creux*, which suggests, as previously mentioned, a kind of hollow pit that is, at once, cavernous and dark. Impelled by a 'poverty of experience,' I suspect that the brooder is similarly primed to '...start from scratch; to make a new start; to make a little a long way; to begin with a little and build further, looking neither left nor right' (Benjamin, 'Experience and Poverty' 722).

Gess reads in Benjamin an appeal to children as symbolic devourers of humanity. Their destructive affinity works to animate the cyclical integrity of the creative principle. Gess proposes that children are '...not only survivors of a humanity-devouring war, but themselves devourers of human beings in that they affirm that destruction and drive it even further' (Gess 686). She contends that the repetitive tendencies of Freud's death-drive are adjoined in Benjamin's writing, following his reading of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, to children's play. She makes an intriguing claim concerning children's destructive inclinations when she insists that they behave as if compelled by '...needs and activities connected with suffering of persons or victims' (Gess 684). Their latent fascination with suffering, conveyed 'in games involving burglary, theft, arson, bombing attacks, and murder,' brands children as conveyors of a uniquely destructive drive (Gess 683). Benjamin grants children moral impunity because his interest lies in the promise of renewal which these little actors suprisingly display. In the absence of extenuating circumstances, children, for Benjamin, are the ones who

dismantle so as to begin freshly anew (Gess 688). While Benjamin acknowledges that nothing can remain unaltered in the aftermath of a war, Gess goes further when she maintains that he promotes an understanding of war ‘as the start of a new purification’ (Gess 685).

The picture of Benjamin’s relation to war is very different if we look at the tragic conditions under which he is thought to have taken his own life in PortBou, a Spanish town adjacent to the border of France, on September 27, 1940. His death is the culmination of a most ill-timed attempt to flee Nazi persecution in the middle of the Second World War. An added biographical précis in an online entry on ‘Walter Benjamin’ in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* states that, in 1914, Benjamin renounced his intellectual and political affiliation with Gustav Wyneken, a ‘liberal educational reformer,’ when his former mentor expressed public approval for ‘the ethical experience that the outbreak of war afforded the young.’ Benjamin’s earlier writings in the journal *Der Anfang* promote Wyneken’s guiding assumption concerning the spiritual purity of children. Over a decade or so later, in 1931, these views are again further elaborated in his piece on Karl Kraus. Benjamin’s point about the purifying capacities of children is not necessarily a moral one. He seems to be suggesting that there remains much to learn about the kinds of destructive forces which subtend children’s most creative efforts. Rather than endorsing the purifying effects of war, I take him to be reminding us of the various incipient impulses and disastrous instincts which, without ever actually harming anyone, operate in children so as to secure the possibility of unimaginable futures.

*Narcissus poeticus*¹³

The carnivorous plant in Fayolle’s drawing-series toys with a question or two on the topic of succession: how a thing comes to follow, and if, in some way, it destroys that which gave it life. Fayolle exhibits an interest in what happens to the natural filiation when a violent act mars its course. What might it mean to devote oneself to some thing, a project or an entity, to the extent that one is

¹³ *N. poeticus*, the white daffodil’s Latin name, is also conventionally known as the Poet’s Lily (*OED*).

devastated or destroyed in the process by this very ‘other’? What happens to the thing you care most for when you compel it beyond the limits of its own forbearance? What survives, and who suffers for it? Gray poses a similar question at the end of *Threats* where a taped-in bit of paper solemnly rests. The suspended plots and images examined throughout this thesis reflect back to the reader their longing for a response which these works make no pretense of offering. I’ve long been interested in works which do not end *well*; where, in the absence of structural measures or means to uphold the weight of a conclusive proverbial lesson, such narratives work to remain supple and open-ended instead. And as their influences and significances extend beyond their own posited ends, the sentiments and impressions which these texts also convey often exceed the reader’s ability to grasp them.

I was initially motivated by the idea of a reading which could resist the desire to eat a text. I wanted an approach to literary material which could taste at a respectful distance without fixing or sully the composition’s teeming parts. I was preoccupied, you see, with the idea that absorption of the material would irremediably destroy something—the text, perhaps, or the ambulatory and unfinished event which reading is—and ultimately, that it would feed the reader with an illusory piece of knowledge onto which it might hopelessly try clinging. Textual ‘bits’ and pieces already resist our catabolic tendencies to ruin and to take apart. I was perhaps slow to see this. During the course of writing, while attempting to gauge the place of oral appropriation in reading, I took to wondering instead whether our mandibles might loosen to give way to a less biting relation. And it was later that I seemed to encounter renderings of this possibility everywhere—as repeated, for instance, in the writings of Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit. In a discussion of Alain Resnais’s films in *Arts of Impoverishment*, they open the chapter ‘Stalled Movement’ with the following line of inquiry: ‘Is there a nonsadistic type of movement? Would we go toward the world if we were not motivated by destructive impulses?’ (147). They remark that Freud at once formulates and circumvents this very question in his ‘Instincts and Their Vicissitudes.’ Upon noting that love converts into hate near the end of this piece, Freud is able to describe the conveyance of ‘a self-preservative reflex’ in the ‘infantile ego’ as it works to defend itself against the external world’s imposing objects and to mitigate what

Bersani calls its 'paranoid suspicion of the world's difference' (147). Bersani revives the same set of questions in *Thoughts and Things* at the beginning of the first chapter 'Father Knows Best.' The chapter focuses on Claire Denis' film *Beau Travail* which features images, among others, '...of nature itself in a kind of stilled contemplation of humanity both destroying and renewing itself' (14). At the end of the chapter, Bersani casts a brief conciliatory nod to the parentless child: 'I would like my own exercise in witnessing to be taken as an admittedly exalted collaboration with the children who refuse the family game imposed on them, children who insist, in their play, on the foreignness of that game and on their determination to remain orphans' (14).

Bersani's anti-familialism here is reminiscent of Deleuze and Guattari who, in their *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, repudiate the Oedipal figure in Freudian psychoanalysis:

By boxing the life of the child within the Oedipus complex, by making familial relations the universal mediation of childhood, we cannot help but fail to understand the production of the unconscious itself, and the collective mechanisms that have an immediate bearing on the unconscious [...] For *the unconscious is an orphan*, and produces itself within the identity of nature and man... (*Anti-Oedipus* 48-9)

Deleuze and Guattari insist that in privileging the role of the nuclear family in the development of these spatial and temporal regions, we are doing the capaciousness of childhood, as well as the wily vigour of unconscious processes, a great disservice. Deleuze and Guattari maintain that Klein and other (post-) Freudian analysts fail to grasp the logic of 'partial objects' among which children live when they insist on re-absorbing them within an Oedipal code (*Anti-Oedipus* 44). Deleuze and Guattari argue that these quasi-objects are not representative parts of the child's parental body; rather than representing anything, these only produce or unproduce phantasmic and desiring relations (47). Deleuze and Guattari want to veer away from the strictures of 'familial' associations to account for children's playful transmutations into inanimate trains or insurgent robbers (*Anti-Oedipus* 46). To pursue any further the implications of their remonstrance against Freudian psychoanalysis would take us away from the gentle wave which Bersani casts in the orphan's direction. What of the sensuous lives of orphans, then, whose psyches graze the fabrics and textures of an ever-expanding world? What of those who bear most the misgivings of having been so unjustly cast aside?

Some orphans engage with their environments without resorting to violent or sadistic strategies. Others rewrite the phantasy of reciprocated desires while they remain open to the effects of cryptic poetic verses. And yet, the monstrous child in Fayolle's 'The carnivorous plant' who kills two weeds which interfere with his chance for unrestricted growth teaches us about the tenacious instinct to be unbound, unmitigated, autonomous, and free. There are other orphaned creatures who exhibit less reactive tendencies, as, for instance, the lamb-children in Gray's *Threats*, whose unmediated encounters with a world of things made to fit inside other things leaves them most vulnerable to trickery. And even if there remains for them the possibility of newly imagined fittings, something to which Gray's text only barely alludes, we can imagine how this moment of deception could exact upon them rather enduring effects. Even the girl in Galchen's 'Wild Berry Blue' is not orphaned in the traditional sense of the term and yet, in love, she is already bereft of any parental guide or surveyor: her *desire* brings her alone wherever it chooses to take her. An Oedipal assessment could be postulated, should the girl actively supplant her need for recognition from the father with the pursuit of a remote lover's dotting attention and interest. Yet to posit such a reading would be, I think, to dismiss the unassimilable forces of her own unconscious.

The girl transmutes near the end of Galchen's story. Moved by such beautifully damaged and fragmentary things, her commitment to the staples of her childhood begins to wane. A poetic caesura happens to her in a bathtub. The cut of an enigmatic passage catches her sleepy eye when an unfinished aphorism stolen from Flaubert begins forever to elude her. She is not able to piece from it a relevant meaning and yet, a splintered poetic reading somehow presides. She reads without knowing how the sentence begins, where it ends, why it seizes her, and how it can tell her everything without seemingly saying anything. The original of Flaubert's text reads « ...*que la parole humaine est comme un chaudron fêlé où nous battons des mélodies à faire danser les ours, quand on voudrait attendre les étoiles* » (265-6). Flaubert's use of « *attendre les étoiles* » carries the sense of wanting to elicit a *tenderness* from the stars. The impossible would be to elicit feeling from these insentient celestial

bodies. In removing the end-part from her narrative, Galchen offers the girl a chance to brood over the occult effects of this wistful literary fragment. Somehow, the girl doesn't succumb to an aggressive wish to arrive at the secret so that she might eat it. She submits to the quixotic charm of Flaubert's broken lullaby without wishing to resolve it. Able to bend in the vicinity of that which remains unknown, she displays an affinity for an errant brooding which perseveres without need for a conclusive ending.

5. Swanning (to Utopia)

*The poets teach that earth hangs in midair
for all its weight: earth cannot rest on earth*

*(Aeris in spatio magnam pendere docentes
Tellurem, neque posse in terra sistere terram)*

Titus Lucretius Carus, *On the Nature of Things*¹⁴

Lucretius' couplet catches 'midair.' An ancient proverbial lesson, attributed to the poets, hesitates to come full circle. An unassuming rest between both lines stalls the couplet's cadence while keeping with the poem's time. In an attempt to honour the 'architecture of the original,' Frank O. Copley adopts a loose English iambic pentameter to approximate the Latin hexameter which gives form to Lucretius' poem (Copley xxi). In both poetic renderings, only a bit of time is needed for the line to fall short of returning. Still, the pause softens our desire for immediate closure. Attending to this fleeting structural formation involves stretching, awaiting, and orienting one's faculties toward it. I wish to propose that a break 'midair' in Lucretius' couplet enjoins readers to tend to the poem's idiorrhhythmic intonations. A definition of Roland Barthes' 'idiorrhhythm' is elaborated in this chapter, as is the notion that various breathing and beating bodies converge in the event of a poetic reading. The poem and reader occasionally meet as if to kindle, through the interaction of their modulated bodies, an idiorrhhythmic concert. I offer a reading of poetic compositions as utopian occasions for variable bodies to co-incide, if only, for a time.

¹⁴ Lines 602-3 in Book II of Lucretius' poem. I consult the Latin version in Henri Clouard's French translation of *De la nature*. Paris: Éditions Garnier Frères, 1954 (102).

I think it's useful to remark here, before continuing, that this thesis charts the course of varied reclaimed terms. These include, 'narcissism,' as seen in the last two chapters, 'grace,' as it remains to be addressed in the last, and finally, 'rhythm' and 'utopia,' both of which I re-examine in this chapter. In these experimental moments, I request that we explore the meanings of these unlocked terms in recognition of unsettled potentials and untapped resonances. This pursuit is supplemented by an observation Maggie Nelson makes in *The Argonauts* concerning Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's incitation to allow 'queer' '...to hold all kinds of resistances and fracturings and mismatches that have little to do with sexual orientation' (28-9). Nelson writes there that '[t]his is [precisely] what reclaimed terms do—they retain, they insist on retaining, a sense of the fugitive' (Nelson 29). In oscillating between keeping and falling out of time with a range of compositional bits, this chapter concerns itself with what continues, in poetry, to elude our readerly grasp.

Ellipse

A thought comes to me, in a manner evincive of a Germanic expression once translated by a dear conversant and friend as 'it swans to me.' I distinctly remember Melanie Lewis, during one of our informal meetings, associating *mir schwant* with the dual colloquial senses of 'I have a hunch that' and 'it has flown to me.' A partially-formed thought sidles over to me just now. It concerns the Greek *ἔλλειψις*, the noun of action from which 'ellipse' derives its name, and which the *Oxford English Dictionary* translates as 'to come short' (*OED*). In a state of suspended animation, I'm reminded that poetic lines only approximate a sense of completion given their precondition to indeterminately cut off. The poem nourishes what cannot be said by way of fragmenting affects into tiny bursts of written activity. A passing thought concerning the poem's elliptical configuration happens to me in a way which honours its ability to 'move about freely or in an (apparently) aimless way,' and somewhat 'idly,' as these motional characteristics happen to be included in the *Oxford English Dictionary's* verb-entry for 'to swan' (*OED*). A poem may affect a reader when least expected. A poem can elicit heightened appreciation and intense feeling even in instances where a conclusive interpretation cannot

be extracted. How else to explain to you, then, that in failing ever so briefly to meet, Lucretius' couplet moves me to tend to moments where a poetic line awaits, intermits, or surceases. Given the varied nuances and modulations in a poem's idiorrhhythmic spacings, readers often submit to these without knowing where they lead or what they mean. Another way of introducing this approach could be to characterise it as one part of the inexperience of attending and yielding to poetic texts.

Lucretius' couplet seems to me to wind indefinitely around some sort of elliptical plane. I'm visualising here the conic section of an ellipse. In one possible geometrical diagram, an ellipse is illustrated by an oblique plane which fails, as it cuts across the cone, to intersect with the base. An affinity can be drawn, I think, between this figure which comes short of reaching its own base and a line in Lucretius' poem which comes short, at least momentarily, of reaching its own end. The presiding motion in question would be neither linear nor circular. As Sarah Wood affirms in a companion-text to Derrida's 'Ellipsis,' '...what is elliptical escapes circularity; it's an oval and its more technical mathematical description depends on a failure to meet' (Wood, *Writing and Difference* 153). As a closed symmetrical curve, the figure of the ellipse promises to return to itself. Derrida writes near the end of *Writing and Difference* that, in returning, we anticipate coming back to the illusion of an originary point. Yet the origin, for him, is already 'no longer in itself' (Derrida, 'Ellipsis' 295): 'Repeated, the same line is no longer exactly the same, the ring no longer has exactly the same center. *The origin has played.* Something is missing that would make the circle perfect' (296). I feel prompted to add here, somewhat indirectly, that Lucretius himself was suspicious of the logic of the center. He refutes, for instance, the centripetal theory of atomic movement when he argues that there is no center in the universe towards which movement might be drawn. 'For there can be no middle,' as he writes in *On the Nature of Things*, 'since the All is infinite. Nor if there were a middle could anything rather find a foothold there than in quite different fashion be repelled' (1. 1070-1).

I wonder if some themes are more suitably expressed in poetic form than others; as in, the uncertainty of the middle, the evasiveness of the center, the inability to fully 'express the sense' of

something (*OED*), or the coming short of reaching an end in a way which either defies clear-cut definition or hinders the ability to resolve anything. This project engages elliptical thematics in an attempt to work alongside rather than against enigmatic textual forces. The motivating interests are to dispel common mythologies according to which a subject has unmitigated access to itself and to dispute the notion that writing's expenditures always bring with them profitable returns. Something in the notion of not coming back exactly to where one was suggests to me a mode of utopic relationality. In positing that a utopian sensibility subtends these thematic shortcomings, I'm guided by Barthes' notion of 'utopia' which he associates with a limited and disjointed possibility of 'living-together.' According to Barthes' line of thought, our bodily rhythms are reconstituted through the influence of outside pauses and interruptions which are themselves precipitated by encounters with other bodily rhythms. 'Utopia,' as a form of attuned living, requires that we remain open to one another as well as susceptible to the possibility of *losing* rhythm – space – time.

Derived from the ancient Greek *οὐ*, which translates to 'not,' and *τόπος*, which converts in English to 'place,' 'u-topia' stands for 'no-place.' A reader's inexperience of the poem involves gathering disparate threads, and occasionally, adjoining points which barely leave a mark. My analysis is devoted to an evasive orbit of inquiry. Guided by my own inexperience, I'm moved by the nearness of the 'out-of-place' to the 'no-place'; a connection I feel the wounded and wounding poem alternatively loses and unloses. I seek in this chapter to revisit and expand more traditional understandings of 'utopia' as an ideal and a 'no-place.' In prefacing the chapter with a reading of Lucretius' elliptical diversion, I hope to bring out the latent potential of the 'out-of-place' and to expose it as the sort of poetic spacing which commands, distracts, and loosens our readerly (in)attentions. The 'out-of-place' incites the inexperience of our attentions to alternately err and halt—that is, to stray far away from the page or to patiently stay with it, as we roam around 'that invisible no-place of the mind' which readers and writers both together and apart 'contrive to inhabit' (Robertson 27).

The two poems with which this chapter engages offer divergent readings of ‘utopia.’ Each poem is written as an attempt to define the raw intricacies which constitute living amidst collectivities of ‘things’ and ‘creatures.’ Derrida concedes that ‘utopia’ contains ‘critical powers’ that should not be abandoned despite his suspicion of the word: ‘There are some contexts in which *utopia*, the word at any rate, can be too easily associated with dreams, [...] or an impossible that is more of an urge to give up than an urge to action’ (‘Not Utopia, the Im-possible’ 131). When utilised as a strategy to resign from the *socius*, ‘utopia’ can incite a dangerous forsaking of one’s responsibilities towards the other. Robertson offers a contour to Derrida’s cautionary remark in an online interview with Julia Carr when she posits that her ‘utopia’ is not

a non-situated elsewhere to strive towards, nor [is it] contained only within an imaginative projection. Utopia could be instead considered almost in phenomenological terms as a sensed present.

I have the feeling that political transformation has to be situated in what we are already in the midst of experiencing. The repudiation of the present, of sensing and of relationship, which is the present, is uninteresting and flattened out. There’s a plenitude of unrepresented agency already existent. The present is materially infinite. (‘An interview’ in *Evening Will Come*)

Robertson’s poem ‘Utopia/’ offers a way of tuning into sentiment that is both shared with others and intimately felt in the now. It’s also a way of describing the phenomenological experience of reading. Following Marielle Macé whose lecture ‘*Barthes, rhythmicité du vivre*’ I attended at the University of Kent in the fall of 2013, I intimate that Robertson and Barthes share a similar appreciation of ‘utopia.’ I recall Macé arguing that we shouldn’t be surprised if a literary thinker who is clearly attuned ‘to the subtleties of social formations’ is driven to make notable political contributions in his works. She notes that if Barthes doesn’t invoke the lexicon of a political theorist, it’s because he’s neither interested in endorsing or defending any sort of revolutionary movement. His conception of ‘utopia’ remains, for Macé, intimately enmeshed with questions of textuality. Such that, far from re-affirming a separatist philosophy, his ‘utopia,’ like that of Robertson’s, involves the question of how we come together to generate a productive reading.

Idiorrhymy

Barthes lectured at le Collège de France in 1977. In the notes which were later gathered and published as the manuscript *How to Live Together: Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces*, he reserves the name ‘idiorrhymy’ for a specific utopian phantasy. Disinterested in both ‘the subject in his familiar straitjacket or the crowd’ (9), Barthes’s phantasy dispels the ‘couple,’ the ‘family,’ and the ‘community’ from its scope of consideration. Macé explains in her lecture that his interest lies instead with ‘collectivities of solitude.’ She places the ensemble at the threshold ‘between solitude and putting an end to solitude.’ In *How to Live Together*, Barthes himself posits that this coming-together involves something ‘...like solitude with regular interruptions: the paradox, the contradiction, the aporia of bringing distances together—the utopia of a socialism of distance...’ (6).

The word ‘idiorrhymy’ swans to Barthes during his ‘chance reading’ of Jacques Lacarriere’s *L’Été grec* (*How to Live* 6). And though his writing in *How to Live* is expectedly sparse and erratic, he develops the connection further by referencing a specific situational context: ‘On Mount Athos: coenobitic convents + monks both isolated from and in contact with one another within a particular type of structure [...] = idiorrhymic clusters. Where each subject lives according to his own rhythm’ (Barthes 6). Less interested in these kinds of clusters, Barthes pursues instead a ‘median, utopian, Edenic, idyllic form,’ what he calls ‘idiorrhymy. [...] In sum: neither the monastery, nor the family, the idea being to eschew those grand repressive forms’ (Barthes 9). ‘Idiorrhymy’ has to do with nuances and gradients in ‘moods, unstable configurations, phases of depression or elation; in short, the exact opposite of an inflexible, implacably regular cadence’ (Barthes 8). Coenobite and phalansterian communities may have inspired Barthes to adopt the term but their activities which are scheduled even ‘to the nearest quarter of an hour’ remain, for him, too measured, calculated, consistent, and systematic (8). He argues that a ‘repressive meaning’ suffuses the word ‘rhythm’ as if everything is made to fall to a certain time. Rhythm, often equated with calculation, uniformity, and metronomic precision, is detached from its roots inasmuch as ‘*rhuthmos*’ was initially thought to connote ‘the pattern of a fluid

element (a letter, a *peplos*, a mood), an improvised, changeable form' (7). So that in order to restore the sense of the 'personal,' the 'private,' the 'peculiar,' the 'separate,' and the 'distinct' to 'rhythm,' Barthes argues that it was necessary to adjoin the prefix *idios* to the word (8).

Difference coincides with singularity. Rhythm is what bodies produce as they come in-and-out of contact with one another: 'The threats which arrive from the outside to the inside,' as Macé put it, 'is what makes life rhythmic.' In the same paper presented at the University of Kent in October of 2013 as part of a lecture series named 'What's so Great about Roland Barthes?' Macé affirms that poets are most aware of the way people introduce rhythms into the world, on account of a sensitivity to these sorts of embodied happenings, of which living essentially consists. Rhythm, she further explains, is a struggle between self and others. Never a harmonious state, this condition of strife and dispute is one we are born to assume and to engage. Macé goes on to emphasise that 'collectivity' is not born upon ties, bonds, or attachments for Barthes, but rather, as an altercation between the threshold of what's around and within us. 'Poets are aware of these thresholds and above all,' Macé asserts, it is they who 'desire to overstep them.'

'To bring this introduction to idiorrhymy to a close,' Barthes states on page nine of *How To Live Together*, 'I shall present a trait that seems to me to characterize the problem in a specific, localized manner.' He narrates a story which becomes for him a point of instructive musing:

From my window (December 1, 1976), I see a mother pushing an empty stroller, holding her child by the hand. She walks at her own pace, imperturbably; the child, meanwhile, is being pulled, dragged along, is forced to keep running, like an animal, or one of Sade's victims being whipped. She walks at her own pace, unaware of the fact that her son's rhythm is different. And she's his mother! (9)

The case for 'idiorrhymy' which Barthes hopes to bring to a close seems rather to gestate with the introduction of this scene. Barthes reads in this scene the subtle way in which power occurs through 'disrhythmy, heterorhythmy' (9). A poem may impel a reader with force, yet never quite with the same violent disregard characterised by the mother's frantic and hurried hand in Barthes' scene. A poem, even at its most cutting, is more often gentle, intimate, pliable, capacious, patient. We approach the

poem with our own idiorrhythmic aptitudes and the poem impresses us with its own. The simple act of reading poetry is to enact a case for idiorrhythmic living, while something in the inexperience often falls short of reaching. Perhaps it's that a poetic text invites us into its room, and still, we're never quite certain whether we've been admitted inside.

This analysis rotates around a collection of clipped bits of poetic text. It takes the poem apart to focus on the deciduous and fragmentary states of its expressions. There is much to be done with very little, as seen in the case of the Lucretian couplet which introduces this chapter. Consider, for instance, the poetic rest which takes place in the form of a colon in the second line: two vertical dots cleave the time of an affirmation ('The poets teach...') from the time of a negation ('earth cannot rest on earth'). A word resounds in the direction of an interminable straying. This word, 'earth,' appears a sum of three times. The number of lateral dots used to signal in writing an omission, repetition, abbreviation or hesitation, is three. The English name for this syntactical device is 'ellipsis,' a singular term which extends and multiplies in French with « *points de suspensions* » in which the last word spaces itself over three syllabic beats. Such are a few succinct reflections born of two unassuming lines.

The technical term 'enjambment' signals the poetic decision to carry a syntactical unit from one line over into the ensuing one (Attridge 10). In Copley's translation of Lucretius' couplet, the syntactical convoy of choice is a colon positioned in the second line. A comma presides in Lucretius' original verse. This minute difference in punctuation suggests to me that contingency both subtends the work of translation and informs the process of composition. Translation is never seen as an essential quality of the work for when it does take place, it occurs as a chance-phenomenon that can be 'observed' without ever remaining fundamental to the work (*OED*). Translation is often recognised as the effect of a close and capacious reading which risks a certain violence to the text in order to render technically untranslatable prose accessible to other readers. Because generated by the pursuit and possibility of retrievable meanings, this process can always lose the 'non-meaning matter of language' from which the poem also incidentally emerges (Marder, 'Snail Conversions' 185). The symbolic units

employed to convey to the reader the sense of a poetic and linguistic world are not always able nor willing, as such, to undergo conversion. Derrida writes elsewhere that ‘...the traversing of the road named translation remains as improbable as an accident’ (Derrida, ‘Che cos’è’ 227). Because translation can neither predicate its ability to carry over the poem’s sense nor transpose its unique compositional elements into another language without reducing or gravely distorting, it necessarily fails to achieve a clean and veracious transfer. This failure to accomplish what it sets out to do is nonetheless what defines and animates its venture. If it intends to bring to completion in a way that respects the integrity and singularity of a poem—itsself, the product of anasemic traces which precede and proceed without direct investment in ‘meaning’—any attempt to translate seems as much prone to fail as it is, occasionally, to come through. Lucretius’ couplet doesn’t immediately return to itself, nor is the couplet’s meaning and improvised rhythm perfectly encapsulated in Copley’s conversion-work. In at least two different languages, then, the Lucretian couplet reminds us of the contiguous channels through which poetry, contingency, and translation necessarily fail to touch.

The couplet in the epigraph appears in its original form in the second book of Lucretius’ unfinished poem *De rerum natura*, written sometime between 95 and 50 B.C. Near the beginning of the essay ‘Lastingness: Réage, Lucrèce, Arendt,’ Lisa Robertson writes of flying to the British Library with the idea of ‘tracing’ Lucretius (21). She withholds from the reader the date of her visit and tells instead of an enduring interest in 17th and 18th century English translations of Lucretius’ text. Her reading of Lucretius reflects a slackening attention to procedure and order. While she begins with the earliest Latin version of his text, she goes on to question the utility of this approach which she determines, finally, to be ‘Arbitrary because, although I have repeatedly gazed at it, on it, existed in the gutter between parallel texts, I have no Latin’ (21). I regret to inform you that Lucretius’ Latin prosody mostly eclipses me too. Still, I discern in the arrangement of his letters a soothing idiorrhym: ‘*Aeris in spatio magnam pendere docentes/ Tellurem, neque posse in terra sistere terram.*’ I hesitate for a moment to affirm whether the spacing in Copley’s translation is consistent with the lineation of the Latin text. The first reference to an ‘earth’ in the Latin prototype tows the second line; not the first, as

it is in the English translation. The positions of the earth in the Latin transcription are not congruous with the positions it assumes in the English text. A space between two 'earths' in the English holds the second line at a distance. A silent pause extends before the second iteration of 'earth' can take place as if to save a bit of time or else to space it. I lose the ability to tell this time. Sarah Wood tells us in her reading of *Writing and Difference* that the movement of the ellipse '...cannot be located in linear time because it is a closed form and a repetition. It combines closure and difference, stillness and whirling' (159).

Derrida writes this fluttering germ in a piece which appears in his and Cixous' collaboration *Voiles (Veils)*: 'A sentence in suspense that flaps its wings at birth, like the silkworm butterfly, above the cocoon, that is, a poem' (Derrida 'A Silkworm of one's own' 36). I dream that the English iteration of Lucretius' couplet is caught skimming out of its silky envelope at the onset of this chapter. And that it might still be heard, or seen, or felt there, as it palpitates above its Latin source of origination. Captured in this vulnerable moment of suspense, the couplet flutters its wings at birth. It is a poem, then, in its most incipient form. I feel at liberty to write this because Derrida postulates elsewhere that a poem must 'be brief, elliptical by vocation' ('Che cos'è la poesia?' 225). The notion that these two lines might stand on their own is also reified by Copley who remarks that, within the setting of Lucretius' extended poem, the couplet seems 'out of place' (42). Copley attempts nonetheless to render coherent the verse in which the couplet appears in spite of rifts detected in its stylistic configuration:

The ancient poets of Greece have sung of her

* * *

enthroned in her chariot, driving her yoke of lions.
The poets teach that earth hangs in midair
for all its weight : earth cannot rest on earth.
They added the lions since, however savage,
the child must bow before the parent's love. (2.600-605)

The line 'enthroned in her chariot, driving her yoke of lions' refers to Cybele, the deified figure of earth incarnate, who also happens to be invoked in the earlier line 'The ancient poets have sung of her.' With the presentation of this last line, Copley's translation cedes to the suspected loss of at least two

other lines. Copley remarks upon the disjunction in a footnote which appears at the bottom of this same page. He signals a deliberate break in Lucretius' work with an ellipsis composed of three asterix-like stars. It's as if he chooses this symbolic interception to make sense of the couplet's impending presentation. For the line which follows 'earth cannot rest on earth' once again veers apace towards Cybele with the return of her chariot: 'They added the lions since, however savage, the child must bow before the parent's love...' Cybele drives away the possibility of meditating on an elliptical passage concerning the ancient poets' teetering earth. Somewhere in between these lines, the chord of a musing falters.

Minor ellipses recur throughout Lucretius' text, yet this effect is not unique to Copley's translation. Any reader of Lucretius' work risks falling into the poem's elliptical snare and to remain caught there, webbed, in a kind of meandering sway. A poem ensnares by keeping its distance. Barring the reader's desire for synchronicity, the poem's sense of time occasionally falters as the reader becomes distracted by the ineptitude of their own textual inexperience. In 'Utopia/' Robertson writes of a 'same problem of decay latent within my attention' ('Utopia/' 60). But elsewhere in *Nilling*, as when she posits 'the inexperience of my attention,' Robertson indirectly recalls the 'freely floating attention' with which Freud advised analysts to listen to their patients, in giving '...the same attention to every element of the sentences proffered by the analysand, however tiny or futile it may appear' (Lyotard 30). Jean-François Lyotard summons in *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* the psychoanalytical precept of 'working through' according to which '...the only guiding thread at one's disposal consists in sentiment or, better, in *listening* to a sentiment' (Lyotard 31, emphasis added). An 'inexperienced attention' diverts and migrates inasmuch as it swans, aimlessly flutters about, as it gently catches onto poetic surfaces both discreet in sound and in flare. Robertson attests to the influence of such readerly digressions when she writes of reading as a constant shifting of gears: 'I slipped into reverie, I obediently pursued a concept, I made my corresponding marks, I resisted, I was lazy, I looped back, I sometimes skipped forward without immediately noticing' (*Nilling* 28). And yet,

it's equally so that through a 'tensile listening' (*Nilling* 61), a poem's sentiment can occasionally surge across to you...

'This Is the Beginning of Utopia...'¹⁵

'A fragment of a sentence, a scrap of information, a word, come along' whenever readers work through or listen to sentiment (Lyotard 31). 'Utopia' swans into focus as the name of two poems; one found in Lisa Robertson's *R's Boat* (2010) and the other, one of seventeen poetic aggregates to make up Valzhyna Mort's *Collected Body* (2011). A recognition of 'utopia' as an unsolicited outgrowth occurs to me while jointly reading these contemporary works. I'm especially beset by the recurrence of 'utopia' in the context of Robertson's writings and interviews. She writes of melancholy in 'Perspectors/Melancholia' as 'a big contemplative utopia' (*Nilling* 51). And in her poem 'Hotel,' as tears seep out in the midst of 'thinking of friendships,' Robertson gathers a bit of herself to

Begin again to invent the line of
My life amidst utopia. Probably
This is the center—the worn-out house, walls
Humming the repose of systems, the
Modest light, but I wanted an urgent
Line to begin the future, something like you,
What will you do with your legs and your heart? (Robertson, *Magenta Soul Whip* 19-20)

Robertson draws 'you' into the invention of her dotted utopian lifeline. She exhorts your body as if it were a distant friend to attend to this piece of writing. She entreats you to sustain the work of engaging and attending to the orchestrated fall of letters and unrehearsed spaces there in-between. A subtle question about the legacy and *daemonic* heart of the poem moves when, with candid softness and inquisitive trust in 'you' and in your capacity to respond justly, she compounds this lasting line of inquiry (Derrida 'Che cos'è' 235): 'What will you do with your legs and your heart?'

In some conceptual iterations, 'utopia' is simply a faraway state of idyllic perfection. Near the onset of *The Inhuman*'s second chapter, 'Rewriting Modernity,' Lyotard settles on 'utopia' as a

¹⁵This is the first of two lines in Robertson *R's Boat* written on the retro-verso of the final page of her 'Utopia/' (68).

recuperative project which hopes to ‘resolve itself into a sort of ultimate stability’ (25). It should perhaps be affirmed, however, that this remote ideal is never immune to ‘the enigmatic confusion of the past, the confusion of the badly built city [...] Of everything that comes to us from behind, “before”’ (Lyotard, *The Inhuman* 38). A nostalgic eye can always camber back to the recollection of a prominent childhood character as in the case of the blue-haired Malvina, a figure in Aleksey Nikolayevich Tolstoy’s *The Golden Key, or the Adventures of Buratino* whose aura in Mort’s ‘Utopia’ rears something like a trenchant hope for the future of Belarus’ war-torn past. As a loose adaptation of Lucretius’ words, ‘utopia’ could perhaps be conceived, then, as a settlement ‘...built of bones, blood, veins, heat, water, guts, and sinew from the same source, yet all dissimilar far’ (Lucretius I. 669-71). Robertson writes of the ‘tenuous’ utopia she unearths in pieces of manufactured synthetics, discarded alloys, and human residuum, ‘...made from steel, wooden chairs, glass, stone, metal bed frames, tapestry, bones, prosthetic legs, hair, shirt cuffs, nylon, plaster figurines, perfume bottles and keys’ (‘Utopia/’ 51). Nothing but refracted bits of time or, as Julie Carr states in an online interview with Robertson, nothing but ‘layers of simultaneity in time,’ in the form of scattered ruminations and insoluble inquiries, seem to settle in this no-place of the mind. As a diffuse settlement composed of raw and artificial materials, I felt at first that this ‘utopic’ assemblage of parts could be read as a materialist case-study against the structural flaws and habits of the neo-liberal cityscape. I came to understand, through Robertson, that utopia is never entirely sealed from ‘The world with its streets, interiors, railroad stations, restaurants, sportscars and beaches’ (Robertson, ‘Utopia/’ 59). Robertson expresses in an online interview with Brecken Hancock the ‘...need to form communities that help us live outside the general economy, to cultivate resistant paths of thought.’ Given her preoccupation with this notion of ‘feminist solitude’ and her desire to ‘experiment with time,’ Robertson classifies ‘utopia’ near the end of her poem as ‘one part of the history of a girl’s mind’ and one part ‘deer-fenced garden’ (‘Utopia/’ 67). ‘Utopia’ saves and recycles the vastly disseminated bits of lush flora and rusting things which Robertson’s writing naturally retrieves.

While it resonates as ‘a dream of paradise’ for some or a romantic escape from the strictures of capitalist states for others (Robertson 34), ‘utopia’ for Mort is a geographical area isolated from an otherwise global-wide nexus of imbricated relations. Mort suggests something like this in an online interview with Nathalie Handal when she issues the ensuing comment: ‘To leave Minsk for a short trip to another European capital, one has to apply for a visa and prove his or her worthiness to be let out from the utopia into the real world’ (‘The City and the Writer’). ‘Utopia’ is at once, here, a Belarusian point of suspension and Mort’s place of birth. According to Mort, it’s also a point conceived by the outside world as a remote European city. A Belarusian’s lawful entry into the greater European landscape can always be prohibited. During the era of the Soviet occupation’s decline and collapse, Mort’s childhood was nourished in Minsk, a city in a country geographically bordered by land. But her poem ‘Utopia’ takes place in a town which seeps water. The first two lines of ‘Utopia,’ italicised and rendered in lowercase script, are dispatched to the left of the page where they open the poem with an urgent supplication: ‘*have you seen a girl with blue hair?/ have you seen my Malvina?*’ (39). A timid, tangential murmur announces the disappearance of Malvina. In the fourth verse, the locks of her blue hair condense into saline strands of ocean water. And at the end of the poem, the townswomen pull ocean shells to their ears to listen, ‘holding our breath, / to Malvina’ (Mort ‘Utopia’ 41). Three lines indented slightly to the left conclude with an image of Malvina weeping. Her head, which appears here to have been shaven, lays bare the site of a violated body. Gathering the mangled threads of her recognizable blue hair, whatever little remains of her, continues there to wave (41).

The reference to Malvina recalls Tolstoy’s *The Golden Key*, occasionally read as an adaptation of Carlo Collodi’s *Pinocchio*. But unlike the selfish boy-puppet of Collodi’s work, Buratino and his friends challenge the tyrannical reign of Karabas-Barabas, the cruel owner of the puppet-theatre, with the aim of securing peaceful living conditions for the performers who once made up his repressed theatre-troupe. The Italian Pinocchio eventually morphs from an undisciplined wooden thing into a morally conscientious human boy. Buratino is never bound to any such disciplinary axiom seeing as he remains, for the duration of Tolstoy’s tale, a wooden puppet. Mort’s concern lies not with Buratino but

with Malvina's legendary blue hair. Despite the subtle dematerialization to which her form succumbs, the memory of her defiant hair nonetheless endures there poetically. In Tolstoy's rendition of the tale, Malvina's efforts to instruct Buratino on how to read and write are dismissed by the male puppet. In renouncing his role as her most grateful pupil, Malvina betrays an unforgiving angle when she resorts to locking Buratino up then in a dark cupboard. If Tolstoy's version issues a subdued critique against didactic and corrective Soviet strategems, Mort's poem strips Malvina of her most singular attribute. As her guidance continues to be sought by the siren-like women of Mort's 'Utopia,' the sound of Malvina's tears near the end vibrates in their ears with a melancholic and euphonic quality which seems to endure.

'...Its Material is Time'¹⁶

Malvina in Mort's 'Utopia' appears as the figural remnant of a time lost. This childhood character seems initially out of place. Barely even there to the extent that her body seems to have vanished for an unconscious interval of time, Malvina remains adrift even to the poet who, in the opening lines, decidedly claims her (*'my Malvina'*) as her own. Malvina, in the context of the poem, bespeaks a metaphorical code for a kind of boundlessness. She embodies the natural force of an aqueous lifeform which defies containment and risks engulfing everything. With the final cut of her blue hair, as it disintegrates and disperses into a body of swarming tears, Malvina expands into the ocean which also becomes her. Over the course of her childhood, Mort was landlocked in a 'mostly waterless' environment. She explains in an online interview with Angela Elam of 'Poetry Daily' that the ocean was '...another embodiment of the invisible for me—this idea of a big water, somewhere I would never reach, water that is greatly powerful and greatly indifferent.' Mort reasons that reprieve from one's interminable sufferings can be found in nature on account of its absolute indifference to creaturely pain. Earlier on, near the beginning of the interview, when she divulges how her grandmother was born in the kitchen of her house in Padladze, the interviewer prompts once again for

¹⁶ This is the second of two lines written on the retro-verso of the final page of Robertson's 'Utopia/' (68).

literal clarity: 'In the kitchen? Not in the bedroom, but in the kitchen?' to which Mort affirms: 'Closer to the water.'

I have only a vague sense of how children reading Tolstoy's *The Golden Key* within the war-torn context of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union may have encountered a character like Malvina. I suspect that Belarusians wouldn't have received the work as a celebratory tale written in praise of the Soviet regime's policies and ideologies. Readers surely would have discerned veiled criticisms against the regime amidst the din of Tolstoy's incendiary undertones (Alexandra Smith 305). Alexandra Smith's review of Catriona Kelly's *Children's World: Growing up in Russia, 1890-1991* recalls such a discussion to be remarkably absent from Kelly's work. She accentuates the critical point that overlooked disapprobation towards Soviet authority was often veiled in children's literature (305). Kelly thus fails to remark on the extent to which '...writers either escaped from censorship into children's literature or were labelled as children's writers because their works could not fit into the rigid framework of socialist realist literature' (305). According to Smith, Kelly's reading of Tolstoy's *The Golden Key* fails to engage with the '...book's subversive qualities satirizing RAPP critics, the Moscow Art Theatre, and the Russian police' (305). Mort complains in that same interview with Elam that because they are so often portrayed as a 'calm, peaceful, and tolerant people,' Belarusians are typically considered an overly pliant demographic. She adamantly disavows the currency of this construct which she claims to be a product of the Soviet imagination. In response to this fanciful portrayal, she declares herself a harsh poet to Elam whose writings resist even the softness of the Belarusian tongue: 'The Belarusian language is usually described as a soft language, a language of lullabies. But when we write poetry, we don't write it necessarily in the language of the everyday. We have to change the language, to make it our own.' Perhaps intended as an outgrowth from this narrow reading of her community, Mort chronicles a state of divisiveness between the sexes in 'Utopia.' In calling its inhabitants 'handmade,' she offers an extenuation as to why 'we don't look anything like each other' (39). As if detailing the remnants of a distant infantile memory, she explains how these men and women, fashioned of either stone or wood, at once appear to have been carved by strong air-

currents, softened by tidal-motions, and cracked by the warmth of the sun. These elemental conditions shape their resilient psyches into hollow matter. The application of this marionette-like attribute reflects the effects of a war-torn invention whereby an entire population could be subjugated and defined on account of rather powerfully projected traits. And yet, Mort's 'Utopia' is also a place where bodies, in alternating states of mourning and lust, seem no longer troubled by what should haunt them; perhaps because she intends them to reflect qualities of the ocean as a 'stone face of nature.'

At the beginning of the poem, Malvina withdraws from the text and becomes a vanquished relic of the 'unlost.' Anne Carson avails herself of this term in *The Economy of the Unlost* to account for the lastingness of poetic fragments which steal past the chiseling effects of time. It emerges in her text as a response to Paul Celan's poem '*Engführung*' which Carson translates as 'The Straitening.' She writes, while sitting very close to it, that 'This poem is about what happened to Jews in wartime Europe, and the effect of this event on postwar European culture. The effect seems to have been very little, as Celan sees it. Perhaps nothing' (117-8). 'Unlost' responds to Celan's dark resignation from a world which could persevere as if 'nothing was lost' in the decimated aftermath of the holocaust (Carson 118-19). 'Unlost' is the buried echo of a wreckage which cannot bring itself to articulate it. The prefix scratches through the function of the adjective to revert back to a state somehow anterior to having been either 'lost' or 'found.' We are constantly losing and misplacing things, but for Celan, some things lost both to speech and touch have no choice but to mutely return. 'Unlost' keeps open a cavernous wound which infinitely drags the injured back to an inmost taciturn place. Everything becomes in this spacing a *musings*: absorbed by a recursive fixation of the most harrowing kind, time becomes a retreating shadow. To muse is to become so distracted as to exercise little regard for the surreptitious tic of time. As detailed in the previous two chapters, even the depressive condition of brooding requires its own degree of cogitative immersion. The dictionary also informs me that 'musing' takes at least one of its etymological cues from the French word *amusement*, which conjures up the sort of mental abstraction or distraction implied in the act of 'trifling with the attention or time of any one' (*OED*). But even if the word were to retain any such sense of lightness, I wish to stay for

the moment with this gloaming thought: ‘unlost’ things endure incommensurable atrocity and ruin. The severity of this condition outweighs for me any frivolous or risible possibility.

Robertson writes that ‘Women from a flat windswept settlement called Utopia focus on the intricate life that exists there’ (51). I detect an analogous sense of focus and attention at work in Mort’s poem. Mort explains in the same online interview with Angela Elam that *Collected Body* was written as an effort to tell her grandmother’s story and the stories of the women in her family: ‘So it is a book about women in the family,’ she clarifies, ‘about female ancestors, and it is a book about migration and movement.’ But Robertson’s citation also works to evoke the sort of conflict which emerges between ‘us’ and ‘our men’ in Mort’s ‘Utopia.’ Both sides appeal in Mort’s text to deceptive tactics and aggressive ruses in their engagements with one another. Incredible acts of reprisal are enacted between these gendered bodies, as when Mort writes: ‘we offer those apples to our lovers/ and they break their teeth against them.’ The poem goes on to describe how, after the men emerge with insatiable thirst from an attempt to subdue the flight of a ‘red moth,’ ‘they rush to our mouths/ and through them/ they pull out our hearts/ like buckets full of cold water’ (42). The imagery of the ‘red moth’ as a combative and parasitical agent is perhaps another metaphor for Russian and earlier Polish efforts to indoctrinate the Belarusian colony. The absence of a decreed moral system in Mort’s colony suggests a mode of interrelation among its dwellers that falls outside proverbial limits. Rather than submitting to principles of rectitude, the collective body in Mort’s poem is shaped by its own disinterest and indifference to such modes of ethical conditioning: ‘this is why we know neither good or evil/ sometimes our words can cut meat’ (40). Referring to this place as a ‘colony of the sun’ whose yellow flag—‘a glass of lemonade!—waves over every table,’ an unidentified ‘we’ welcomes ‘you’ to their quarantined water-site (39). But behind such a hospitable pretense, a lament gently escapes from ‘paradise’ and echoes in the past-perfect tense of a not-so distant past: ‘if a heart could be pulled out like a tooth,/ if memory could be killed/ we’d have been so happy living/ under the yellow lemonade flag’ (41).

A flower named the ‘yellow flag iris’ wafts in—slowly, emergent—from the corner of this poetic room. From the family *Iridaceae*, the specimen named *iris pseudacorus* happens to grow mostly in water-logged areas. *Collected Body* was written while Mort lived on the German island of Sylt. She explains in an online interview with Lisa Grove that living and writing on Sylt freed her ‘from the European landscape and its consciousness. I learned to become myself.’ Native to both Germany and Belarus and to a number of other European, Asian, and African countries, the ‘yellow flag’ occurs in the psychic regions of Mort’s childhood where the ocean remained a forlorn dream. The ‘yellow flag iris’ functions as the botanical referent and tissue which gently binds two dream-spaces to one another. The ‘invisible no-place of the mind’ which Mort carefully assembles from what little remains of her ancestral memories and timeless phantasies is actually a place suspended between the island of Sylt and the landlocked city of Minsk.

To move away momentarily from Mort towards Robertson’s poetry is to uncover a very different reading of ‘Utopia.’ In Robertson’s *R’s Boat*, ‘Utopia’ approximates the pleasurable ‘sensation of existing without troubling [oneself] to think.’ This citation, which Robertson pilfers from Jean-Jacques Rousseau himself, appears as the first inscription in *R’s Boat*. Robertson derives the title of her collection from a bucolic image she confects of Rousseau’s boat. In an online correspondence with Sina Queyras, she evokes a memory of Rousseau’s fifth walk in *Rêveries of a Solitary Walker* (*Les rêveries du promeneur solitaire*), of him ‘...floating aimlessly in a lake observing only the flickering of his consciousness in concert with the various patterns of afternoon-light, water, breeze, foliage’ (Robertson, ‘All sides now’). Very little in this utopic landscape takes to settling: the communication of one insightful moment can shift so suddenly that it can’t always be inferred on the basis of what came prior. Consider, for instance, the following two lines from Robertson’s ‘Utopia’: ‘It has to do with light, the way light folds on things, the way light folds on my point of view./ I was timid in the visual, so I came to utterance—rhythm and subjectivity/ that is’ (56-7). ‘Utopia’ comes to reflect for Robertson something of the quality of ‘being promiscuously alive’ (*Nilling* 12) where no singular thought could disturb the bubbling sense of being so immersed within the plenitude of a fleeting

present. In an online interview with Julia Carr, published in ‘Evening Will Come: A Monthly Journal of Poetics,’ Robertson touches on a ‘utopic’ interface which inheres through the sundry cultivation of our collaborative efforts. Already, Robertson seems to be intimating that we are lapsing into this luxurious center when

speaking together, reading and publishing and critiquing one another’s texts, eating at tables and arguing, loving each other, giving life to one another, [what we are doing] is already embodied utopia. That doesn’t mean it’s simple. It has to be reinhabited at each turn. This ongoing reinhabitation is the necessary amazement. It’s politics, it’s the future, and it’s happening in kitchens and in online spaces and classrooms and gardens right now. It’s a resistance. (‘An Interview with Lisa Roberston’)

Robertson offers a portrait of idiorrhhythmic entities colliding in moments where spaces are heartily shared. Whenever we respectively read, make love, eat, learn, and argue with one another, we actively embody a politicized utopia of resistance. Instead of resigning to systems which benefit from our collective states of alienation, disaffection, hostility, and dishonesty, Robertson reminds us to foster relations and networks which effloresce through shared intimacy, contingency, hospitality, and integrity.

The Clearing

Carson opens *The Economy of the Unlost* with the brazen reflection that ‘There is too much self in my writing’ (vii). And just as I feel unqualified to conceive how it could be otherwise, the effect of a clearing in her text fortuitously gives way. A different instantiation of ‘clearing’ came to me once I searched for something like ‘R’s boat’ in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. The word ‘R-boat’ appears there as the condensation of *Räumboot*; a diminutive term which refers to a German minesweeper ‘equipped for detecting and removing explosive mines [...] tethered underwater or floating’ during the Second World War (*OED*). Without wishing to overlook the possessive implication of Robertson’s title, a preoccupation with the idiorrhhythmic iteration of ‘to clear, clear away,’ as uncovered in the etymology of the noun ‘R-boat,’ seems suddenly to haunt and to insist (*OED*). Were these militaristic overtones to be momentarily shelved, the noun might be defined more simply as a neutral process of

elimination where the impetus is to ‘make open or void for passage or operations’ (*OED*). Carson suggests that writing happens when the room clears itself (vii). And that, while one may derive material from the objective ‘landscape of science and fact,’ the ability to write is conditioned by the ability to retreat into ‘a windowless room cleared of everything’ (Carson, *Economy of the Unlost* vii). The kind of clearing Carson has in mind is not strictly Heideggerian, in the sense of an illuminated spacing where manifesting things come to be known on the basis of what is perceived and understood by those who encounter them. Rather, she adopts György Lukács’ definition of such an ‘aesthetic structure’ as ‘a windowless monad’ (*‘Eine fensterlose Monade’*) (vii). She goes on to share certain elliptical ruminations on Lukács’ fusion of ‘monad,’ that infamous ‘indivisible unit of being’ (*OED*), with the kind of room or space which occludes all passage of light (vii). Within the temporal and spatial context of this clearing, the musings which vibrate become indicators of what ought to be written: ‘I guess the important thing,’ Carson writes, ‘is to copy down whatever vibration you see while your attention is strong’ (vii-viii). This notion of a clearing as an embodied psychical movement which refines, expels, and disencumbers without ever quite resting, binds us to one another (Carson viii): ‘Attention is a task we share, you and I. To keep attention strong means to keep it from settling’ (viii). A poetic text compels sensory reflexes to lovingly tune in while these continue, more or less, to migrate and experiment and meander and explore.

At the end, the ‘I’ gradually retreats from the tattered cites of Robertson’s ‘Utopia/.’ An ‘overgrown clearing’ manifests in the last few lines of her poem. The varied surfaces of Robertson’s poetic ‘I,’ which reflect a litany of minute perceptions and a procession of untiring thoughts, suddenly withdraw as if to make way for this final clearing:

This is one part of the history of a girl’s mind.
 The unimaginably moist wind changed the scale of the morning.
 Say the mind is not a point of origin, but a skin carrying sensation into the
 midst of objects.
 Now it branches and forks and coalesces.
 In the centre, the fire pit and log seat, a frieze of salal and foxglove, little
 cadmium berries.
 At the periphery of the overgrown clearing, the skeleton of a reading chair
 decaying beneath plastic. (Robertson 67)

The center in Robertson's poem is perhaps a line drawn with a compass, around an inexact middle, which expands into a site of inwardness. A hearth intended for worship seems to burn there. There is also evidence of shrubs adorned with salal berries and the presence of toxic tubular flowers. If the center is filled with nourishing potential, it's also inhabited by destructive botanical matter. The periphery or the region of a coterminous outside is thinned out by layers of artificial and inanimate strata. These things which take time to clear covertly take over in Robertson's 'Utopia.' The motility of a 'skin carrying sensation into midst of objects,' which Robertson identifies as a mind, extends beyond itself where it commingles with extraneous idiorhythmic sources. Lucretius writes in Book IV about the way in which the body-surfaces of things naturally shed their own films, 'husks,' or 'membranes.' This fluid optical skin in Lucretius' work hardens into a reading *flesh* at the end of Robertson's poem where, upon being stretched out like a French hide, it too works to conjure up the senses of an animal's soft musculature, enclosed by a skin-peel and a framework of bones, as by the plump core of a fruit contained by its own rind (*OED*). Extending from the animal to the human, and even, from the organic to the inorganic, this kind of migratory innervation amidst pneumatic and automatic things in Robertson's 'Utopia/' never settles for too long: rather, it keeps moving. Decay happens all around while some things—plastic, for instance, or cadmium, a bluish-white metal found principally in zinc ores—neither easily disappear nor do they readily transform. 'We die and become architecture' (52), Robertson writes earlier on in her poem, *as if* from out of the smoky clearing that is destined to beset our organic remains, some things continue nonetheless to be written. And while designs and furrows continue to be assembled and carved, a poetic and melancholic reading also learns to adapt.

Unlost Muses

Lucretius dedicates the opening verse of his *De rerum natura* to the glorified Venus who orbits and surveils all things fertile and harmonious. He beckons to 'the absent presence of gods in human rooms' and summons their names into the architectural folds of his poem (Carson, *Economy of the Unlost* 131). Robertson notes in her piece 'Lastingness' that through this tribute, a 'foundational, *venal*

divergency' gleams in Lucretius' poem (35, emphasis mine). She calls it 'venal' because it betrays a softness on the part of a poet who otherwise disavows his allegiance to the gods. Lucretius asserts in Book II that the gods '...most certainly never made the world for you and me: it stands too full of flaws' (2. 178-181). Robertson suggests that the act of summoning an ancient deity could have intriguing implications for Lucretius, who, 'as an Epicurean and a materialist, [...] did not, or ought not, believe in the intervention of gods in human life' (Robertson, *Nilling* 35).

A room 'used for study or meditation' is offered as the fifth entry of the noun 'muse' in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. A small 'muse' begins the word 'museum' as if this figurative carrel of a word were also clearing up the path towards this repository of a building. The dictionary alleges that, as an ancient Hellenic site and holy educational structure, the Museum's creation was inspired by the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, the Muses, whom we may loosely canonise as the nine patron 'saints' of the Arts. Robertson asks in *R's Boat* 'The Present': 'I go to the library/ How will I recognize disorder?' (33). Libraries and Museums share commonalities in structure-design and function. Their columns and rooms are catalogued for an inquiring public on the basis of genre, period, alphabet, and type. These buildings exhibit the works of progenitors whose aesthetic structures are invested both in gathering and conserving. A swan emerges and fades four pages earlier in Robertson's same poem: 'The otherworldly swan wearing white and silver passes on into current worldliness' (29). An ancient swan from an earlier and rather opulent order somehow steals by and fades into the modern landscape. And partly because « cygne » in French is a homonym of « signe » (Cixous, *The Insister of Jacques Derrida* 48), the swan becomes a motile Sign in her poem which appears without a horizon of expectation. As such, in this brief and unforeseeable poetic instant, the possibility of a trace which can neither be possessed nor readily expressed swans in and out of speckled view.

At the point where the first page of 'The Present' transits into the next, Robertson writes: 'You read Lucretius to take yourself towards death, through streets and markets/ In a discontinuous laboratory towards foreignness/ You bring his prosody into your mouth/ When you hear the sound of

paper' (28-9). The stanza breaks just then to accommodate a spatial cleave. Another stanza begins: 'C.Bergvall says space is doubt—What emerges then?' (29). There are buildings and canons made of corrosion-resistant matter. A Laboratory, a house in which alchemical experimentation and the preparation of medicines were initially performed, is also vested with the responsibility of teaching (*OED*). Doubt shrouds the integrity of these walls. I can't be sure but the swan who drifts so seamlessly across Robertson's windowless poem appears to me now as an augury who arrives somehow too early. The myth of a swan casts another canopy across a moment in an online interview where Mort can be read to declare: 'And of course, the very process of writing is one of transformation: if I want to conceive a poem with my muse Leda, I cannot come to her as Valzhyna Mort who makes soft-boiled eggs for breakfast. I have to come to her as a poet Valzhyna Mort' ('Valzhyna Mort Interview'). Leda appears on the cover of Mort's *Collected Body*. The image is a copy of Peter Paul Ruben's interpretation of the mythic encounter between a woman with robust thighs and a swan enveloped between them.

The poem as the sublime residue of divine intervention behaves as a thematic foil in Timothy Clark's *Theory of Inspiration*. He writes there that the song of the muse comes 'from both the poet and the divinity' (Clark 41): 'The muse speaks, and the poet is only her mouthpiece and her servant' (Clark 2). Valzhyna Mort introduces herself in the online interview with Maria Garcia Teutsch as split between mortal and divine provinces. Her muse, Leda, is coupled in traditional Greek mythology with a desiring swan. In his poem 'Leda,' Rainer Maria Rilke obscures the inceptive violence Leda endures at the beak of Zeus' mutable desire. It feels suitable to summon Rilke here, seeing as an online interview conducted by Lisa Grove affirms that Mort kept both him and Carson close while she wrote the pieces that would one day ossify into the tissues and organs of her *Collected Body* on the German island of Sylt. Rilke's poem begins with Zeus, 'the god,' who '*in his need*' passes the immortal threshold to emerge in the place of a swan (*The Essential Rilke* 35, emphasis added). The god recognises a need to modulate his divine partialities in his quest to seduce Leda. And while at first 'almost shocked' by the swan's beauty, 'in his confusion [Zeus] let himself disappear into it' (*The*

Essential Rilke 35). His conversion takes place when, with astonished relief, he encounters the swan's image as his own. Rilke's Leda functions as a commodious medium to the extent that she adapts to the incursions of this god-bird fusion: 'And she, opened,/ could see already who was coming down in the swan/ and knew at once' (35). Rilke doesn't stay long with her confusion: 'he asked for one thing,/ which she, confused in her resistance,/ no longer could keep hidden. He came down/ and, pushing his neck through her weakening hand,/ the god released himself into the beloved' (35). Rilke is all the more compelled by this encounter given that it catalyses for him Zeus' transformation. Zeus converts in the fold of Leda's embrace for it's in the warmth of her lap that the god becomes, as Rilke concludes, 'really a swan' (35).

Near the beginning of 'Utopia/' Robertson writes: 'If pressed to account for strangeness and resistance, I can't' (51). There are strange occasions of resistance in Rilke's 'Leda.' I'm reminded at this moment of a line Robertson writes in a complex piece named 'Perspectors/Melancholia' from *Nilling*. And as this line floats in and out, I begin slowly to feel my way up to an opening in Rilke's poetic exposition: 'Resistance is the vulnerable utopia of inwardness' (*Nilling* 54). Robertson's saying belies the ability to fix the spatial parameters of a psychic region named 'inwardness.' There is a moment of notable lucidity in Robertson's prose where she describes this melancholic region of 'inwardness' less as an interiority than as 'an inconsistent system of metamorphoses—spatial extension inwards from the locus of doubt and uncertainty, towards something *not the same* as the present [...] Metamorphoses, because in this skeptical site, belief in the spatial organization of vision is replaced or supplanted by the unknowably superb risk of experiment' (51-2). Extension moves from a point of conceptual indeterminacy without necessarily meeting its own end. And since the movement doesn't land, it keeps funnelling and adapting to this unstable psychical terrain. Blindly, this region of 'inwardness' also yields to unforeseeable risks and unknowable contingencies which leave it infinitely open to the chance of various idiorhythmic adaptations.

Confusion is what Rilke offers as a cognitive contour to Leda's resistance. Already sensing an inherent susceptibility to an unforeseeable change, her body dithers in response to Zeus' 'passing-through.' Leda's confusion is the contorted condition her body assumes as it's made to expedite a transformation which is 'never a neutral event,' as Robertson writes, but 'always a grievance or an astonishment' (*Nilling* 51). Leda's resistance flashes with astonished grief. In Robertson's 'Perspectors/Melancholia,' transformation 'can claim potential' in a melancholic system in the form of '...decay, multiplication, reversal, inflation or minification, fragmentation or annexation, plus all the Ovidian modalities' (51). Melancholia is described there as '...a latent or paused anticipation of something necessarily unknowable, where the latency is not passive, but an experimental site for non-identity' (51). Leda's resistance refracts for Rilke from a melancholic lens which, without seeing, somehow calculates the inherent probability of this risk and of all her chances. Without time to anticipate the cost, she intuits the catastrophic loss of individuality which her receptivity will come to ensure (Bersani, *Forms of Being* 5). And while Zeus willingly forgoes the transcendent position of god to become a temporary creature made of flesh, bone, and psyche, Leda too becomes something else: hardly a place but a conveyor intended for Zeus' own hatching.

An Otherworldly Swan

A swan caught in the icy lake of Stéphane Mallarmé's poem glistens in Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*. The narrator, Marcel, recalls this swan in a final letter he writes to Albertine who has, at this stage of the novel, already become a snuffed romantic flame from another time and place. In his letter, he laments: had she not escaped so soon, he would have gifted her a car and a yacht which he would have named *Le Cygne* (*The Swan*) in the spirit of a desire Albertine once disclosed to him during a past summer's retreat in Balbec (Proust 1946). He notes that he would have adorned the yacht's bow with the middle verse of Mallarmé's « *Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui.* » It's as if this inscriptive gesture were meant to reprove Albertine for choosing to leave at all; claiming retrospectively and somewhat implausibly that he would have bestowed the sort of vehicular gifts upon

her that would have permitted her to wander and perhaps, even flee. But when considered on its own, Mallarmé's verse regresses towards a presiding monotony, an inertia, a failure, an *ennui*. Perhaps it was Marcel and Albertine's lot to abandon the circuit of monotonous repetition in order to break off into two continents destined to drift apart. Somehow, the verse seems to commemorate and to understand this. Marcel notes in the same letter to Albertine that, while she grew to love another of Mallarmé's sonnets, she did not at first understand it (Proust 1947). The verse in question reads as follows:

*Un cygne d'autrefois se souvient que c'est lui
Magnifique mais qui sans espoir se délivre
Pour n'avoir pas chanté la région où vivre
Quand du stérile hiver a resplendi l'ennui.* (qtd. in Proust, 1947)

Anne Carson offers a translation of this verse at the end of *The Albertine Workout*:

a swan of olden times remembers
that it is he:
the one
magnificent but
without hope of setting himself free
for he failed to sing
of a region for living
when barren winter
burned all around him with *ennui*. (21)

As the shadow of a swan he once was, and having since become so overwhelmed by a sense of tedium or melancholic world-weariness, the writer absolves himself here of the role of 'poet.' And yet, this same poet happens still to remember 'a glorious summer which preceded the icy winter of his sterility' (Smith 61). The verse may seem a strange one to engrave upon a vessel which skims and slides and sails. Especially since, unlike the yacht which drifts and skirrs, the swan in Mallarmé's sonnet is caught in a place of nilling paralysis. The swan is trapped in a frozen body of water in the first quatrain whereas in the last one, reproduced for you above in two languages, the swan seems nearly complacent in his refusal to fly. Instead of trying to escape his 'prison,' the swan seems eventually to identify with it (Smith 57). Harold J. Smith offers a Hegelian reading of Mallarmé's « Le vierge... » in 'The Bird and the Mirror':

The Mallarmean lyric now unfolds according to a rigorous dialectic of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. An initial movement of negation (the folding of the wing,

the coming of the night, the closing of the coffin) leads to a final phase of affirmation (the shining forth of a light in the darkness, the resurrection of the phantom bird from the tomb). The bird (symbol of faith, of lyric inspiration and of desire) must die to be reborn in the work of art. (Smith 60)

In these subtle references to ‘...the folding of the wing, the coming of the night, the closing of the coffin,’ germinal and soon-to-become familiar traces of Psyche seem already, and so rather forebodingly, to flit about here. Psyche is re-visited in the last chapter of this thesis as an extended body who happens to be suspended at the verge of a lasting moment of conversion. Despite being captured in Jean-Luc Nancy’s ‘Psyché’ in a state of passive resignation, she attracts such feelings of intense longing from those who stand around, observing and preserving, her. Yet still, another development proposed by Smith in the excerpt above conceives of the sublime work of art as creatively actualized only when its muse is put down to rest. The stillness of the swan could be read as a metaphor for the death of the poetic ‘I,’ particularly if a poem is written by an ‘I’ in moments where it has no consciousness of itself (Nouvet 157-8). Smith reminds us not only of Albertine who must die in order for Proust’s *œuvre* to come to life but also of Narcissus who perishes in order to live on as a flower and who subsists outside the Ovidian myth as an elementary work of art.

‘Tous les poètes sont des Narcisses...’

Without hope of arriving again at the phantasy of an originary entry-point, I want to end by way of returning. A line doesn’t return the circle to itself if the point where the circle begins is already lost. Turning away from the center as from an ellipsis in Lucretius’ poem, we end, then, with an aphoristic twirl. And so, with a little line preserved above in the title of this subsection which re-occurs in the conclusion of Claire Nouvet’s *Enfances Narcisses*. Nouvet excises this saying from Blanchot’s *L’écriture du désastre*, the inheritance of which is traced back to Lacoue-Labarthe and again, a bit further, to him reflecting upon Schlegel’s proposition that ‘Every poet is Narcissus’ (Blanchot 135). Against this sentence which seems initially to reflect the humanistic precept that a poem can be written only once it affirms a live subject’s subjectivity, Nouvet advances another reading. She reads Blanchot to insinuate that insofar as the poet fails to garner a dose of self-recognition, a poem can only be

written without consciousness of itself (Blanchot 135). An extended consequence or effect would be that a poem's underlying subtext or nuance may not always be accessible to readers. Poetic lines, especially those which fail to meet, are able to elicit in readers all kinds of lasting sensations and affective turbulations. Such that, in instances where the poem cannot give the reader what it desires—say, either closure, security, or a stabilizing sense of certainty—still, it can give something else: perhaps, the chance of an idiorrhythmic reading, the occasion for a utopian inexperience, or the possibility of a swanning which changes everything.

Following Nouvet's reading of Blanchot, Ovid's Narcissus is not able to write because he remains frozen at the wound. Transfixed by his own state of suffering, Narcissus is caught up in a no-place where the other's advances are received as vestiges of an originary state of violation. Narcissus refuses, as a result, to conceive of this traumatic event as a chance, among others, to write (Nouvet 156). In refusing the admittance of the other, Narcissus keeps himself hermetically sealed. Writing entails opening oneself up to the other's idiorrhythmic charges and pulsations as they happen within and without. And even if Narcissus were moved to write, Nouvet contends that he would only write himself, and not ever anything else. Blanchot's aphorism submits to a wonderful turn when he proposes the following amendment: 'The poet is Narcissus to the extent that Narcissus is anti-Narcissus: he who, turned away from himself—causing the detour of which he is in effect, dying of not re-cognizing himself—leaves the trace of what has not occurred' (Blanchot 135). Narcissus perhaps inspires this final proposition: that all poems are derived from former Echoes which would not have otherwise been written.

6. Psyche

...in French a psyché, a homonym and common noun, is also a large double mirror mounted on a rotating stand [dispositif pivotant].

Jacques Derrida, *Psyche: Inventions of the Other* (Volume 1).¹⁷

Perhaps I can incite you a bit to dream:

Setting.

Dusk. A blushing hue swells at the horizon. Distant half-light cedes to the darkening pull of night. It's late, perhaps too late to be preoccupied with this same scene.

(I pause here for a moment to tell you that it isn't mine, this scene. Jean-Luc Nancy writes its earliest instantiation in 1978 and publishes it in the sixteenth issue of *Première Livraison* under the title « Psyché ». He appeals to this proper name as the referent of an unconscious feminine body in his later works *The Gravity of Thought* (*Le poids d'une pensée*) and *Corpus*. Emily McVarish's translation of 'Psyche' appears at the end of Nancy's book, *The Birth to Presence*, in 1993. The piece spans only a page (393). Nancy pulls there at the strings of a sleeping figure adapted to various religious, psychoanalytic, aesthetic, and mythological stages. He intimates that a desire persists across these classical spheres to settle something of Psyche's form, substance, essence, function. The embodied referent of this proper name is recognizable in Nancy's text to the extent that *she* exhibits certain traits; most notably, those of passivity, evasion, not-knowing, and extension. I propose in this chapter that similar characteristics subsist in other fictional texts where animate and inanimate aspects of this body cohere. In demonstrating what happens when human and non-human creatures attach and detach from one another, these texts detail formative occasions where psyches brush against one another. The

¹⁷ This citation is taken from Catherine Porter's English translation (18) of Derrida's *Psyché: Invention de l'autre* (24).

inconclusive presentations of these extending, middling, and refracting bodies offer impelling counter-narratives to Psyche as a fabulous prototype. They influence this project's migratory instinct to bypass *Psyche*, as the capitalised name of a mythical personality, to study *psyche* instead as a lowercase carrier-term and diffuse neologism. Given the composition of various fictional scenes in which characters glean tenuous insight from the workings of their own unconscious, these texts reflect back to us the underlying message in Nancy's scene: namely, that no one seems to know the unsettled and undecided body which *psyche* is. With the idea of eventually strengthening this proposal, I offer now a debriefing of Nancy's curious little scene):

Scene.

Enter Freud, or rather, his voice, announcing in German that Psyche is extended (*'Psyche ist ausgedehnt,'*) without knowing it (*'weiss nicht davon'*) (393). Nancy concedes that this line was discovered post-mortem. He fails to tell us that it's also the last of four which Freud writes on a singular sheet of paper on August 22, 1938 (Derrida, *On Touching* 11-2). Instead, he forecasts a point of finitude: 'Everything ends, thus, with this brief melody,' at which point he repeats Freud's lulling *pense-bête*, « *La psyché est étendue: n'en sait rien* ». The German *ausgedehnt* alongside the French *étendue*, or the English 'outstretched' depending on the translation, is repeated throughout Nancy's text a total of six times. If anything can be said to happen in this terribly short scene, it's perhaps only that a line ext-ends beyond all attempts to portray it. It's as if Nancy were intimating that every effort to present Psyche could never quite capture the sense of Freud's aphorism.

Act i.

The first of three acts, or 'starts' as they are named by Derrida in *On Touching* (11), magnifies the obscurity of this condition that is *her* non-*savoir* and state of intangibility: 'Psyche is outstretched [...]: she is but a dispersion of infinitely parcelled out places in

locations that divide themselves and never penetrate one another. No encasement, no overlap; everything is outside another outside—anyone can calculate their order and demonstrate their relationships’ (393). A presence hovers in the form of ‘anyone’ who may desire to locate, measure, and survey her geographical surface: ‘Psyche alone knows nothing of this; for her, there is no relationship between these places, these locations, these bits of a plane’ (393).

Act ii.

Extended ‘in the shade of a walnut tree, as evening falls’ (393), Psyche rests before Eros who ‘contemplates her, with both emotion and malice’ (393). The speculative specimen of the prior act is supplanted here by a more ancient mythological predecessor. As recounted by Lucius Apuleius Madaurensis in *Metamorphoses* (*The Golden Ass*), the Roman myth of Psyche and Cupid culminates with their matriominal union. This reconciliatory act is often read as an allegory for the merging of body and soul. But Apuleius’s tale also extols love’s capacity to triumph over sources of conflict in the text; namely, Psyche’s vengeful sisters and Cupid’s envious mother Venus. In Nancy’s piece, we return to an earlier scene in Apuleius’ text which directly precedes Psyche and Cupid’s iconic merging; where, upon being moved by an abiding curiosity to open Proserpina’s forbidden box of divine beauty, Psyche is swept away by an all-consuming sleep. Just prior to her awakening in Apuleius’ text, Nancy tactfully suspends Psyche in the vicinity of Cupid’s pointed gaze of which she remains entirely unaware: ‘Her sleep is so deep that it has taken from her even the abandon of her pose’ (393).

Act iii.

Psyche is extended in the site of a coffin: ‘Soon it will be closed’ (393). As soon as this ‘soon’ is posited, a mist of particulate bodies materialises around her. Her outstretched body deprived of consciousness commands the attention of an audience whose mixed

responses, Derrida remarks, recalls Caravaggio's painted tableau named *The Death of a Virgin*. Nancy's reading of this painting in 'On The Threshold' follows a mourning ensemble whose gazes are transfixed on the sight of Mary's body or concealed in their implacable palms (Derrida, *On Touching* 49): 'Among those present, some hide their faces, others keep their eyes desperately fixed on Psyche's body' (Nancy 393). While some intently survey Psyche, others continue to miss her: 'She knows nothing of this—and that is what everyone around her knows, with such exact and cruel knowledge' (393). *End scene.*

To Dream: the Absence of Psyche's Proper Name

Derrida formulates an urgent need, detailed in the chapter 'Autobiographical Animal' from *The Animal that Therefore I am*,

...of acceding to a thinking, however fabulous and chimerical it might be, that thinks the absence of the name and of the word otherwise *as something other than a privation*. (48, emphasis mine)

Nancy's scene ends where psyche begins to lose the name. At the moment where she is nearly embedded in the text, so too does this amorphous body begin to dissociate from *her* proper name, gender, and corresponding form. I suspect that my preoccupation with this scene has something to do with its unexpected mirror-effect, in that it coerces readers and spectators to reflect over its re-treatment of psychoanalysis, mythology, and aesthetics, as it startles its audience with the fine chance of a conversion upon which the text remains expertly suspended. Nancy's book *The Birth to Presence* is partitioned into two sections. He assembles the first set of prose-essays under the heading 'Existence' and the second under 'Poetry,' which, as he explains in the preface to his work, is not meant to evoke a literary genre but rather, '...the limit of "literature," of "writing," where nothing is written but the coming of a presence, a coming that can never be written or presented in any way' (ix-x).

By ending *The Birth to Presence* with the piece ‘Psyche,’ Nancy intimates that a coming-to-presence passes with the death of a tradition which both privileges a certain kind of ‘sense-making’ and prioritizes a certain kind of onto-epistemic position. Not as the ‘firmly standing presence, immobile and impassive, of a platonic Idea’ (ix) but *presence*, then, as the embodied event of a birthing and becoming that can never be written and yields to an instantaneity which itself ‘comes, and only comes’ (ix). It’s impossible to ignore the extension of a pleasurable tideswell in Nancy’s thought. The first text in Nancy’s *The Birth to Presence*, ‘In Statu Nascendi,’ inaugurates the section written under ‘Poetry’ and begins with the subtitle ‘Freud, Pleasure, Art, Knowledge.’ Alongside an investigation of the work of *Vorlust* (fore-pleasure) as it ‘takes shape’ in Freud’s book *Der Witz*, Nancy addresses ‘the central motif of an ancient and important branch of aesthetics’ in Freud’s work (213). He re-traces *Witz* as the uncontrollable and most ‘social’ manifestation of the unconscious, which Freud at one point reduces to ‘a waking correlate of the dream’ (213). A question posed by Nancy accentuates the edge of a shimmering possibility: ‘Instead of being a science of the psyche, especially *applicable* to the productions of art, is Freud’s work the displaced, disengaged return of aesthetics as it emerged within (and outside) modern philosophy?’ (213). Nancy reminds us that prior to its contemporary definition as ‘theory of art,’ eighteenth-century aesthetics emerged as ‘...the problem of the *cognitio inferior*, of the nondiscursive, subjective, nonconceptual (nonconceiving and nonconceivable) *cognitio*’ (213). Nancy suggests that Freud may also have been preoccupied with ‘...something that has tripped up every investigation of the subject—interpreted and interpreting subject, the analyzed and analyzing subject’ (214)—namely, a realm of cognition that can ‘...itself never be “known,” that it implies a new, unheard-of “science” or “sense” and “sensation”’ (214). It’s perhaps clearer now to see how half-way through *The Birth to Presence*, Nancy forecasts a reading of his text ‘Psyche’ as a monstrative performance in which *aisthesis*, the question of sensible knowledge, takes a brief tailspin off the stage.

Perhaps unavoidably so and aside from any authorial intent on his part, Nancy’s presentation of Psyche seems capable of ensnaring its audience with unforeseen image-effects. Nancy writes in a piece called ‘*We need...*’ that if words conjure up images in most literary domains, poetry alone rejects

this practice: ‘When a literary piece extends credit to images, uses words as images, one can be certain, no matter how superb the work, that it is not poetry’ (*Birth to Presence* 308). As a point of contrast, it’s useful here to recall Hegel who conceives of images (*Bilder*) as representations apprehended by sensible intuition. Of concern to Nancy is the *presentation* of a textual event as it infinitely comes to pass. He writes of poets as surveyors of ‘language’s entire area’ to the extent that they cover this semantic and syntactical territory, not as creators might, ‘...in order to find something, or to plant a crop, or to build an edifice, but simply to measure it’ (308). The audience in Nancy’s scene are surveyors of an extended topography where they appraise the ‘subject’ of their sensuous and analytical desires without ever quite seizing or grasping this uncertain terrain. And if their senses seem heightened by the visual and tangible dimensions of Psyche’s modest form, they’re also inclined to appeal to words in an effort to transcribe what little of her they claim so desperately to know. I concede that this former proposal is informed by Derrida who writes elsewhere that ‘Psyche is ex-posed, surrendered to the word of the other *around her—and about her*’ (*On Touching* 51). Yet I wish also to stipulate that this chapter alternates between two kinds of reading approaches: one that is drawn to textual images which seem more desirable in part because of their impermanence, and another that is drawn to words in a way that enables the eye and ear to move freely amidst varied lexical influences and derivatives. At differing points throughout the analysis, it will be useful to recall then that these fabulous scenes compel us to oscillate between a thinking which refocuses the image and a thinking captivated by the breadth of words.

A Tribute to Freud

Of the four lines Freud records on August 22, 1938, Psyche’s name appears only after the more technical phrase, ‘psychical apparatus,’ is used twice. Written in point-form haste, Freud’s original prompt reads: ‘Space may be the projection of the extension of the psychical apparatus (*des psychischen Apparats*). No other derivation is possible. Instead of Kant’s *a priori* determinants of our psychical apparatus. Psyche is extended, knows nothing about it’ (‘Findings, Ideas, Problems,’ 299-

300). It's perhaps tempting to read Freud's note as if it were conveyed across the wavelengths of an occult dream or as the somnabulistic event of an astral projection—itself, a kind of paranormal phenomenon where consciousness is thought temporarily to leave the body. The psychical apparatus enables Freud to conjoin a set of synchronised psychical systems, either the *Ucs.*, *Pcs.*, and *Cs.* of his earlier topographical model or the id-ego-superego agencies of his revised structural theory. While it's well-recognised that Freud sought to champion a credible and accredited field of psychical analysis, his writing occasionally betrays an interest in occult phenomena. His stance toward such arcane matters softened with age. In his 1933 lecture on 'Dreams and Occultism,' the third of three pseudo-addresses on mystical themes never presented to the public in spite of alleged intention, Freud writes: 'No doubt you would like me to hold fast to a moderate theism, and show my self relentless in my rejection of everything occult. But I am incapable of currying favour and I must urge you to have kindlier thoughts on the objective possibility of thought-transference and at the same time of telepathy as well' (Freud, 'Dreams and Occultism' 54). Derrida summons another note by Freud written on the same date, August 22, 1938, in the first section of his *On Touching*: 'Mysticism is the obscure self-perception of the realm outside the ego, of the id' (qtd. on 12). Diverted by an experimental notion which seems to swan to him more or less poetically, Freud expands the dynamics of his structural model when he advances the notion that the occult may be the projection of a mirror conditioning the 'outside' *as if* from an introspective 'inside.'

Freud's nascent thought hedges in the dark towards a point where psychical and material reality converge. I come across the adage '*No other derivation is possible*' as a dreamer might in sensing their corporeal edges to be shifting and expanding. It can be difficult in a dream, as in an instant of phantasmic projection, to ascertain where one extended body ends and where another begins. It may be difficult to discern, in such psychical instances, at which point the formation of an inner world coincides with the presentation of an outer world. As a way perhaps of magnifying the risk of phenomenal distortion which besets so many psychical bodies, Freud posits an enigma when he identifies Psyche as constitutively unaware. Perhaps he means to caution against an easy dismissal of

phantasms and unconscious transferences on the basis of imaginary or ‘unreal’ speculated effects. In their extensive glossary *Language of Psychoanalysis*, Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis derive ‘phantasy’ from the German *Phantasie* which reaches beyond the imaginative act to touch upon ‘...the sense of the world of the imagination, its contents and the creative activity which animates it’ (Laplanche and Pontalis 314). Freud assigns to projection a fairly decisive meaning inasmuch as it plays ‘...an essential part in the genesis of the opposition between subject (ego) and object (outside world)’ (Laplanche and Pontalis 352). We project when we attribute an undesired quality, feeling, or wish not yet recognised within ourselves onto someone else. Otherwise put, we project when our environmental perceptions happen to reflect our internalised wishes, interests, and expectations. In this commodious psychological sense, animals too are capable of projecting inasmuch as they select ‘...special stimuli from [their] field of perception which [then] govern [their] entire behaviour’ (Laplanche and Pontalis 350).

Freud gently remonstrates Kant’s *a priori* determinants of ‘our psychical apparatus’ because he questions the implicit assumption that space and time are forms of intuition which transcend experience. Freud’s memorable note articulates a phantasy about spatial apprehension. Space is somehow a phenomenal stratum of extension that is individually projected at the same time as it’s objectively shared. As he furthers Freud’s incitation to question Kant’s approach, Nancy remains close to an unseeing and unsensing topology; to a body, then, who is outside and beside herself, unaware that she is extended and unattuned to the existence of a greater macrocosm of which she is also part. Yet it’s somewhat unclear whether Nancy’s silent unconscious body can remain the indistinct psychic center in which Freudian projection takes form. Derrida asks of Nancy in *On Touching*: ‘And when he says that Psyche is extended, and thus outside, is he thinking of a ‘projection’ effect, as Freud literally, seems to be doing? Or, on the contrary, of an exteriority resisting any projection even if it makes possible some projection *effects*?’ (43). Derrida re-poses the question a page later: ‘What is projection, and what does the figure of a *projection* signify where there isn’t any space yet?’ (44). Freud must have intended to endorse a *pure* intuition of space according to which it wouldn’t be derived empirically but

‘found in us prior to any perception of an object’ (*On Touching* 44). And if Freud proposes that space is ejected outside by a ‘psychic interiority,’ nothing could be ‘more unlikely and contrary to common sense,’ as Derrida himself opines, ‘than this derivation of space or spatiality, which is to say, of the outside’ originating, as such, from the inside (*On Touching* 44). Psyche in Freud’s note incarnates the tenuousness of this speculative proposition. As the embodiment of an unconscious spacing whose mechanism is to deflect (‘*everything is outside another outside*’), this figure extends in Nancy’s text to the point where she becomes indiscernible from the perceptual plane which shapes our external impressions and informs our phenomenal appearances. The mystical potency of such a body, capable of conditioning and moulding our conceptions of the ‘outside’ as it’s both sensorily apprehended and shared, is not always much reflected upon.

Another dimension of thought not yet touched upon in this analysis concerns Freud’s invocation of *die Seele*, the German ‘soul,’ in the original texts he elaborates on psychical structuration. The spiritual essence of the word ‘soul,’ a term associated with humanistic fragility and emotional plenitude in Bruno Bettelheim’s *Freud and Man’s Soul*, is also argued there to be abstracted by the use of mechanised terms like ‘mental apparatus’ or ‘mental organization’ in the translations of *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (Bettelheim 71). Bettelheim senses that Freud appeals to the German ‘soul’ throughout his *oeuvre* ‘because of its inexactitude, of its emotional resonance’ (77). Guided by encounters with ambiguous pieces of literature, this thesis adopts an investigative approach which disengages from dualistic modes of systematisation. Each evocation of ‘psyche’ in this thesis can be seen to illustrate the extent to which the intellectual-spiritual mind (*Geist*) and the bodily soul (*Seele*) brush against one another in moments of psychoanalytical exploration as in general instances of reading. I propose in this chapter that some fictional texts seem more able to occasion in us the ‘...spontaneous sympathy of our unconscious with that of others, a feeling response of our soul to theirs’ (Bettelheim 5). I maintain, however, that this potential for interrelation is informed as much by an agnostic understanding of the soul (*seelisch*) as it is by the discernments of a spirited intellect (*geistig*). For while such activities remain largely

motivated by unconscious processes, we seem able, at least through bouts of deliberate introspection, to occasionally heed the effects of these mysterious operations.

Following Derrida's speculative cue, I read Nancy to be revising a point proposed in the second book of Aristotle's ancient treatise *De anima* (*Peri psūches*), written on and *around* psyche, concerning 'that which has soul' as 'distinguished from that which has not *by living*' (Aristotle 75). Aristotle asserts that the soul is the 'actuality' of an animated body in which it resides while remaining irreducible to one (Aristotle 79). Psyche's body in Nancy's rendition consistently sways between the registers of movement and inertia, knowing and unknowing, insentience and sensation, death and life. 'The soul in living creatures,' Aristotle writes near the end of *De anima*, 'is distinguished by two functions[: by] the judging capacity which is a function of the intellect and of sensation combined, and the capacity for exciting movement in space' (Aristotle 181). Nancy's collated presentation of Psyche probes Aristotle's definition of the soul as that which is essentially *living*. Yet, his work also enables her name and image to remind us of the very characteristics which the ancient Greek philosopher associates with life, for she arouses in her audience the influences of either '...mind, sensation, movement or rest in space, besides the movement implied in nutrition and decay or growth' (Aristotle 75). The audience's ability to take hold of this psychological landscape in Nancy's scene is precisely the sort of relation which remains impossible for them to secure. From a concerted desire to touch and a conjoined failure to see, an audience blindly extends towards that which continues, uncertainly, to *move* them.

In Between Scenes: a Synopsis and an Overture

Nancy prompts Psyche to withdraw from a tradition which reduces her to 'breath,' Eros' lover, Freud's psychical apparatus, Aristotle's 'principle of animal life,' and even, to *nous* as 'world-soul' or 'animating principle of the universe' (*OED*). By directly invoking the image of a 'monad shut in upon itself,' Nancy is also staging his own rendition of a pre-egoic psychoanalytic phantasy (Laplanche and

Pontalis 257). By failing to turn a finger toward herself in order to say ‘*this is I*,’ Psyche lacks the sort of self-awareness which would affirm the precedence of a superintending ego (Derrida, *The Animal* 94). Freud writes about the possibility of an ideal objectless state whose onset and duration would fall somewhere between the stages of auto-eroticism and object-relations. This stage, which he names ‘primary narcissism,’ is characterised by an ego-id relation not yet able to differentiate internal and external worlds (Laplanche and Pontalis 338). Considered ‘more or less [a] successful imitation’ of ‘intra-uterine existence,’ sleep is identified by Freud as its ideal state of expression (Laplanche and Pontalis 256). In this elementary state of existence, the self would be ‘...characterised by the total absence of any relationship to the outside world, and by a lack of differentiation between ego and id’ (Laplanche and Pontalis 256). Such a self would exist without having yet formed part of ‘...a self-conscious and self-controlled human personality, aware of itself as an organic whole distinct from other personalities and from the world around it’ (Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet* 38).

Nancy re-traces in ‘Psyche’ the synoptic biography of a figure who lacks character, depth, as well as presence of mind. She knows nothing of her extension, of her ‘being-extended,’ is virtually unfigurable in this state of dispersion, and remains, at once, an untouchable body. Freed from any sort of intellectual responsibility, Psyche is oblivious to how her segments connect to constitute the whole of her extended soma. ‘This is about a passage,’ Derrida remarks as he reads and re-reads Nancy’s scene in *On Touching*: ‘it is *after* Psyche’s death, and the scene rather looks like an entombment’ (17). A swarm of mourners partially conceal her body as she passes into another realm. Suspended in the temporality of a soon-after, her death rather looks like a cocoonment to the extent that she hinges in Nancy’s text at the precipice of a substantial transformation. A cloud of indecision permeates the scene as if *here* is not quite the place where one is able to decide.

Nancy scarcely alerts us to the possibility of her fabulous conversion as it passes before our eyes. Psyche’s mute latency, a textual indicator of what is perhaps coming to pass, can also be read as a partial rejoinder to Descartes’ position that the soul’s being consists in uttering ‘*ego sum*’ (‘*I am*’).

Psyche responds and exhibits responsibility only as an absenting body. I argue that as she evades all linguistic order and drifts slightly beyond this 'indivisible limit held to separate human from animal,' she is moving towards an otherworldly or 'inhuman' periphery (Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* 48). Her hibernation bespeaks the disposition of a plant, a thoughtless automaton, a reflex, a larva. And as she retreats from conventional understandings of what constitutes an animated body, she becomes, in Nancy's scene, the prototypical expression of a 'preempirical auto-affection' (*On Touching* 46). In *The Animal that Therefore I am* (*L'animal que donc je suis*), Derrida defines 'auto-affection' as '...auto-motricity, a spontaneity that is capable of movement, of organizing itself and affecting itself, marking, tracing, and affecting itself with traces of its self' (49). No one denies the animal 'auto-motricity'—the animal, who is more often *seen* than considered from the vantage point of one who is able to *see* (14). 'The 'I' is anybody at all,' Derrida explains a bit later in *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, to the extent that 'Whosoever says 'I' or apprehends or poses herself as an 'I' is a living animal' (49). But animality is inextricable from this reflexive motility or *auto-motricity*, this 'relation to itself' which determines what is alive and what is animal even before one can 'consider the discursive thematic of an utterance or of an *ego cogito*, more so of a *cogito ergo sum*' (50). And if the intention here is not to 'give speech back' to animals, neither is it to reconceptualise Psyche's indifference within a paradigm which privileges lingual forms of communication over non-verbal kinds (48). In suggesting that a glimpse of 'auto-motricity' can be gleaned in Psyche's pre-narcissistic disposition, I'm requesting that this halted moment be recognised as an inherently active one. I concede that it rewrites what constitutes an animated response, when, without discernible incitation to answer to her own proper name, *psyche* with a little 'p,' as some composite body made up of animal, human, and non-human parts, begins to respond without emitting a single word or sound. In the introduction of her piece on the untranslatable inexperience assigned there to 'conversion,' Sarah Wood reads a quotation from Derrida's *Épreuves d'écriture* which ends with 'As for the rest we are all experts, full stop. What one could say, one must keep quiet...' (qtd. in Wood 257). While they refuse to keep quiet about her, the audience in Nancy's scene wants to glean the secret of her graceful passivity without simultaneously awakening her. This desire to speak on her behalf and to decipher

what Psyche withholds from herself as from all the rest vaults the circumference of Nancy's scene. In this way, Nancy reminds us that this scene reveals more about the desires of those who surround her than it could ever hope to settle on the topic of psyche's itinerant nature.

Withdrawing

In order to withdraw from Nancy's scene, it occurs to me that it needed perhaps to be drawn once more. At some point, Nancy turns in *The Birth to Presence* to the function of a tracing which subtends the passage of any 'withdrawal.' In an exchange with Ann Smock named 'Speaking Without Being Able To,' he concentrates on the meaning of the word as it involves an inscription that is, on occasion, drawn, sketched, or portrayed (316):

In French, a portrait was a *retrait*, like the Italian *ritratto*—which can be understood as 'withdrawn' as well as 'drawn again, a second time.' In the withdrawal, something (or someone) is withdrawn and drawn again, drawn for a second time without any first time—without a model, a 'first person.' It—or she, or he—is drawn in its (her, his) disappearance. At the point of disappearance—as it were—some 'presence' is drawn, not re-presented, but presented becoming absent. (Nancy 316)

In re-drawing Psyche's disappearance, Nancy seems to attempt to summon this figure away from the 'first person' whose likeness or semblance she was perhaps meant, in another context, to portray. The opening at the end of Nancy's scene enables a protean form to detach from a tradition which desperately wants to claim her. She is no longer an originary source-spring from which an answer can be extracted or a question resolutely answered. Psyche channels the ability to reflect *you* back to yourself, at the moment when you begin to lose sense of this character's essence and mythological origin. I argue that this body comes loose from the interminable consultation held around and about 'her' in fictional works conjointly read throughout this chapter. These works of fiction incite our intellectual priorities to shift from an impulse to resolve the enigma that is her absenting body, towards a textual approach which engages what these states of extension and evasion affirm about those who happen to be attentively reading and surveying their passing effects. These texts remind us that while psychical carriers transit between animate and inanimate bodies, these extensible forces shape the subtle ways in which we see others and ourselves.

The reflecting cheval glass of a ‘full-length, free-standing mirror’ faces us in the opening epigraph to this chapter (Derrida, *Psyche: Inventions* xiii). A mirror is laid down to rest once *psyche* becomes, as an effect of Nancy’s scene, a lateral plane of extension in which we, readers and writers, are intimately enmeshed. Because this inanimate surface at once entraps and confronts us, the mirrored sheen of this psychical body stimulates in us a need to reflect over what it means to extend towards what we see, desire to make sense of, and fail exactly to touch. No one is exempt from the effects of this scene which provokes in the spectator-reader an overwhelming desire to see as to make sense of what also exceeds our range of vision. Suspended in a state of despondent repose, a lowercase psyche is precisely the figure whose mirror-like stillness and rotary function is able to captivate and promote in us a desire to move, or else, to analyse what does not in the least seem to affect it.

I posit that the historical analysis consisting of everything said and written on Psyche is loosened in fictional texts where psychical impulses, affects, and potencies extend among and between varying bodies. Psyche is never directly named in the fictional works in question, though elements of this figure persist in the behaviours and dispositions of other fictional characters, as in Albertine, who so often sleeps in Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time*) and in the feline Thessie from Hélène Cixous’ « *Albertine disparue* », in whom an element of Psyche’s indifference continues to smolder. But before we can even approach these two fugitives, I argue that an aspect of Psyche’s evasiveness endures in an arthropod who absconds from sight in Lydia Davis’ short story ‘The Caterpillar.’ And that, beyond the arachnid who travels feverishly in Arthur Rimbaud’s poem « *Rêvé Pour l’Hiver* », this poetic text also appraises the psychical work of projection as it informs the poet’s desire to shield his amorous situation from the chill of winter. I turn, from there, to Kleist’s ‘The Puppet Theatre.’ This text subverts a dignified mode of human perception by focusing on a sensory technique which emerges from the other side of this mirror. This perceptive approach is prefaced in Kleist’s short story by a marionette and further illustrated in the mannerisms of an immutable bear. I turn, in conclusion, to Josefine, the nearly inaudible mouse-singer who is ‘also terrifying because,’ as Cixous writes elsewhere, ‘she is Kafka’s last work, she is the Psyche of the dying Kafka, who had in

effect lost his voice...' (*Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* 131-2). I discern in these works of fiction the presentation of elaborate and sensitive specimens. In these scenes of psychical interrelation, a subliminal transiting across and between a minimum of *two* bodies or species occurs in a way which offsets the ability to synthesise this figure within a fixed psychoanalytical or philosophical system. These literary works channel the possibility of psyche's mutating and transiting propensity. They distend the parameters of what is termed 'animal,' 'human,' 'inhuman,' 'psychical,' while at the same time expanding the register of what constitutes a viable response. The possibility of a silent response which Nancy's mirror-like façade cannot absorb continues, in other textual media, to seep out. A bit like a small animal who addresses 'you' from 'down there' as a 'wholly other [point of] origin' (Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I am* 13), these pieces of fiction brilliantly reflect our preoccupation with psyche from the other side of conscious thought.

Between Image and Word: a Proto-Psyche in Transit

An image near the onset of Apuleius' 'The Story of Cupid and Psyche,' the Roman text in which Psyche's mythological roots are preserved, captures the '...citizens and foreigners, drawn together in eager crowds by the fame of such an extraordinary sight, [...] struck dumb with admiration of her unequalled beauty' (72). A cast of Psyche's beauty is released from her body, perhaps in the Lucretian sense where 'likenesses' and 'effigies' are shed from the surfaces of material things. All this dotting attention directed towards her image has the effect of freeze-framing her into a hollowed spectacle: 'Though all admired her divine loveliness, they did so merely as one admires a statue finished to perfection' (74). Akin to the way animals naturally shed their epidermal shells, a diaphanous film exuviates from this figure who is often thought capable '...of persisting in a disembodied state after separation from the body at death' (*OED*). While she appears in John Keats' 'Ode to Psyche' as a winged creature or butterfly, the *Psychidae* family is also the entomological genus for a type of moth whose females are conversely without wings, antennae, or legs (*OED*). This seems as suitable a time as any to draw a Middle English connection between *Catyrpel*, the larvae of the butterfly, and the Old

French *chatepelose*, defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as a ‘hairy or downy cat’ (*OED*). A nominal link can be drawn between the French *chaton* (whose English equivalent is ‘kitten’), the French *chenille* (derived from the Latin *canicula*, meaning, ‘little dog’) and the noun catkin, given that these ‘things resembling hairy caterpillars’ also conjure up images of a ‘woolly bear’ with its botanical reference to a ‘...unisexual inflorescence, consisting of rows of apetalous flowers ranged in circles along a slender stalk; the whole forming a cylindrical, downy-looking, and generally pendant part, which falls off in a single piece after flowering or ripening...’ (*OED*).

A strand of a hairless insect falls out of Lydia Davis’ ‘The Caterpillar.’ The narrator discovers it in her bed one morning and becomes so absorbed in the task of removing the undesired thing from her living quarters: ‘There is no good window to throw him from and I don’t crush or kill a living thing if I don’t have to’ (531). She elects to carry ‘this thin, dark, hairless little caterpillar down the stairs and out to the garden’ (531). Yet, midway to the garden and halfway down the stairs, it sidles out of her hand. The caterpillar’s physical form begins, just then, forever to elude her (531). Cixous writes of a connective fibril in *OR* which she names « *une mèche de vie* ». As previously stated in the first thesis chapter, Derrida writes of ‘this wisp of hair’ as ‘a piece given or kept of the other’s body’ (Derrida, *H.C. for Life* 80). A nearly imperceptible link in the form of an ‘extensible hair’ is also the tangible chord through which two bodies are bound to one another (82). A hair that is pulled or drawn exhibits a certain telephonic *might* whenever the other’s name is called upon. To restore life by tugging on the hair of this entity’s name occurs with the kind of ‘absolute speed,’ Derrida remarks, ‘that makes the letter arrive before the letter’ (*H.C. for Life* 83). Cixous posits an exception to this rule in *OR*, insofar as the names of those who are ‘totally dead,’ ‘long departed,’ or dead for an outstanding period of time cannot be re-called. Only those who have recently died can be resurrected, then, ‘...for they still remain between two doors for about eight days. Maybe a fortnight. During these days it is still possible to bring them back to this side’ (Cixous, *OR* 20-21). The caterpillar is never named in Davis’ short story. The fate of this nameless specimen would seem logically to foreclose the capacity ever to recall it. And while no hair exists which could facilitate its restoration to life, somehow, the narrator

continues to summon its memory, to amplify the proportions of its image, and to anxiously return to the magical places where she infers it still to be lurking. Either because it so recently died or because it escapes the measures of a surveyable death, the caterpillar disquiets, nettles, and persists as an unlost body. While the survival of a vital union would seem here most untenable, the ‘braid of a name’ upon which Cixous claims the dead are ordered to ‘Come! Be! Stay! Live!’ is regenerated by a naked strand of bare life in Davis’ tale.

The disappearance of Davis’ aberrant caterpillar invites the reader to overturn and re-examine the text without ever quite moving passed it. The event of the caterpillar’s withdrawal offers a funnelling ingress back into Nancy’s scene of Psyche’s retreating body. Psyche, who is so often defined as ‘the breath of life’ or whom Derrida defines, after Aristotle, as ‘the animation of the animal’ is also impossible to forget (*On Touching* 18). The narrator in Davis’ short story explains how this male arthropod, who is too small to go on thinking about and too evasive to go on hunting, defiantly hangs onto her. Against all odds, the caterpillar remains enlivened by the narrator’s animistic faith in its unlikely survival. The possibility that its three pairs of legs are still scuttling somewhere, somehow, is more tolerable to her than the event of its accidental death. And while the physical body of this creature absconds, some aspect of it continues to return in the form of a restless psyche: ‘Every time I go upstairs or down, I avoid his side of the stairs. I am sure he is there trying to get down’ (531). Just as she remains unable to move past him, I too am not at will to forget *her*, who has ‘probably died by now’ (Davis 532). Psyche continues to live beyond the staging of her demise in Nancy’s short text, in part, because there can be no extension, no possibility of life-after-life, without a body to incarnate it, without heat, or electricity, or movement to stimulate it. And when Davis’ narrator resorts to illuminating the staircase with a flashlight where she finds things that look ‘rather like him—a very slim splinter of wood or a thick piece of thread,’ she deduces that these things are not ‘him’ by virtue of their rivaling lack of animation. Unlike these things which do *not* move, the elapsed caterpillar is seized by an imagined sinew in the narrator’s psyche which compels her to re-member this bit once deemed inconsequential to her (532). The narrator in Davis’ short fiction is haunted by a tiny thread of

life whose sense and meaning continues to evade her.

A Romantic Interlude – A Poetic Phantasy

On October 7th of 1870, Arthur Rimbaud writes a sonnet. A solemn dedication « *À Elle xx* » crests the right corner of the poem which he names « *Rêvé Pour l'hiver* » ('A Dream for Winter'). In a footnote below the text, the editors of the *Classiques Garnier* publication of Rimbaud's *Œuvres* remark on the capitalisation of the preposition « *Pour* » in the poem's title. They infer that the poet must have later appended the past participle of 'to dream' (*Rêvé*) to « *Pour l'hiver.* » As if the text itself were little deterred by the rules of punctuation, it skips across « *Rêvé Pour* » to begin instead with « *L'hiver, nous irons dans un petit wagon rose...* » ('In the winter, we will leave in a small pink railway carriage...') (Rimbaud 75/42).

Rimbaud etches little circles around two bodies who want to flee together from the world. Inscribed before the dative at the bottom of the text, « *En wagon* » intimates the setting in which the poem was written. The railway car (« *wagon* »), a romantic nest in which the love of two creatures hopes to subsist, is described as a rose-coloured sanctuary where feverish kisses are seamed into the corner-pleats of encircling blue cushions: « *Avec des coussins bleus. / Nous serons bien. Un nid de baisers fous repose/ Dans chaque coin moelleux* » ('With blue cushions. /We will be comfortable. A nest of mad kisses lies/ In each soft corner') (Rimbaud 75/42). This « *nous* » is not quite *pneuma*, translated in Stoic thought to 'life breath' and associated there with the principle of *psyche* or *anima* (soul). Nor is it yet the equivalent of 'mind' and 'intellect' (*nous*) so commonly invoked in Ancient Greek philosophy (*OED*). *Nous* refers rather to the French pronoun 'we,' simply intended here as an affectionate pairing of two. Rimbaud and his unnamed lover hasten away to avoid the inclemency of a glacial winter. And though the cold of winter is never directly summoned in Rimbaud's poem, he beseeches his beloved in the second verse to avert their eye so that they might not notice those aggressive monstrosities (« *De démons noirs et de loups noirs* » / 'Of black demons and black wolves')

loitering outside their window (« *glace* »)...

I hesitate over the word *glace*, sensing that the poem issues through it something like a cautioning murmur. Perhaps because « *Rêvé Pour l'hiver* » opens with the coldest season in the northern hemisphere that *glace* also has the effect of evoking 'ice,' 'frost' (*givre*), and particularly, 'mirror' (*glace*). It's as if the poem intends to ward off menacing wolves who threaten from the inside to abate romantic feeling, or to deflect demons who entreat a ruinous kind of self-reflection whenever their shadows are discerned in a train's moonlit window. Carson reminds us in *Eros, the bittersweet* that projection prompts '...the mind to reach out from what is present and actual to something else, something glimpsed in the imagination' (Carson, *Eros* 52). The origin of a tension between internal ego and outside world is also ratified by Freud in his 'Instincts and their Vicissitudes,' and expanded elsewhere, in 'Pleasure-Ego/Reality-Ego' and in 'Negation.' To the extent that it tends towards pleasurable incitations, the Freudian ego works to introject sources of gratification and to project outside sources of displeasure. Rimbaud's love nest is an extension of this psychical effort to sustain a pleasurable-unpleasurable divide between 'inside' and 'outside.' To further the allure of the lovers' sensuous diversion, Rimbaud traces the fit of an unhinged kiss in the third verse which scuttles across the lover's neck as if it were a restless spider: « *Puis tu te sentiras la joue égratignée.../ Un petit baiser, comme une folle araignée,/ Te courra par le cou...* » ('Then you will feel your cheek scratched . . . / A little kiss, like a mad spider, / Will run around your neck . . .'). As a way of precluding an impassive inertia from settling, two creatures attempt to lose one another in their shared escapades. And while the exhilarating chill of winter threatens to deaden the couple's erotic attachments, Rimbaud advances a hope which he intends romantically to last: be it that all seasonal distress may eventually pass in the idling time it takes to stir across the lover's body a little creature who travels frequently.

Scenes of Looking: Albertine as an Image of Psyche

A memory concocted by the narrator of Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* concerns a

freckle of a creature who travels errantly across Albertine's face. The motility of an arachnid in Rimbaud's poem reflects the peripatetic movements of a passionate desire. The recollection of a fickle memory in « *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleur* » upsets Marcel's ability to remember the exact location of a beauty mark on Albertine's face. He reassesses his instinctive ability to secure its position; initially recalling the « *petit grain de beauté* » on her cheek directly below her eye whereas later, it occurs to him as if it had always been positioned on her chin (Proust 686). At every occasion where they meet, Marcel makes a point of fixing the resting place of this quasi-trait which his unconscious is in the habit of displacing.

Marcel admits to remembering Albertine differently each time (685). Even at the earliest onset of their becoming acquainted, he thinks of her, not as a ghost worthy of haunting the rest of his life (« *ce seul fantôme digne de hanter notre vie* ») but as a nimble passerby about whom not a verifiable thing could be known, let alone discerned (684). On the elusive nature of human perception, Marcel determines that it's only by revising our earlier optical errors that an exact knowledge of an 'other' (« *la connaissance exacte d'un être* ») can be attained (685). And even when a remediation of this sort can be initiated, Marcel concedes that it's never truly possible to catch up with the other. For the other evades, especially in instances where we believe ourselves to have finally reached them; « *nous pensons le rattraper, il se déplace...* » (685). And should we believe the other to ever be more clearly apprehended, we eventually remember that the composite of images with which we're left, despite having once been taken and correspondingly grown clearer in time (« *que nous avons réussi à éclaircir* »), have since become irrelevant or obsolete (685). A radical dissemination of Albertine's image, resulting from the magnification of her facial features, occurs in another scene from « *Le Côté de Guermantes* » as Marcel comes close to Albertine's face with the intent of kissing her cheek. In this moment of nearness, certain sensory constraints impede him from tasting the unknown blush of Albertine's glowing cheeks (1028). Marcel's sensory precision founders in moments like these: when his lips cannot locate their desired sustenance because they've long been forsaken by his capacity for smell, or when his eyes, on account of proximity, fail to re-adjust to what appears to them too close-

grained (1028). And what results for Marcel from this sensory confusion is that his kissing lips ultimately fail to savour the rose of her delectable cheeks (1028-9). Proust writes that it's from this intimate vantage point that Albertine's indistinct cheeks turn aside as if to offer him other cheeks, while the unrefined pixels of her neck work to unveil a 'robustness' which further modifies the composition of her face (1028). And it's through this short trajectory from his lips to her cheeks that Marcel comes to experience, not one, but *ten* Albertines—where one adaption immediately gives way to the place of another with his every attempt to approach any one of 'her' (1029).

Marcel's character reflects a constant need to repeat, to revisit, and to revise. The insistence of this 're' is able to turn a piece of clothing, some bit of food, the gist of a sentiment or scent, over and over again, across the length of the narrator's exhaustive quest for lost time. These bits re-occur throughout the work under varying textures of light. A reflection expressed at first with conviction is often later exchanged in favour of a more befitting thought-organism. His anecdotal tendency to modify previous statements communicates to the reader an openness on his part to the instability of *life* *death* as well as a sensitivity to the fluttering nature of his own desires. The importance of a kind of phantasy-work informs Marcel's invention of Albertine as an 'other.' Preferring that his decorative illusions about her could have endured, Marcel construes the cultivation of intimacy as a diminution of what he feels to be infinitely more valuable. The intensification of this disappointment coincides with the rate at which his rarefied phantasy of 'Albertine' fatally deflates. And it's precisely at this point that his confected portrait of her becomes for him an intolerable reality (684).

Marcel's foiled encounters with 'things' in an earlier scene in « *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleur* » helps to convey to readers the ambit of his own narcissistic projections. He is moved in this particular scene to remember the contents of his room in Balbec. He remarks initially how the space was replete with things which seemed conscious of one another yet unaware of him (« ...*pleine de choses qui ne me connaissaient pas...* ») (529). While Marcel remembers feeling tormented by the small library bookcases, this psychological disturbance is only heightened for him by the presence of a

large-scale standing mirror (« *une grande glace à pieds* ») (530). The mirror's obtrusiveness leads him to infer that the possibility of reprieve can no longer obtain for him (530). He compares these obdurate things to the objects in his Parisian room which were deemed inoffensive because he recalls experiencing them as disarming extensions of himself (« *...car ils n'étaient plus que des annexes de mes organes...* ») (530). The latter conciliatory entities become conduits through which his psychical body could expand out into the room. And yet, the unforgiving mirror in Balbec deprives him of this exact experience. As if trapped in the memory of his room in Balbec with the presiding sense that there is no more universe, no more room, and no more body to call his own, Marcel, overcome with loneliness, feels himself wanting to die (530). The fortuitous event of his grandmother's entrance clears a chance, just then, for infinite spaces to open (« *Alors ma grand-mère entra; et à l'expansion de mon cœur refoulé s'ouvrirent aussitôt des espaces infinis* ») (530). And while his grandmother's arrival suddenly reanimates for him the possibility of spatial continuation, Albertine forestalls the protraction of his psychical self, only to deflect back to him the fragility of his own narcissistic pinings.

Marcel wants Albertine to reflect to him the sheen of his projected artifice. And when she fails to do so, something inside of him shatters. It's perhaps fitting that much later in the fifth book « *La prisonnière* », Proust writes of love as an extension of Marcel's sadness: 'that our love perhaps is our sadness, and that its object is, to a very small extent only, the girl with the raven tresses [*la jeune fille à la noire chevelure*]' (442/1671). Marcel concedes that fugitive beings such as Albertine are more adept than others at inspiring love. Albertine is never, for Marcel, a certain kind of being but rather many « *êtres de fuite* » ('these fugitives') (1672/442). Born perhaps of an earlier impression of Albertine as inseparable from her feminine companions, he is never able to distinguish her from her band of similarly-mannered friends (730, 737-38). Proust writes that the fear of suffering from a loss attaches itself to the desired winged creature who, in surpassing Beauty itself, never allows herself to remain caught for long (1672). Even when she leaves Balbec to reside a short while with a nervous Marcel in his Parisian apartment, Albertine remains as one (of many) whom he could never wish to own: 'And, be it understood, what we say of fugitives is equally true of those in prison, the captive women, we

suppose that we are never to possess them' (442/1672). Marcel posits the famous trope shortly thereafter that 'we love only that which we do not entirely possess' (« *On n'aime que se qu'on ne possède pas tout entier* ») (1682), or as the English version laments in recuperating detail, 'we love only that in which we pursue something inaccessible...' (648-9).

Psyche's mythical counter-part and the ancient Greek deity, *Eros*, promises the conflation of 'want' for 'lack' through the timeless presentation of a 'desire for that which is missing' (*Eros the Bittersweet* 10). Freud occasionally beckons to Eros in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. He associates this figure there with the drive of 'poets and philosophers which holds all living things together' (61). When he invokes Eros' name, Freud intends to preserve the scope of our wildly erotic instincts. For it is well-known that Eros often goads the lover to reach beyond the satisfaction of its own self-preservation instincts: 'The lover wants what he does not have' (Carson 10). Carson ratifies this thought in *Eros, the bittersweet*, where she posits the ensuing rhetorical address: 'Who ever desires what is not gone? No one. The Greeks were clear on this. They invented eros to express it' (Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet* 11). Under the influence of prurient desires, we pine for that which remains wildly elusive, indifferent, and eternally, out of reach.

It's not simply that Albertine incarnates these hidden beings for Marcel, nor that she conceals their voluminous forms « *sous l'enveloppe charnelle* » ('beneath whose envelope of flesh more hidden persons are stirring'); but more specifically, that she simulates 'the desperate quest of all these persons' (« *l'inquiète recherche de tant d'êtres* ») (1672/443). And what disquiets Marcel most is the impression that she flickers with insatiable desire, and that, in concealing the sensuous memories of so many unknown figures, she flutters about in a state of permanent unfulfillment. Perhaps more unsettling to him still is the notion that she mirrors his own readiness for otherworldly pursuit. Marcel in « *La prisonnière* » comes to resent his life with Albertine as if her presence were now interfering with his urge to travel alone to Venice (1729, 1898/ 497, 640). The infuriating parts of Albertine's character he could never hope to fix are inverted in these instances where they become projections of

traits he is already in the habit of educating. Marcel remarks earlier on that, with each variant of Albertine who appears before him, he should have assigned a corresponding name to each Marcel (« *à chacun des moi* ») who thereafter thought of her. It's as if through this analogical tie, he were hoping to convey a silent hope that their psyches may be conjoined through the merging of their proper names (739). If the invention of an 'other' is contingent upon the quality or bent of a spectator's melancholic lens, the ways in which this other plays at mitigating their own readability must not, however, be discounted. Marcel perceives Albertine to simulate the barely visible veils of a sea which alters the colour of its surroundings based on the level of its concentration, motility, dispersion, and effluxion (« *fuite* ») (740). With this comparison, Marcel intimates that the perceived can influence the beholder's flow of perception. And since the other is as much capable of deflecting as of diffusing the spectator's gaze, Marcel naturally comes to confound Albertine with the sea (739).

Albertine, like Psyche, is an abstraction who detaches herself from the qualities Marcel tries to pin onto her pliable form. Marcel's fable of her begins sometime before their first meeting, during a summer's retreat in Balbec, when his eye would often follow in the distance the movements of a young girl as she walked along the side of the sea. It's only after he makes Albertine's acquaintance that he becomes convinced of the fact that the two are images of the same. Only after investing such time and energy on the creation of this whimsical figuration does Marcel come to feel a certain degree of promise towards Albertine (686). Marcel expresses an element of surprise when he discerns in his earlier desires for Albertine a more carnal instinct for possession (729). He notes that the impulse to 'penetrate her life,' to follow her into the countries where she had spent her childhood so that he may be initiated by her side into a life of sport, is abated *en masse* given her initial resistances to his physical advances (730). To endure these intimate rejections, his desire learns to detach itself until his unconscious, at some point, even begins to mistake her for a wax doll: '...as if I had known a waxed doll instead of a real live girl...' (« *...comme si, au lieu d'une jeune fille réelle, j'avais connu une poupée de cire...* ») (translation mine, 730).

More than any other part of her body, Albertine's cheek kindles in Marcel a consideration of her doll-like affinity. Remarking on the translucid pink of her matted cheeks (« *ses joues mates comme une blanche cire...* »), he attests just then to a spurring desire to kiss them (« *...ce qui donnait tellement envie de les embrasser* ») (738). I come across another reference to Albertine's lustrous appearance in « *La prisonnière* » in which the budding romanticism permeating earlier scenes can no longer be felt. Marcel, aware that Albertine is gradually resigning from his affectionate grip, confirms the extent of her growing indifference in the blushing tint of her figurine-like cheek:

...she might have allowed a tress of her long, dark hair to fall over *a cheek of rosy wax* and, half shutting her eyes, unfolding her arms, have seemed to be saying to me: 'Do with me what you please ! [*Fais de moi ce que tu veux !*].' (431/1660, emphasis mine)

Marcel often recalibrates this air of '*Do with me what you please*' in the yielding that is Albertine's recumbent form. He commonly returns to her enchanting sleep-states in « *La prisonnière* », perhaps because his stirring need for surveillance finds near satisfaction in occasions where he can bear unconscious witness to her. He suspends his growing *ennui* of Albertine whenever he pauses to watch her lull into a distant sleep. He expresses an 'indissoluble attachment' to her and finds her childish grace (« *sa grâce enfantine* ») most appreciable in her dormant states of abandon (1688/459). And when she sleeps, he absolves Albertine of any trace of maleficence. She sheds, with each fall of her eyelids, every performative mask he has ever accused her of wearing (1654/426). In her protracted state of absention, Marcel feels that she confides herself entirely to him and burgeons, as such, with reclaimed innocence (1688/458). Only in moments of such sweet resignation does he fail to detect any trace of mischief or deceit in her softened expression (1688/458). Casting aside his suspicions of her more insidious tendencies, Marcel reserves for her the most endearing terms whenever he happens upon her in a wilted state of grace. Watching on as her hand rests against her chest in such an unaffected and puerile manner, he describes the need to stifle the desire to smile (« *d'étouffer le sourire* ») and likens it to the sort of gentle regard adults reserve for small children in response to their mixed airs of gravity (« *leur sérieux* »), grace, and innocence (1656/427).

A passage in Carson's *The Albertine Workout* offers an alternate reading of Albertine sleeping:

27.

- a) Sometimes in her sleep Albertine throws off her kimono and lies naked.
- b) Sometimes then Marcel possesses her.
- c) Albertine appears not to wake up (11).

The ironic inflection of 'appears' in c) suggests that Albertine may only pretend to sleep. Perhaps she senses Marcel's jealousy soften whenever he happens upon her unconscious form. Perhaps she only seems to rest so that she and Marcel can temporarily restore the conditions of their lost amorous paradise. I can't recall a moment in Proust's novel where Marcel entertains her sleep-state as a possible ruse, careful strategy, or plotted feigning. Albertine's dreamy state of withdrawal is considered from the perspective of a persistent desire which wants what it wants. And yet, Albertine as a manikin dreamer loosens Marcel's hold of her and relaxes his epistemic prerogative without his quite consciously remembering it. With her inverted stare, she deflates the auto-referential confidence of an 'I' or two, and draws Marcel's eye away from the extensible horizon which he is prone to project. The marionette, for Derrida, 'drives the human being beyond the human' (Krell 26) while 'the animal(s)' invite(s) the human to confront their own abyssal limit, even as this limit itself folds, multiplies, and so always resists, according to Derrida, totalizing objectification (Derrida, *The Animal* 12, 30-31). And in this case, it is Marcel's projection of Albertine as part-cat, part-feminine puppet, and part-infant which ultimately entices him beyond the limitations of this most intimate mode of desiring.

Albertine's coy becomingness is concentrated for Marcel in the tip of her dainty nose—« *le bout de son nez, fin comme celui d'une petite chatte sournoise* » (739). Albertine's nose initially resembled to him the muzzle of a stealthy cat with whom anyone would long to play (739). And yet, much later, when he finds a familiar Albertine coiled into a ball of mischief upon his bed (« *pelotonnée espièglement en boule sur mon lit* »), Marcel notes again of a desire to play all night with this large cat (« *grosse chatte* ») (1660/431). Following this solicitation, he remarks on her little pink nose whose tip she would lower and make 'even tinier' as she cast beyond it a coquettish gaze (1660/431). Only later, at the near-end of « *La prisonnière* » and with the advent of the sixth book « *Albertine disparue* »,

does Marcel renounce his more endearing attitude towards her cat-like finesse to adopt instead an embittered and condemning tone. As in their final encounter, when she deprives him a second time of his goodnight kiss, Marcel details an animalistic aversion on her part: « *elle s'écarta avec l'espèce d'entêtement instinctif et néfaste des animaux...* » (1903). Prior to the event of this second renunciation, Marcel presses her despondent form against his heart in a state of anticipatory desperation and remarks just then to himself the azure-gold hues of her Fortuny gown. The piece of clothing's Arabic ornamentation and distinctly Venetian name, *Tiepolo*, whose roseate stone matches the gown's pink sleeves causes it to register earlier on to Marcel as the seductive shadow of an inaccessible Venice (1899/656). But as Albertine withdraws from him, he comments again on the colours of the gown which shimmer as he imagines Venice's Grand Canal would. He notes that a pair of oriental birds mirrored across the gown's columns appear, rather ominously, as if they were balancing between a tenuous life and a precarious death (1903, 1899/656). Marcel, who once conceived of Albertine as 'a wild beast tamed' (« *[une] bête sauvage domestiquée* ») (1890/647), recalls the manner in which she steers clear of him. He notes that she casts in his direction an instinctive air of defiance deemed peculiar to animals who can track and sense the nearness of death (« *qui sentent la mort* ») (1903/659). And though he eventually conceives of this as a calculated escape (1925), twelve pages after refusing Marcel his importunate kiss, Albertine finally flees.

Scenes of Parting, Departing, and Coming Apart : A Cat Responds

We turn to Cixous only to arrive again at a different scene. Suspended in a state of endless departing, Albertine returns, but this time, in another text. Proust writes of a correlated effect in the seventh book to follow « *La prisonnière* » which he names « *Albertine disparue* ». Marcel describes there how he can idealise Albertine only after she carries out her decision to leave (Proust 1944). In the manner of a doted seashell now left unnoticed on a dresser, it's only in becoming irrevocably lost that Albertine comes to summon in him an extended memory of the sea's joyous beauty as of its resplendent blue mountains (1944-5). In her book *L'amour du loup et autres remords*, Cixous begins the chapter

« *Albertine disparue* », a title she pinches from Proust, with ‘Miss Albertine has left [*est partie*], I was reading Albertine’s ball [*la pelote d’Albertine*] for two weeks now...’ (61). The Proustian reference which starts Cixous’ text falls short of the exclamatory birr felt when « *Mademoiselle Albertine est partie!* » bursts open the sixth book of Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu*. And yet, Cixous’ text mirrors Proust’s to the extent that it re-iterates how the beloved’s departure precipitates the ends of one’s idealised state of attachment. If she begins her tale by retracing Proust’s words, it’s partly because reading intimately informs the composition of her text as subtly as it influences the events in her life. Preoccupied with the departure of her beloved cat, she can no longer discriminate between this event and the one which Proust’s text precipitates or else repeats. In each textual instance where a character absconds, gradually disappears, or suddenly takes leave, we arrive at a point where there is no clear point of departure. No one arrives or lands at the shore of a leaving. And if we ever arrive, it’s only in having resigned to what remains already well out of keeping.

Cixous writes near the beginning of « *Albertine disparue* » : ‘she is forever leaving, who could imagine that leaving could linger so [*qu’il y a tant de partance*] in the moment of departure [*dans un simple partir*]' (61, translation mine). The narrator marvels at her awareness that there could be so much departing in so modest a verb. While speaking of Albertine, once again, she softens the distinction between reading and living. She makes note of Albertine’s *pelote* which I’m tempted to translate here as a woolly ball or a feline’s mere play-thing (61). In a seamless moment, she revives Proust’s image of Albertine who appears in a catkin-like ‘ball of mischief’ curled up on Marcel’s bed. Albertine’s *pelote* is the sort that would roll back into itself were one to unwind it (61). This type of *pelote* belongs to Melanie Klein, the narrator remarks, insofar as it lacks both an outside and an inside (61). The narrator who takes *to* and is taken by it becomes so caught up alongside and within it that her feelings (« *sentiments* ») are turned from one side over and in the inverse direction as well (61). A whirling torment which she names an « *entournement* » has already begun and perdures without ascertainable end (61). The first sentence in her work continues for the time it takes her to describe this sinuous state of non-fictional enmeshment. It swerves for a moment to return to the circumvolutions of

a « *partiretour* » until it settles, momentarily, in the form of a period. Yet this bated rest comes only after an announcement is made concerning the fifteenth of April, where, on the first page of this companion-piece to Proust's « *Albertine disparue* », we are told that at night and rather suddenly, Thessie too had disappeared (61).

Composed of only six pages, « *Albertine disparue* » constitutes a rather short essay in Cixous' *L'amour du loup et autres remords*. While the narrator has become entangled for two weeks in Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*—during which time she's unravelled the reel of Marcel's projection of Albertine as a secretive and misleading feline—she remains unable to incite her cat to return to her room. Proust reminds us at one point that Marcel so desires to pierce through Albertine's robe; not to *see* her body but to see *through* her body so that he may be privy to her most private reflections and assignations (« *tout ces bloc-notes de ses souvenirs et de ses prochains et ardents rendez-vous* ») (Proust 1672). Marcel's sadness undulates with his vacillating treatment of Albertine, whom he alternately conceives as a marionette he can unthinkingly maneuver on his lap or as an exalted deity of Time whose operating-mechanism he remains unskilled to track (Proust 1894):

I might, if I chose, take Albertine upon my knee, take her head in my hands; I might carress her, pass my hands slowly over her, but, just as if I had been handling a stone which encloses the salt of immemorial oceans or the light [« *rayon* »] of a star, I felt that I was touching no more than the sealed envelope of a person [« *l'enveloppe close d'un être* »] who inwardly reached to infinity [« *qui par l'intérieur accédait à l'infini* »]. How I suffered from that position to which we are reduced by the carelessness of nature which, when instituting the division of bodies, never thought of making possible the interpenetration of souls (for if her body was in the power of mind, her mind escaped from the grasp of mine... (Proust 650/1893)

Marcel senses that even if his hands could commit to memory the grooves and folds of her apricot skin, his would only be brushing against the carapace of an unknowable creature whose interior life seamlessly extends towards the infinite. Marcel suffers immensely from this, in a state of disbelief that a monumental oversight on nature's part could institute the separation of bodies without thinking to render possible the interosculation of souls (1893). That her psyche should remain unattainable remains for him an injustice. Proust does not forage out of the orbit of human interaction, but in Cixous's « *Albertine disparue* », readers are caught in a house with two different creatures as each grazes the

limits of the other's entreating body.

Thessie's disappearance is contingent on her hiding somewhere inside the house (62). Cixous writes that along with S., she searches the home near and far, upstairs, under the bed, at which point they think to beckon Thessie by name: 'shaken, we called out her name, this was our first error' (« *nous l'appelions étonnées, ceci fut notre première erreur* ») (62, translation mine). A transgression precipitated by the expectation that Thessie should respond to her name, is furthered by the narrator's dismay when Thessie finally withholds an audible response. The narrator rationalises: Thessie is free and safe, so why even chase her? (« *car après tout elle est libre, elle est sauve pourquoi la pourchasser* ») (62). She honours Thessie's being-unattached in a way which Marcel's insecure disposition could not. Marcel saunters around Albertine's prostrate form with his « *pas de loup* » so as not to wake her (Proust 1657). But in Cixous' text, an absent « *pas de chat* » prevents the narrator from sleeping: 'From one moment to the next. Not only in books. In our life' (« *Elle m'empêche de dormir. D'un instant à l'autre. Pas seulement dans les livres. Dans notre vie* ») (64, translation mine). The narrator eventually discovers Thessie under a bed downstairs in a remote corner of a yellow room where she remains still and quiet despite the narrator's many entreating calls (62). When the narrator returns upstairs without a consenting cat to nestle up to, she settles instead for the elusive nearness of Proust's Albertine. And yet, in an effort to assuage her growing fears, she reminds herself that the cat will come out (« *Elle sortira me dis-je* »); that she will come back up at some later hour (« *tout à l'heure elle viendra* ») and that she will return even as it increasingly seems that she will never again come back to her (62). Marcel attempts to calm himself in « *Albertine disparue* » with a reminder issued on the same day of her greatest disappearance that Albertine will again return (Proust 1926). He relents hope only after he receives a telegram announcing that Albertine was crushed to death by her renegade horse (Proust 1962). Thessie eventually returns at five in the morning 'without any sign whatsoever' (« *sans le moindre signe de rien* »). But something changes when the narrator affirms that the past is no longer sutured to the future by a continuous temporal link: « *le trait est rompu. Elle est partie. Elle est devenue partie* » (65). The line has been broken. Thessie is gone. She has gone away

and has resolutely come a-part. Contaminated by the event of this unforgiving ‘de-parture’ and identifiable only as the passage of a constant ‘de-parting,’ Thessie now remains only ‘part’ of what she formerly was.

It’s with remarkable ease that Cixous’ narrator confounds Albertine with Thessie: ‘A seven-year span has lost all aspect, all meaning. Immediately, I no longer love her’ (« *Sept ans changent totalement de sens, de figure. Subitement, je ne l’aime plus* ») (64, translation mine). The narrator transfers responsibility onto Albertine for the cat’s injurious behaviour: ‘I love my cat but not Albertine’ (65, translation mine). Because the narrator admonishes the *partance* which Albertine’s mere name hypostasizes for her, this fictional character is held accountable for the event of an extraneous separation (65). She descries everywhere in the house and in the garden Albertine’s loitering spirit, to the point where she can no longer discern if the one prowling (« *se faufile* ») in the grass outside in the manner of a cat is actually Thessie or if it’s rather Albertine (65). Gone are the seven years where Thessie patiently awaited the narrator’s return from Venice, Saint-Marc, or any other place to which the book may have whisked her away (62). Distorted are those seven years spent nourishing a secret *entente* and honouring the symmetric balance of a « *partiretour* » where they would part during the day and converge again at night with a book impacted between them: ‘she delivers (the book) me her on me the book, we ritualise’ (« *elle le livre moi elle sur moi le livre, nous ritualisons* ») (62). The application of the cat’s weight against her sends the narrator back to herself. In choosing not to respond, the narrator deduces that Thessie must have intended to sever old habits (« *Elle avait rompu les habitudes* ») (62). The narrator endures a narcissistic injury when this most cherished other fails to hold her up to herself. Insofar as her entire world and sense of self was formerly insulated by this feline other, she was able to remain constitutively bound as well as defined by her tenacious attachment to Thessie. And while she ultimately approves the cat’s decision, something she must do if she is to honour the cat’s difference and autonomy, Thessie never again comes back to her. It’s only as an untamed and unknowable other that Thessie, once again, returns.

Thessie Returns: A Mirror Shatters, Another Door Opens

As Cixous relents her 'seven year' alliance with Thessie, a muted allusion to Francis Ponge's « Fable » may perhaps be heard: '(After seven years of misfortune [*Après sept ans de malheurs*] / She broke her mirror [*Elle brisa son miroir*])' (8). The preceding couplet follows an elliptical break in Ponge's poem. Isolated from the rest of the composition by a set of parentheses, both lines seem initially out of place. The original French version of Ponge's poem appears beside an English translation in the first volume of Derrida's *Psyche: Invention of the Other*. Derrida writes extensively on the technical and syntactical aspects of this laconic poem: on its ironic presentation as allegory, on its invention of a poetic language which struggles to refer to itself while seeking to address an other, and on its attempt to initiate a transition towards 'the other side of the mirror' (9). In recalling Ponge's admiration of La Fontaine's fabled reconstruction of the myth of Psyche, Derrida ratifies the sensation that we are caught in the mirror's 'fatal and fascinating trap' while we read « Fable » (17). The psychical apparatus is never summoned in Cixous' « *Albertine disparue* », nor does she name the mythical character in Apuleius' story 'who loses Eros, her fiancé, for having wanted to see him even though it was forbidden' (Derrida 18). Rather, a small cat in Cixous' tale shatters the narrator's fragile mirror. An unassuming cat disturbs her need for simulated recognition. A cat breaks with tradition when she responds with indifference to the narrator's call for sustained mimicry. The narrator's perception of Thessie suffers irreversibly from the cat's disappearance. And despite reiterating to herself « *elle est libre* », the narrator knows not how to unburden herself of a weakness for shared rituals.

In the subsequent chapter, « *Le dernier enfant* », Cixous writes of Thessie, no longer as her 'fiancée of seven years,' but as her last child (*L'amour du loup* 67). More than any other creature, it would seem, the cat exhibits for her the subtlety of unhindered thought (71). If cognition and knowledge are extensions of human potentiality for Hegel, Cixous focuses instead on the agility and sharpness of an entity whose reflective capacities are not clouded by the interferences of a synthesising

ego. Cixous intimates that the cat's perspicuity tends to be overshadowed by its presumed verbal incompetency:

She hid much power in appearing not to have inherited a capacity for speech (*sous son apparence de déshérité de la parole*). But what more she had than any other creature was simplicity of thought (*la pensée*). With her, a thought could never hide behind a thought. (Cixous 71, translation mine)

The narrator begins to limn the presence of grace as it illuminates the cat's soul. A trusting sense of confidence which so often writhes inside the human heart never once vacillates in the cat's heart (72). The cat's eyes¹⁸ which are to her naked, never shielded, and wildly still, convey crystal gazes rather than projections in the direction of passersby (72). Cixous accentuates the invariance of this otherworldly creature: 'It's that her soul does not change (*ne varie pas*) [...]: she did not confound fear and danger. She would be afraid only when warned (*qu'à bon escient*). She was not of our world' (Cixous 72, translation mine).

Cixous asserts near the end of « *Albertine disparue* »: 'I exclude the possibility that the cat is innocent. The choice is made' (65, translation mine). Her averment tilts an entire philosophical edifice at an angle to allow for a conversation to stir. In disavowing the possibility of the cat's innocence, Cixous responds to Hegel's adaptation of an ancient religious tale in his *Lectures of 1827*. According to this originary fable, primeval existence is characterised by a state of innocence and grace. Hegel refers to it as a 'sojourn in paradise,' whereas the Greeks before him named it the 'golden age' (211). Hegel argues that humans, in this prefatory stage, are not yet equipped with a capacity for moral discernment. Paradise (*παράδεισος*) simply remains, then, a 'zoological garden [*Tiergarten*]' (214). Non-human animals are perpetually in a 'state of desire or general wildness' but in this initial stage of unity, humans are not for Hegel 'as they ought to be' (215). Hegel conceives of humans as 'essentially spirit.' As beings-for-themselves, they are free to discern who they are over and against those whom they conceive as beings-in-themselves (213). If humans exhibit an inherent capacity to withdraw from

¹⁸ When Marcel writes at one point of Albertine's eyes resembling the ore of an opal, he goes on to describe how '...the two facets which alone have as yet been polished, which, become more brilliant than metal, reveal, in the midst of blind matter [*matière aveugle*] that encumbers them [*qui les surplombe*], as it were the mauve, silken wings of a butterfly [*les ailes de soie mauve d'un papillon*] placed under glass [*qu'on aurait mis sous verre*]' (648/1891).

nature, it's because they only reconcile themselves with their own essence and truth once they set themselves apart from what, in essence, cannot be constituted as such. This moment of cleavage or rupture, as Hegel defines it, coincides with the emergence of conscious reflection and ethical judgment: 'The stone or the plant is immediately in this unity, but in a oneness that is not a unity worthy of spirit, is not spiritual oneness. Spiritual oneness comes forth out of severed being' (213-14). Innocence for Hegel is characterised by an absence of will (Hegel 440). Cixous aspires to a world where non-human animals are never simply exempt from the conjectured beginnings of accountability. She rejects the possibility of banishing an autonomous creature to a prelapsarian state of non-agency. When a cat responds and exhibits responsibility in Cixous's piece, our harrowing and inherited systems of human understanding seem suddenly ineffectual when it comes to recognising and honouring non-human singularities.

Cixous' response challenges an ingrained philosophical tradition which some claim Aristotle to have instantiated and others, like Descartes, Kant, Heidegger, and Levinas, to have emended. She responds to these thinkers who have kneaded an anthropocentric concept of 'the animal' in which difference is nearly, if not entirely, missed. According to Derrida, the category 'the animal' limns the diversity of 'animals' by whittling down the 'structural differences between different types' and thronging them all into one reductive sub-category (Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* 90). In the process, these creatures are deprived of responsibility as of the ability to respond. According to this inherited tradition, animals cannot speak, cannot (deliberately) lead another astray, nor can they exhibit the potential of honest thought (Derrida 33). A cat responds to these philosophers in Cixous' writing. In failing to conform to a ritual, a cat tricks her human counterpart into learning that an animal is never simply a mirror to be utilised at another's behest. Cixous grapples in this short piece of fiction with respecting 'the presence of the animality of the animal,' which she describes elsewhere as 'a fabulous exercise that needs to be done with a technique that resists narcissistic capture of the savage body' (*Readings: The Poetics* 53). Thessie exists for her benefit alone and exists as such without the least hesitation or apology. The narrator chooses to dissociate herself from an institution which endorses the

application of narcissistic tools of appropriation. Innocence is not a moral virtue which can be attributed to a cat as simply as it can be restored by Marcel to a sleeping Albertine. And if innocence is not befitting of a cat, then neither is it suited to any of '(the) animals' whose livelihoods are often compromised as a consequence of others' ritualistic ceremonies. In precluding the possibility of the cat's innocence, Cixous also responds with a tinge of envy: « *Elle a toujours fait ce qui lui convenait, ce qui lui faisait le plus plaisir. Pas une préférence, pas une trahison. [...] Je l'approuve: elle suit sa pente* » (65-6). The cat has always done what suited her most, what gave her the most pleasure without a hint of vanity, preference, or betrayal. And of her, Cixous *approves*: the cat is free to follow her inclination, which she does, and always at her own discretionary risk.

Scenes of Losing (Balance, the Image, the Other): Kleist's 'The Puppet Theatre'

An image of grace reinvigorates Nancy's scene. It has to do with a mode of extension which reaches, as psyche does, towards what inhumanly moves or unknowingly calls to it. The possibility of a divineless grace, as the one which seemingly presents itself there, would involve neither redemption from a previous state of sinfulness nor a celebratory return to a former state of savagery. Instead, it would have something to do with losing the image of one's self along with the fabulous notion of an originary first. It would involve narcissism too; as the complex precursor to becoming oneself which is hastened by one's infantile encounter with alterity. These rudimentary thoughts are caught, as I dream of them now, between the teeth of Cixous' *Readings: The Poetics of Blanchot, Joyce, Kafka, Kleist, Lispector, and Tsvetayeva* and the maneuvering fingers of Heinrich von Kleist's 'Über das Marionettentheater' ('The Puppet Theatre'). Translated in the English version of Cixous' *Readings* as 'The Marionette Theatre,' Cixous turns there to a small kindling thought on '(the) animals' as it spirals out of Kleist's text. I appeal hereon to '(the) animals' so as not to echo the disabling effects which egress from a co-opting category like 'the animal.' In honour of heterogeneities, then, I follow Derrida who wonders in *The Animal that Therefore I am* if we should perhaps not say '(the) animals,' to renounce 'any horizon of unification of the concept of the animal, to which one would be able to

oppose in turn anything else identifiable whatsoever: man, for example...' (62). I wish to write in a way which recognises an animated mode of thinking unburdened by the misfortunes of a distressed ego. Cixous characterises Thessie in « *Le dernier enfant* » as a kind of depth without depth akin to the one God must also exercise: « *Cela lui donnait une espèce de profondeur sans profondeur comme celle que Dieu doit avoir* » (71-2). She intimates, in a manner distinctly reminiscent of Kleist's marionette, that a cat is perhaps closer, than a human is, to God.

Kleist's 'The Puppet Theatre' tessellates various points of conversation between a narrator and a dancer on matters pertaining to mechanical, divine, and animal modes of psychic interrelation. The two meet in a public garden on a wintry evening in 1801. The dancer, Herr C., was at that time receiving notable accolades for his recent appointment to first dancer with the opera. The narrator initially confesses to having been surprised at witnessing the dancer visiting a puppet theatre '...erected in the marketplace where little burlesques, into which were woven songs and dances, were being given for the entertainment of the common people' (411). As a means of justifying his recurrent attendance, the dancer explains to the narrator that the puppet's simulated movements epitomise grace in a way that the *entrechats* of a human dancer can only fail to: '...it would be quite impossible for a human body even to equal the marionette. In dance, he said, only a god was a match for matter; and that was the point where the two ends of the round earth met' (Kleist 414). In contrast to a force of attraction which exhausts and mutilates the human form, Herr C. exalts the puppet's ignorance of its own lightness and privileges what he names its 'advantage of being *resistant to gravity*' (Kleist 414). Affectation, a kind of defect or mistake that is particular to humans, occurs '...whenever the soul (*vis motrix*) is situated in a place other than a movement's center of gravity' (Kleist 413). This, Herr C., limns in a passage where the souls of dancers are localised in specific sites of their bodies:

'Watch P.,' he went on, 'when she is playing Daphne and, pursued by Apollo, turns to look at him: her soul is somewhere at the bottom of her spine, she bends as if she would snap, like a naïade à la Bernini. And watch young F. when, as Paris, he faces the three goddesses and hands Venus the apple: his soul – it is painful to see—is actually in his elbow.' (Kleist 413)

The comical condensation of the soul in various niches of the dancer's body communicates a poverty where a notion of psychical harmony or unity is concerned. 'Such mistakes,' the dancer added, 'have been unavoidable ever since we ate from the Tree of Knowledge. But Paradise is locked and barred and the Cherub is behind us. We shall have to go all the way round the world and see whether it might be open somewhere at the back again' (Kleist 413-4). If the human's lapse from a purified state of grace is hastened by Eve's caterpillar-like submission to a desirous feeding, Herr C. nonetheless leaves ajar the possibility of an anticipated restitution.

A tale within a tale presents itself in Kleist's piece. It tells us that we must proceed all the way around the world to reach the posterior end of an anthropocentric legacy where an allegory about humanity's divided state of consciousness is also sustained. Cixous mutely proposes at the end of « *Albertine disparue* » that the place we have left behind may be slit open, by a cat. Thessie 'opens' the door at the end of « *Albertine disparue* »: « *Elle a ouvert la porte. Elle a pris le chemin du futur qui éloigne* » (66). The cat precipitates the path of the future which distances and separates. She revises a point about the history of creaturely origination in the moment where her silence is construed as a severing response. In this demure state, the cat projects a time to come which would involve neither the question of original sin nor a state of posited 'natural oneness.' She sets herself apart irrespective of whether anyone would conceive this occasion as consciously or unconsciously willed. And when the cat returns, it's only as another; as one who can no longer be identified by the narrator as her dearly betrothed of seven years (66). Thessie returns as an autonomous creature divested of all affiliation to her human benefactor. The narrator accepts her own desire to be recognised by the one whose name she lovingly calls. But in order to accept the cat's tacit rejoinder, as she must, the narrator is challenged to honour this other's unknowable state of grace. The cat's ability to respond without any sign of internal resistance or psychic inconstancy reminds the narrator of this creature's unwavering sense of direction and resolve. The cat offers an alternative approach to a kind of thinking which tries too much to grasp as it turns around and looks longingly upon what came prior. There is 'no turning back' for Cixous insofar as each of us is left alone 'to advance along the trajectory of loss' (38). The dancer in

Kleist's story intimates that it's only when the moral ideal of 'paradise' loses its status as tenable 'first choice' that an embodied state of grace can emerge again. Kleist's text also suggests that this possibility can be evinced only in a body which moves neither with nor against (its own) nature. Grace manifests perhaps in a body whose movements and behaviours are neither consciously predetermined nor intellectually overdetermined. A graceful body is perhaps only one which responds as if it were simultaneously being released from and outside of itself.

At one point in the fiction, Herr C. accuses the narrator of having failed to read the third chapter in Genesis which discusses the Edenic prohibition, the human's first transgression, and their consequent fall from sanctity. The narrator responds with grounds for a defense: 'I said that I was perfectly well aware of the damage done by consciousness to the natural grace of a human being' (Kleist 414). To illustrate his point, he offers a story in which a warning against the mirror's ensnaring hold also happens to resonate. He recounts the tale of a young man whose innocence, at the age of sixteen, suffered as he became engrossed by the spectacle of his own reflection. The story of the bather 'whose development at that time had a wonderful grace about it,' tells of this young man's attempt to model for the narrator the pose of a German statue pulling a thorn out of his foot (Kleist 414-5). And as the young man repeatedly tries to prove to him that he can perfectly simulate the posture of this statue, the narrator, either because he desired 'to find out how securely grace dwelled in him' or thought it would benefit him to weaken his confidence a bit, insolently responds that 'he must be seeing things' (Kleist 414). Cixous writes that the narrator's dismissal directly compels the young man to descend along the path of imminent loss (Cixous, *Readings* 41): '...from that very moment forth, the young man underwent an unbelievable transformation. He began spending days in front of the mirror; and one after the other all his charms deserted him' (Kleist 415). A warning against the effects of representation, as of the image's potentially petrifying and submerging hold, occurs in Kleist's storytelling (*Readings* 32): 'This Narcissus who bears no name is going to fall not into water but into the mirror, and there he drowns. He is losing his balance, something that is in a harmonious, precise relationship with itself, like the movement of the marionette. The young man is leaning towards vanity.'

He is going to fall into an absolutely mortal mode' (Cixous, *Readings* 39). He endures this fall from grace as a continuous engagement with loss inasmuch as 'Grace is not lost all at once. It is on the way to being lost' (Cixous, *Readings* 40). The young man steadily withers into the lap of Vanity (*Readings* 39). That he can become so enthralled with an alienated image of himself is a catastrophe of a discernibly mortal kind. It's in part to this last point that Herr C. responds with a story about a clear-sighted bear in whom grace 'emerges, in ever greater radiance and supremacy' (Kleist 416).

Without a Certain Grace

With a smile, Herr C. begins: 'I must tell you another story. You will soon see its relevance here' (Kleist 415). He describes a journey taken to Russia where, as a guest at Herr von G.'s country house, he was challenged to a fencing match with Herr von G's eldest son. But once he defeats his contestant, the son spitefully insists on bringing his vanquisher to meet *his* rival. A bear, whom Herr von G. happened to be 'rearing in the yard,' is presented as the narrator's next competitor (Kleist 415). The subtlety with which Kleist fastens the bear's hind legs to a post, a visual reminder concerning the oscillating movements of 'binding and unbinding, of attaching and detaching,' also recalls the marionette who derives its mechanised *élan* through the tugging of its inanimate strings (Cixous, *Readings* 68, 54). After the bear is coerced into a duel, Herr C. quickly discovers that he is no match for this composed and imposing animal:

Now I tried a thrust, now a feint, the sweat was dripping off me: all in vain ! Not only did the bear, like the foremost fencer in the world, parry all my thrusts, when I feinted—no fencer in the world can follow him in this—he did not even react: looking at me in the eye, as though he could read my soul in it, he stood with his paw lifted in readiness and when my thrusts were not seriously intended he did not move. (Kleist 416)

Under a section entitled 'Brushing (*frôlement*),' Cixous writes: 'Animals have an imaginary but no unconscious. They have no superego, hence no ego. [...] The bear does not repeat his movement. He improvises and invents incessantly while the fencer tries and calculates' (*Readings* 48). Derrida asks in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, 'Does [an animal] get bored? Does it lie? Does it forgive? Does it sing? Does it invent?...' (63). Cixous turns this line of inquiry back upon itself when

she concedes, without attempting to gauge from a humanistic vantage point its level of ingenuity or its capacity to respond, that the bear certainly improvises and invents. Instead, she whittles it down to a simple difference: the ego, a system the bear lacks and which, given its peculiar integrative processes, adapts in the human as the seat of narcissistic development. This level of perspective clarity, if it can even be humanly attained, suffers when a mirror-effect encroaches in mere instances of looking: ‘The bear’s secret is that he sees straight but when we see, we project. We see what we have already seen, what we want to see. We see through a mirror. We see ourselves seeing but the bear does not’ (Cixous, *Readings* 55). Because human perception is prone to curve, it more often yields to obfuscation than it does to clarity. The bear, unlike the human, is not restrained by a psychical instrument which interferes with its potential for perceptive acuity. Human in-sight is more likely, then, to fold back in an effort to secure for itself a reliable point of reference.

In this frayed passage towards psyche along which we have, for some time now, been tentatively brushing, I wish to turn to a brief passage from Kleist’s ‘The Puppet Theatre’ in which Narcissus and the bear are tied together with two annular knots. By playing with the focus of perception, Herr C. proposes that humanity’s redemptive path towards grace remains always to-come:

We see that in the same measure as reflection in the organic world becomes darker and feebler, grace there emerges in ever greater radiance and supremacy.—But just as two lines intersecting at a point after they have passed through infinity will suddenly come together again on the other side, or the image in a concave mirror, after travelling away into infinity, suddenly comes close up to us again, so when consciousness has, as we might say, passed through an infinity, grace will return; so that grace will be most purely present in the human frame that has either no consciousness or an infinite amount of it, which is to say either in a marionette or in a god. (416)

Kleist adopts a mathematical approach according to which history can be seen to funnel back by way of an infinite set of repetitious events. The endless deferral of grace and a geometrical metaphor converge when Herr C. advances the notion that two lines extending out from one point are destined to converge again at some future point. According to ordinary plane geometry, a line which extends without determinable limit cannot return ‘into itself at any finite distance’ (*OED*). In an article entitled ‘Passing Through Infinity,’ Sarah Pourciau proposes that a non-Euclidean system emerges in Kleist’s

writing. This projective or spherical system is one according to which ‘distance’ and ‘angles’ are dispensed with to focus instead on properties which are perspective-driven. She argues that this model of ‘stenographic projection’ was utilized by ancient Egyptians and Greeks in their attempts to map out the regional positions of stars. But this system would certainly have been familiar to Kleist who, at the end of the eighteenth century, as Pourciau reminds us, studied mathematics in both Freiburg and Paris. Conceptually speaking, because it ‘...allows for the projection of spherical surfaces *onto a two-dimensional plane*,’ beholders would not be able to differentiate points found behind them from those found in-front, nor those found below from those found above. In these warped spatio-temporal conditions, two parallel lines could be seen to meet at what is called ‘a point at infinity.’ An affinity persists between the concave mirror and this ‘geometry of position’ (*OED*). Strictly contingent on the spectator’s reference-point, an image perceived in a parabolic mirror could invert or it could withdraw into the distance until it becomes amplified on the other side of the mirror. Or else, it could entirely disappear. This last possibility intrigues Miglena Nikolchina in her piece ‘The Concave Mirror: Notes on the Parahuman in Kleist and Rilke.’ She invites her reader to visualise a beholder standing at the precise point along the focal axis of a curved mirror where rays of light laterally extend without merging. This precise location forecloses the capacity to produce a *real image*; a visual event which is generated whenever rays converge on the beholder’s side of the mirror, as well as a *virtual image*; another sort of visual event produced when light-rays extend back towards the other side of the mirror where they also intersect (82). Nikolchina belabours this point because when a beholder is placed at the focal point of such a curved mirror, there is no image to apprehend. Herr C.’s redemptive journey towards grace would have to pass then, as Nikolchina insinuates, through a similar perceptive blind-spot. It’s only in this indistinct zone where the subject disappears without an image to compute and without a ‘self-perception’ to resolutely hold onto, that the possibility of grace, then, elliptically returns.

Grace re-appears at the end of Kleist’s piece as a state *without* return, in part, because its originary conditions can never again be perfectly recovered. But a certain kind of grace can return once

the mirror-image disappears at the precise point where it passes through infinity. Yet, still: faint visuals of Albertine sleeping, of Thessie de-parting, and of a nameless caterpillar evading somehow persist throughout this chapter. Each tale of disappearance, displacement, extension, and withdrawal silently, that is, inferentially, likens a human system of perception to a mirror. Each demonstrates what comes to pass when a desired or projected image begins to fragment or recede from view. The possibility of tending to Albertine's polychromatic image is stunted when Marcel stows her in an unconscious state of innocence. His resolve to reduce her to this singular trait is an attempt on his part to stave off the reality of his having already lost her. A mirror-image is shattered when a cat rejects the timeworn thesis that only humans can respond. And when the improbable wings of a missing caterpillar begin to flit around in the psyche of another, the recognition that the effects of a body always exceed its physical, perceptual, and tangible form, suddenly begins to insist. These blind specimens cast images in the direction of narrative beholders and readers which defy expectation. Derrida likens the encounter with the mirror in *The Animal that Therefore I am* to a hunting which reflects an aggressive search for a response (64); something like an explanation which might affirm to you your origin and your destination. It's only in failing to return to oneself, as it happens when one begins to lose the assumed image, that a creature can begin to extend beyond what's been previously ascertained or tirelessly presupposed. It's only in losing oneself that one encounters the other. It's only in failing to see what one assumes to have seen that one begins to explore what it means to co-exist amidst evolving states of entangled be-comings.

Scenes of Extending an(d) Ending: Kafka's Josefine

Franz Kafka wrote '*Josefine, die Sngerin oder Das Volk der Muse*' ('Josefine, the Singer, or The Mouse People') in 1924. Published several months after his death that same year, 'Josefine, the Singer' is the last of four short stories written and gathered under the title *Ein Hungerknstler* (*The Hunger-Artist*). The narrator of Josefine's story is a nondescript member of the mouse-community. From an innermost place, the narrator deduces that Josefine's unremarkable song could perhaps be attributed to

some pared form of a whistle. The narrator explains that whistling, which Kafka may have intended as a metaphor for story-telling, is an ‘unthinking’ act which all mouse people do: ‘We all whistle, but it wouldn’t occur to any of us to claim it as an art, rather we whistle thoughtlessly, without even noticing it, and there are many of us who don’t even know that whistling is among our characteristics’ (Kafka 265). Her song-whistle is set apart because more than any other, she remains able to captivate an audience, even if her enraptured members strain to hear the notably delicate and feeble sounds she emits. And in spite of ‘the much greater riddle of [her whistling’s] great effect,’ the narrator comes to renege his former conclusion. He comes to insist that her vocal sonority must be ‘more than whistling’ (266) because ‘...if you sit in front of her, you understand her; opposition is something you can only do at a distance; when you sit in front of her, you know: this whistling of hers is no whistling’ (267).

Josefine’s body extends on stage. As the narrator recounts, she ‘emitted her triumphal whistle and was quite beside herself with her outspread arms and neck stretched till it would stretch no further’ (267). It’s perhaps only clear from a distance that a shunning of communal responsibility is not implied by Josefine’s commitment to whistling. After all, her performance is contingent on the possibility of her being seen and heard by others. Just as Psyche’s entire constitution pledges itself to the venture of sleep, every region of Josefine’s protracted figure is invested in the conservation of her chosen vocation. Josefine’s embodied commitment is pursued in the name of something whose greater significance continues to evade her: ‘it’s as if she had collected up all her strength in her song, as if everything in her that was not at the service of her song, every ounce of strength, almost every possibility of life had been taken away from her, as if she were laid bare, offered up, left in the care of kindly spirits, so that, utterly withdrawn and dwelling only in her song, a chill breeze would be enough to kill her, merely in passing’ (Kafka 268). Josefine is so predisposed to those around her that the mere impact of a gust of wind could mark the ‘end’ for her. A bit later in the text, the narrator anticipates her imminent retreat:

Soon will come the time when her last whistle sounds and falls silent. She is a little episode in the never-ending story of our people, and the people will get over her loss. It won’t be easy for us; how will our assemblies be possible in complete silence? Then again, were they not silent, even with Josefine there? Was her actual

whistling noticeably louder and livelier than in our memory of it? Was it ever more than a memory, even while she was alive? (Kafka 282)

The mouse people are not moved to 'give themselves unconditionally' to one another (Kafka 269). They do, however, exhibit a remarkable penchant for schematisation as when they rally themselves together with marked efficiency each time Josefine happens to issue a winged missive. The mouse people lead precarious existences. As an endangered species, 'the children lack the time in which to be children,' the reality of which compounds their behavioural predisposition towards being, at once, 'prematurely aged' and permanently child-like (Kafka 273). To overcome the numerous economic perils and adversaries which afflict them, the mouse children are deprived of their 'time of grace,' as well as of 'an entitlement to a little freedom from worry, a little innocent larking around, a little play' (Kafka 273). The narrator explains that their accelerated course of development could explain their 'lack of musicality,' on account of their being in some significant respect, 'too old for music' (Kafka 274). There remains a sense in which this hastened maturation, a remnant nostalgic pull of which Josefine's voice also works to revive, spurs in them a search for lost time.

Josefine's whistling grants the mouse people a chance to feign provisional immunity from their daily strifes and sufferings. And the silence into which her whistling is absorbed reflects back to the audience, as Margot Morris suggests in 'Kafka's Josefine,' the muted sound of their own thoughts (Morris 370): 'It is her song that enraptures us, or is it not rather perhaps the festive silence surrounding that feeble little voice?' (Kafka 267). It would seem, then, that they gather 'not so much [for] a vocal concert as a popular assembly' given that Josefine's song offers them an occasion to hear themselves think: 'The whistling that arises, when all others are enjoined to silence, comes almost as a message from our people to the individual' (Kafka 272). In this state of reflective serenity, the limbs of the audience melt into the warmth of a sensuous mass: 'Here in the scant intervals between battles the people dream, it's as if the limbs of each individual relaxed, as if each anxious veteran were finally able to stretch out in the big warm bed of the people' (Kafka 275). Her performances are those they 'wouldn't miss [...] for the world' (Kafka 276) for they expand the parameters of what this asylum-seeking collectivity deems possible as well as desirable: 'Before long we too are immersed in the

sensation of the crowd, listening together, body warmly pressed against body, shyly breathing' (Kafka 268).

It's as if everything depends on the hollowing respite which Josefine's song accords: 'the hour is much too grave for us to want to chatter through it' (Kafka 268). Out of respect for the fleeting nature of her performance, the audience listens. For an hour 'much too grave' already projects an end to these occasions for sobering reflection. Josefine, who is 'blinded by over-confidence,' often 'fails to see certain things' (272). An obstinate Josefine wants 'only the unambivalent permanent public recognition of her art' (278). Determined to assert her difference to the grave, she campaigns not merely for 'differentiation, but [for] *recognition* of difference' (Morris 373, emphasis mine). She issues the 'extravagant demand' that she be exonerated from work by virtue of its 'deleterious' effects upon her voice (Kafka 277). Her requests however are subject to a chilling response from the mouse people who repeatedly turn a deaf eye to her solicitations for aesthetic validation. During her last recorded performance, the narrator remarks on a grave diminution in the level of her enthusiasm and in the presentation of her truncated form. Upon drawing to an end, the narrator follows her 'cold eye' as it 'surveys the respectfully retreating crowd...' (Kafka 282). Josefine, who cannot see or who so often misses things, watches the crowd with an indignant gaze as she begins gradually to withdraw. Her blindness extends into the future where it bends to meet her unsightly end. The little bit of distinction for which she struggled will be swallowed up by a self-effacing multitude whose history and narration no one seems the least interested in conserving (Morris 383). But the narrator finds solace and grace in the fate which awaits her, for he writes that in being '...released from the earthly torment [... she] will happily lose herself in the numberless crowds of the heroes of our people' (282-3). It would appear a 'heightened relief' to the narrator that she too can be forgotten, as were all the nameless others who came prior (282-3).

Precedence is given to the collective body. Difference at the level of the individual is neglected, if not, flatly dismissed. As she withdraws, Josefine momentarily flickers amidst this

assembly as if she were the last mouse-child. In demurring the injustice of a life deprived of relaxation and play, her last glance conveys an air of contempt for their obedient natures. And yet, just as Nancy postpones the end of his text on Psyche as another way of *extending* the determinable limit of a timeless narrative, so too does Kafka gently defer the imminent end of Josefine's song. A 'soon' defers the event of her anticipated disappearance in the last sentence of Joyce Crick's translation, for he notes there that 'she will *soon*, redeemed and transfigured, be forgotten, like all her brethren' (282-3, emphasis mine). A bit of Josefine endures then, just as Psyche endlessly slips out of a tiny aperture in a coffin. Fragments of their mute and mutating natures resound in the responses of other characters, be they fictional puppets or alphabetical letters. The echo of Josefine's voice persists in Kafka's last story¹⁹ where, even if difference could be entirely muffled, it would continue to hide and thus to offer 'itself in every atom of sound, perhaps...' (Lyotard 164).

Learning to End, Finally

In the piece 'God and the puppet,' Jean-François Lyotard attaches a tail-image to the kind of 'grace [*Amnut*, but also *Grazie*]' about which Kleist writes (163):

The extinction of the subject, of the subject's mirror, of its reflexivity in the usual sense, of its most elementary capacity for synthesis, does not come about within its reflexive temporality, like an interval, even one given over to the subject's loss. The interval and that temporality are themselves suspended on it. (Lyotard 157)

For Lyotard, the shattering of the subject's mirror or the 'extinction of the subject' doesn't happen within a space of time where introspection presides. The chance of psyche's transition or conversion remains suspended upon the chance of a dream where awareness and examination dithers. Grace, for Kleist, according to Lyotard's reading, involves '...the freeing of the mind from all diachrony, from all task of synthesis. It is the graciousness due to the sufficiency of the all in one, according to God, or the one in all and for all according to mechanics' (Lyotard 163). 'Synthesis,' in the dialectical sense of the term, refers to the attainment of a resolution where the conflict between a thesis and its negative

¹⁹ Tuberculosis ultimately deprived Kafka of his voice, of his capacity to drink, and finally, of his ability to write.

antithesis gives way to the transcendence of a new stage or idea. Occasionally, ‘synthesis’ corresponds to a Hegelian moment of reconciliation defined, as we have seen, by a rupturing event or foundational cleaving through which spirit consciously returns to itself. Nancy stages the presentation of an asynthetic figure which bears no intention, no sign of retention, and no ostensible aspiration to become what it otherwise is not (Lyotard 163). Grace, in this context, approximates an act of extension which mindlessly reaches out towards that which is other. Grace, without innocence, without exoneration, and without savagery, happens when one opens towards the other without hope of returning to oneself.

The possibility of a vegetating growth, as of a mutating gene, or a propensity to wander around in astral-like *rêverie* abide in these fictional texts, as does the elliptical conveyance of an uncertain grace. Aspects of Psyche endure in the small feline who seems not to respond to her own name, as in a mystical caterpillar initially dismissed on the basis of its namelessness, and in Albertine, the fugitive whom Marcel at once projects, idealises, and ultimately distrusts in Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu*. As they play at inverting the authorial and readerly positions assumed in these varied scenes of writing, these marionette-puppeteers monstrate, affirm, and reflect us back to ourselves in their own mirrors (Derrida, ‘Psyche’ 18). And insofar as they exhibit an unconscious might and striking facility to become lost, they lose their audience too, at least momentarily, where nothing seems less certain to us than what these psychical permutations are planning, devising, dreaming, desiring, thinking. It’s perhaps by retracing the textual trajectories of these departing and extending bodies that readers and spectators alike are able, finally, to lose the myth of an original portrait and to abandon the possibility of ever acceding to a former state of purified existence. As in a dream-spell, where the impulse to synthesize yields to all sorts of aleatory displacements, these texts teach us about the sort of lightness which inheres when we suspend the need to elevate certain forms of existence above others on the basis of certain exceptional and supposedly redeemable features. These splendid pieces of fiction remind us that a light treading is enacted in reading as in life when we disjoin ourselves from techniques which prioritize the need to possess and to know. Wherever we challenge the application of hierarchical systems and redress myths written in the name of ‘human exceptionalism,’ we extend

ourselves by way of opening out to a diverse ecosystem of co-inhabiting entities of which we are merely part. As we brush up in these texts against inanimate and animate others whom we can never fully grasp nor know, we uncover rich and nuanced modes of psychical affiliation which continue, unexpectedly, to re-animate us.

Coda

I want to end with an image. Written images are the sort which come at us blindly. Oftentimes, as readers, we submit to the inexperience of engaging these bits of composition without fully understanding them. If images are held suspect by Hegel, it's in part because he deems them metaphorical, and so, as neither directly nor explicitly meaningful on their own. I wish to affirm that *written* images are able to cross between all sorts of oppositions. I contend that these obscure what differentiates abstracted rêverie from critical thinking, concept (*Begriff*) from image (*Bild*), fiction from nonfiction, knowing from not-knowing.

I have in mind the image of a tail-piece. It emanates from a creature nearest in form to an armadillo. This solitary and mostly nocturnal furrower's name is derived from the Spanish word for 'small armed person' (*OED*). While most armadillos resort to digging or jumping, the three-banded armadillo of the *Tolypeutes* genus, whose body is similarly covered in coriaceous osteoderms, typically rolls into itself when a source of peril is detected. Once it assumes this form, the creature's short tail-bit neatly tucks the body into itself. The nine-banded armadillo of the *Dasypus* genus bears a narrowing tail which trails behind it with seeming indifference or else responds to its environment with sensitivity and awareness. Perhaps you can dream alongside me of this caudal appendage whose movements alternate from pliant to alert. This tail evokes the integrity of a position as it oscillates between a state of passive resignation and one of sensuous feeling. I should perhaps concede to you that the selection of this particular tail was inspired by a line from a 2007 *Time International* article I'm often in the habit of remembering. Despite acknowledging that later developments in neuro-scientific research would deem the two 'dissociable,' Daniel Williams momentarily equates dreaming with the REM-stage of deep sleep; and out of this vein of speculative thinking, he remarks that while armadillos and opossums would be 'among the most prolific dreamers,' dolphins would 'do very little of it,' and humans would fall somewhere 'in the middle...' (Williams, 'While You Were Sleeping' 38-45).

Derived from the Latin *cauda*, the word for ‘tail’ emerges *as if* from the middle. The body could be seen as a kind of middle to the extent that it has neither clear end nor obvious starting-point. The noun ‘start,’ which stems from the Old English word for tail (*steort*), works perhaps indirectly to confirm this. I sense, nevertheless, that my general uneasiness with ending is compacted by this feeling that ‘ending’ seems too rigid, too definitive, too immovable, too permanent. When a coda appears on sheet music ‘...after the completion of the essential parts of a movement, so as to form a more definite and satisfactory conclusion’ (*OED*), it surpasses what came prior in order to perfect the possibility of its own consummate ending. I feel an urge suddenly to roll myself into a ball around the notion that ending is perhaps only a live piece of tail which spaces and extends itself in opposing directions.

Since this project dreams of writing from the place of an ‘other,’ I was initially convinced that the written ‘I’ would have to withdraw, somehow, to the point of self-effacement. Sarah Wood captures the force of this sentiment at the very onset of *Without Mastery* when, in reference to the ‘*thought of the trace*’ as it concerns the erasure of the present, the subject, and its proper name, she writes: ‘It occurs to you that what is required of you is the ability *not to be*’ (1). Conceived initially as an exercise in yielding to the integrity of non-human entities, I felt that this pursuit could only be achieved once the human ‘I’ had resigned to the future: that is, to unwilled natural forces, to rising temperatures, and to the precedence of organic quiescence. But it was also Sarah Wood who reminded me that the writer’s ‘I’ accords the reader with a much needed sense of assurance and security. She intimated that hostile textual conditions would perhaps result from its retreat and that the reader’s ability or willingness to carry on reading would, in turn, inevitably suffer. In the end, it seems to me that I needed to fail to erase the ‘I’ in writing if I was ever to openly and justly approach the ‘other.’

A fixed resolution can’t always be culled from the disconnected bits which populate this thesis. Together, perhaps, we’ve learned that loose ends and pieces cannot be easily redacted into a systematic and unitary whole. I offer this last textual appendage, then, in honour of the immense

fortitude which subtends occasions of willed submission. The thesis admires the stilled composure of the mineral and the vegetal, along with the quiet endurance which inheres in these states of graceful in/animation. And it seems to me now—perhaps more than ever, in a time of political turbulence and administrative haste (Sellars, ‘Ann Wordsworth and the Clandestine University’ 173)—as attentions continue to gravitate towards ecological shifts in our biosphere (Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge* 48), the insidious effects of xenophobic rhetoric and sentiment, and the displacement of millions of resilient and frangible bodies, that we are in grave need of invoking a nonviolent approach towards others; one which greets bodies and texts alike, with softness, sincerity, and openness towards these emergent expressions of contingency and surprise. To learn to await and to feel and to brood in the vicinity of whatever might come to pass is to yield to a capacity for remarkable attachment. We are each defined by the conditions which surround and befall us. If we continue to recoil from the other as we reflect bits of Narcissus within ourselves, we would seem only that much more condemned to miss the pre-condition that is our wondrous states of entangled co-existence. Having written this thesis with the idea of always keeping bits of the other in the tail of our eye, I hope to have encouraged you to work to remember them too.

Works Consulted

- Abba, Agustín M., et al. 'What do we know about armadillos? An analysis of four centuries of knowledge about a group of South American mammals, with emphasis on their conservation' in *Mammal Review* 44, 2014: 69-80.
- Abraham, Nicholas and Maria Torok. 'Mourning or Melancholia : Introjection *versus* Incorporation' in *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*. Ed. Nicholas T. Rand. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994: 125-139.
- . *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.
- Antonio, Nanci. *Ten Cate's oral histology: development, structure, and function*. 7th ed. St. Louis: Molby Elsevier, 2008.
- Apuleius. *The Golden Ass, or Metamorphoses*. Trans. E. J. Kenney. London: Penguin Books, 2004.
- Aristotle, *On The Soul (Parva Naturalia, On Breath)*. Trans. W.S. Hett. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014.
- Barthes, Roland. *Le plaisir du texte*. Paris: Seuil, 1973.
- . *How to Live Together: Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013.
- Benjamin, Walter. 'Experience and Poverty' in *Selected Writings, Volume 2: 1927-1934*. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1996: 731-736.
- . 'Karl Kraus' in *Selected Writings, Volume 2: 1927-1934*. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1996: 433-458.
- Bennington, Geoffrey. *Late Lyotard*. Geoffrey Bennington. 2008.
- Berlant, Lauren. *Desire/Love*. Brooklyn: Punctum Books, 2012.
- Bersani, Leo and Ulysse Dutoit. *Arts of Impoverishment: Beckett, Rothko, Resnais*. Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1993.
- . *Caravaggio's Secrets*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998.
- . *Forms of Being: Cinema, Aesthetics, Subjectivity*. London: British Film Institute, 2004.
- Bersani, Leo. *Thoughts and Things*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015.
- Bowen, Elizabeth. 'Daffodils' in *The Collected Stories*. New York: Anchor Books, 2006.
- Boyle, Marjorie O'Rourke. *Divine Domesticity: Augustine of Thagaste to Teresa of Avila*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997.
- Blanchot, Maurice. *Death Sentence*. Trans. Lydia Davis. New York: Sation Hill Press,

1978.

-----, *L'espace littéraire*. Paris : Gallimard, 1988.

Brottman, Mikita. 'Psychoanalysis and Magic: Then and Now' in *American Imago* 66.4, 2009: 471-489.

Brown, Bill. 'Thing Theory' in *Things*. Ed. Bill Brown. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004: 1-23.

Catts, Oron and Ionat Zurr. 'Disembodied Livestock: The Promise of a Semi-Living Utopia' in *Parallax* 19.1:101-113.

Carson, Anne. *Decreation : Poetry, Essays, Opera*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005.

-----, *Economy of the Unlost (Reading Simonides of Keos with Paul Celan)*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999.

-----, *Eros the Bittersweet: An Essay*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986.

-----, *Red doc>*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013.

-----, *The Albertine Workout*. New York: New Directions Publishing, 2014.

Cixous, Hélène. 'Albertine disparue' in *L'amour du loup et autre remords*. Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2003: 61-66.

-----, 'Fiction and its Phantoms : A Reading of Freud's *Das Unheimliche* (The 'Uncanny').' *New Literary History* 7.3, 1976: 525-645.

-----, *Hyperrêve*. Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2006.

-----, *Insister of Jacques Derrida*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007.

-----, 'Le dernier enfant' in *L'amour du loup et autres remords*. Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2003: 67-77.

-----, 'Philippines' in *Oxford Literary Review*, 2. 30, 2008: 257-282.

-----, *Readings: The Poetics of Blanchot, Joyce, Kafka, Kleist, Lispector, and Tsvetayeva*. Trans. Verena Andermatt Conley. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.

-----, 'Tancredi Continues' in *Coming to Writing and other essays*. Ed. Deborah Jenson. Trans. Sarah Cornell et al. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991.

-----, *Three Steps on the Ladder to Writing*. Trans. Susan Sellers and Sarah Cornell. Columbia University Press, 1994.

-----, 'What is it O'Clock? Or the Door (We Never Enter)' in *Stigmata: Escaping Texts*. Trans. Catherine A.F. MacGillivray. Routledge: New York, 2005. 48-70.

- , 'Without End, No, State of Drawingness, No, Rather: The Executioner's taking off' in *Stigmata: Escaping Texts*. Trans. Catherine A.F. MacGillivray. Routledge: New York, 2005. 16-30.
- Cixous, Hélène and Jacques Derrida. *Veils*. Trans. Geoffrey Bennington. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001.
- Cixous, Hélène and Marie Maclean. 'Introduction to Lewis Carroll's Through the Looking-Glass and the Hunting of the Snark' in *New Literary History*, 3.2, 1982: 231-251.
- Clark, Timothy. *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept*. London: Bloomsbury, 2015.
- , *The Theory of Inspiration: Composition as a Crisis of Subjectivity in Romantic and Post-Romantic Writing*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000.
- Cohen, Tom, Claire Colebrook and J. Hillis Miller. *Twilight of the Anthropocene Idols*. London: Open Humanities Press, 2016.
- Critchley, Simon. *The Book of Dead Philosophers*. New York: Vintage Books, 2009.
- Davis, Lydia. 'The Caterpillar' in *The Collected Stories of Lydia Davis*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009.
- Derrida, Jacques and Jean-Luc Nancy. 'Eating Well,' or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida,' in *Who Comes After the Subject*. Ed. Eduardo Cadava et al. New York: Routledge, 1991: 96-120.
- Derrida, Jacques. 'A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event.' Trans. Gila Walker. *Critical Inquiry* 33, 2007: 441-461.
- , 'Biodegradables: Seven Diary Fragments.' Trans. Peggy Kamuf. *Critical Inquiry* 15.4, 1989: 812-873.
- , 'Che cos'è la poesia?' in *A Derrida Reader : between the blinds*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991: 221-237.
- , 'Counter-Signatures' in *Points . . . Interviews, 1974-1994*. Ed. Elisabeth Weber. Trans. Peggy Kamuf et al. Stanford: Stanford University Press. 1992: 365-372.
- , 'Economimesis' Trans. R. Klein. in *Diacritics* 11.2, 1981: 3-25.
- , 'Ellipsis.' Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1978: 295-301.
- , 'Envois' in *The Post Card*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- , 'Feu la cendre/ Cinders' in *Cinders*. Trans. Ned Lukacher. University of Nebraska Press: Lincoln & London. 1991. 31-78.
- , 'Force and Signification,' in *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass. London: Routledge, 2001. 1-36.

- , 'Foreword: *Fors: The Anglish Words of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok*' in *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*. Trans. Barbara Johnson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005: xi-xlvi.
- , '“Freud” and the Scene of Writing' in *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bas. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978. 196-232.
- , *Glas*. Trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. and Richard Rand. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986.
- , *Glas*. Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1974.
- , *H.C. for Life, That Is to Say...* Trans. Laurent Milesi and Stephen Herbrechter. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006.
- , 'L'Animal Que Donc je Suis (à Suivre),' in *L'animal autobiographique: Autour de Jacques Derrida*. Paris: Galilée, 1999. 251-301.
- , *Margins of Philosophy*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982.
- , *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*. Trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.
- , 'Not Utopia, the Im-possible' in *Paper Machine*. Trans. Rachel Bowlby. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005: 121-136.
- , 'Telepathy' in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other, Volume 1*. Eds. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007. 226-262.
- , *The Truth in Painting*. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- , *The Animal that Therefore I am*. Ed. Marie-Louise Mallet. Trans. David Wills. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008.
- , 'Paper or Me, You Know . . . (New Speculations on a Luxury of the Poor),' in *Paper Machine*. Trans. Rachel Bowlby. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005. 41-66.
- , *Psyche: Inventions de l'autre*. Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1987.
- , 'Psyche: Invention of the Other' in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other, Volume 1*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Eds. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007. 1-47.
- , *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*. Trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.

- . *Signéponge/Signsponge*. Trans. Richard Rand. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.
- . *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987.
- . 'Unsealing ('the old new language') in ----- . *Points . . . : Interviews, 1974-1994*. Ed. Elisabeth Weber. Trans. Peggy Kamuf et al. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995. 115-132.
- . 'Writing Proofs' in *Responsibilities of Deconstruction: PLI Warwick Journal of Philosophy*. 6, 1997: 38-50.
- Engelbert, Lynn Hughey. "'Wild' Freudian Psycho-Analysis : Ingestion, Incorporation, and Mourning in Derrida and Deleuze and Guattari' in *Mosaic: a journal for the interdisciplinary study of literature*, 44.4, 2011: 161-176.
- Fayolle, Marion. *In Pieces*. London: Nobrow Press, 2013.
- Flaubert, Gustave. *Madame Bovary*. Ed. Thierry Laget. Paris: Gallimard, Folio Classique, 2001.
- Freud, Sigmund. 'A Note upon a Mystic-Writing Pad' in *General Psychological Theory: Papers on Metapsychology*. New York: Collier, 1963. 207-212.
- . *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Ed. James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press. 1974.
- . 'Dreams and Occultism' in *The Standard Edition of The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XXII*. Ed. James Strachey et al. London: Hogarth Press. 31-57.
- . 'Findings, Ideas, Problems' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XXIII*. Ed. James Strachey et al. London: Hogarth Press, 1941. 299-300.
- . 'Leonardo and a Memory of his Childhood' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XI*. Ed. James Strachey et al. London: The Hogarth Press, 1964. 63-139.
- . 'Mourning and Melancholia' in *The Freudian Reader*. Ed. Peter Gay. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc, 1989. 584-589.
- . 'On Narcissism: An Introduction' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XIV*. Ed. James Strachey et al. London: The Hogarth Press, 1964. 69-102.
- . 'On Transience' in *Writing on Art and Literature*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997. 176-180.
- . *Reflections on War and Death*. Trans. Dr. A. A. Brill and Alfred B. Kuttner. New York: Moffat Yard and Company, 1918.
- . *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Ed. and Trans. James Strachey. New York: Basic Books, 2010.

- , 'The Uncanny' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XVII (1917-1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works*. Trans. James Strachey et al. London: Hogarth Press, 1981. 217-253.
- , *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. Ed. James Strachey. Connecticut: Martino Fine Books, 2011.
- Ferenczi, Sandór. *Thalassa: A Theory of Genitality*. Trans. Henry Alden Bunker. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.Inc, 1968.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 'The Nature of Things and the Language of Things (1960),' in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Trans. and Ed. David E. Linge. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976. 69-82.
- Gaddini, Eugenio. 'Notes on the Mind-Body Question' in *A Psychoanalytic Theory of Infantile Experience: Conceptual and Clinical Reflections*. London: Tavistock/Routledge, 1992.
- Galchen, Rivka. 'Wild Berry Blue' in *American Innovations*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014.
- Gess, Nicola. 'Gaining Sovereignty: The Figure of the Child in Walter Benjamin's Writing.' *MLN* 125. 3, 2010 (German Issue): 682-708.
- Gray, Amelia. *Threats*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012.
- , *Museum of the Weird*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2010.
- Guyer, Sara. 'Albeit Eating: Towards an ethics of cannibalism' in *Angelaki* 2.1, 1997: 63-80.
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art. Vol II*. Ed. and Trans. T.M. Knox. Oxford: Clarendon, 1998.
- , *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: The Lectures of 1827*. Ed. Peter. C. Hodgson. Trans. R.F. Brown et al. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.
- , *The Philosophy of Right*, T. M. Knox. Ed. London: Oxford University Press, 1967.
- James, William. *The Principles of Psychology*. New York : Dover Publications, 1890.
- Kafka, Franz. 'A Crossbreed [A Sport]' in *The Complete Stories*. Ed. Nahum Norbert Glatzer. Trans. Willa and Edwin Muir. New York: Schocken Books, 1972. 426-7.
- , 'Josefine, the Singer, or the Mouse People' in *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*. Trans. Joyce Crick. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- , 'Josefine, the Singer, or the Mouse People' in *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*. Trans. Michael Hofmann. London: Penguin Books, 2007.
- Kamuf, Peggy. 'Béance' in *The New Centennial Review* 2.3, 2002: 37-56.

- , 'La morsure' in *To Follow: The Wake of Jacques Derrida*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010. 68-71.
- Klein, Melanie. *Envy and Gratitude: And Other Works 1946-1963*. London: Vintage Books, 1997.
- , 'The Role of the School in the Libidinal Development of the Child' in *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works 1921-1945*. New York: The Free Press, 1984: 59-77.
- Krell, David Farrell. 'All You Can't Eat: Derrida's course, 'Rhétorique du cannibalisme' (1990-1991)' in *Research in Phenomenology* 23, 2006: 130-167.
- Laplanche, Jean, and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis. *The Language of Psychoanalysis*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. London: Penguin Books, 2007.
- Latour, Bruno. 'Why Has Critique Run out of Steam : From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern,' in *Things*. Ed. Bill Brown. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004. 151-174.
- Leader, Darian. *Introducing Lacan*. Illustrator. Judy Groves. Thriplow: Icon, 2005.
- Lennard, John. *The Poetry Handbook*, 2nd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Lispector, Clarice. *The Passion According to G.H.* Trans. Idra Novey. Ed. Benjamin Moser. New York: New Directions, 2012.
- Lucrèce, Titus Carus. *De la nature*. Trans. Henri Clouard. Paris: Éditions Garnier Frères, 1954.
- Lucretius, Titus Carus. *On the Nature of Things*. Trans. Frank O. Copley. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1977.
- Lukacher, Ned. 'Introduction: Mourning Becomes Telepathy' in *Cinders* by Jacques Derrida. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987: 1-21.
- Liotard, Jean-François. *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*. Trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991.
- Malabou, Catherine. *The New Wound*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2012.
- Marder, Elissa. 'Snail Conversions: Derrida's Turns with Ponge' in *Oxford Literary Review* 37.2, 2015: 181-196.
- , *The Mother in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction : Psychoanalysis, Photography, Deconstruction*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2012.
- de Montaigne, Michel. 'Chapitre XX: Que philosophe, c'est apprendre a mourir' in *Essais. Livre Premier. Chapitre I à XXV*. Paris: Société Les Belles Lettres, 1959: 109-132.
- Mort, Valzhyna. 'An Interview with Valzhyna Mort,' with Lisa Grove. *The California Journal of Poetics*. Web. September 15, 2015.

- , *Collected Body*. Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press, 2011.
- , 'The City and the Writer: In Minsk with Valzhyna Mort,' with Nathalie Handal. Feb. 15, 2012. *Words Without Borders*. Web. September 15, 2015.
- , 'Valzhyna Mort Interview,' with Maria Garcia Teutsch. 2012. *Poetry International*. Web. Accessed 15 Sept. 2015.
- Naas, Michael. 'Lifelines' in *Derrida From Now On*. Bronx: Fordham University Press, 2008. 213-227.
- , 'Lacunae: Divining Derrida's Sources Through 'Telepathy' in *Taking on the Tradition: Jacques Derrida and the Legacies of Deconstruction*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003. 76-92.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. 'Identity and Trembling' in *The Birth to Presence*. Trans. Brian Holmes. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993: 9-35.
- , 'Psyche' in *The Birth to Presence*. Ed. Werner Hamacher and David E. Wellbery. Trans. Emily McVarish. Stanford University Press, 1993: 393.
- , 'Psyché' in *Première livraison*, no. 16: 1978.
- , *Fall of Sleep*. Bronx: Fordham University Press, 2009.
- Nikolchina, Miglena. 'The Concave Mirror. Notes on the Parahuman in Kleist and Rilke' in *Critique and Humanism Journal*. 22, special issue 2006: 75-92.
- Nouvet, Claire. *Enfances Narcisse*. Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2009.
- , 'The Inarticulate Affect: Lyotard and Psychoanalytic Testimony.' *Discourse* 25.1+2, 2003: 231-247.
- Onions, C.T. *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*. Oxford University Press, 1966.
- Pontalis, Jean-Bertrand. *Frontiers in Psychoanalysis: Between the Dream and Psychic Pain*. Trans. Catherine Cullen and Philip Cullen. London: The Hogarth Press, 1981.
- , *En marge des nuits*. Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2010.
- Pourciau, Sarah. 'Passing Through Infinity: Kleist's *Marionettentheater*, Kantian Metaphor, and the Spherical Geometry of Grace' in *POETICA. Zeitschrift für Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft*. 47:1-2, 2015. 51-82.
- Phillips, Adam. *Darwin's Worms : On Life and Death Stories*. New York: Basic Books, 2000.
- Proust, Marcel. *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Ed. Jean-Yves Tadié. Paris: Quarto Gallimard, 1999.
- , *Remembrance of Things Past*. Trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff. New York : Random House, 1932.
- Rilke, Rainer Maria. *The Essential Rilke*. Trans. Kinnell, Glaway and Hannah Liebmann. New Jersey: The Ecco Press, 1999.
- Rimbaud, Arthur. *Œuvres*. Eds. Suzanne Bernard and André Guyaux. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2000.

- Robertson, Lisa. 'All sides now: a correspondence with Lisa Robertson' with Sina Queyras. *Poetry Foundation*. 2010. Web. Accessed 20 Sept. 2015.
- , 'An Interview with Lisa Robertson,' with Brecken Hancock. *Canadian Women in the Literary Arts*. Web. September 20, 2015.
- , 'An Interview with Lisa Robertson,' with Julie Carr. *Evening Will Come: A Monthly Journal of Poetics*, 25: 2013. Web. Accessed 18 Sept. 2015.
- , *Magenta Soul Whip*. Toronto: Coach House Books, 2009.
- , *Nilling: Prose Essays on Noise, Pornography, the Codex, Melancholy, Lucretius, Folds, Cities, and Related Aporias*. Toronto: BookThug, 2012.
- , *R's Boat*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.
- Rosenthal, Bernice Glatzer. 'Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking, 1880-1920 (review)' in *Comparative Literature Studies* 40.4, 2003: 450-452.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. 'Les Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire' in *Œuvres Complètes: Les Confessions, Autres Textes Autobiographiques*. Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1959: 993-1099.
- Royle, Nicholas. *Telepathy and Literature: Essays on the reading mind*. Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1991.
- , 'Quick Fiction: Some Remarks on Writing Today' in *Mosaic: a journal for the interdisciplinary study of literature*, 47.1, 2014: 23-39.
- Sartiliot, Claudette. *Herbarium/Verbarium: The discourse of flowers*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993.
- Segal, Hanna and David Bell. 'The Theory of Narcissism in the Work of Freud and Klein,' in *Freud's On Narcissism*. Eds. Joseph Sandler, Ethel Spector Person and Peter Fonagy. London: Karnac Books, 2012. 149-175.
- Sellars, Roy. 'Ann Wordsworth and the Clandestine University' in *The Oxford Literary Review* 38.2, 2016: 173-187.
- Schwenger, Peter. 'Words and the Murder of the Thing' in *Things*. Ed. Bill Brown. The University of Chicago Press, 2004: 135-151.
- Shipley, Joseph. T. *Dictionary of Word Origins*. New York: The Philosophical Library, 1945.
- Smith, Alexandra. Rev. of *Children's World: Growing up in Russia, 1890-1991* by Catriona Kelly. *The Modern Language Review*. 104.1, 2009: 304-305.
- Smith, Harold J. 'The Bird and the Mirror: A Reading of Mallarmé's 'Le Vierge, le vivace...'' in *The French Review* 63.1, 1989: 57-65.
- Stewart, Kathleen. 'Weak Theory in an Unfinished World' in *Journal of Folklore Research* 45. 1, 2008: 71-82.
- Weil, Simone. *Gravity and Grace*. London: Routledge, 2002.

Williams, Daniel. 'While You Were Sleeping. (Cover Story).' *Time International (South Pacific Edition)*, no. 14, 16 Apr. 2007, p. 38. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=f5h&AN=24733209&site=ehost-live.

Wilson, Elizabeth. 'Gut Feminism' in *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 15.3, 2004: 66-94.

----- *Psychosomatic: Feminism and the Neurological Body*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.

Wood, Sarah. 'All the way to writing' in *Angelaki*, 12.2, 2007: 137-147.

----- 'An Inexperience' in *Oxford Literary Review* 37.2, 2015: 257-272.

----- 'Center-piece' in *Theory & Event* 12.1, 2009.

----- 'Dream-hole' in *Journal of European Studies* 38.4, 2008: 373-382.

----- 'Foreveries' in *Oxford Literary Review* 31. 1, 2009: 65-78.

----- 'Optic Nerve' in *Oxford Literary Review* 26.1, 2004: 139-153.

----- 'Some Scraps on Beauty-in-the-Ghost' in *Parallax* 15.1, 2009: 80-89.

----- *Without Mastery: Reading and Other Forces*. Edinburgh University Press, 2014.

----- *Writing and Difference : a reader's guide*. London: Continuum, 2009.

Zhuangzi. *The Book of Chuang Tzu*. London: Penguin, 2006.