MODERNISM IN LOVE

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The present study identifies a transformation in the delineation of love in the first half of the twentieth century. Concentrating on the work of D. H. Lawrence, Mina Loy, Elizabeth Bowen and Graham Greene, I argue that romantic love arises in these authors' work not in the conventional pattern that constitutes the "love plot" (from encounter and seduction to crisis and reconciliation), but when the pattern is defied by certain insistent words or figures that preserve the enigma of love as a shock of not knowing. Rather than assimilate love to the rhetoric of self-discovery that the closure of a love plot usually implies, then, the texts I study ask what it means when the experience of love, as an encounter with the limits of self-understanding, shatters the coherence of the text as a quest for personal and historical meaning. Writing against the critical tendency to dismiss love as an outmoded topic in the twentieth century, this dissertation exposes how love, as a seemingly personal experience, surprisingly provokes a variety of epistemological crises in the social realm, from the birth of individuality in Lawrence to feminism in Loy, from the wartime question of responsibility in Bowen to the theological question of redemption in Greene.

Despite the unrelenting demystification of love in the polemics of this period, modernist authors are intensely, passionately and often exhaustingly preoccupied with reinventing the language of love. While Lawrence and Loy (both admirers of F. T.

Marinetti at some point) deploy the vocabulary of futurism to unleash the potential of deep connectivity while maintaining a sense of selfhood in a love relation, Bowen and Greene (both volunteers during the aerial bombardment of London in WWII) explore how the unprecedented violence of the war generates at once a global sense of paranoia and persistence that turns love, surprisingly, not so much into a self-destruction as a witness to destruction. Far from depreciating love as a serious topic of discussion, these authors instead ask how the resonant language of twentieth-century modernity might renew our understanding of this ageless subject: not only what it is as an ontology but also what it can do as a performance. In engaging the "performative" quality of my literary texts, my dissertation argues that love may reveal its ethical possibility only insofar as it resists the formal (or perceptual) constraint of the text; it is in attending closely to the way in which the formal quality of literature is marred by this resistance, I argue, that we may begin to trace the force (and form a different story) of a radical self-transformation, or of multiplicity, that love occasions in its rhetorical capacity.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Yee Hang (Ben) Tam was born and raised in Hong Kong in 1986. He completed his bachelor's degree at The University of Hong Kong in 2008, his master's degree at Georgetown University, and his doctoral degree at Cornell University in 2018. He joins the English faculty at University of South Florida in Fall 2018.

To my aunt, Connie Szeto

With love and gratitude

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Introduction

A Crank Is Turning

1) Hurdy-Gurdy Man

In one of the fragments of his most passional work *A Lover's Discourse*, Roland Barthes describes a strange behavior of the lover whose destiny seems to reside entirely in his inability to stop talking. Enraptured by a fragmented phrase he has formulated in his head, Barthes observes, the lover cannot help but keep rehashing that phrase until it affords some pleasure or relief. Like an autistic child or a victim of merycism, the loquacious lover is possessed by the repetition of his own invented phrases, a series of "syntactical aria" whose tragic grandeur is marked by the absence of a compassionate audience. For a lover waiting perpetually for the loved object to convey a sign of love, then, the "lacerating phrase" he repeats carries an especially poignant force: a "fever of language" that goes on burning, insistently and evanescently, in the desolate theatre of love.[1] Though initially tracing this solitary practice of love to an ancient form of spiritual exercise, Barthes eventually turns to a musical figure in a famous lieder by Franz Schubert, a "hurdy-gurdy whose crank […] is never silent," to illustrate the pathos of a lover's discourse:

> There, at the end of the village, a hurdy-gurdy man,
> Turning the crank with his numbed finger,
> Plays what he knows.

[1] Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill & Wang, 2010), 160.

Barefoot on the ice, he staggers,

And his bowl remained empty.

No one listens and no one looks at him,

And the dogs growl around the old man.

But he cares about nothing:

He goes while turning his crank,

And his hurdy-gurdy never stays quiet.

O strange old man, should I go with you?

Will you, for my songs, turn your hurdy-gurdy?[2]

As the final lieder in Schubert's renowned song cycle *Die Winterreise*,[3] "The Hurdy-Gurdy Man" concludes a young man's winter journey to escape the painful memories of a woman who turns out to marry another man. Turning his crank repeatedly, against the actions of the indifferent world and seemingly on the brink of death in the midst of a harsh winter, the hurdy-gurdy man exemplifies an internal motion of repetition from which there is no escape, and in which, more harrowingly, a sound may linger on and on even when a body may not. Such, for Barthes, "is a kind of specifically human misery: I am language-mad: no one listens to me, no one looks at me, but (like Schubert's organ-grinder) I go on talking, turning my hurdy-gurdy."[4]

Through this poignant lieder, Barthes thus illustrates the compulsive action of a lover's discourse by likening a loquacious lover to an enigmatic musician. But what

[2] Translation mine; I wish to thank Simone Brühl for her translation assistance. The original text can be found online at https://genius.com/Franz-schubert-der-leiermann-lyrics.
[3] Consisting of 24 poems, the lyric sequence was written by the German poet, Wilhelm Müller. For an in-depth study of the compositional history of the song cycle, see Lauri Suurpää, *Death in Winterreise: Musico-Poetic Associations in Schubert's Song Cycle* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014).
[4] Ibid., 161.

is particularly striking about this song, I would suggest here, is the actual non-convergence between the forlorn lover and the persistent hurdy-gurdy man and, consequently, the potential vast difference between a song and the musical accompaniment as a background motif. For although the lover may share the same state of complete solitude as the musician, what the lyric poem insistently shows us is a dramatic plea made by the young man for the hurdy-gurdy man to accompany, rather than replace, his songs: "Will you play your hurdy-gurdy for my song?" (*Willst zu meinen Liedern / Deine Lierer drehn?)"* Schubert's final lieder may indeed be said to not only illustrate a compulsive repetition at the heart of love, but also, through the young man's lyric address, dramatize a morbid desire (and failure) to merge or harmonize a personal story with what are potentially only marks of sounds, a series of notational figures whose impact, like the discordant piano in Schubert's lieder, may lie precisely in their monotonous and repetitive intrusions. Any lover of *Die Winterreise*, if I may be so bold to say so, must recall how hauntingly and achingly the piano drones at the end of "Der Leiermann" that the singer sings as though he were off-pitch. At the center of Schubert's song, beyond Barthes' conceptual framework, is thus perhaps not quite an endless churning of broken phrases, but a far more disturbing tension between singing a story and welcoming illegible sounds, between weaving a lover's case and unweaving it to traces of unrecognizable threads.

If Barthes identifies volubility as "the emphatic form of a lover's discourse," I would add that this particular form of discourse (its insistence on telling a story even as the story threatens to disintegrate at any time) also discloses a fundamental, but much ignored, link between love and literature. As the singer of Schubert's lieder

dramatizes it, love emerges not simply in the sonorous voice with which love's despair is *told*, but also when the voice encounters the persistence of the seductive (but undeciperable) sounds from the piano that threatens to extinguish it. Like love, literature enthralls us because it denies our access to positivist knowledge (i.e. full possession of the beloved or the text) even as it consistently, and maybe all too cruelly, draws us to its gleaming chance. Perhaps for Barthes, the fragmented style of his own text can only be a symptom of love's influx of energy: just as Friedrich Schlegel once said that "the theory of the novel must be a novel," Barthes' theory of love must itself be, I think, a closeted love letter. Yet since *A Lover's Discourse*, and especially with the recent strong sociological approach to love, we rarely find studies of love that are that attuned, or that susceptible, to the literary resonance of love. Most recent studies on love indeed tend to focus on the question of ethics often without regard to its poetics. To turn back to literature—to the literary quality of love, to what love can do (ethically or not) through literature, and to update Roland Barthes' exquisite insight with my inquiry into the social dimension of love—will be the goal of the present study.

2) Love and Literature

Love loves paradox. One of the greatest paradoxes, in recent theoretical articulations, is how to maintain the singularity of one's love experience while ensuring its formal recognizability in a story. While love is often said to shatter our psychic coherence and force us to leave our framework of understanding, it also demands that it be understood and recognized by the subject who experiences it. For

love to be felt as love, then, it is bound to induce elements of shock that exceed the subject's consciousness. In the philosophical tradition, love is often distinguished from erotic desire alone; it names not simply the fulfillment of individual ravishment or excitement but also, as Alain Badiou recently describes it, an "existential project" to "construct a world from a decentered point of view."[5] But how can love, as an event, be placed within a formal structure that would simultaneously keep the disorienting impact that constitutes love in the first place? Seduced by the mechanical drones of the hurdy-gurdy, the young man's desire to sing his story in Schubert's lieder could indeed be seen as a larger parable of the desire for formalization at the heart of love.

For the past twenty years or so, the topic of love has received an astonishing amount of consideration in academic studies. Within the field of cultural studies and critical theory, in particular, numerous monographs and edited volumes have been published on the centrality of love in issues (both perennially relevant and contemporary) ranging from interpersonal ethics to friendship, from revolutionary communism to state violence and citizenship. *More Love: Art, Politics and Sharing Since the 1990s* (2003), *Understanding Love: Philosophy, Film, Fiction* (2011), *Common Love, Aesthetics of Becoming* (2011) are only few of the recent titles that add to the burgeoning topic already adorned by established philosophers and humanistic critics such as Alain Badiou, Jean-Luc Nancy, Alexander García Düttmann, Niklas Luhmann, Lauren Berlant and Michael Hardt. In neurobiology and cognitive science, likewise, ever since the anthropologist Helen Fisher discovered that the "brain in love" is the same as the "brain on coke" via photoimaging (fMRI) of the human brain,

[5] Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, trans. Peter Bush (New York: The New Press, 2012), 25.

numerous debates have arisen in the field of analytic philosophy concerning questions of legal responsibility. If "addiction" is no longer a poetic figure for love but a literal illness, some philosophers argue, we must seriously consider administering mandatory treatment therapy to those plagued by love.[6] Furthermore, the discovery that the lover's brain can be so vulnerable to a specific set of conditions has led to the controversial speculation (by scientists and creative writers alike) that "falling in love," contrary to ancient wisdom, can be deliberately cultivated.[7] Because love need not happen as "accidentally" as we were accustomed to think previously, a number of social activists believe that love—or more specifically the patriarchal paradigm of love—can also be "reinvented" for the design of radical, revolutionary politics. As a blogger recently puts it, "if you are only attracted to able, 'mentally well,' cis, normatively beautiful people, then you are upholding violent norms."[8]

To delve into the arguments of each of these exciting thinkers would be beyond the scope of this study. But judging from the tendency of these arguments, we can safely conclude that literature, once the privileged site for investigating the variegated facets of the human conditions, is no longer relevant to the conceptualization of love for most theorists. The marginalization of literature—or literary theory for that matter—is at once odd and predictable, however. On the one hand, what appears as a purely psychological or physiological model of love (however

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[6] See, for example, Brian D. Earp, et al, "Addicted to Love: What is Love Addiction and When Should It Be Treated?" *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology* (Vol. 24, 1, 2017), 77-92.

[7] The 2013 essay, "36 Questions that Lead to Love," went so viral that the "Modern Love" column of *New York Times* to this day still receives numerous responses from hopeless romantics and cynical pragmatists alike.

8 Josefin Hedlund, "How to make love revolutionary," *Transformation: Where love meets social justice*. 17 February, 2016. https://www.opendemocracy.net/transformation/josefin-hedlund/revolutionary-love

naturally "addictive" it feels, like coke) is from the beginning rooted in the Western myth of romantic love. As Denis de Rougement argues in his foundational work, *Love in the Western World* (1939), the "paradox" of love as we perceive it today has its rhetorical founding in legends such as *Tristan and Isolde* or the Arthurian romance. Setting into motion the "inescapable conflict in the West between marriage and passion," a conflict which has no doubt survived to this day in different forms, the earliest myths of romantic love condemn posterity to the "state of absorbed suspense thanks to which narrative imparts the illusion of veracity."[9] If the psychology of love is structured by literature, can we say for certain that the feelings of jealousy or longing conventionally associated with love are entirely ours or "subjective"? On the other hand, the downfall of literature in the conceptualization of love is not so surprising because literary study itself, as a discipline, has been undergoing waves of institutional crises for the last fifteen years or so. To dwell on the convention of love lyric today, for some readers, might be already a deplorable sign of institutional elitism if one does not quickly move on to its sociological implications. Resisting the erosion of literature within literary studies, the psychoanalytic literary critic Shoshana Felman argues that the disciplinary problem today is no longer the dearth of cultural intervention in literature (as in, say, New Criticism) but precisely the dea(r)th of literary intervention in cultural inquiry. Asked to comment on the relation between literature and psychoanalysis in 2017, she says that "the task today … is not so much to teach or to rethink otherwise psychoanalysis, as to recover literature from its devaluation and depreciation, to rescue it from its cultural and political eradication by

[9] De Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, trans. Montgomery Belgion (New York: Harcourt, 1939), 15.

the neoliberal university and by the corporate world's overwhelmingly predominant, global ultra-capitalist economic ideology."[10]

Under the incumbent weight of neoliberalism, Felman's call to resuscitate the inherent power of literature may seem impractical to some critics. But curiously, with her cautioning against the pressure of ultra-capitalism, her critique of the depreciation of literature is fully in line with a more deliberately cultural critique of the capitalist market economy: Michael Hardt's recalibration of love as a "properly political concept." In his essay "For Love or Money," Hardt draws on Marx's proposal for the "renewal or extension of the existing human senses" and argues that love, more than anything else, is the singular transformative energy that can emancipate us from the restrictive logic of property.[11] But in order for love to be truly political, he suggests, we must also acknowledge the shortcomings of erotic love traditionally conceived as the fusion of two beings. The erotic desire to merge with the other (to "find the missing puzzle that completes me") is a political obstacle because it imprisons our senses to our comfort zone; it refuses to embrace multiplicities and "set[s] aside or expel[s] differences in the interest of the same and what unites." For love to be genuinely political, he goes on, we must instead "identify or invent another love" consisting of at least these three qualities:

> First, it would have to extend across social scales and creates bonds that are at once intimate and social, destroying conventional divisions between public and private. Second, it would have to operate in a field of multiplicity and function not through unification but the encounter and interaction of differences.

[10] Felman, "Preface (To Reopen the Question)," *Paragraph* (Vol. 40: 3, 2017), xi.
[11] Hardt, "For Love or Money," *Cultural Anthropology*, (Vol. 24: 4, 676-682), 672.

> Finally, a political love must transform us, that is, it must designate a becoming such that in love, in our encounter with others we constantly become different.[12]

Hardt's proposal to "invent another love" is laudatory; insofar as his version of love is rooted in the Spinozan belief that two multiplicities, in the event of love, can "engage in a relationship and form a new body," it assents ultimately to the ethical logic of otherness to which all social projects aspire.

As revolutionary as Hardt's social theory of love may be, one also wonders at the viability of his advocacy of multiplicities as a non-literary, non-philosophical everyday practice. This questioning is not concerned with any literary problems, but praxis in a strictly philosophical sense. As one of the most significant interlocutors with Hardt's theory of love, Lauren Berlant expresses her admiration of his call to train a new sensorium released from the burden of capitalism. And yet as a "leap of faith to seek the end of a world on behalf of a fantasy," she argues, Hardt's proposal for a disinterested version of love ultimately smacks of an unwarranted, self-serving idealism. Because it is "interest that brings us to the rhythm of convergence we call love," she retorts,

> No amount of pushing out narcissism—the subject's aggressive desire to reencounter herself through her objects—can stanch the fierce tendency of love to express a desire to know and be known, to have amoral curiosity and incuriosity, to be excited but not too much, to be transported but not too far, and to feel held in a world without having any obligation to hold the world

[12] Ibid., 678.

> back. Love is not entirely ethical, if it has any relation to desire, which it must, if it is to be recognized as love.[13]

For Berlant, then, the eloquent call for a non-aggressive version of love is ultimately a euphoric utopianism in disguise to the extent that it ignores how most people behave psychologically in their real, everyday lives. It is fiction, at best, to think that we can all act like self-aggrandized heroes in our ordinary lives, much less in the situation of love. If Hardt believes that we can "invent another love," Berlant, in her most humanistic way, seems to believe that it may be reinvented to the point it becomes *unrecognizable as love*.

As it so occurs, the debate is finally dramatized as a conflict between an optimistic revolutionary and a skeptical realist. Judging from the tone of their disagreement, it would seem that the nature of this polemic is primarily affective or perhaps even personal. But in converging on the question of "recognizability" at the end of the debate, and in accidentally turning the word "love" into a definitional crisis, something unacknowledged is at stake. Although Hardt has used many examples from literature (most notably Marcel Proust, Jean Genet and Pier Paolo Pasolini) in his other major essays about revolutionary love,[14] Berlant seems to be repeatedly mounting the same critique: that love without the conventional strategies of desire's unfolding and containment, as a pattern of actions, is not really love regardless of what the poet or a character *says*; it is a fiction of self-shattering (a fiction, perhaps, of a philosophical event) in the name of love from her realist point of view. But realism,

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[13] Lauren Berlant, "A Properly Political Concept of Love: Three Approaches in Ten Pages," *Cultural Anthropology*, (Vol. 25: 4, 683-691), 684.
[14] See Hardt, "Pasolini Discovers Love Outside," *diacritics* (Vol 39: 4, 2009), 113-129.

far from being "real," has its formal, fictive history, too. A large corpus of criticism has been written on the mimetic relation between the plot of a novel and sexual and psychological experience, most notably by Peter Brooks and Hélène Cixous.[15] In Berlant's own terms, it is specifically the "love plot," codified in the eighteenth-century English novel and surviving to contemporary popular romance, that continues to shape the way in which we experience erotic desire and social recognition. That the "love plot" can endure for so long is no accident; it relies on an all-absorbing grammar that allows itself to be removed from all referential (and therefore historical) restraints: "Even if its content is unclear, love's function is to be formally brilliant. But in the fantasy of love's self-love, reiteration is *always* with a difference."[16] Formally speaking, for example, *Titanic* (1997) and *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) programmatically reproduce the logic of romance that moves from seduction to the lost possibility of marriage—even though we know a sinking ship and herding sheep are very different.

To the extent that "recognizablity" is at stake, the question is no longer affective but literary. Hardt believes that no love is worthy of its revolutionary potential if it does not lead to a Spinozan type of self-decomposition, while Berlant argues that the self-shattering event of love (as Hardt so endorses) must also be properly assimilated to the grammar of a conventional love plot in order for it to be recognized. The arguments appear to be finally irreconcilable and the quandary here is

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[15] See Brooks, *Psychoanalysis and Storytelling* (London: Wiley-Bucknell, 1993), and Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs: Journal of Women and Society*, (Vol. 1: 7, 1976).

[16] Berlant, "Love, A Queer Feeling," *Psychoanalysis and Homosexuality*, ed. Tim Dean and Christopher Lane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 432-451.

essentially formal. But the fact that the debate appears to hit an ultimate standstill is less interesting for us than the fact that both theorists, in talking about the sovereignty of life or affective ordinariness, almost insistently avoid acknowledging that the theorization of love is, after all, a preeminently formal question. Perhaps at the heart of Berlant's inquiry of the impersonal mechanism of love is not formalism alone, but a humanism that believes that the *formalism of literature* can be entirely conflated with the *formalism of life* to which we can all relate; no matter how sovereign we think we are, most of us do seem to process our life experience (e.g. love, death, mourning) according to the way in which we process the temporal schemas of literature or popular culture. That literature is thereby "instructive" may be an irresistible argument, pragmatic enough to be temporarily taken for granted. But the conflation now implies that literature—often associated with style, performative language, figures of speech, intertextual reference, and much more—can be reduced to its formal dimension alone. This implication is no longer pragmatic but critical. Does literature always convey a love experience accessible to our intuition and perception? For Hardt, the answer may be negative. The Proustian version of love, he insists, does not simply promote multiplicities and differences at the end; it also resists our perceptual faculties as a self-governing body:

> The love procedures that Deleuze and Guattari find in Proust strongly echo the composition of bodies described in Spinoza's physics. Every body, Spinoza explains, is composed of many smaller parts that agree with one another. Agreement for Spinoza is not based on sameness or similarity, but rather indicates the potential of two multiplicities to engage in a relationship and

> form a new body […] Encounters, however, can also result in processes of decomposition. Spinoza explains, for example, that a poison introduced into the bloodstream decomposes the relationships that originally constituted the blood such that it is no longer blood, thus killing the body […] Love in Proust, like the physical interaction of bodies in Spinoza, certainly arrives as an event, outside the march of time, unforeseeable.

When two multiplicities collide, nothing can be guaranteed anymore. Love lends itself towards poetics in that sense. The graceful beauty of Spinoza's description—of the formation of a new, ever-evolving body in the event of love—implies that the philosophical ideal of "unforeseeability" is not something to be intuited on its own. Unforeseeability itself, like love, has no intrinsically phenomenal qualities and must resort to the narration of composition and decomposition to give it an extrinsic sense of logic. Love needs figuration: this is an argument dating back to the blazon sonnets in Petrarch's times at least. But would any perceptually accessible figure, at the same time, be genuinely adequate for the concept of unforeseeability? The process of "becoming" may be aestheticized through the Romantic images of water, fluid, blood, particles, atoms, but are these poetic images sufficient to bring out the force of unforeseeability insofar as they also betray its refusal of all senses by, precisely, letting us "see" or imagine it?

That love, like literature, cannot be *only* about formalism means that it is not a priori certain all the elements contained within it can be accessible to our perception and understanding. For Hardt, no genuinely ethical concept of love is possible without the radical force of becoming; for Berlant, no genuinely felt experience of love is

possible without the grounding of a familiar grammar. Between the organizing impulse of narrative and the disorganizing impact of love, we seem at the furthest remove from getting into the heart of this ancient topic.

Modernism in Love, at its most theoretical moment, could be understood as participating directly in this debate. In presenting the Hardt-Berlant debate as an impasse here, my project aims to question a certain set of presuppositions about the relation between love, literature, and ethics. First, Hardt argues that love arises as an ethical moment when one can no longer predict the composition of the self in the encounter with the other, but what will this revolutionary rupture of love look like as soon as it is placed within the formal condition of a literary text? Second, if a love story does not always formalize a good picture of an ethical love relation as Berlant argues, does it mean that there is no ethical value in studying it? Does literature always refer directly to a love relation (ethical or not) so that we can, in our turn, determine its ethical capacity? Posing these two major questions about the relation of love, literature and ethics, I will ultimately analyze whether it is possible, as an alternative to the impasse, for literature to generate *an ethical possibility of love beyond its representational claims.* My emphasis on "possibility" is in sync with Hardt's notion of "unforeseeability." To be sure, if the revolutionary potential of love resides in what the philosopher deems the "transformational process" of the self, it is certainly the case that what the self may become cannot be guaranteed or reified in a crassly material sense. However, if unforeseeability has to be represented by dint of figuration, it is also true that it is susceptible to the formalizing logic of a narrative that never ceases to tame it, to domesticate it. To discover the ethical potential in a literary

text, I would argue, means that one would then have to engage in the double-bind of every text: not only what constitutes its formal logic, but also what exceeds it or what renders it impossible, like a material decomposition according to Spinoza, perhaps, but also like the enigmatic sounds coming from Schubert's hurdy-gurdy man. This excess, this remainder as that which cannot be incorporated by the formal constraint of the text, is what I mean by the ethical "possibility" of love.

The study thus presented here is not aimed to be a comprehensive study of the literary history of love of a particular time frame[17]; instead, it consists of close readings of the work of four major modernist authors: D. H. Lawrence, Mina Loy, Elizabeth Bowen, and Graham Greene. In each chapter, I will attempt to show how love may persist in its surprise beyond the representational claim of the text and how, in this persistence, each text may unwittingly reveal another potential, an ethical potential, to break the hermetic structure of the self, and of the governing norms specific to my authors' historical contexts. In my reading of the operation of each individual text, therefore, I will draw attention to the way in which it is bound up with the social, cultural and spiritual project each author sought explicitly to undertake: with the Futurist possibility of inventing "a new relation between the sexes" in Lawrence's *The Rainbow* (1914), with the feminist response to the bombastic Futurist ideology in Loy's *Songs to Joannes* (1917), with the staging of wartime paranoia and betrayal in Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* (1948), and finally, with the postwar

[17] For an excellent account of the representation of love in the English novel, see Joseph Allen Boone's *Tradition Counter Tradition: Love and the Form of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). On the representation of first love in modernism, see Maria DiBattista, *First Love: The Affections of Modern Fiction* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991). On the thematic transformation of love from the modernist novel to the contemporary novel, see Ashley Sheldon, *Unmaking Love: The Contemporary Novel and the Impossibility of Union* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

possibility of salvation from God in Greene's *The End of the Affair* (1951). Each chapter, firmly rooted in the historical specificity of the author's time, will reveal how a novel or a poetic sequence simultaneously responds to, and resists, the ideological or theological claim it makes in its formal elaboration. It is in attending closely to the way in which the formal quality of literature is marred by this resistance, I will argue, that we may begin to trace the force (and form a different story) of a radical self-transformation, or of multiplicity, that love occasions in its opacity.

3) Modernism in Love

Though my dissertation does not claim to write a new literary history of love, I would nonetheless like to briefly explain why I have chosen modernism as my period of study. Modernism (at least in the Anglo-American tradition) has been generally regarded as the period in which the novelistic tradition of love has come to an end. If we look at the canonical texts written during this period, indeed, what we would most likely encounter are themes of exile, alienation, austerity, warfare, welfare, trauma, colonialism, class conflicts, sexual revolution, not to mention a plethora of manifestos that called for new artistic expressions and the advent of new technologies that fundamentally changed the way we perceived things. From Dada to Futurism, from Surrealism to Vorticism, from Imagism to Logopoeia: these well-known stylistic principles developed from the European avant-garde movements all seemed to work actively against the possibility of the "love plot" at the dawn of the twentieth century. While F. T. Marinetti famously claimed that the new age of poetry must "exalt movements of aggression, feverish sleeplessness […] the slap and the blow with the

fist," Virginia Woolf, in a completely different register, similarly kept Peter Walsh's repeated proclamations of love in a cynical distance in *Mrs. Dalloway*: "Love and religion, thought Clarissa, going back to the drawing-room, tingling all over. How detestable, how detestable they are!"

Why was love relevant in the age of social and artistic upheavals? To be sure, the modernist culture is still by and large structured by figures whose encounters with the force of modernity are often alienating rather than amorous: the urban flâneur in Baudelaire, the blasé individual in Simmel, the traumatized soldier in Freud, the angel of history in Benjamin. Yet, in its collision with the extremities of new social forces, modernism unexpectedly also unleashed a new language for a handful of authors to describe love and reinvent its possibilities. I have chosen D. H. Lawrence and Mina Loy in this period of "high modernism" because they were most explicitly concerned with reinvigorating what they saw as the dead genre of love. While Lawrence vowed to turn away from a feeling-based concept of love according to the "old human conception," Loy similarly called for the reduction of love to its "initial element" in her "Feminist Manifesto." Both were deeply dissatisfied with the psychological structure of the love convention; but more remarkably, both were great admirers (and critics) of Marinetti's poetic doctrines. Drawing on the Futurist language of materialism and dynamic composition, Lawrence and Loy decisively transformed the face of love from the psychological model of passion to the modernist model of impersonality. However, in their staunch critiques of Marinetti's anti-human or male-centered campaign, both authors surprisingly used Futurism against Futurism, unleashing an *effect of infinity* against any programmatic ideology or doctrine. For

Lawrence, any conceptualization of impersonality must ultimately involve an "illimitable, endless space for self-realisation and delight"; for Loy, likewise, the material dynamic of love she envisions must encounter "the illimitable monotone" of her own poetic performance. For both authors, impersonal love is distinctly anti-conceptual; and it can be fully enacted only when it braces the power of infinity beyond our seeing and knowing. To discover the most radical aspects of impersonal love from high modernism, Chapter One and Chapter Two will both read how the work of Lawrence and Loy as fulfilling the Futurist potential and excavate new figures of infinity beyond the thematic scope of their individual plots.

Instead of trying to find the conventional love plot in modernist literature, then, my endeavor is to tease out the innovative energy of modernism as resources of thinking for our current theorization of love. In Chapter Three and Chapter Four, I will turn to what might be felt as the less audacious era of the twentieth century: the postwar period in Britain. In recent years, mid-century literature (sometimes broadly known as late modernism) has been reappraised for its capacity to illuminate a distinct national consciousness as the British Empire began to fall apart with the onset of decolonization. But just as Britain was searching for her destiny in the wake of WWII, literary style in the postwar period (in the works by novelists such as Isherwood, Greene, Waugh, and Bowen) became also increasingly bound up with the problematics of representation. In the immediate postwar period, prominent fiction writers and critics alike were in serious business of reevaluating the lost values of realism, with some even arguing that high modernism in the 1920s was nihilistic and therefore ultimately complicit with fascism—an argument that is still heard

occasionally today. For Greene, in particular, "accuracy" became the golden rule for both his method and style. And this, he said, "was not only a matter of artistic conscience but of the social conscience as well."

Turning to two novelists who could be loosely grouped as "realist," and whose thematic concerns were explicitly with the war and its catastrophic impact, I am intent on tracing how the realism occurs in the first postwar novels by Bowen and Greene respectively. While Bowen re-creates the tense wartime situation of London and recounts a love story that happens within it, Greene uses a first-person narrator to tell a wartime love story in the form of an autobiographical flashback. In these novels, unlike Lawrence's, the mid-century authors are particularly concerned with the inevitable and often uneasy entanglement between the personal and the public, between desire and responsibility. How should I act, Bowen's novel asks, if I found out that my lover is a Nazi spy? In the work of these authors, we no longer feel the feverish energy in the realist language with which the historically-situated stories are told. However, we persistently stumble upon an enigmatic deformation in these novels that threatens to disarticulate the fluency of the stories. In Bowen's novel, the deformation comes notably from mysterious figures of beginning that put into question not only the formation of the stories told within the novel but also ultimately the formation of the novel itself. Tracing these figures of origin, Chapter Three will turn to the love stories recounted within the text and recuperate the force of accident and its underestimated impact on the category of realism. In Greene's expertly told love story, we likewise encounter an ethical dilemma. What does it mean to believe in someone's love, it asks, when claims of love always defy all empirical evidence? In

this autobiographical fiction, Greene unwittingly puts his stylistic faith in "accuracy" in crisis, all the more so, indeed, when the narrator finally has to confront the possibility that the love also comes from God. How is it possible to go on loving, Greene thus painstakingly asks, when the lover is absent (dead) and when God (eternal) resolutely resists our seeing? In my reading of this deeply moving novel, I try to follow the traces of suddenness that are inscribed in the text, treating them not so much as instances of miracle but rather as forces of incomprehension that are bound, without guarantee and without sense, to the question of survival and transmission in war-torn London.

In all four chapters, these figures of infinity, origin and suddenness do not come from a unified perspective of a single lover. Rather, they are contained within their specific historical contexts as events that put into question the formation of their own status of intelligibility. *Modernism in Love* therefore does not—and cannot—provide a general theory of love; but in failing to conceptualize love into any system, it encourages the readers to encounter, in their turn, the unexpected power of love in action against the formal tradition or historical events to which these modernist authors reacted. That love is understood as some sort of power means that it cannot be reduced into a known message; but as my chapter on Loy will demonstrate more specifically, the power of infinity unleashed in her poetic performance—in the material production of her text—could be precisely the condition of possibility for a new knowledge to come, for "far further differentiation." In what follows, therefore, we will come across expressions of love in all registers—psychological, affective, moral, theological, philosophical, speculative; but it would be in the way in which my

literary texts act—in their unexpected intrusions or interventions against sense and perception—that we will find the ethical potential in the power of love.

Chapter One

Sublime Dissolution

In terms of shock or scandal, the fame of D. H. Lawrence's 1915 novel, *The Rainbow*, is now perhaps eclipsed by the more modern sequel *Women in Love* (1920) and the widely adapted sensational *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928). Yet when it first appeared in the heat of WWI, *The Rainbow* also had a brief (and, for us, provocative) history of prosecution and offense. On November 3, the police raided the publishing house Methuen with a warrant to confiscate all copies and unbound sheets held in stock. About ten days later, upon hearing the Obscene Publications Act of 1957, the Magistrate quickly ruled in favor of the destruction of all copies of the book and said how glad he was "to hear that the libraries refused to circulate it." The suppression of the novel was initially compounded by waves of hostile attacks from the English reviewers, condemning Lawrence's work as "a monotonous wilderness of phallicism" or "an orgie of sexiness." From a contemporary standpoint, of course, these hypocritical attacks on Lawrence as a sex revolutionary are already dull and dreary. Yet a great portion of the negative comments, quite unique to *The Rainbow*, also involved condemnation of the inhuman quality of the characters. In one of the most vitriolic remarks, James Douglas said it bluntly, "These people are not human beings. They are creatures who are immeasurably lower than the lowest animal of the zoo." One might treat Douglas' vehement attack as a reflection of Lawrence's so-called modernist primitivism, but if we read him a bit more literally—probably more than he deserves—we find that his remark actually raises a new question about the inhuman

(and not even bestial) status of Lawrence's characters: what does it mean, we might ask, for the characters to be "lower than the lowest animal"? I have no intention to maintain the animal hierarchy or the hierarchical division between human beings and animals, but this irate reviewer seems to have confused the "lowest animal" with something else. The entire novel, he concluded, was "vicious" not only because of its sex content (he was referring to one lesbian scene), but also because its "inartistic intrusion of matter" ultimately "has no place in the development of a story and adds nothing to the subtle depicting of human beings." To be lower than the lowest animal, he seems to suggest, is to be no longer even recognizable as living beings; it is to degenerate into matter, into "truthful, physiologically truthful things" so utterly devoid of "faith, hope, charity, honour and humour." And to use this degeneration for the depiction of human beings, as Lawrence did, was to constitute the greatest offense of *The Rainbow.*

The suppression and prosecution of the novel eventually made Lawrence so sick that he told his friends he had to flee to Florida for a small break. But the ability of those hostile reviewers to identify an apparently egregious pattern in his work, I would argue, also sheds light on an artistic vision of Lawrence no critics have sufficiently accounted for. It is a new kind of impersonality rooted not so much in a new affective posture as a complete, radical destruction of all human feelings. Lawrence first outlined the anti-psychological turn in his career when he was still drafting a novel (tentatively entitled back then "The Wedding Ring") which would then be split into *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*. In a letter to his editor, who found the characters in his manuscript psychologically implausible, Lawrence wrote back in

defense, "You mustn't look in my novel for the old stable ego of the character. There is another *ego,* according to whose action the individual is unrecognizable, and passes through, as it were, allotropic states which it needs a deeper sense than any we've been used to exercise." Lawrence was in this period highly influenced by the work of the Italian Futurist, F. T. Marinetti, but what he found deeply unsatisfying in his manifesto was that none of Marinetti's anti-establishment doctrines, in their glorification of the machine, dealt adequately with the inhuman potential that lies "within humanity." What Lawrence would set out to accomplish, then, is a Futurist-inspired modern novel that seeks to overturn the traditional paradigms of the psychological novel; it seeks to destroy not only the civilizing telos of the novel that had been utilized as primarily cultivating the reader's moral character; but in doing so, it also seeks to unleash "a new ego," the inhuman and material dimension of characters that would exceed our framework of understanding and recognition. What would an inhuman human look like in *The Rainbow*? And how did Lawrence fulfill his artistic ambition in the final version of his work?

The Futurist principle of his work arguably made *The Rainbow* his first truly modern novel. However, the anti-psychological turn was not all that was the most revolutionary or most unsettling about his work. For what *The Rainbow* narrates, crucially, is not simply the desire or fulfillment of a single (in)human being but also the transformation and repetition of the love relationships of the Brangwen family across three generations: between Tom and Lydia in the first generation, between Anna and Will in the second generation, and between Ursula and Skrebensky in the third generation. In each generation, we almost invariably stumble upon the same

scene of "transfiguration" in which a lover is "obliterated" by the other and becomes "will-less," the same struggle between a man and a woman who must "venture into the unknown," the same literary pattern (such as the figures of light and darkness) by which the lovers are made to "lapse," "fall," and finally "open" toward each other. In its remarkable repetition, *The Rainbow* is thus insistently concerned not only with the material dimension of a character, but also with the connective potential between characters once their humanity is eroded to its material, physiological state. "I can only write what I feel pretty strongly about," Lawrence wrote again to his editor. "And that, at present, is the relation between men and women."[1] If we initially asked what would the inhuman human look like, then, we need to in fact also ask some questions that are far more perplexing: what does it mean to create a new form of relationality when human beings are so radically deprived of their ability to feel? How can love, indeed, be recognized as such if it refuses to subscribe to the conventional feelings that make it legible in the first place?

In this chapter, I will argue that Lawrence's project on new relationality must be understood in terms of a futurist, materialist impersonality. To understand Lawrence's unique brand of futurism, we will first analyze two iconic modernist documents wherein the author details what he means by the "new ego" severed from psychology: his June 5 1914 letter to his editor Edward Garnett as well as his critique of Freudian psychoanalysis, *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* (1921). In these two documents, we will unearth what Lawrence means by the "ego," its "material" status, but more specifically what he means by the anti-ideational and anti-conceptual drive

[1] Lawrence, *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, Vol. I, ed. James T. Boulton et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

within that ego. For Lawrence, anti-conceptuality is the indeed the force or motion of the ego that ensures the self does not become simply assimilated to the other. "Primal," he writes, "is the blissful sense of ineffable transfusion with the beloved, which we call love, and of which our era has perhaps enjoyed the full." But "if this activity alone worked, then the self would utterly depart from its own integrity." At the heart of this Laurentian ego is thus a new, peculiar self-oppositional force of rejection and incorporation that refuses to turn itself into any Platonic ideal of oneness; and it is this non-blissful force of impersonality, I will suggest, that is finally enacted in his modernist family chronicle, *The Rainbow*. Anti-conceptuality is of course always susceptible to being reduced into a concept itself, especially when rendered by the incantatory, prophetic prose of Lawrence. To read the anti-conceptual drive of Laurentian impersonality, my strategy is therefore to analyze the impersonal force of encounter not only as it is described by the narrator in scenes of transfiguration, but also as it is enacted by the textual compositions in the novel (especially by the figural interventions of light) truly beyond our "recognition." As I will show in the last section on Ursula's self-fulfillment in her first encounter with the rainbow, Lawrence's radical notion of impersonality is finally transformed into infinity, into something that essentially exceeds perception; and yet how infinity is performed in the novel's final chapter is a question we might address only insofar as we move past the prophetic claim of the text.

1) LAWRENCE'S ANTI-PSYCHOLOGICAL TURN

When Lawrence submitted the early draft of what was to become *The Rainbow* to his friends and editor, the responses he received were all overwhelmingly charged with misgivings on the psychological credibility of the novel's characters. Edward Carpenter, for example, commented that even though he did not have problems with the potentially "controversial" materials, he disapproved of the style: "The style is jerky, and rather 'forced'—something artificial about it." Yet if we look back at the famous 1913 letter, wherein the author replied to his editor who launched a similar critique, Lawrence was in fact quite certain that the new style was necessary for his new project:

> I don't think the psychology is wrong: it is only that I have a different attitude to my characters, and that necessitates a different attitude in you, which you are not prepared to give. […] I think the book is a bit futuristic—quite unconsciously so. But when I read Marinetti—"the profound intuitions of life added one to the other, word by word, according to their illogical conception, will give us the general lines of an intuitive physiology of matter"—I see something of what I am after. I translate him clumsily, and his Italian is obfuscated—and I don't care about physiology of matter—but somehow—that which is physic—non-human, in humanity—is more interesting to me than the old-fashioned human element—which causes one to conceive a character in a certain moral scheme and make him consistent.

Lawrence's encounter with Marinetti's May 1912 "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Manifesto" marked a decisive turn in his career. Yet Lawrence's attitude to Futurism was also ambivalent. Instead of simply subscribing to the Futurist doctrine, Lawrence

argues that what truly galvanized the anti-humanist spirit of the Futurist movement was not the "the physiology of matter" but the "non-human within humanity": something "physic" that was inspired by, and yet fundamentally distinct from, Futurist materialism. One the one hand, Marinetti's repudiation of psychology inspired Lawrence to conceive of a characterology that resists the moralizing impulse. "Destroy the *I* in literature; that is, all psychology," as Marinetti proclaims. Without a characterological consistency afforded by the stable "I," it follows that there would be no more "moral scheme" in the character, a narrative strategy Lawrence finds especially "dull, old, dead" in the works of Turgenev and Dostoevsky.[2] Lawrence indeed would later admit that what is truly groundbreaking in Futurism, precisely, is a language of energy that revitalizes European literature from "the weary sickness of pedantry and tradition and inertness." Yet on the other hand, Lawrence was deeply unsettled by Marinetti's rigid bifurcation between inanimate objects and animate life. For though Futurism offers a radical doctrine that liberates the novel from the "old-fashioned human element," a doctrine that reduces object to its ontological purity by eliminating all forms of embellishment (in adjectives, adverbs, or verbs) that would imply human psychology in it, the "human" as a category remains resolutely unchanged in the language of Futurism; it is as though the frantic speed and noise in the machine glorified by the Futurists were absolutely impervious to the inert human. In the same letter, Lawrence thus critiques:

[2] It would be interesting to note that on the Anglo-American side, the novel was also perceived at the time as conducive for, and indeed indispensable for, one's moral development. In *The Art of Fiction* (1902), for example, the novelist and historian Walter Besant points out that "a moral purpose… has become practically a law of English fiction."

> When Marinetti writes: "It is the solidity of a blade of steel that is interesting by itself, that is, the incomprehending and inhuman alliance of its molecules in resistance to, let us say, a bullet. The heat of a piece of wood or iron is in fact more passionate, for us, than the laughter or tears of a woman"—then I know what he means. He is stupid, as an artist, for contrasting the heat of the iron and the laugh of the woman. Because what is interesting in the laugh of the woman is the same as the binding of the molecules of steel or their action in heat; it is the inhuman will, call it physiology, or like Marinetti—physiology of matter, that fascinates me. I don't so much care about what the woman feels—in the ordinary usage of the word. That presumes an ego to feel with. I only care about what the woman *is*—what she IS—inhumanly, physiologically, materially—according to the use of the word: but for me, what she is as a phenomenon (or as representing some greater, inhuman will), instead of what she feels according to the human conception. That is where the futurists are stupid. Instead of looking for the new human phenomenon, they will only look for phenomena of the science of physics to be found in human being [*sic*]. They are crassly stupid. But if anyone would give them eyes they would pull the right apples off the tree, for their stomachs are true in appetite.[3]

If Lawrence initially claims that the "physiology of matter" espoused by Marinetti as a tool against human inertia is uninteresting, he now suggests that what appears as marks of human emotions (like tears and laughers) are, in fact, the very "physiology of matters." The distinction between inanimate matter and animate life is collapsed in

[3] Lawrence, *Letters*, Vol. II, 182-183.

Lawrence's reformulation of the Futurist rhetoric. In order to truly perceive the phenomenon of the physiological operations that lie at the heart of all matters, Lawrence implies, we must include the "human" in it: for the "human" is not excluded from the material world but rather constitutive of it. This "new human phenomenon" thus suggests not only, as Marinetti claims, an absolute destruction of all forms of sentimentalization or anthromorphization of matters ("We are not interested in dramas of humanized matters"), but also a destruction of "feelings" and a sense of consistency that make up the "human" within humanity.

But what does Lawrence mean when he says the phenomenon of human-as-matter represents "some greater, inhuman will"? Although Lawrence apparently seeks to liberate the material potential of humanity from the constraints of psychology, his concern seems to lie ultimately not so much in the *actions* from different beings as the material *composition* that binds all beings. What is indeed intricate in Lawrence's new literary project is that, despite his aspiration to invent a groundbreaking characterology rooted in Futurism, the meaningfulness of the characters' material change is somehow offset by their compositional sameness. As Lawrence continues to explain:

> You mustn't look in my novel for the old stable *ego*—of the character. There is another *ego*, according to whose action the individual is unrecognizable, and passes through, as it were, allotropic states which it needs a deeper sense than any we've been used to exercise, to discover are states of the same single radically unchanged element. (Like as diamond and coal are the same pure element of carbon).

The synecdochal word Lawrence uses for the "human" is "ego." Lawrence would elaborate on the necessary destruction of the Freudian ego in his critique of psychoanalysis in his 1921 book *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* when he relates his own brand of vital materialism to his philosophy of love. But here Lawrence is not only mounting a critique of psychoanalysis; in destroying the "old stable ego—of the character," he proposes "another ego," a new ego, in which an individual experiences an "allotropic" state that enables him or her to have "forms with different physical properties, though unchanged in substance" (*OED*). Individuals thus change phenomenologically, but in insisting upon "the same single radically unchanged element," Lawrence radically eliminates the supposed uniqueness of each individual, foregrounding instead the same materiality, "some *greater*, non-human will," of which every individual is made. A diamond and a coal may have different appearances, that is, but they are materially aligned because they are composed by "the same pure element of carbon." What is "non-human" in Lawrence's theory of his novel in progress turns out to be not only a de-psychologization of his characters, but also, more fundamentally, their compositional sameness and constancy *despite* their characterological differences.

2) THE FUTURIST MACHINE

For Lawrence, therefore, the "new human phenomenon" has to be included in the Futurist understanding of how other non-human objects move, interact and function in the frantic, modern world. It also requires us to perceive "another ego" in materialist terms, as opposed to the "old stable ego" as defined by Freud. But

following the letter Lawrence never systemically described further what he means by "another ego," except when he launched his infamous attack of Freud and the institution of psychoanalysis writ large both in *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* (1921) and its sequel *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1922).

Lawrence's criticism of Freud is probably misguided or simply outright wrong on many levels.[4] But it is in his impassioned critique of Freud we find Lawrence develops a theory about the "new unconscious" whose creative energy is said to be a counterpoint to the sterile "idealism" of psychoanalysis. It is important, indeed, to first point out that Freud's unconscious is for Lawrence ultimately something like a nucleus of modern mental over-development, "the cellar in which the mind keeps its own bastard spawn." In order for psychoanalysis to emerge as a "logical" theory with clear causes and effects, Lawrence argues, the unconscious was in fact only created by Freud as an "incubus" or "procreator" for the explanation of neurotic symptoms; it acts "*deliberately*" within the concept of psychoanalysis (italics original). As a theory, therefore, psychoanalysis is already a symptom of the modern preoccupation with the mind, with the unconscious invented as a "secret agent" only to support what Lawrence saw as Freud's "incest-craving" theory. But what is at issue for Lawrence is not ultimately the unconscious, but the ego. For in its self-concealment, the unconscious was always made in the service of the Freudian ego, "the total sum of

[4] As Jennifer Spitzer points out, "for intellectuals and general audiences alike, much of the dissemination of psychoanalytic theory occurred through more popular channels, such as the lay press, advice columns, and self-help literature. In Lawrence's own words, by the 1920s, the Oedipus complex had become 'a household word, the incest motive a commonplace of tea-table chat.' Psychoanalysis had colonized public attention so thoroughly through the power of its ideas that people claimed familiarity with its concepts without ever coming face to face with an authoritative text." See Spitzer, "On Not Reading Freud: Amateurism, Expertise, and the 'Pristine Unconscious' in D. H. Lawrence," *Modernism/Modernity*, Vol. 21, 1, January 2014, 96.

what we conceive ourselves to be." Since the unconscious is "unwilling to expose itself to full recognition," its real potentiality, for Lawrence, is always distorted by the Freudian ego as an inward, repressed desire for the incest taboo. As Philip Rieff remarks, "By appearing to confirm the inwardness of the dominant type rather than stimulate a cleaner break away from inwardness, Freud stood condemned, in Lawrence's mind, as a powerful new apologist of the old culture, which had so perverted the 'moral faculty' in man."[5]

What Lawrence would set out to invent in *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*, then, would be a new kind of unconscious. "Is it true," he asks, that "the great unknown of sleep contain nothing else"? The new unconscious is said to be a "creative element" that is "all the time moving forward, beyond the range of its own fixed laws and habits." If the Freudian unconscious is the site on which all repressed desire can be symptomatically read, the Laurentian unconscious is said to be "pristine and anterior to mentality." Our modernist author, however, never truly defines what he means by the "pristine" unconscious, except that he emphasizes again and again that it is *non-ideational*: it has nothing to do with the "idea of sex" and therefore "precedes all knowing." The Freudian unconscious is a conceit for Lawrence precisely because while claiming to be the "origin" of modern neurosis, it is fundamentally subordinate to the theory of psychoanalysis, a discipline preoccupied only with the "idea of sex" in Lawrence's view. What he would mean by *sex itself*, then—sex not only as non-ideational and pristine but also as a *creative* energy that exceeds its status as a symptom of something—could be interpreted, in this sense, as a translation as

[5] Rieff, Philip. "The Therapeutic as Mythmaker," *Modern Critical Views: D. H. Lawrence*, ed. Harold Bloom. (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986), 34.

"another ego" Lawrence brought up but never explained fully in the letter. However, in gesturing towards the creative, allotropic potentiality of the de-psychologized human again, Lawrence makes a surprising turn against the Futurist rhetoric. If he previously revered the Futurists (despite their "stupidity") for bringing out the non-human dynamic within humanity in the letter, here in the treatise against psychoanalysis Lawrence aligns, quite unexpectedly, t*he machine with psychoanalysis itself*. They are ultimately aligned, he explains, because they are both grounded on the principle of the ideal:

> An ideal established in control of the passional soul is no more and no less than a supreme machine-principle. And a machine, as we know, is the active unit of the material world. Thus we see how it is that in the end pure idealism is identical with pure materialism, and the most ideal peoples are the most completely material. Ideal and material are identical. The ideal is but the god in the machine—the little, fixed machine-principle which works the human psyche automatically.[6]

An "ideal," in Lawrence's understanding, need not be perfect; it is instead identical to the "supreme machine-principle." Like a machine, an ideal hinges upon a matrix of fixed principles that are inseparable from abstraction and logic. For Lawrence, psychoanalysis is exemplary of this obsession with the machine-ideal because in following a set of automatic, interlocking principles, it structures every psychic impulse into a system of desire, such that all passional registers become, in a sense, decodable through logical deduction. "By idealism," Lawrence thus writes, "we

[6] Lawrence, *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*, 12.

understand the motivizing of the great affective sources by means of ideas mentally derived." Under the framework of idealism, what is lost is precisely the material status of the machine. In saying that an ideal is "the god in the machine," indeed, Lawrence seems to wonder if a transcendentalized machine—an ideal, that is—contains any materiality at all.[7] (Impure) materiality and "pure materialism" may be distinct to the extent that the latter works so smoothly, and "completely," in accordance with abstraction and logic that it does not induce material friction, and therefore feel material, at all. A machine effaces its own materiality by turning against its material parts towards a fixed machine-principle of logic. In Lawrence's view, consequently, psychoanalysis does not only engage in deciphering work, but also in dematerializing work in its reduction of all creative passional registers into a system of codes. One might refer again to the de-naturalized functions of tears and laughs and their physiological "actions" in the letter as an instance of Lawrence's resistance to dematerialization, but Lawrence is apparently no longer satisfied with the idealization of the Futurist machine insofar as it is based on doctrines and precepts. What would it mean, then, to speak of a materially-oriented "new human phenomenon" that refuses to comply with the machine-principle?

The Laurentian unconscious seems to assert itself thus far as the *origin* of mental life that the primitivist Lawrence asks us to return to. However, in revealing its absolute anteriority, Lawrence finds himself in a situation where he needs to resort to

[7] Materiality may be understood here broadly, in Marc Redfield's terms, as that which resists being incorporated into the symbolic order. It is "illegible" because of its exclusion from the symmetrical relationship between the signifier and the signified, and therefore "radically external" in its positing on anything that is perceived but semantically undecidable in the world. In deriding psychoanalysis as a practice of decoding, then, Lawrence has his reason to believe that psychoanalysis is itself a "god in the machine," subsuming every affective register into a network of codes. See Redfield, *Phantom Formations: Aesthetic Ideology and the Bildungsroman.* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 33.

the biological sciences to explain further the origin of the unconscious itself. "We are trying to trace," he explains, "the unconscious to its source":

> And we find that this source, in all the higher organisms, is the first ovule cell from which an individual organism arises. At the moment of conception, when a procreative male nucleus fuses with the nucleus of the female germ, at that moment does a new unit of life, of consciousness, arise in the universe. Is it not obvious?

Knowing that Lawrence admittedly relies on "intuitional feelings" as a substitute for independent observation or replicate experiments, we may concede that Lawrence's biological explanation doesn't reveal much substantial insight here.[8] But it is crucial, nevertheless, to notice this turn to the so-called "subjective science," not simply to trace how Lawrence turns to primitivism, but also to trace how he *creates*, in his turn, a particular brand of materialism that confers human-as-matter a sense of agential vibrancy. The Laurentian unconscious is indeed not only pristine in its de-idealization but also material in its biological root. To be sure, while Lawrence now seems to have relegated the Futurist glorification of the machine to an idealism that he critiques, he never abandons the principle of the human organism as matter. After Lawrence establishes his assertion that the unconscious begins where an organism begins, he reinstates the significance of the birth of the unconscious as a vital moment of individuation. And this moment of individuation, he claims, is as blind as the machine: "It is a blind, almost mechanistic effort on the part of the new organism to extricate

[8] Katherine Hayles, "The Ambivalent Approach: D. H. Lawrence and the New Physics." 89. Lawrence indeed believes that the unconscious can be approached through "direct experience." He writes, "We watch it in all its manifestations, its unfolding incarnations. We watch it in all its processes and its unaccountable evolutions, and these we register" (16).

itself from cohesion with the circumambient universe." The movement of an organism into the world, which is itself a moment of creativity, essentially depends upon this frictional moment of extrication: a "fighting back." For Lawrence, the active blindness of the unconscious, or its propensity for clashes and explosions, is "unanalyzable, undefinable, inconceivable." In the opposition of forces coming from both sides (from, say, the baby's unconscious and from his mother's) as a "sweet commingling" and a "sharp clash of opposition," we might hear once again the influence of Futurism in Lawrence's brand of vital materialism.

However, what is peculiar about this clash, or this moment of individuation, is that the vitalism in the clash is a creative force that resists any simple *conceptual unification*, which marks a crucial difference to the Futurist rhetoric of idealism. For the unconscious, Lawrence emphasizes, "contains nothing ideal, nothing in the least conceptual, and hence nothing in the least personal, since personality, like the ego, belongs to the conscious or mental-subjective self." The Laurentian brand of vital materialism thus operates like a blind machine without abiding by the machine-principle. Since the unconscious exceeds "its own fixed laws and habits" in its ability to commingle with the others, its blind mechanicity must be understood as un-containable within the transcendental logic of the machine propelled by an "engine-driver." This emphasis on excess is especially illuminating with respect to what Lawrence described in the letter as the allotropic state in the "non-human within humanity." For insofar as an allotrope requires first and foremost an *encounter* of two material forces, it suggests a change that cannot be humanly predicted or controlled. But here, in the polemic against psychoanalysis, Lawrence points out that even the

encounter itself, between two unconscious organisms, is at risk of being conceptualized into an idealized fusion. Attempting to preserve the vitality of the human, then, Lawrence finally introduces two simultaneous movements at the heart of the unconscious, of extension and of withdrawal, which prevents the encounter from morphing into a perfect fusion. The first movement involves an "attractive vitalism" that, "drawing unto itself as by vital magnetism," "drinks in, as it were, the contiguous universe." The "imbibing" force of this moment knows no bounds: it is "darkly self-centred, exultant and positive in its own existence." In the second movement, however, a 'strong rejective force" springs from the organism to ensure that the individual is not assimilated to the external universe and becoming indistinguishable. The psyche, Lawrence claims, "recoils upon itself, in its first reaction against community with the outer universe. It recoils even against its own mode of assimilatory unison." Lawrence's vital materialism is thus not an infinite extension of an individual to the external world; it is also dependent upon an active, separatist energy that prevents the individual from becoming entirely incorporated into the larger community. The simultaneous movements of imbibing and rejecting—of two opposing material forces commingling and not commingling at the same time—thus insistently thwarts the materiality of the "new ego" from any homeostasis, from congealing into any transcendental idealism that lies at the heart of the Futurist machine.

If the "new human phenomenon"—de-psychologized, unfeeling, allotropic—Lawrence spoke of is constituted by an encounter of two material forces irreducible to conceptuality, we may finally wonder if the phenomenon, perpetually unwoven by its

frictional motion, is truly accessible to our perception. We can perhaps refer back to the letter for a moment, wherein Lawrence proclaims that the allotropic action, central to his notion of "another ego" (or of the material unconscious in *Psychoanalysis*), will allow the individual being to emerge "unrecognizable." Could this unrecognizability be another term, or figure, for the dematerialization of the machine? An undone machine may lose its functional status, but it might be because of this de-idealization, I would propose, that the materiality inscribed in the machine will emerge as a potentiality for endless encounters and self-transformations that exceed our perceptual or cognitive grasp. This problematization of the "new human phenomenon" might sound counterintuitive or simply contradictory to Lawrence's proclaimed interest, while all this anti-conceptual thinking about the unconscious as outlined in *Psychoanalysis* might remain on the level of abstraction and therefore turn conceptual in its turn. It is in Lawrence's 1915 novel *The Rainbow*, I would suggest, where we might find the self-oppositional motion of the unconscious in action through the love stories of the Brangwen family.

3) DISCOVERY AND EXPLORATION

Narrated as a family chronicle that delineates three generations of the Brangwen family, spanning from 1830 to 1900, *The Rainbow* is framed as one single narrative that essentially encompasses the stories of three pairs of lovers. This neat arrangement of a family chronicle would seem to promise a linear historical progress of the development of human relations and its challenges. Towards the end of the first generation, shortly after the marriage of Tom and Lydia, the narrator concludes their union as follows:

> It was an entry into another circle of existence, it was the baptism to another life, it was the complete confirmation. Their feet trod strange ground of knowledge, their footsteps were lit-up with discovery. Wherever they walked, it was well, the world-re-echoed round them in discovery. They went gladly and forgetful. Everything was lost, and everything was found. The new world was discovered, it remained only to be explored.[9]

Lawrence's intended exploration of the "new world" of human relations through the successive generations is clear. If what is "discovered" is Lawrence's establishment of the "new relation" between men and women, what is to be "explored" is, by default, a *continuation* or *expansion* of what has been found, or what has been conceptualized as a "new relation" in the discovery. The newfound land, though "complete" in its own as a new existence, remains "a strange ground of knowledge." The central event that anchors the narrative as a whole is the very grounding of a nascent new relational mode, untested by time, that anticipates new versions of it in the future generations in order to prove its strength, endurance, and universality.

Indeed, this twin rhetoric of "discovery" and "exploration" has dictated the way critics in the last few decades analyze the structural and thematic development of the text. For many, the "new world" is the central spatial metaphor for what Lawrence describes in the letter (and what we have analyzed) as the "new human phenomenon," a phenomenon that offers, according to one critic, "alternatives to romantic love and marriage." Though not all critics treat the phenomenon in the direction of Futurist materialism as this chapter proposes, most do recognize Lawrence's effort to turn

[9] Lawrence, The Rainbow, 90.

away from the old model of romantic love towards "a more complex sense of material embodiment and relatedness." However, as these critics shift gear from the emotional towards the material, or from the "humanistic" towards the "posthuman" in their theoretical approaches, they are also mired in an interpretive predicament that blocks their attempt to see where the "new world" leads to, or, in Lawrence's rhetoric, how the strange "new world" is developed in the novel. Many critics have noted rightly what is promised to be an exploration turns out to be, quite frustratingly, only a *repetition*; the second and third generations repeat the same attempts, trials, and challenges that have occurred in the first generation, such that the novel taken as a whole ultimately offers, in the words of Alan Friedman, "no resolution, no settling, no summing up. Only the movement out."[10] In the first generation, for example, Tom's struggle to commingle with Lydia is described as follows:

> He had her in his arms, and, obliterated, was kissing her. And it was sheer, blenched agony to him, to break away from himself. She was there so small and light and accepting in his arms, like a child, and yet with such an insinuation of embrace, of infinite embrace, that he could not bear it, he could not stand (44).

In the second generation, Will's fear of losing his will clearly repeats Tom's agony of self-obliteration:

> If he relaxed his will he would fall, fall through endless space, into the bottomless pit, always falling, will-less, helpless, non-existent, just dropping to

[10] Colin Clarkes echoes this observation by adding that the "recurrent exploration" of the same theme fails to "realize the full cumulative significance of the discoveries made in the course of that exploration," resulting in a narrative form that remains radically centrifugal and open-ended.

> extinction, falling till the fire of friction had burnt out, like a falling star, then nothing, nothing, complete nothing (175).

In the third generation, Ursula's quest for "something impersonal," beyond "love" as she claims (440), is similarly motivated by her initial fear of being destroyed:

> [Anton] kissed her, and she quivered as if she were being destroyed, shattered. The lighted vessel vibrated, and broke in her soul, the light fell, struggled, and went dark. She was all dark, will-less, having only the receptive will (414).

The observation about narrative repetition, moreover, is dovetailed with another crucial observation about Lawrence's evasive treatment of history. If the "exploration" of the "new world" was to go hand in hand with the historical events that took place between 1830 and 1900, critics argue, it would make sense for us to assume that the difficulty of enacting or furthering the same relational mode would come from the new social ideologies and practices (England's rapid industrialization, higher literacy rate, rise of education for women) that emerged in Victorian England. And yet as Robert Kiely astutely observes, even though these symptoms of modernization can be felt occasionally in the novel, their sporadic appearances and little bearing on the narrative plot suggest that these "external considerations appear to interest Lawrence less than the emotional and physical intimacies that change relatively little from generation to generation." *The Rainbow*, he argues, "can be seen as a family history that, in an odd way, refuses to go forward but repeatedly turns back on itself, as if trying to determine whether there is a logic in human mating that is stronger than historical circumstances and personality."

A telling problematic of reading thus arises in the relation between structural analysis and hermeneutics. Critical commentary on the novel suggests that the repetitive inconclusiveness of the text—its movement being "always 'outward' from a center, 'beyond' a limit, and into the 'unknown'"—is precisely the *cause* of our inability to fully comprehend the "significance" of the characters' discovery; it is as though the more we know how the text structurally works, the less we know about the philosophical issues it raises. The text seemingly anticipates a linear exploration of a new relational mode, but as a "new world," or a seemingly solid "complete" state, its development is consistently thwarted by a narrative stagnancy, a decentering that relentlessly diffuses the developmental logic. What is anticipated to be a temporal development is thus not only, as it were, horizontalized into a space, it is also *involuted*—folding back into itself—into a space that "repeatedly turns back on itself," a self-destabilizing space that progresses only to return. Thus while Gary Day suggests the "male-female axis [in the text] offers an alternative mode of being" to the mechanistic character of mass society, Frank Kermode argues that *The Rainbow* is distinguished in Lawrence's oeuvre because the "fertility of textual invention" effectively emaciates the power of doctrine into a "skeleton." The text for these critics, it would seem, is exceptional *either* for its narrative complexity *or* its one-dimensional suggestion of "alternatives" of human relationship, but not both.

And yet, if it was the very concern with the "relation between the sexes" that motivated Lawrence to invent a new textual apparatus in the first place, there might in fact be a more subtle continuity between the narrative structure and its thematic content. Critics have generally considered the first generation as a prelapsarian state,

and the successive generations as a gradual fall from the Edenic bliss towards the tumultuous vortex of modernity.[11] Rarely has the "fall" been read in association with Lawrence's materialist conception of the "human," whose degradation from a "pristine" unconscious into an overdeveloped mental being is attributed to the modern impulse of ideological abstraction: the abstraction of materiality into machine, of the "sweet commingling" of two individuals into an idealization of oneness, and of, as the last generation of Lawrence's novel makes clear, citizens into a negligible "brick" of the nation during the period of rapid militarization in Britain. In the second generation, for example, upon finding that "things are not what they seem" after his marriage to the strong-willed Anne, Will turns to wood-carving as a practice where he can, in his mental world, carve out his ideal of a pliant woman modeled after the biblical Eve. "All that mattered," he believes, "was that he should love her and she should love him and they should live kindled one another." This retreat into the mental space as a way of finding solace from the disenchanted modern relationship evolves into a complete conflation of mental space and national propaganda in the third generation when Anton Skrebensky, in an argument with Ursula about him joining the 1899 Boer War, claims that one's existence is entirely dependent on him being a *representative* of the nation: "The Whole mattered—but the unit, the person, had no importance, except as he represented the Whole." He thus tells Ursula: "You wouldn't be yourself if there is no nation."

[11] Charles Brurack, for example, argues that "the Fall is for Lawrence a fall from a boundless feeling of connection with the universe to a constricted state of self-consciousness and isolation." *D. H. Lawrence's Language of Sacred Experience: The Transfiguration of the Reader.* (London: Palgrave, 2005), 51.

The exploration of the "new world" in the successive generations, in this sense, might be understood in light of its intersection with the historical context that Lawrence delineates, and not just as a nonreferential (and "inconclusive") repetition of what has happened in the first generation. But what would it mean, then, for certain things to repeat despite the linear movement of history? While critics argue that the "new world" comes undone, or "turns back on itself," only *as* the second generation begins, the involution might in fact be immanent within the first generation. The involution within this generation, often interpreted as "inchoate," "ahistorical" or "not yet realized" compared to the later generations,[12] is crucial as a counterforce to the disenchantment of modernization in the successive generations that seek to overcome its epistemological challenges: a counterforce, I would argue, precisely unleashed by the creative energy of Lawrence's Futurism. The material friction of being is not a motion we find only in the modern time of the third generation, in this sense, but is indeed a mode of creative action that undergirds the epic chronology of the novel as a whole. The questions I will address are: What are the Futurist elements of the "new world" that cause its internal rupture? And how are these elements preserved in the later generations, in their unwitting repetitions, as a critique of the increasing mechanization of modernity?

4) LIGHT OF TRANSFIGURATION

To answer the first question we need to grasp that the elements of the "new world" are *literal* elements: they are the physical materials Lawrence uses to construct

[12] Maria DiBattista, *First Love: The Affections of Modern Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 127.

the characters, Tom and Lydia. And the encounter of the characters *as* materials, contrary to the dominant view that it is harmonious and progressive culminating finally in a "good marriage,"[13] is in fact also full of violence, conflicts, and even destruction. Over and over again Lawrence describes their encounters as moments of "transfiguration," their embrace is "elemental" and their separation "breaking apart" or "fragmentation" of the self. Lydia's embrace of Tom is at times described as his "obliteration," a "sheer blenched agony to him." But after a while of this external intrusion, we also see how it installs itself in his body where "another centre of consciousness" begins, brewing "another activity." Scenes of their tenderness saturate the first generation as many as scenes of their hesitation, agony, defense, self-dissolution, and transfiguration. What appears to be a progressive movement towards their commingling ("transfiguration," "swallowing," "lapsing," "belonging") is often intersected by forces from within an individual ("withholding," "tension," "will," "indifference") that break them apart, before the individual begins to "flow" towards the other again. The first half of the text is therefore constructed around this repetition of material encounter and falling apart, anticipating but forbidding a perfect fusion to fully occur.

The material elements must be understood in a literal sense, moreover, because they do not serve to symbolize a consistent characterological development; instead, they *act* in the text as though they have the ability, as *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* suggests, to "create" something unexpectedly new from their own

[13] Frank Kermode argues that their "good marriage" is perfect for their epoch; and Roger Sale argues that the first generation represents the perfect concordance of a couple that the next generations only "deteriorate."

encounters, and that something new can continue to interact with the old encounter to produce yet another new material being. By "literal" I therefore do not mean that they are "real" according to the natural reality, but that since the material elements in Lawrence's text are often so insistent on their capacity to act and interact in the text, their usual susceptibility to symbolization must be temporarily suspended. In the first transfiguration scene between Lydia and Tom, we find how their encounter produces something that seems initially only a symbolic effect but turns out to be actually a new material being that acts like a third participant in the event:

> A daze had come over his mind, he had another centre of consciousness. In his breast, or in his bowels, somewhere in his body, there had started another activity. It was as if a strong light were burning there, and he was blind within it, unable know anything, except that this transfiguration burned between him and her, connecting them, like a secret power (38).

In this short passage, something enigmatic happens. We see an ostensibly smooth movement from the intrusion of a *daze* over Tom's mind, which leads to a new "centre of consciousness," to *another activit*y that begins to stir "somewhere in his body," to finally a *burning light* that leads to Tom's and Lydia's transfiguration and connects them. All the things that happen to Tom's body seem to follow logically from one activity to another; but it is impossible to perceive in what sense a daze, for example, would lead to "another centre of consciousness," or in what sense "another activity," emerging "somewhere in his body," would lead to a burning light that transfigures the couple. The light therefore seems to come out of the daze, as something like a physical transformation in Tom, and yet it is also an arbitrary existence as it turns almost

unnoticeably from a simile ("as if") to an actual action. The series of non-sequiturs, moreover, not only disrupts what is presumed to be a symbolic unity of Lawrence's writing, it also implicates another figure in the event of transfiguration, Lydia, in linking together a stupefying daze and a burning light. We are told that the burning light makes Tom "blind within it" and "unable to know anything," except that "*this* transfiguration burned between him and her" (emphasis mine). In this passage, it appears that the burning light allows for the occasion of transfiguration, but it is insistently unclear how the light comes into the text that triggers the motion of transfiguration. The deictic "this" indeed creates an ambiguity of the origin of transfiguration, just as Tom himself is confused about the site of the burning light—is it in the breasts, the bowels, or just "somewhere in his body"?

Transfiguration, in Lawrence's text, thus occurs almost as a textual event; it installs itself as a burning light that inexplicably connects the lovers in a daze. But transfiguration is, of course, also highly charged with religious connotations. It traces reference explicitly to the passages in the Gospels of the Christian Bible where Jesus is seen transfigured with rays of light up on a mountain. Christian theology interprets this occurrence as a crucial symbolic moment where the identity of Jesus as the Son of God is revealed in bodily forms. He is figured, as the theologian Dorothy Lee remarks, as a mouthpiece or messenger of God through his incarnation, thereby bridging the temporal and eternal, earth and heaven. In the quoted passage from Lawrence's text, the ambiguous origin of the light does seem to be linked at the end to an external source outside of human control, a "secret power." In this religious context, we might read Tom's transfiguration as the moment where a divine message is revealed. And

the overall passage, as well, might be read as the transitional moment where something hidden and eternal, as a message, is revealed through the performance of transfiguration in Tom and Lydia. However, despite the strong religious reference, something is strikingly different from what happens to Jesus' transfiguration in the Bible. Whereas in the Bible, the three disciples (Mark, Matthew, and Luke) serve as "independent eye-witnesses" to the blinding light from Jesus' face and his garments; in Lawrence's text, Tom strangely *at once* experiences and witnesses the transfiguration, for "He is blind within it, unable to know anything." If the transfiguration in the Bible is supposed to be read as what Lee calls an "epiphany" that reveals "Jesus' heavenly origins and identity," Tom's transfiguration is at the same time what brings him to the state of incomprehension that undercuts his role as the messenger. The doubleness of Tom's experience therefore conflates the subject and the object in the Jesus-disciple relation, and blocks, as a result, the symbolic transition from the eternal meaning to the earthly manifestation that is meant to "bridge" the gap between God and His people.

We might wonder why Lawrence appropriates a religious symbol for the purposes of configuring the relation of Tom and Lydia only to destabilize its rooted meaning. If the transfiguration of Jesus marks the very moment where the eternal and the temporal is bridged, Lawrence seems to be highlighting, through the doubleness of Tom's experience, a destabilization at work in the text between inside and outside, or between (hidden) meaning and its (material) manifestation. Such destabilization occurs not because the manifestation doesn't coincide with the inside, but because the manifestation itself is complicated by its own unstable phenomenality so much so that

the "access" towards its interior meaning is blocked. Because the transfiguration is so blinding and the light so burning that the whole experience evades Tom's perceptual grasp, we are bound to fail to know exactly how and where the transfiguration takes place: or the *figure of the transfiguration*. If the manifestation no longer functions to "manifest" a latent, eternal meaning as in the spirit-flesh relation in Christian theology, Tom's experience is no longer simply a theological manifestation; there may indeed be something creative about the light of transfiguration, as a blinding event, that exceeds the symbolic meaning embedded within the religious discourse.

To be able to understand the material surface as already phenomenologically unstable is crucial for us, indeed, to analyze the "new relation" as embodied in Tom and Lydia. For if the transfiguration doesn't serve to carve out a stable meaning, it is impossible for us to also determine whether the transfiguration, whose connective power seems so promising as a sign of Tom's and Lydia's "commingling," can be indeed taken as the end-point, or fulfillment, of their relationship. Indeed, the narrative structure of the first generation of the text is peculiar in that the progression towards transfiguration is often frustrated by the regression back to the couple's individual status. Yet the constant oscillation between the couple coming together and falling apart can hardly be resolved dialectically as "struggles" towards an ideal state of a "good marriage" as some critics suggest; Lawrence's narrator tends to use idealizing language to describe these two opposing forces—whereas their "commingling" is "sweet," for example, their breaking apart a "release" from the constraints of their bond—such that, in effect, the status of ideal is essentially handicapped. Indeed, the latter force of their relational rhythm, which is the disintegration of their commingling,

would increasingly come to the fore of the narrative when Tom is drawn to the very incomprehensibility of the traumatic, blinding experience. The enigma of the experience "burns" within Tom, but in the burning, his consciousness simultaneously arises: "Queer little breaks of consciousness seemed to rise and burst like bubbles out of the depths of his stillness." What appears initially to be a self-extension for Tom through his transfiguration with Lydia is thus, paradoxically, what at the same time "fragments" him into pieces, "incomplete and subject." "Behind her," we are told, "there was so much unknown to him. When he approached her, he came to such a terrible painful known. How could he embrace it and fathom it?"[14]

Two conflictual meanings thus emerge simultaneously from the transfiguration scene. While it creates a situation where Tom and Lydia are "connected" together by a light like a "secret power," the burning light that so perturbs Tom at the same time gives rise to an ever inward-turning consciousness that prevents him from embracing Lydia, and therefore keeps them apart. The oscillation between their togetherness and apartness therefore turns out to be not a sequential "either/or" alternation; their "both/and" simultaneity suggests that neither state could be idealized into a fulfillment or taken as a stable meaning of love that defeats another. It is the very internal rupture, within the "phenomenon" of their relational mode, that maintains the continuity of their relationship. While the burning transfiguration instills within Tom a consciousness that keeps him from fully commingling with Lydia, it is also the realization of his fragmentariness, which his consciousness occasions, that draws him back to her. "He was nothing. But with her, he would be real… she would bring him

[14] Ibid., 56.

completeness and perfection."[15] The transfiguration therefore does not only disconnect Tom and Lydia because of his rising individuality, it also disintegrates Tom into fragmentary pieces when he realizes he cannot possess her. Tom himself, as a figure, is thus also experiencing two situations that mutually obliterate each other: the bubbling formation of his consciousness is consistently de-formed by his self-fragmentation that his consciousness (of his incomprehension) necessarily entails.

Because of Tom's self-fragmentation, his action may not be said to be attributed to a single coherent psychology; it is only through his material friction with Lydia Tom may truly be activated to act. The ontological passivity critics usually attribute to Lydia's character often stems from the observation of her deliberate exoticization in the text: her Polish origin, her lack of fluency in speech, and the "darkness" of her appearance (when Tom first sees her, it is her "black cloak," "black bonnet," and "thick dark eyebrows" that captivate his attention). But such observation often belies one important fact about her recalcitrance to Tom's increasing demand to try to possess her, "that blind, insistent figure standing over against her" (39). Although the diegetic description of Lydia often alternates between her receptiveness to Tom's possessive desire and her intransigent resistance to his demands, her resistance is never demonstrated as some kind of assertive opposition. Instead, what we see from her resistance is closely linked to her very act of passivity, her constant "lapsing" into stupor and indifference, that seems almost detached from Lydia's own control:

[15] Ibid., 40.

> Always … between-whiles she lapsed into the old unconsciousness, indifference, and there was a *will* in her, to save herself from living any more. But she would wake in the morning one day and feel her blood running, feel herself lying open like a flower unsheathed in the sun, insistent and potent with demand.[16]

The "lapsing" and the "opening" may be psychologically interpreted as Lydia's resistance and receptiveness, but the alternation is in fact far more complicated than what may appear as Lydia's "struggle" to become part of Tom's life. Indeed, what is difficult for conceptualization here is that Lydia's character seems to be the exact opposite of what her appearance suggests. In her "lapsing" into indifference, for example, Lydia reveals not a weakness but a "will" against the demands of living; and in her "opening" to consciousness, Lydia reveals not her vulnerability as an unsheathed flower would imply but her insistence and potency. The figure of the flower and the figure of lapsing thus seem to imply two opposite postures (receptiveness and indifference), but here they in fact strangely perform the same anti-assimilationist force: a flower that is potent with "demand" and a lapsing that is actively defiant against Tom's rising consciousness. Lydia's individuality must therefore not be understood simply as an upholding of the sovereign self, for it is not in her assertive action where her individuality is revealed, but in her phenomenological unbinding, between her "lapsing" and "opening," "folding" and "unfolding," as a *passive action*, where we can discern the greater "will" within her characterological traits.

[16] Ibid., 54.

The "will" in Lydia is, of course, a clear echo of what Lawrence has theorized as the "greater, inhuman will" in the letter, the "will," he insists, that represents not so much the unbridgeable gap between individuals as it does the material *sameness* between them. Even though Lydia remains an inscrutable figure who opposes a complete mingling with Tom, and he remains resistant "in the relaxing towards her" so as to protect his individuality, Tom is continually drawn back to Lydia's elusiveness even when he is most disturbed by it: "There was *that* in him which shrank from yielding to her, resisted the relaxing towards her, opposed the mingling with her, *even whilst he most desired it*. He was afraid, he wanted to save himself" (90 emphases mine). In our previous analysis, we have discovered that Lydia's utter inscrutability is the cause of Tom's material disintegration. But in this passage, if "that" in Tom functions as the very anti-assimilationist force just as the intransigent "will" in Lydia, how do we explain Tom's *persistent desire* to be drawn to that which disintegrates him, or that which would perhaps even threaten to destroy his "will"? How do we, in fact, account for the self-obliterating relation of Tom and Lydia that lies beyond a material sameness between them? These questions seem to suggest not a self-other relationality grounded in phenomenal sameness, but a non-relationality grounded in mutual self-erasure, or self-dematerialization, that eludes what the self can even perceive or recognize.

In his letter and in his depiction of Lydia's phenomenological unbinding, Lawrence suggests that if we can look beyond a person's characterological traits we will be able to see the "greater, inhuman will" beneath. But the "will," at the same time, does not seem to contain an impenetrable consistency that would somehow act

like a kernel to the phenomenological inconsistency on the surface. Indeed, towards the end of the first generation, as Tom once again "flows" towards Lydia, the narrator brings out a paradox at the heart of the relationship that raises telling questions about the binary of inner "will" and outer phenomenon:

> Then gradually, the tension, the withholding relaxed in him, and he began to flow towards her. She was beyond him, the unattainable. But he let go his hold on himself, he relinquished himself, and knew the subterranean force of his desire to come to her, to be with her, to mingle with her, losing himself to find her, and to find himself in her.

What we are witnessing here is similar to what we have seen in Lydia's phenomenological unbinding. Tom "let go his hold on himself," in a self-shattering gesture that resembles Lydia's self-opening to the world like an unsheathed flower. But in his self-opening to Lydia, strangely, Tom not only finds Lydia, but also "himself in her." The relaxation of Tom's "withholding"—or his "will"—is also strangely not an abandonment of his individuality, but precisely a way of finding it through his material obliteration. The "will" therefore does not operate as a hidden, stable kernel *within* the phenomenological surface; its revelation as a character's discovery of his self in fact *coincides with* the character's self-relinquishing. Obliterated by Lydia, Tom finds himself at the same time. The "will," in other words, cannot be deployed as a means to overcome phenomenological instability, because the "will" is precisely the unbinding of the material surface.

If both Tom's and Lydia's "will" implies not a mastery of the self but precisely the opposite—its disintegration and deprivation of the self—Lawrence shatters then

not only the inside/outside binary, but also the self/other relation. As we have seen, Tom's self-discovery is occasioned by his self-disappearance in the other. If Tom and Lydia inaugurate a "new relation between the sexes" as Lawrence hopes to achieve, the relation may be said to be, paradoxically, a *non-relation*. And in this new non-relation, finally, Lawrence boldly abandons the apotheosized ideal of oneness by letting the couple *disappear* in each other rather than synthesize their individual differences. Instead of being swallowed by the abstract whole of ideology, Tom in the story is eventually swallowed by the darkness of Lydia's incomprehensible embrace:

> The reality of her who was just beyond him absorbed him. Blind and destroyed, he pressed forward, nearer, nearer, to receive the consummation of himself, be received within the darkness which should swallow him and yield him up to himself. If he could come really within the blazing kernel of darkness, if really he could be destroyed, burnt away till he lit with her in one consummation, that were supreme, supreme (90).

In being "absorbed," "swallowed," and "received" by the reality of Lydia's utter inscrutability, Tom at the same time "receives the consummation of himself." The remarkable passivity of the event, or the way in which a destroyed, desubjectified Tom moves through an external world utterly outside of his agency, thus paradoxically inscribes with it his own fulfillment. Tom is consummated, indeed, not because he accomplishes a sexual act that allows him to exert his possession of Lydia, but precisely because in being "destroyed and blind," he is no longer materially resistant to Lydia's inscrutability. Tom's complete destruction in this scene may be said to be an utmost expression of his gradual material disintegration since his transfiguration.

His destruction may indeed represent, as Leo Bersani suggests, a literalized expression of the Freudian death drive that exceeds all kinds of sexual enjoyment derived through material frictions. However, what is persistently unsettling, despite the eventuality of the complete destruction of Tom, is that Tom's disappearance, or his "burning away," is precisely also the moment when he is "lit" up with Lydia. The figure of light thus emerges once again *after the end*. If Tom is completely obliterated in his sexual consummation with Lydia, what survives enigmatically, in their newfound non-relation, is an inexplicable glimmer of light that radically resists Tom's or Lydia's perception. Light, as we have seen, was blindly posited into the text to enable the motion of transfiguration, but what does it mean for light to survive *beyond* the Laurentian project of transfiguration in the first generation? What does it mean, indeed, for light to survive as a figure after the end?

5) "Earth's New Architecture"

For many critics, the establishment of the "new world" in the first generation is to be tested and rearticulated by the second and third generations as the Brangwen family confronts new forces of modernity. The "exploration," as Lawrence conceives it, is thus not solely a philosophical journey (in which modern individuals practice the new nonrelationality) but also a linguistic quest (in which modern individuals bring this new nonrelationality to greater clarity). "Read as a revelatory epic," Maria DiBattista argues, "*The Rainbow* depicts the *verbal* longings that prompt us to venture into the unknown." For her, these longings form a clear linguistic pattern which could also be understood as a historical pattern of modernization. They are "first expressed

in the demotic or vernacular language of common desires, are refined and extended in hieratic speech and gesture, but are satisfied, literally, only by the novel's last words—the numinous hieroglyph of the divine Logos 'built up in a living fabric of Truth.'"[17] DiBattista is here appropriating the cycle of history established by Vico as a description of the epic scale of Lawrence's text. While Tom "can only propose an ahistorical figure for a human destiny *not yet realized*," it befalls Ursula, from the third generation, to build a coherent symbolism that would finally "link the letter and the spirit." The last chapter of Lawrence's text, indeed, encompasses the famous scene in which this latest member of the Brangwen family, encountering a rainbow for the first time, arrives at an epiphany about human destiny that is also unmistakably Lawrence's:

> And the rainbow stood on the earth. She *knew* that the sordid people who crept hard-scaled and separate on the face of the earth's corruption were living still, that the rainbow was arched in their blood and would quiver to life in their spirit, that they would cast off their horny covering of disintegration, that new, clean, naked bodies would issue to a new germination, to a new growth, rising to the light and the wind and the clean rain of heaven. She *saw* in the rainbow the earth's new architecture, the old, brittle corruption of houses and factories swept away, the world built up in a living fabric of Truth, fitting to the overarching heaven (459 emphases mine).

In this final paragraph of the novel, the rainbow appears to not only serve as a prophetic symbol that links earth and heaven in the establishment of Truth; it also

[17] DiBattista, 123.

appears to create a philosophical and aesthetic distance through which Ursula, as the ultimate heroine of the novel, can *see* the promise of the rainbow installed within the blood of the sordid people even if they cannot. Unlike her grandfather Tom, indeed, whose transfiguration is enabled by his burning obliteration of all understanding and articulation, Ursula seems to regain the insight of this transfiguration precisely by her ability to see from an aesthetic distance enabled by the rainbow. For DiBattista, the rainbow is thus a hieroglyph, like an ancient emblem, that finally "reviv[es] the incarnational language which makes Creation—and persons—new again."[18]

Despite the repetitive structure of the three generations, in this sense, the ending of Lawrence's novel seems to congeal in a symbolism that suddenly clarifies in its prophetic tone our understanding of the previous generations. But the arrival of spiritual clarity would apparently mark at the same time the disappearance of all transfigurations in the figure of Ursula herself. Indeed, right before seeing the "earth's new architecture," Ursula decides to definitively break up with her boyfriend, Anton Skrebensky, the soldier sent to the Boer War with the "triumphant, flaming, overweening heart of the intrinsic male." "She knew," Lawrence says in the final chapter, "that Skrebensky had never become finally real. In the weeks of passionate ecstasy he had been with her in her desire, she had created him for the time being. But in the end he had failed and broken down" (457). If Ursula can "see" the potential transfiguration in the sordid people below the hill, it seems it is only because, high up on the hill, she must ironically sever her own relationality with anyone in the rise of her transcendental and prophetic self. "Ursula's space," as Robert Kiely observes, "far

[18] DiBattista, 138.

from being shared with Skrebensky as Tom's and Lydia's was shared, is gained at his expense."[19] In psychological terms, our heroine's decision to break up with Skrebensky also echoes an important moment a chapter before wherein Ursula confesses she doesn't "*care* about love":

> "Then what do you care about?" [Dorothy] asked, exasperated.
>
> "I don't know," said Ursula. "But something more impersonal. Love—love—love—what does it mean—what does it amount to? So much personal gratification. It doesn't lead anywhere" (440).

In Ursula's answer, impersonality does not seem to ultimately have to do much with transfiguration; or if transfiguration it must be, it is so sublimated in its embrace of the "entire social and political future"[20] that love, or Lawrence's original emphasis on a new "relation between the sexes," feels almost superfluous to the vision of the human destiny in the last pages. Indeed, it is the over-arching symbolic structure enforced so suddenly by the rainbow, at the expense of Lawrence's consistent concern about relationality, that F. R. Leavis argues that the ending of the novel is "wholly unprepared and unsupported, defying the preceding pages."

Is impersonality, however, truly antithetical to transfiguration? While the self-fulfillment of Ursula seems to leave no space to accommodate transfiguration in the final chapter, we find in the preceding chapter a description of impersonality in a language that remarkably invokes the radical connecting power of Futurism that we learned in his letter. In a passage on Ursula learning the physical sciences at the university, we learn something about the power of the light again:

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[19] Kiely, 110.
[20] Daniel J. Schneider, 130.

> Electricity had no soul, light and heat had no soul. Was she herself an impersonal force, or conjunction of forces, like one of these? She looked still at the unicellular shadow that lay within the field of light, under her microscope. It was alive. She saw it move—she saw the bright mist of its ciliary activity, she saw the gleam of its nucleus, as it slid across the plane of light. What then was its will? If it was a conjunction of forces, physical and chemical, what held these forces unified, and for what purpose were they unified (408)?

For Ursula to be understood as an impersonal force of conjunction, she must be first likened to the electric light. But unlike the electric light, which has no soul, Ursula must install within impersonality a "will" whose philosophical aim must be rooted in the human cause. In its philosophical agenda, Lawrence seems to repeat what he has laid out in the letter and in the first generation. However, in foregrounding impersonality as a conjunction of electric forces, Lawrence for the first time also introduces the *concept of infinity*. In this scene of learning, indeed, Ursula discovers not only "the incalculable physical and chemical activities nodalized in this shadowy, moving speck under her microscope," but also, in her inward reflection, the divisions within "intense light" much more infinitesimal than the discernable divisions of physical activities. Light is not a metaphor graspable by one's subjectivity, again, but rather occurs as a creative figure that swallows Ursula within its oneness. Upon inspecting the forces of conjunction under her microscope, Ursula "passed away into an intensely-gleaming light of knowledge […] It was a consummation, a being infinite" (409).

We find an echo of infinity, moreover, when Ursula challenges Dorothy on the supremacy of love. Although the Brangwen sister could not quite articulate what she means by "something impersonal," her rejection of love precisely rests on the logic of foreclosure that the ideology of heterosexual love espouses. "What does [love] matter to me?" cried Ursula. "As an end in itself, I could love a hundred men, one after the other. Why should I end with a Skrebensky? Why should I not go on, and love all the types I fancy, one after another, if love is an end in itself? There are plenty of men who aren't Anton, whom I could love—whom I would like to love" (440). Ursula cannot love Shrebensky, it turns out, not simply because of the ideological conflict about the war or nationalism (as is often brought up in critical discussion) but also because Ursula, transfigured by light like her grandparents, cannot accept the logic of finitude that undergirds the "ineffable transfusion of love" Skrebensky romanticizes: "All he wanted now was to marry her, to be sure of her" (424). To brace the power of infinity, for Lawrence, is to brace the venture into the unknown of a radical deindividualization Skrebensky cannot tolerate.

Yet the singular force of infinity cannot be said to reside in its conceptualization. Instead, true to Lawrence's commitment to the anti-conceptual motion of the unconscious as we have seen in *Psychoanalysis,* the power of infinity—as a core element within Lawrence's modernist impersonality—could be found only insofar as we read beyond the characters' or even the author's narrative self-persuasion. If we return to the scene in which Ursula fatefully decides to break up with Skrebensky before she turns to the rainbow, what we encounter is not a simple motion of turning away *from* man *to* nature, but in fact one of the most enigmatic moments in

the novel in which the face of a man is *installed within*, and *carried away*, into the sublime landscape:

> Strange, what a void separated him and her. She liked him now, as she liked a memory, some bygone self. He was something of the past, finite. He was that which is known. She felt a poignant affection for him, as for that which is past. But, when she looked with her face forward, he was not. Nay, when she looked ahead, into the undiscovered land before her, what was there she could recognize but a fresh glow of light and inscrutable trees going up from the earth like smoke.

In turning away from the finitude of the past, Ursula faces forward into the unknown future. But facing forward, Skrebensky is mysteriously far from gone. In turning her face to the "undiscovered land" before her, the face of a man is instead inscribed—or, better, "transfigured"—within "a fresh glow of light." In Lawrence's bizarre shift from her bygone lover to the "undiscovered land" mediated simply through "Nay," two properties are suddenly exchanged via an anacoluthon. What happens in this moment, I would argue, is not any conceptualization of infinity but rather the giving of a face to the power of infinity that light occasions, an act of a non-physical rebirth. Skrebensky does not disappear but is transformed instead from Ursula's finite memory into "smoke" and "a fresh glow of light" simply through an act of face-turning. If transfiguration has been previously understood in terms of the unbinding of phenomenality between *two people*, Skrebensky's "transfiguration" marks a face-to-face encounter while simultaneously dissolving completely into the impersonal, *non-dyadic sublime*. It turns out that impersonality does not exclude transfiguration; it

transfigures an individual into the infinite future beyond our recognition or imagination. It is only fitting that what immediately follows this moment is Ursula's realization of her miscarriage. The loss of Skrebensky's child, one might argue, is the gain of a new face inscribed in an unknown future.

Yet what does it mean for Skrebensky, so repeatedly preoccupied with the "whole" of his country, to be carried away into Ursula's vision? In the last few pages of the novel, Lawrence describes the final emergence of the rainbow not only in terms of its overarching position, but also in terms that remarkably invoke the infinity of divisions within the rainbow. For unlike the division of physical activities Ursula could discern in her microscope, the divisions that separate colors in a rainbow are so infinitesimally, so imperceptibly small that they must defy her understanding. Looking up over the hill, Ursula sees "a band of iridescence colouring in faint colours a portion of the hill. […] Steadily the colour gathered, mysteriously, from nowhere, it took presence upon itself, there was a faint, vast rainbow." (458). The mystery of the rainbow, for Ursula standing before it, is indeed its inexplicable formation from an accidental gathering of colours from nowhere. But more remarkably, alongside this unaccountable emergence of the rainbow, a vast expanse of landscape suddenly turns shapeless before the eyes of our heroine. If the rainbow cannot help but insert its symbolic status in the text as "earth's new architecture," what accompanies this architectural wonder is a sudden propagation of objects so illimitable that Ursula, we are told, is "sick with a nausea so deep that she perished as she sat": "the stiffened bodies of the colliers," "the hard, cutting edges of the new houses," "the triumph of the horrible, amorphous angles and straight lines," "the dun atmosphere over the

blackened hill," or "the dark blotches of houses, slate roofed and amorphous" (458). This vast expanse of landscape is truly sublime, in a strictly Kantian sense, insofar as its expansiveness is that which cannot be exhausted, totalized, or fulfilled in Lawrence's enumeration of these objects. What we find here is radically disruptive to all understanding about the novel's "message." For if Lawrence confers through the occurrence of the rainbow a moment of symbolization, he in fact also desymbolizes it through a metonymic account of the landscape whose summation of parts can never quite amount to its whole. For Skrebensky to be inscribed within this landscape, in this sense, it means that he must also be dismembered into body parts as fragmented as the edges or lines of a house. Yet Lawrence is not at all pessimistic about the amorphous infinity of this final scene of transfiguration. If it is only when light is divided into infinite divisions of colours can the rainbow be "seen" or "known," he seems to imply that it is only when Skrebensky is absolutely dismembered can Ursula, finally, address him for the first time, non-physically, non-nonhumanly, non-phenomenologically.[21]

The radical infinity of Lawrence's project in *The Rainbow*, I would suggest, is not merely a concept one could master or possess. While Lawrence gives us a new Futurist doctrine about the "inhuman will" or a new psychoanalytic understanding about the unconscious, the anti-conceptuality he so painstakingly teases out can only be enacted in the text: in the way, as I hope I have shown, in which the figure of the

[21] When Skrebensky is most physically present, Ursula cannot communicate with him. One might recall the instance in the previous chapter when Ursula says "my love" to Skrebensky repeatedly only to question her the communicability of her own words:

> "My love? She said to him, questioningly, when the car was again running in full motion.
>
> He made no movement or sound. He let her hold his hand, he let her reach forward, in the gathering darkness, and kiss his still cheek. The crying had gone by—he would not cry any more. He was whole and himself again.
>
> "My love," she repeated, trying to make him notice her.
>
> But as yet, he could not (435).

light posits itself in the configuration of a new relation between the sexes, and survives as a form of intervention against Lawrence's self-fulfilling prophecy about the self. In Lawrence's work, light is indeed creative insofar as it not only promises the potential of transfiguration but also unleashes a radical infinity that breaks the imperviousness of the self beyond recognition. Lawrence's project on infinity, in this respect, might be helpful in furthering our understanding of modernist impersonality as codified by Pound, Laforgue, Eliot, and Joyce. For Lawrence, impersonality is neither predominantly an "objective correlative" nor a "*dédoublement* of personality," even though the force of irony inhabited within these two concepts could well be applied to his work. Instead, throughout *The Rainbow*, what we find consistently is Lawrence's unwavering commitment to an *ethical possibility*: the possibility of establishing a new world of relationality in which two people may be brought together in a non-relation without the usual attendant weight of possession. To be dispossessed, in Lawrence's theory, is to fall from the mastery of the known into the infinity of the unknown; it is to be deprived of any subjectivity, personhood, identity, or even the slightest particles of the material self one could claim as one's own. But any attempt to *undergo* this radical infinity, Lawrence shows us simultaneously, is also to brace the risk of an utter dismemberment no theory of love could restore.

Chapter Two

Body Heat

Mina Loy's 1917 poetic sequence *Songs to Joannes*, now revered as a masterpiece in modernist literature, is probably best remembered today for the author's unapologetic treatment of female sexuality and its demystification of romantic love. Beginning its opening verse with a re-writing of Cupid from Apuleius' second-century novel *Metamorphoses*, Loy transforms this familiar figure into a lascivious "Pig Cupid" in a language so blasphemous and sexually explicit that even her female contemporaries were taken aback. Yet Loy's defamilarization of romantic love is not simply a modernist experiment with language and syntax, for it is also situated within her life story as it was shaped, in the chaotic years between 1912 and 1918, by her short-lived and sensational love affairs with the high-profile Italian Futurists F. T. Marinetti and Giovanni Papini. Though initially a great admirer of Futurism for its promise to renew the poetic energy of a jaded Europe, Loy was quickly dismayed by Futurism's lack of artistic merits it had claimed, especially when the ideology became explicitly sympathetic with the actual war with which Italy was finally involved in 1916. Marinetti's conversations now "fell like Bombs among the solitude-induced static of her mind," she would write. In this autobiographical context, *Songs to Joannes* represents not only a revolutionary form of female sexuality; in its reference to her Futurist lovers, indeed, the poetic sequence could also be understood as a student's reply to her former teachers: an autobiographical story in which Loy unleashes a new bodily, material and poetic energy beyond her teachers' doctrines.

In this chapter, I will ask: how did Loy use her poetic sequence as a feminist response to the complacent male-dominated Futurists? If the poet's love affairs with Marinetti and Papini had been inseparable with their poetic and political influence on her, moreover, what does it mean for *Songs to Joannes* (originally named *Love Songs*) to be construed or even dedicated as a feminist revision of love from a student's perspective? Since the resurgence of the Loy's fame in the 1980s, criticism almost unanimously focused on how Loy critiques the chauvinism of Futurism with her unique brand of satire. In the poems written between 1914 and 1917, such as "Giovanni Franchi," "The Effectual Marriage," or "At the Door of the House," one often finds figures of the Futurist male caricatured in their bombastic talks and gestures. Here is a scene of instruction performed by one of them: "Giovanni Franchi's wrists flicked / Flickeringly as he flacked them / His wrists explained things." Loy's satire was her wit. And wit was what the male Futurists lacked in their obsession with the militant genre of the manifesto. Yet to be clear, Loy never entirely forsook the stylistic influence Futurism had upon her. Unpunctuated lines, irregular meter, refusal of enjambment, broken sentences, parataxis, and random white spaces between words—all of Loy's signature poetic devices are testament to her belief in the golden rule of Futurism even when she is most satirical: "One must destroy syntax and scatter one's nouns at random, just as they are," the first aphorism of Marinetti's "Technical Manifesto" goes. To attack the sexism of the Futurists, it seems the best resources would be to use their resources to undermine their ideological enterprise.

These stylistic principles continue to be applied in Loy's most difficult work, *Songs to Joannes*. Consisting of 34 songs, the sequence has been traditionally singled

out for its anti-lyrical modes and daring choice of words. Although they are called "songs," indeed, nothing in the sequence points to their vocative qualities or gestures of yearning that characterize most conventional love poetry. One may find an implicit "I-thou" lyric structure in several songs, but for the most part the apostrophic gesture of the sequence is undercut by Loy's pervasive use of avant-garde poetic devices that decisively break down all possibilities of communication. More frustratingly, *Songs to Joannes* is rife with obscure, utterly disenchanting and at times even irritating dictions like "proto-plasm," "caryatid," "homophonous hiccoughs," or "cymophanous sweat." No elegance or beauty exists in Loy's work in the traditional sense, but these features for most critics are exactly the satirical elements for Loy to advance her critique of the gendered ideology of love in a sequence that classifies itself as a series of "songs." For Rachel Blau DuPlessis, the "Pig Cupid" introduced in Song I cannot be clearer as a figure for Loy's satirical treatment of the ancient love story. With his "rosy snout" and "erotic garbage," Cupid is transformed into a crassly sexual and verbally incompetent anti-hero. And to repeat a phrase as hackneyed as "once upon a time," as "Pig Cupid" does, is to "call attention to the fictive or scripted nature of the love plot in an arch, ironic, and bitter way."[1]

Almost all commentaries on *Songs to Joannes* start with a discussion of "Pig Cupid" as a prime example of the satirical status of the sequence. In this chapter, I will too analyze this ancient figure under the hands of Loy. However, as much as I am interested in Cupid, I am also interested in Psyche, or more specifically, Loy as the modern Psyche. There are two major reasons I turn to the female counterpart in the

[1] DuPlessis, 64.

story. First, although identifying the satire on Cupid and the male ideology in the songs serves as a useful ideological critique, focusing on satire alone also greatly stymies new forms of energy Loy invents. To treat Loy as a modern Psyche is therefore my attempt to give a new, modern voice to the ancient figure whose voice has been historically silenced in a story that privileges Cupid as the all-knowing lover-savior. Second—and this is my slightly more daring claim—*Songs to Joannes* in fact begs for an intertextual reading with Apuleius's love story and the philosophical text that undergirds it, Plato's *Phaedrus*. As I will elaborate in the following pages, although Song I starts with a description of "Pig Cupid," the song is governed entirely by the perspective of the lyrical or anti-lyrical "I" who "lives in my lantern," "trimming subliminal flicker." For the rest of the sequence, Loy will continue to probe the question of seeing, or of what there is to see while the eyes are interfered by subliminal light. In "Cupid and Psyche," meanwhile, the story of love is staged as a story of blindness and insight. In lighting her lantern to see Cupid for the first time, many of us will remember, Psyche fatefully injures her husband and causes him to disappear. It is only through overcoming her tortuous trials assigned by cruel Venus that the now-mature lover is finally reunited with the now no-longer-invisible Cupid. In this ancient love story, true love demands not only trust (on the woman's part) but also the conversion of superficial seeing to mature insight signified by Psyche's ultimate ascendance to the realm of gods. What would it mean for our modern Psyche, at the beginning of the twentieth century, to choose to not to be lifted to the all-seeing supreme Futurist pantheon, but to linger in the flickering light between seeing and not seeing?

In this chapter, I will argue that Loy rewrites the story of "Cupid and Psyche" in her response to her futurist teacher-lovers Marineti and Papini from the female lover's perspective. Instead of merely satirizing the lyric convention of love, however, Loy is inventive in her treatment of light that allows us to explore the possibilities of new connective potential buried by the militant regime of Futurism. Like Ursula in D. H. Lawrence, who craves "the illimitable, endless space for self-realisation and delight," Loy is drawn to the "illimitable monotone" of the material white space in her poetry as what she calls a space for "far further differentiation." It is in the stunning melting of her words into the potential of a complete white space, I would argue, in which the poet enables a remarkable convergence between the erotic self and the possibility of fusion. Unlike Lawrence, though, Loy is resolutely non-didactic. Nothing in the sequence gives the slightest hint on how the individual songs could be linked to produce a satisfying narrative. To see how Loy invents this illimitable space, my strategy is to track the movement of certain recurring figures, specifically the figures of the eye and of light, and the way in which these figures are inscribed within the larger narratives (both the "Cupid and Psyche" story and the Socratic myth of love in Plato) as their matrix of significations. *Songs to Joannes* is neither a dramatic monologue nor a lyric sequence. But since its meaning may arise only insofar as it defies the lyric tradition (as DuPlessis' interpretation performs it), we are also inescapably caught in the motion of novelizing the sequence. To see how Loy's work invents a new feminist poetics of love within the resistance to the male convention would be the goal of this chapter.

* * *

A significant amount of criticism has been devoted to how Loy distanced herself increasingly in the years between 1914 and 1917 from Marinetti. In a 1914 letter to a friend, she expressed earnestly how much her poetic skills had improved thanks to her teacher: "I am indebted to M. for twenty years added to my life from mere contact with his exuberant vitality." But by 1917, the Futurist protégée would register her relation to her teacher in a completely different tone: "Like all his poesie—a succession of headlong phrases into the obvious—Much and More & Many & Most was what the platitudes were preaching… The whole significance of the man was in his Noise." As a critic argues, the greatest irony of Loy lies in the fact that she inherited the spirit of Futurism only to use it against her teachers as "a highly skillful satirist."[2] The satirical poems could be found in numerous lyric poems written during this formative period. But for the purposes of this chapter, I want to highlight one remarkable poem, "Three Moments In Paris" (1914), to analyze how Loy situates her amorous relation to Marinetti specifically in a pedagogical context:

Though you had never possessed me
I had belonged to you since the beginning of time
And sleepily I sat on your chair beside you
Leaning against your shoulder
And your careless arm across my back gesticulated
As your indisputable male voice roared
Through my brain and my body
Arguing "Dynamic Decomposition"
Of which I was understanding nothing
Sleepily
And the only less male voice of your brother pugilist of the intellect
Booms as it seemed to me so sleepy

[2] Elizabeth Arnold, "Mina Loy and the Futurists," *Sagetrieb* (Vol. 8: 1-2), 85.

Across an interval of a thousand miles
An interim of a thousand years
But you who make more noise than any man in the world when
you clear your throat
Deafening wake me
And I caught the thread of the argument
Immediately assuming my personal mental attitude
And ceased to be a woman

Beautiful halfhour of being a mere woman
The animal woman
Understanding nothing of man
But mastery and the security of imparted physical heat
Indifferent to cerebral gymnastics
Or regarding them as the self-indulgent play of children
Or the thunder of alien gods
But you woke me up
Anyhow who am I that I should criticize your theories of "Plastic Velocity"
"Let us go home she is tired and wants to go to bed."

In a lesson about dynamic decomposition, Loy the pupil claims she "understood nothing," but in a clever trick of turning the teacher's discourse into a "cerebral gymnastics" and herself into "animal woman," Loy playfully turns the scene of education into a scene of outwitting. Loy is Laurentian in the sense that she seems to believe in the instinctual quality of being Marinetti fails to recognize. But she is also utterly un-Laurentian with her talent of wit without the slightest appeal to any programmatic doctrine. In the zeugma and alliteration of "my brain and my body," Loy puts into question the binary of two categories and their gendered presumption. Yet, precisely because the body can't be defined against the brain, Loy doesn't believe that sleep, nor "mere woman," nor "the security of imparted physical heat," can be conceived as any simple power against the male theory, either. The poem indeed culminates not in any triumphalist gesture from the speaker's point of view but rather

in the disturbance of her sleep, and it is in pure satire she wakes into in the last two lines. Satire by definition cannot propose. With a self-questioning without a comma and a dismissive line in quote, Loy fully deploys the power of wit to highlight the absurdity of male certainty and the bombastic noise that destroys her evening.

If education entails the transmission of knowledge, then, outwitting in this poem breaks down the authority of knowledge in its emphasis on language's endless capacity for play. However, if we focus on satire alone, how do we account for the first two lines, "Though you had never possessed me / I had belonged to you since the beginning of time"? Unlike the rest of the poem, nothing is satirical in these soft, personal lines. In opening the poem with the language of belonging, Loy sets up a context of intimacy first before we enter the pedagogical occasion on which a student sits on a chair next to her teacher. But what is strange about the setting of intimacy is that, despite its thematic continuity with the rest of the poem, it seems to exist outside the temporal framework of the pedagogical occasion itself. Except for the first two lines, indeed, the entire poem is written the simple past tense. The slightly awkward use of the past perfect tense in the first two lines suggests that another level of intimacy is present, but it is present not in the pedagogical scene but rather in an unknown past—"the beginning of time"—outside the framework of the lyric description. Loy's figuration of a temporal infinity is echoed later in the poem, when it turns to a "boom" of energy released supposedly from Marinetti's pugilist brother:

> And the only less male voice of your brother pugilist of the intellect
> Booms as it seemed to me so sleepy
> Across an interval of a thousand miles
> An interim of a thousand years

In its thunderous boom, the "less male voice" presumably shoots across the Futurist classroom. Yet, instead of being awaken to this voice at this particular moment, what occurs is an incredible indeterminable state between sleeping and waking: the male boom is not only characterized satirically as a ridiculous epiphany, it is also intersected with a sleepiness that decisively transforms the impact of the boom into "an interval of a thousand years": a dynamic decomposition of time and space much more intense than what the male Futurists theorize. With the two white spaces, Loy seems intent on denaturalizing the presumed link between cause and effect, as in other instances such as "Deafening wake me" or "But mastery and the security of imparted physical heat." But the two white spaces in the "boom" line are slightly more peculiar in that they seem intent on breaking the subject position so that one can no longer tell if the booming from the "less male voice" is identical to Loy's sleepiness. The confusion of waking and sleeping is not an experience from the lyric speaker or other members of the Futurist classroom; it is instead an effect coming from the verbal design of the poem, an effect of pre-historical, pre-lyrical, and pre-physical "belonging" one could discern only in the intersection. To be thrown to a different temporal framework of intimacy unseen by the male Futurists, Loy seems to suggest, we must look beyond what the poem recounts and see, with our own eyes, a new level of physical heat inscribed materially on the pages.

"Three Moments in Paris," in this way, thus offers a neither strictly satirical nor strictly propositional lesson about a different kind of belonging. In the poetic diffusion of physical matter into a physical heat beyond time and space, Loy the disciple might be said to have outwitted Marinetti the master. In the main text of our

study, *Songs to Joannes*, we'll come across similar strategies with which the poet responds to the self-complacency of Futurism. Originally published in its short version in the July 1915 *Others* magazine, alongside the early work of Marianne Moore and William Carlos Williams, the sequence (entitled as "Love Songs" back known) was an instant scandal in Manhattan when it first hit the stands. So controversial it was that, as Alfred Kremborg reflected years later, it pushed Loy to the literary stardom as much as it injured her.[3] "In an unsophisticated land," he recalled, "such sophistry, clinical frankness, sardonic conclusions, wedded to a madly elliptical style scornful of regulation grammar, syntax and punctuation, horrified our gentry and drove our critics into furious despair. The nudity of emotion and thought roused the worst disturbance, and the utter nonchalance in revealing the secrets of sex was denounced as nothing less than lewd. It took a strong digestive apparatus to read Mina Loy." Like Lawrence, indeed, Loy was reprimanded by her critics not only for the subject matter but also for the offensive technique. But unlike Lawrence, Loy had to also deal with the biased audience who was discomfited by a Futurist poetess. "Had a man written these poems," Kremborg reflected, "they might have been tolerated." For her contemporary critics, Loy "imbibed the precepts of Apollinaire and Marinetti and became a Futurist with all the earnestness and irony of a woman possessed and obsessed with the sense of human experience and disillusion."[4]

Among many noticeable traits of the Futurist influence in *Songs to Joannes*, indeed, we may first find out how the sequence presents the gender dynamic between Loy and Joannes (a fictional figure for Papini). Song VII, for example, memorably

[3] Amy Lowell famously threatened to withdraw support of *Others* because of "Love Songs."
[4] Conover, 189.

begins the poetic subject left behind in the trails of her lover's militant pursuit of knowledge.

> My pair of feet
> Smack the flag-stones
> That are something left over from your walking
> The wind stuffs the scum of the white street
> Into my lungs and my nostrils.

In Song XV, the sequence turns more vivid in figuring Loy's desire and inability to catch up her superhuman lover's pathbreaking spirit:

> But you alone
> Superhuman apparently
> I had to be caught in the weak eddy
> Of your driveling humanity
> To love you most.

In many songs, the figuration of Loy as all-too-human (weak or perhaps even sentimental) is almost intended, tempting us to read Loy as "defeatist" in the first half of the sequence before her so-called cynical "feminine consciousness" takes over in the second half. What prevents the songs from sinking into excessive pathos is, once again, the satirical tone. Repeatedly we see exhilarating figures of hyperbole (her "smacking" feet, for example) and litotes ("Superhuman apparently") operating interchangeably on the level of tonality that diffuses signs of sentimentality into an uplifting cerebral play with unlikeness and uncertainty. Our poet here is indeed a master of rhetorical figures. Nowhere does any polemical force arise from her poetic wit such that we don't know in the end if Loy has any solution to the oppression of her male lover. Perhaps Ezra Pound already had this in mind when he calls Loy's poetry, comically, "a mind cry" or an exuberant "dance of intelligence."

Difficult as it is to assimilate the sequence's poetic devices into simply an act of resistance to the Futurist's superhuman knowledge, we are nonetheless consistently seduced to link Loy's wit to a larger pattern in the text that emits a clearer theme of half-seeing or half-knowing. If Joannes is often associated with his solar light, *Songs* is suffused with numerous weaker versions of light that encode Loy's impaired vision. Not not-seeing, but half-seeing. In the sequence, we never see any complete darkness that signifies any shutdown of knowledge. Throughout the sequence, instead, we see images of light "flickering" (I), "candle-ends" (VIII), a "green-lit glow-worm" drenched to "raylessness" (XIX) or fireflies "bouncing / Off one another" in "recaptured pulses / Of light." These short-lived versions of light echo, appropriately enough, the obsessive figurations of the "eye," whose ability to see properly is first put into question in the opening song:

> Spawn of Fantasies
> Silting the appraisable
> Pig Cupid his rosy snout
> Rooting erotic garbage
> "Once upon a time"
> Pulls a weed white and star-topped
> Among wild oats sewn in mucous-membrane
>
> I would an eye in a Bengal light
> Eternity in a sky-rocket
> Constellations in an ocean
> Whose rivers run no fresher
> Than a trickle of saliva
>
> These are suspect places
>
> I must live in my lantern
> Trimming subliminal flicker
> Virginal to the bellows
> Of Experience
> Coloured glass

The dominant figure here is indeed the eye. But instead of completely blinded, Loy's Psyche views from her lantern through a "subliminal flicker." Loy's "eye," in the second stanza, substitutes the missing verb in the agrammatical sentence and links itself to the subject "I" from the same sound they share. "I" can see, it is implied, but her seeing is not necessarily endowed by the natural function of the eye. By exchanging an expected verb "see" with the noun "an eye," seeing becomes a mere textual imposition rather than a natural perception. And instead of having a pair of eyes, moreover, Psyche only has one. Loy indeed seems intent on undermining Psyche's visual abilities. For the fact that we are drawn to notice the missing of the other eye is enabled precisely by the two white spaces between "an"; it is almost as if, in another witty gesture, Loy created the spaces as our eye sockets to notice deliberately the singular status of Psyche's eye. Like "Three Moments in Paris," the song relies on our ability to see in order to understand Loy's undermining of natural sensorium.

In subsequent songs, we continue to see more images of the "eye" that suffer the same fate as the hindered lights: the "one eye" in Song VI, "interfered" eyelashes or "steel eyes" in Song XXV, "slit eyes" in Song XXVI, "impossible eyes" in Song XXVII, or "blind eyes" in Song XXX. The entire poetic sequence is frenetically preoccupied with the possibility of seeing, but the battle between "other lights" and God's light (within the erotic chain of metaphorical substitution of "shuttle-cock and battle-door") refuses to reveal the logic of "seeing more" as a triumphalist sign of the sex battle. Even in the last few songs of the sequence, light and seeing are still in their

weakened states, active but impaired. From a psychological point of view, the agrammatical structure of the "eye" appears to introduce a sense of failure in the sequence; but Loy forbids us to remain on this level of pathos because the songs are continuously rejuvenated by their rhetorical or rhythmic wit. "Steel eyes" and "slit eyes" may be signs of blindness, for example, but the sheer delight in hearing the reversal of "t" and "l" immediately distracts us from the sense of unending failure. The agrammatical line, instead of simply blocking all possibilities of sight, could be, alternatively, a trope for a new kind of seeing, a new kind of seeing not dependent on the attendant syntax (the subject-verb agreement) that enables the function of natural perception.

What, then, does Loy's Psyche "see"? For many critics, Loy's hindered vision—along with the distorted typography on the material page that reinforces the sense of visual impairment—ultimately works to reinscribe the "dissolution of her identity" (Peter Quartermain), the "impacted and intellectualized languages of wit" (Richael Blau DuPlessis), or the modernist collage as a "truncated and broken speech" (Maerra Shreiber). But could Loy's interfered eyes be seen as inventing something new beyond the modernist signature of fragmentation? If Loy's Psyche opens her sequence by saying she must retreat to her lantern because "These are suspect places," might we be able to try to see what she sees from within her lantern? Could we find, within her lantern, a different source of energy her superhuman Futurist lover cannot comprehend?

* * *

Like Apuleius' Cupid, Loy's "Pig Cupid" is portrayed as haughty, self-righteous and impenetrable in his own male universe. Like Apuleius' Psyche, Loy also aspires to be connected to his transcendental ideal yet fails in following his aesthetic standard, his "clock-work mechanism / Running down against time / to which I am not paced." But unlike the Latin text, the American poetic sequence does not offer as its closure any transcendental resolution to the quest of Psyche's trial. There is no Jove, as Virginia M. Kouidis points out, in the modernist text who intervenes to provide a happy ending to the speaker's downtrodden journey. If the "Cupid and Psyche" story ends with a heavenly marriage emblematized by the birth of their daughter, Loy's *Songs to Joannes* portrays instead a butterfly-daughter botched by a sex battle: between "Shuttle-cock and battle-door / A little pink-love / And feathers are strewn." What we are presented, then, appears at first glance only to be a "modern unsuccessful and unredeemed Psyche" in stark contrast to her "original" progenitor.[5]

In Apuleius' picaresque novel, the young woman's loss and reunion with her godly husband has been widely interpreted as an allegory of the mortal man's quest for true knowledge through the journey of love in Plato's *Phaedrus*. If the wiser, philosophical lover in the Greek text "teaches" the young beloved in their act of love, it is said that Psyche in the Latin text equally "learns" to regain her connection with truth, embodied by Cupid, through her impossible trials and ordeals assigned by the cruel Venus. This general interpretation, however, often assumes but critically neglects what I see as a profoundly allegorical moment in Apuleius' story, namely

[5] Virginia M. Louidis, *Mina Loy: American Modernist Poet* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 76-78.

Cupid's *invisibility* and Psyche's *curiosity to see*. Upon describing Psyche's fateful act of injuring her husband, the narrator thus comments:

> O rash and bold lamp, the vile ministry of love, how darest thou be so bold as to burn the god of all fire, when surely some lover invented thee, to the intent that he might with more joy pass the nights in pleasure? The god being burned in this sort, and perceiving that promise and faith was broken, he fled away without utterance of any word from the kisses and hands of his most unhappy wife. But Psyche fortunes to catch him as he was rising by the right thigh with both hands, and held him fast as he flew about in the air, hanging to him (poor wretch) through his cloudy journey, until such time that, constrained by weariness, she let go and fell down upon the ground (5: 24).

Losing grip on Cupid, Psyche embarks on a thorny quest alone for her husband through all the nearly-insurmountable tasks and gets reunited with Cupid eventually in a marriage that takes place in heaven. In this love story, endurance and blind faith are what count. If Psyche was punished for her failure to trust her husband's words (by lighting the oil-lamp to see him), she now can both see Cupid and truly deserve his love with her endurance. From her initial vainglorious seeing to her ultimate insight of the deeper meaning of love, Apuleius' love story has encoded the "love plot" in the Western culture that foregrounds this metamorphosis. It is Psyche's continual trust in her husband despite her inability to see him during her trial that constitutes symbolically for Apuleius (and for future readers) the idealism of love.

This idealism, of course, is highly gendered. Psyche is portrayed often as greedy and superficial; she is saved from her despair most of the time not by her own

wit but by being lifted by sympathetic animals and the winged Cupid. To be lifted upwards, moreover, is not only a literal motion of saving Psyche from the edge of the precipice, it is also a figural motion of transforming her as a fallen soul into one of the immortals, literalized by her ascendance to heaven in the end. In its descriptions of falling and rising, Apuleius' love story has been historically read as an allegory of the winged soul in Plato's *Phaedrus*. While Psyche is lifted by Cupid in their holy marriage, the Platonic boy is lifted by his older, wiser lover in their mutual transcendence. For the Greek philosopher, a proper love relation must always occur as an education, an active seeking of knowledge that allows oneself to become proximate to the truth again one has seen as a soul in heaven. In this educational relationship, the older man (like Cupid) is thus always the pedagogue while the young man (like Psyche) is always the pupil. Most extraordinarily, just as Apuleius sets the love story into motion from Psyche's inability to see her husband, Plato also describes the love pedagogy around the starting point of a certain blindness or not-knowing. Yet this *not-knowing* (on the part of both the lover and the beloved) is, importantly, not quite the same as Psyche's *ignorance*. In the following pages, I will argue 1) that the allegorization of the philosophy into a love story reduces the power of incomprehension at the heart of love into a metaphor of ignorance, and that 2) Mina Loy's poetics decisively reopens the potent space of incomprehension as a critique of the male Futurist knowledge.

In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates' impassioned defense of love is a complex relation between the experience of the soul in quest of truth and the experience of the mortal being as the soul incarnated. To understand love as an earthly but divine experience,

Socrates first states, we must understand the soul's journey as the lover's pre-incarnate history, as what the lover has experienced but might have potentially forgotten. This attempt to place love within a larger history of the soul and its quest for truth, moreover, is not simply to justify love as grander than the trivial incidents of jealousy that characterized love in Lysias' speech, but also to define the origin of humanity as such: "A soul which has never seen the truth cannot enter into human form." We *are* human, Socrates makes it explicitly clear, because we have, as souls, "seen" truth but now have forgotten it. The experience of love, which belongs to the mortal man, is thus inhabited by the larger history of the soul's experience, the experience of sight in the face of truth, that the mortal man cannot fully know.

Though man cannot perfectly enter the previous state as soul, it is in the intrinsic character of the soul to follow a god he worships and to journey skyward to the rim of heaven to see the "true being" of things. "True being," Socrates tells Phaedrus, "is the province of everything that counts as true knowledge. [S]ince the mind of the god is nourished by intelligence and pure knowledge [...] it is pleased to be [...] in a position to see true being, and in gazing on the truth it is fed and feels comfortable, until the revolution carries it around to the same place again" (30). True knowledge in heaven is thus an entirely visual experience, but Socrates cautions that not all souls, unlike the gods, are fortunate enough to succeed in their journeys to see truth. For the flight itself is possible only with the wings of the soul that are nourished by anything good, wise and virtuous, and damageable by all that is evil. "The natural property of the wings," Socrates says, "is to carry something heavy aloft, up on high to the abode of the gods." As literal vehicles of flight, the wings thus fly the soul to see

truth at the outer rim of heaven while they, themselves, are nourished simultaneously by what the soul sees. A soul capable of this circular movement with strong full-fledged wings is called "a complete soul."[6] Now, when the mortal man sees a beautiful being on earth, Socrates says, he is "reminded" of the true knowledge he has seen as a pre-incarnate soul. Both experiences are predicated on "the keenest kind of perception"--that is, a seeing that is empirical rather than figurative--but why does Socrates displace the seeing of truth to the seeing of a mortal beautiful being and link, moreover, the latter to the "experience men call love"? It would be because, Socrates claims, in the mortal world where our sense organs are dim, we are no longer capable of seeing wisdom directly:

> As with everything else which is an object of love, wisdom would cause terrible pangs of love in us if it presented some kind of clear image of itself by approaching our organ of sight. It is only beauty which has the property of being especially visible and especially lovable (34).

The beauty of a mortal being, as a "loveable" version of wisdom, thus apparently substitutes truth as the alternative object of desire in the world where we can no longer have straightforward access to truth through perception. In the loss of the perfect oneness of seeing and knowing in heaven, beauty appears to emerge as a replacement or an image (*eidos*) of a true knowledge that can no longer be directly seen. The

[6] The soul for Plato is also characterized notably by its "self-motion" (28). It's the fact that it can only be moved by itself (instead of by anything external or experiential) that the soul can be understood as "origin" and linked ultimately to self-knowledge. For an excellent commentary on the concept of the soul in relation to the self-knowledge in the *Phaedrus*, see Charles L. Grisworld, Jr., *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus.* (State College: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).

cognitive loss of truth, it would seem, is the gain of beauty (and of potential love) in the mortal world.[7]

However, though Socrates says we can fly only we were souls, he uses the figure of the wings again when he describes the actual love experience of man in the mortal world. When a man sees “beauty” here on earth, Socrates remarks:

> His wings begin to grow and he wants to take to the air on his new plumage, but he cannot; like a bird he looks upwards, and because he ignores what is down here, he is accused of behaving like a madman (249d).

We might identify the structure of resemblances between the soul and the lover based on the re-emergence of the wings, but what is peculiar in Socrates' description here, remarkably, is not so much the possibility of flight (and consequently the potential re-connection to truth) as its absolute impossibility: the lover, we are told, begins to *grow wings that cannot fly*. This is so, however, not because the man cannot possess the beauty; it is because, in seeing the beauty and not knowing what it is that enchants him, the lover is "amazed and beside himself [from] a certain unclarity in [his] perceptions." For unlike heaven, "likenessses here on earth [...] lack all lustre, and only a few people come to them and barely see, through dim sense organs, what it is that any likeness is a likeness of" (250b). Although Socrates would call his speech on love a "tribute to memory," the beautiful object is in fact an imperfect reminder of true knowledge: it does not give any access for the lover to know wisdom, directly or indirectly, insofar as the lover only sees likeness but does not understand what the

[7] The beginning of mortality, in this sense, can be marked as the beginning of experience and therefore the loss of self-motion. The loss must not be understood as a permanent loss to the extent that the immortal soul "survives" in the mortal man.

likeness refers to. For Plato, then, love is not a movement from forgetting to remembering. If it is understanding that sets the wings to flight to the "region beyond heaven," it is not-understanding that converts the wisdom-seeker into a lover.

But what concern Plato, in his philosophy of love, are not only the unilateral experience of the lover but also the experience of the boy in his turn. After having redeemed love as a kind of god-given madness, Socrates proceeds to describe the philosophical relation between the lover and the beloved around the common god they follow, thus seemingly leaving the wings of madness behind. The "consummation of [the lovers'] quest," Socrates now claims, is grounded in the transmission of philosophical knowledge: in not only the lover imitating his god, but also, "by persuasion and education," in "lead[ing] the beloved to the conduct and nature of the god" (253b). When wisdom is slowly instilled into the boy, Socrates states, he would no longer be a passive image of heavenly beauty but someone who's capable of loving in return.[8] A proper philosophical teaching must therefore be understood as continuous with the establishing of requited love, or of "an image (*eidolons*) of love" which Socrates would later name "counterlove (*antérōs*)."

In his famous essay on "The Power of Evil and the Power of Love," Leo Bersani would seize Plato's concept of counterlove to launch his argument about "impersonal narcissism." Because what the lover loves is not an absolute Other but an

[8] We therefore see a sequential order of the transmission of knowledge here, from the god to the lover to the beloved. As Evelyn Fox Keller puts it, "In relation to his *eromenos* [the young male beloved], the *erastes* [his lover] is a teacher, but in relation to knowledge, he is a student, looking awlays upward. But reflection, the beloved also learns to look upward. Together they climb 'the ladder of love,' with the *erastes* always in the lead." The "ladder of love" is a reference to Socrates' speech which recounts the teachings of Diotima in the *Symposium*, another great Platonic text on love. See Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 29. For more critical commentaries on the relationship between the *erastes* and the *eromenos*, see Robin ……

image of himself (because the boy already bears an imprint of the knowledge his soul once saw in heaven), he argues, what the boy loves in his turn is not the teacher as he is either but the "lover's image of him." In psychoanalytic terms, Bersani argues that the "the lover recognizes *his* ideal ego in the boy [so that] desiring the boy is a way of infusing the boy with an ideal that is both the boy's and the lover's." The love relationship is "impersonal" to the extent that it is an ideal form of knowledge that both the lover and the boy are desiring. However, while Bersani highlights what he sees as the fluid motion of self-transformation around the same god they lovers pursue, what Socrates describes in the counterlove passage is strikingly again a suffering of madness on the boy's part that seems to merely repeat the lover's first experience. After praising the beauty of knowledge, Socrates turns to the figure of the boy and describes his physical experience in terms that clearly invokes the lover's first madness:

> Just as the wind or an echo rebounds from smooth, hard surfaces and returns whence it came, so the stream of beauty passes back into the beautiful one through his eyes, the natural inlet to the soul, where it reanimates the passages of the feathers, waters them and makes the feathers begin to grow, filling the soul of the loved one with love. So he is in love, but he has no idea what he is in love with. He does not know what has happened to him and he cannot explain it. It is as if he has caught (*apolelaukôs*) a disease of the eyes from someone else and cannot say where it came from; he sees himself in the lover as in the mirror, but is not conscious of the fact. And in the lover's presence, like him he ceases from his pain, and in his absence, like him he is filled with

> yearning such as he inspires, and love's image (*eidolon*), counterlove (*antérōs*), dwells within him; but he calls it, and believes it to be, not love, but friendship. (255c-e).

If the feathers of the boy's wings are "reanimated" in his intellectual conversation with his teacher, Socrates tells Phaedrus, it is because the boy, like the lover, cannot know what he sees standing before him. "To be filled with yearning" is thus not simply a narcissistic encounter with an image of the self but also an epistemological encounter with the limits of self-knowledge; it would be wrong, indeed, to equate love with an impersonal education because in both descriptions (of the lover and of the beloved) the scenes of education are decidedly qualified by the lovers stumbling upon a cognitive and verbal failure of explanation: the madness of love. If the Platonic ideal of love is said to be rooted in an "erotic reciprocity," it would be apt to say that what repeats is actually an epistemological crisis. Yet remarkably, the repetition on the part of the boy also brings a difference that seeks to negate it. For unlike the previous madness the lover suffers, Socrates is describing a direct suffering of his eyes that blinds the boy just as he sees his lover: "It is as if [the boy] has caught a disease of the eye and cannot say where it came from." The boy's suffering is not only a madness of love; it is also a suffering of blindness that doubly negates the negation of knowledge. The boy cannot see the cause of the madness itself and therefore cannot understand how he caught the disease, the origin of a suffering.[9] Counterlove, as I would interpret it, is

[9] Robin Waterfield argues that "it was an ancient Greek folk belief that it was possible to catch ophthalmia just from someone's glance, by a mysterious process similar to that by which a yawn is contagious."

not only a mechanical return of love that simply repeats the lover's experience, but also the event of transmission that is erased in the repetition.

* * *

Apuleius, in re-writing the Platonic myth, turns the visual beauty of the lover into a belated insight as a reward of the perseverance of blind faith. If love occurs in the *Phaedrus* primarily as a madness, Apuleius could be said to miss this madness in the transmission of love and misplace it conveniently within the character of Psyche herself. For as soon as she sees her husband for the first time, he flees away. The story thus turns Psyche's seeing as a symbolic fulfillment of her vainglorious curiosity and her subsequent ordeal as a necessary journey to reach the "higher" truth of love. For Plato, blindness is a necessary starting-point for the journey of a philosophical education; for Apuleius, blindness becomes an ignorance or a superficiality to be corrected by the male lover as her guide.

For Loy, the image of the female lover as superficial and dependent perpetuated in the love plot of "Cupid and Psyche" was clearly as present as ever in her time. Indeed, if we turn to her 1914 "Feminist Manifesto," published only a few months after "Aphorisms on Futurism," we discover that her great onslaught on the current institution of gender was precisely targeted at the unchanging convention of love. Towards the end of the manifesto, she states: "The desire for comfortable protection instead of an intelligent curiosity & courage in meeting & resisting the pressure of life sex or so called love must be reduced to its initial element, honour, grief, sentimentality, pride & consequently jealousy must be detached from it." Loy's doctrine here might appear to be a total negation of love, and indeed most criticisms of

Loy would turn to her other radical beliefs in the manifesto: her racial theory, the eugenic component of her feminism, and rights about maternity. Yet if we turn back to *Songs to Joannes*, we shall find that her attack on conventional discourse of sentimentality does not quite amount to a total denial of the possibility of love. What exasperated Loy the most, in fact, might be closer to what Lawrence saw as the limitations to the "old human conception" of the ego in the modern world. In her proposition to reduce love to its "initial element," in this sense, our Futurist poet might be inventing a new poetics of love in which the self-other encounter could turn away from the "erotic garbage" of the love plot toward a new form of configuration. This new configuration between two beings, I shall contend, may be understood as a modern version of Platonic madness: not as a direct acquisition of a new knowledge, but as a bracing of decomposition as the condition of possibility for a new knowledge.

While critics tend to argue that sequence signifies Loy's mourning of the impossibility of love in the modern world, *Songs to Joannes* is in fact full of expressive (and at times even unlikely propositional) desires on how love could be reformed. In Song XXIX, for example, the poet begins with an evaluation of sexual inequality before turning startlingly to a series of lyric address:

> Evolution fall foul of
> Sexual equality
> Prettily miscalculate
> Similitude
>
> Unnatural selection
> Breed such sons and daughters
> As shall jibber at each other
> Unintepretable cryptonyms
> Under the moon

Give them some way of braying brassily
For caressive calling
Or to homophonous hiccoughs
Transpose the laugh
Let them suppose that tears
Are swowdrops or molasses
Or anything
Than human insufficiencies
Begging dorsal vertebrae

Let meeting be the turning
To the antipodean
And Form a blurr
Anything
Than seduce them
To the one
As simple satisfaction
For the other

Let them clash together
From their incognitoes
In seismic orgasm

For far further
Differentiation
Rather than watch
Own-self distortion
Wince in the alien ego

For Loy, insofar as sexual evolution has made it impossible to achieve sexual equality, any existing communication between the two sexes is only reinforcement of the fiction of love: "uninterpretable cryptonyms / Under the moon." The description of this oppressiveness gives way next to Loy's propositions on what could be done under the oppressive condition of the female sex. "Give them some way of braying brassily," she writes, or "Let meeting be the turning / To the antipodean." Instead of meeting, Loy proposes clashing; instead of proximity, Loy proposes polarity; and instead of knowing each other in mutual complementarity, Loy proposes "incognitioes / In

seismic orgasm." Yet, Loy's collision does not imply simply a non-lyrical or non-pastoral encounter; it means more radically a "far further differentiation." If sexual evolution has created an imbalance of the two sexes, Loy suggests, the clashing of the two sexes is to divide the two, further and further, into an infinity of numbers. It is a venture into the infinite unknown in Laurentian terms. In the face of the "uninterpretable cryptonyms" of romantic love, Loy is not interested in hermeneutic repair; sexual evolution has to turn into a sexual revolution in which a sexual being can no longer remain intact in its impervious humanness or singularity.

To unleash the true power of infinity is thus to venture into the realm of the imperceptible at the heart of differentiation. Loy, indeed, cannot be more ironic when she turns to an unexpected series of paean-like addresses in her proposition about infinity in a modernist collage. To propose, one is already in the realm of the known and the finite. This is to say, I believe, that while Loy proposes that we see the power of infinity as a new, seismic counterargument to romantic love, she also implicitly asks that we treat the propositional structure of the lyric address as itself a collision with the rest of the sequence. Indeed, if we try to hear the sound pattern of this song, we will discover the most awful, jarring sounds "uninterpretable crytonyms" appear just when Loy draws us to the beguiling musicality of the love plot, and the smooth alliterations—"braying brassily," "caressive calling," or even the slightly lengthy "homophonous hiccoughs"—appear precisely when Loy is talking about clashing and colliding. Loy's irony here may be read as a sardonic attack on the male-centered structure of the love plot (a structure the poet clearly argues can no longer not be questioned in the twentieth century); but can't the surprising caress of the clash, or the

smoothness of the seismic shock, be read as Loy's more inventive way of expressing a new, unbound and non-propositional energy that exceeds our recognition? To feel the impact of the energy, one might have to suspend our usual reliance on sense perception as a source for understanding.

In its venture into infinity, *Songs to Joannes* indeed offers an archive of alternative visions whose perceptual abilities are often paradoxically assumed and undermined. In Song VIII, Loy writes:

> I am the jealous store-house of the candle-ends
> That lit your adolescent learning
> - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -
> Behind God's eye
> There might
> Be other lights

And in the following song:

> When we lifted
> Our eye-lids on Love
> A cosmos
> Of coloured voices
> And laughing honey
>
> And spermatozoa
> At the core of Nothing
> In the milk of the Moon

Probing the question of what it might mean to "see," these two songs unveil "other lights" behind God's eye and the eyelids only to expose a series of unrelated and contiguous objects. The frustrating aspect of Loy's poetics is not that we are forbidden to see things—we do see them and, as Shreiber argues, Loy is not particularly interested in dislodging words from their conventional meaning; it is rather that in the plentiful object world of Loy's work, none of those objects revealed by the "other

lights" can be transcendentalized toward a metaphorical or symbolic status. In its insistence on the literal Loy's poetics is not very different from the Futurist doctrine. But unlike Marinetti, Loy tends to juxtapose those literal, semantically unrelated words and insert the juxtapositions within a presumably stable category. While "coloured voices" and "laughing honey," for example, are inserted within the "cosmos," the "cosmos" is inserted within "Nothing," and "Nothing" inserted within the "milk," and the "milk" finally inserted within the "moon." If the solar light of Futurism seeks to underscore the physical energy of matter, Loy's lunar lights seem to illuminate a metonymic decomposition no sense of a literal noun can sufficiently contain.

If we return to the status of the troubled lights in the earlier songs we discussed, the dominant figure of "flickering" suggests that Loy does in fact see *something*. However, what she sees or doesn't is not primarily a question of cognition. For just as seeing itself as a natural act is defamiliarized by the subject-verb non-agreement, the question of "whatness" would syntactically arise from the indeterminacy of the object in the part of speech [i.e. in the subject-verb-object clause] that questions seeing as a natural experience. If to see is always to see *something* in the English language, this *something*, in Loy's work, is consistently presented as an ungraspable enigma at once hospitable and resistant to language, leaving "something," as a word, up to Loy's poetic disposal. In Song XIII:

> Come to me There is something
> I have got to tell you and I can't tell
> Something taking shape
> Something that has a new name
> A new dimension

A new use
A new illusion
It is ambient And it is in your eyes
Something shiny Something only for you
Something that I must not see

Unlike the "eye" line in Song I, nothing is truly agrammatical in this stanza. But in its sprawling multiplication, diffused by the irregular space but linked by the same verb "is," "something" morphs from an abstract idea to be told ["There is something / I have got to tell you"] to a potentially concrete object prohibited from view ["Something that I must not see"]. While Loy says that she must not see "something," it is not clear if the "something" is visual (or can be "ambient" or "shiny") at all. Several critics single out this song as Loy announcing her pregnancy, but what is troubling about this figural interpretation is that Loy is in fact also using the pronoun "something" *as* her literal announcement: "There is something / I have got to tell you." It is almost as if the pronoun is enacting its undetermined state (between the fetus and the announcement) rather than referring to a known object. If Loy states she must not see "something," one may say that "something" is not seeable in the first place and that "seeing" itself (including our own seeing of the poem) is also undermined by the possibility of an ever-spiraling degeneration of a word into mutually-negating meanings. Such is the poet's strategy: the reader is often compelled to see something only to learn its resistance to our seeing.

Yet, in this song as in most others in the sequence, there is one thing absolutely non-intransigent for our seeing: the white space itself. For some critics, the white space signifies the remaining female body parts as resistance to the pompous male voice. However, if we rethink its function in terms of its interlocking relation to

agrammaticality, the irregular space is really anything but an "embodiment" of Loy's subjectivity. It cannot serve as a perlocutionary force (to borrow a linguistic term) in terms of psychological effect, either, if the linguistic part of the sequence is constituted by words whose objecthood cannot be stably put to any perceptual categories. The only trustworthy thing the white space does, on the visual level of the poetic sequence, is to insist upon an empirical seeing threatened by the state of the object described *within* it: if we don't know if "something" can be seen, we can at least see the nothing (i.e. the whiteness inscribed on the page). But what does it mean, then, to see the white space? Later in the sequence, we see more figures of seeing where the object under Loy's poetic gaze continually finds itself on the brink of disappearance, from one sense to another. From seeing to hearing: "When we lifted / Our eye-lids on Love," Song IX begins, "A cosmos / Of coloured voices." And from seeing to smelling: when the universe of love is light-heartedly described in Song XI as "a colorless onion," which "You derobe / sheath by sheath / Remaining / A disheartening odour / About your nervy hands." But it is in Song XXVIII where we find seeing and nothing interfere most powerfully with each other.

The song begins with an upward movement of ascendance highly reminiscent of the soaring wings in the *Phaedrus* or, more vividly, the "ladder of love" in the *Symposium*:

> The steps go up for ever
> And they are white
> And the first step is the last white
> Forever
>
> Coloured conclusions
> Smelt to synthetic

Whiteness
Of my
Emergence
And I am burnt quite white
In the climacteric
Withdrawal of your sun
And wills and words all white
Suffuse
Illimitable monotone

White where there is nothing to see
But a white towel
Wipes the cymophonous sweat
—Mist rise of living—
From your
Etiolate body
And the white dawn
Of your New Day
Shuts down on me

Unthinkable that white over there
— — — Is smoke from your house

In the climacteric withdrawal of Joannes' phallic sun, Loy is "burnt quite white." The sexual imagery is prevailingly clear, but ingeniously interwoven in the sexual climax is a complete white-out that radically suspends all our imagination (including the customary imagination of an orgasm) and returns our attention to the oxymoronic question of *seeing nothing*: "And wills and words all white / Suffuse / Illimitable monotone." If the diffusion of white into a kaleidoscope of colours represents the lantern of Loy's poetics against the futurist "white street," to be "burnt quite white" here would seem to mark a regress of diffusion into an unwanted totality of monotone. In the next stanza, Loy seems to find a way to subvert this oppression (that is, the oppression of a monotonous signification of white *as* knowledge) by diffusing once again the possibilities of white, laying white over white by attaching the color, thought

to be invisible [i.e. "where there is nothing to see"], to a chain of concrete and imaginable nouns like white dawn, white mist, white body, white day, white mist or white sweat. The universe of whiteness, in this stanza, appears to finally transform into an ever-expanding universe of white images.[10]

Yet, quite remarkably, the monotone Loy insists upon is not of an ever-expanding horizon but rather of "illimitability." Among all the white spaces in the sequence, we come across the least irregular one in this line:

White where there is nothing to see

This line "about" absence, like many others, seems to pave way for the presence of white objects in the next stanza. But as a poetic performance, this enigmatic absence immediately interrupts its own statement because the small white space is, in fact, there unreservedly for everyone to see. Unlike the white objects enumerated, the white space can mean here only insofar as its meaning is negated by the adjacent sentence—"where there is nothing to see." If Loy's work demands that we think--what does it mean to see the white space?—it in fact also demands that we ask—what does it mean for the space ____ to be verbalized or put into words as "white" or "nothing"? To raise this second question, we already leave the realm of signification, of having to decide what those white images mean. I am not trying to propose that we fill in the blanks of the poetic sequence with the words "white" or "nothing," but by leaving so many white spaces throughout, Loy seems to be in fact touching upon the production of her own work as an *initiation into language*. To be "burnt quite white" may be a sexual

[10] See John Wilkinson for a deft reading of the same song in "Stumbling, Balking, Tacking: Robert Creeley's *For Love* and Mina Loy's "Love Songs to Joannes," *Salt Companion to Mina Loy*, ed. Rachel Potter (London: Salt Publishing, 2010), 146-165.

metaphor as John Wilkinson suggests; but on the level of the production of the text, it seems to also invoke the trace of a beginning in which the entire sequence—its endless enumeration of words—was an illimitable blank beyond the confines of material pages.

White over white, nothing over nothing--what does Loy's allusion to textual inscription finally have to do with the clashing energy of love or love as decomposition? If we read the "climacteric withdrawal of your sun" not only as the completion of a sexual act but also the aftermath of a violent clash, "to be burnt quite white" would echo, indeed, not simply an ordinary orgasm but a "seismic orgasm." In *Songs to Joannes*, the antipodean clash of love and the metonymic multiplication of words are linked around the notion of initiation. To be initiated is to be inscribed, to be inscribed is to always run the risk of having one's boundlessness be circumscribed by language into sense. To ask us to entertain the notion of an originary complete blank, Loy thus wittily ties her poetic sequence back to the "Feminist Manifesto" in which she proposes love be reduced to its "initial element": to the beginning, that is, before the two sexes were scripted in the tedium of the love plot, to the "wills and words all white" wherein lie the power of differentiation. The power of this burning beginning is not an initiation into any stable form of knowledge, and yet it is at the same time the condition of a new knowledge to come.

We might look at one more song to see how Loy remarkably brings the initiated and the uninitiated together. In Song XXVII, she writes:

> Nucleus Nothing
> Inconceivable concept
> Insentient repose

The hands of races
Drop off from
Immodifiable plastic

The contents
Of our ephemeral conjunction
In aloofness from Much
Flowed to approachment of — — — —
NOTHING
There was a man and a woman
In the way
While the Irresolvable
Rubbed with our daily deaths
Impossible eyes

In her disappointment over the sterility of a sexual act, Loy once again writes of nothing. But failing to give birth, Loy nonetheless conceives something new in her writing. A nucleus may be paraphrased as degenerating into nothing, but in the juxtaposition *between* nucleus and nothing Loy decidedly leaves a white space that allows us to think we might occur between them. What might be surprisingly unlocked in the white space? Nothing in the song leaves us to any imaginable concept, and yet it seems to be "NOTHING" to which everything flows at the end, just as it was also the beginning fertile with possibilities. In its burning, and in its decomposition, *Songs to Joannes* thus melts everything that could be conceivably thought of as forms of knowledge. It is an act of resistance against the convention of the love plot in which the female lover was often thought as being saved by the wiser male lover. But it is also an act of invention in which one is brought to encounter the promise of infinity. As the Socratic myth of love tells us, in love the coat covering the feathers of the soul melts, and one is brought to a state of utter incomprehension despite the resurgence of

memory. Loy's work implicitly asks us, perhaps, to linger a bit longer in this state of melting and discover what lies beyond conceptualization.

Chapter Three

The Shape of Disaster

If the recent, fervent theorizations of the phenomenon of "late modernism" have reached any agreement among the critics, it is that the postwar sensibility around the 1950s was hyper-sensitive to the potential moral vacuum of the artistic experiments from the heyday of modernism. The midcentury indeed seems to mark the culminating point in history in which modernist experimental "isms" have been tested out by the two catastrophic world wars and reappraised for their (remaining) values.[1] Yet while the zeitgeist of this generation suggests a greater consciousness of the literary past, at least one English-speaking author remained dazed in her sense of being in the middle of things. In an essay titled "English Fiction at Mid-Century," Elizabeth Bowen describes what one may call a stunned postwar situation that unfurls any simple conceptualization. Instead of reaching its organic maturity as most instances of "middleness" suggest, she writes, "the twentieth century's development […] has been in some directions so directly forced, in others so notably arrested as to seem hardly to be a development at all."[2] Bowen would initially articulate this midcentury "disarray" in strictly formal and generic terms, but as she goes on to describe a radical loss of collective expressiveness in English fiction, it becomes clear that this inorganic midcentury, and the pathos of disorientation that arose from it, were

[1] The movement from high modernism in the 20s to late modernism in the 50s, for many critics, thus signals what Thomas S. Davis recently calls a "sliding down from the airy world of abstract art into a tool for articulating unauthorized forms of political belonging." Davis, *Extinct Scenes: Late Modernism and Everyday Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).
[2] Bowen, "English Fiction at Mid-Century," *People, Place, Things: Essays by Elizabeth Bowen*, ed. Allen Hepburn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 321.

also direct consequences from the Second World War. "The obliteration of man's surroundings, streets and houses, tables and chairs sent up [for a midcentury author] their psychological worth. Up to now, consciousness had been a sheltered product: its interest *as* consciousness diminished now that, at any moment, the physical shelter could be gone."[3] In Bowen's eyes, the deformity of the blitzed England is nothing less than a disaster of consciousness: it is not any "mature" development, but rather a succession of violent, artificial interruptions, that creates the strange shape of the mid-century.

What does it mean to look back at the first half of the twentieth century and discover that the (historical and artistic) development was, in fact, no development at all? And what kind of historicity, more perplexingly, can emerge from any writing situated *within* this radical loss of consciousness in the postwar period? No postwar English novel is perhaps more adept at addressing these questions than Bowen's own first postwar novel, *The Heat of the Day* (1948). The novel, in brief, tells a suspenseful story occurring in the middle of the war about Stella Rodney, a middle-aged divorcee who is one day approached in her London flat by a mysterious man, Harrison. Informing her that her lover, Robert Kelway, is a Nazi spy, Harrison makes a bargain with Stella which asks for her love in exchange for Robert's safety. To know the truth, Stella must set forth to find out if Robert (now a potential spy) or Harrison (a potential counterspy) is to be trusted, though only to disclose unwittingly along her search for Robert's potentially fictional identities more secrets, more "stories," about her own past. In one of the final chapters, when Robert voluntarily

[3] Ibid., 323.

confesses his espionage work for the enemy, Stella wonders if the seemingly earnest Robert has been the calculating, mysterious Harrison all along, whose first name, in an unexpected final twist of the novel, turns out to be also Robert. The novel's tortuously overwhelming non-disclosure of facts is dramatized in one of its closing lines, when Stella breaks down to say to Harrison: "—I'm not asking for *stories*. What happened? (358)"

Read in light of the British propaganda against "careless talks" amongst civilians in fear of intelligence leaks, and a widespread discourse of paranoia it bred, the dramatic reversal of Robert and Harrison clearly reveals a protracted crisis of knowledge widely felt in London immediately following the war. The continuous rupture of consciousness was perceived as so injurious to the national spirit that, by the end of WWII, the country was trying to systematically correct with the issuing of a manifesto asking the nation to resuscitate "the spirit of Dunkirk and of the Blitz sustained over a period of years."[4] Against the collective attempt to rebuild a national consciousness, then, the singular arrangement of Bowen's text was indeed a rebellious act in its persistence to highlight the pervasiveness of fiction in the creation of consciousness: not only the fiction of the Blitz and Dunkirk but also the fiction of identity. The novel, as is often noticed, has not only Robert and Harrison blurred as substitutable figures, but also has every major character at some point brought to an uncanny level of resemblance to create what the narrator calls "a society of the garrison" in which everyone "began […] all to look a little alike." The power of fiction as an utter displacement of the self is unmistakable. As Stella at one point

[4] The manifesto is entitled: "Let Us Face the Future." See David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain: 1941-51.* (Walker Publishing Company, London, 2008), 21.

says, "it came to be my story, and I stuck to it […] it took my shape and equally I took its" (251). Instead of repairing the postwar loss of consciousness in any simple manner, Bowen's novel, like Stella's life, might be said to enact an all-encompassing fictionality as itself a product of an inorganic, disastrous century.

Yet in the ceaseless propagation of fiction in Bowen's text, I would argue, there is simultaneously a tacit questioning of the remaining possibility of interpretation within the shape of fiction, the internal questioning of the genealogy of fiction and, most profoundly, Bowen's own writing of *The Heat of the Day* as a historical intervention in the realm of fictionality. In underscoring the centrality of fiction in the creation of consciousness, most notably in the disclosure of Robert's fascist leaning in Chapter 15, Bowen's novel also repeatedly draws us to what the narrator calls the "forgotten beginning" of the shape. The "beginning," says the narrator in Chapter 7, "imparted, or was always ready and liable to impart, the nature of an alternative, attempted recovery or enforced second start to whatever followed" (146). This is arguably the most allegorical moment of the novel insofar as it instructs us how to read the text. Yet the status of origin, and of the traces it imparts to the shape of narrative writ large, is for the most part forgotten by most criticisms of the novel.[5] In

[5] No studies of the novel, to my knowledge, have discussed the status of the "forgotten beginning" in the novel. Criticisms have historically focused on the "parallelism" of the text: on the way in which characters uncannily resemble each other and the claustrophobic mood it creates in what is known as a "spy fiction." See, for example, Neil Corcoran, *Elizabeth Bowen: The Enforced Return*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). More recently, critics have turned to the peculiar "middle" status of the novel to recapture the broader postwar sensibility at midcentury. Comparing the early drafts with the final version of the text, for example, Claire Seiler skillfully points out that Bowen's novel, in its frustrating absence of any major plot action, is singularly preoccupied with miming the question of the "middle" tout court: not only the middle of the century or of the war, but also "middle spaces (liminal places such as archways), ambivalent affects (Stella, always of two minds, is a kind of perennially undecided voter), and intrigue (being between two men or two nations)." Seiler, "At Midcentury: Elizabeth Bowen's The Heat of the Day," *Modernism/Modernity* (Vol. 21: 1), 127. What this paper

this paper, I will analyze not only what it means for Bowen to constitute consciousness as a shape, which has its own fascist implications, but also what it means to *return to the origin of the shape as its own potential undoing*. It is only in recuperating the effaced origin of the shape of disaster, and its traces in the novel itself as an interference of its own fictionality, I would suggest, that we may begin to see Bowen's political intervention against what might seem to be a politically quietist text. Bowen's mid-century novel, from this perspective, is not a mere recreation of wartime suspense as is often suggested, but indeed a critical action against a postwar sensibility lost in the century's middleness.

1) "SOMETHING"

At the center of this "spy novel," in effect, is a story that revolves around a romantic tripartite relationship in which Stella, in her dealings with Robert and Harrison, must decide whether personal attachment or collective responsibility is to prevail at the end. The choice is not so simple for Stella because while Harrison repeatedly expresses his conviction of Robert's crime, his credibility is compromised by his personal interest: if Stella returns her romantic favor for him, Harrison suggests, he would give up on his hunting for Robert. In this quandary, Stella must ultimately betray either her lover or her country, but any decision she makes must also be a form of risk-taking because she cannot know assuredly, in the absence of any referent, whether Harrison's words are to be trusted. Indeed, if nothing "ever gets quite

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proposes, then, is a more comprehensive understanding of the fraught relation between the claustrophobic middleness and its effaced "beginning."

started" in this domestic drama as is often suggested,[6] it is because knowledge, bubbling in the form of endless hesitations and calculations, never quite advances within the closed doors and shut windows of secrecy and paranoia into anything more than a discourse of *possibility* or *suggestion*: "With that mood, that touch of *arrière pensée*, went an uncertain speaking set of the lips" (23).

That "uncertain speaking set of the lips," in Bowen's text, describes not merely an atmosphere of perpetual half-disclosure, but more concretely the lips of "something" that keep murmuring to our ears. Although critics often highlight the "dissolving knots" of the text's intricate multi-layered designs, the peculiar status of "something" remains mostly unexamined in critical discussions. Occurring in almost every major episode of the novel often in a glaring manner, the word "something" indeed has an enigmatic function; often it artificially forces the narrative to continue with the promise of "*arrière pensée*" only to forbid any semantic content to truly arise. It appears first in the second paragraph of Chapter 1, when the narrator describes people from the periphery of Regent's Park flocking to the concert music, "by the sensation that they were missing something." as bees are drawn instinctually to flowers (3). Although it is an "open concert" reminiscent of the prewar Edwardian landscape, the diction with which the musical transmission is described forecasts that it is not the desire for Sunday leisure that motivates the war-weary Londoners to attend the concert, but rather *the desire to know* what is being played. The "tarnished bosky theatre" in which the Viennese orchestra plays, we are told, is blocked from the rest of the Park, "from the mound, from the rose gardens, from the walks round the

[6] Sinéad Mooney, "Unstable Compounds: Bowen's Beckettian Affinities," *Modern Fiction Studies* (Vol 53: 2, 2007), 241.

lakes," so that what people could hear is not so much the music in its full exposure as only "hints of it"—"obstructed" and "walled"—when they "escape" from the leaks and lines of the gardens (3). Obstructed sounds here create the desire to listen to unobstructed music, as obstructed information circulated as gossip and rumor will later motivate our quest for Robert's true identity. But arriving at the "muffled hollow" of the theatre, as Bowen's description continues, we learn that it is not quite the musical content that matters to the listeners, but rather the ease proffered by the sheer fact that "something" is happening at the center of the Park: "For many, chiefly, the concert was the solution of where to be: one felt eased by this place where something is happening" (6). As the Londoners arrive at the tarnished theatre, then, it is in fact not the clarity of the music that fulfills their desire but the paradoxical clarity of something. This "something," moreover, is indeed hollow insofar as it is stripped of any (literal or metaphorical) content or the possibility that it may stand for something ineffably significant as a placeholder. When Louie later talks to Harrison in this opening episode, "There is something about you, or isn't something about you. I don't know what" (12), it becomes clear that what exists, alone, is "something": not what it stands for but "something" as it is in its tautological multiplication.

If we look at Bowen's text from a larger perspective, indeed, "something" never gets quite decoded into anything more meaningful and seems to occasionally acquire a life of its own instead. In Chapter 2, when Harrison instigates that Robert is a known Nazi spy for the first time, Stella replies:

> You keep hinting at something, *something*, that should cut out all that. It may, of course, be simply that you see yourself, as you manifestly do, as a quite

exceptional man. But no, no—you mean to convey that there's something more. What, then?—then what? (32 emphasis original).

Although Robert confesses his crime in Chapter 15, Bowen's narrative refuses to settle in any cognitive closure as any spy fiction would normally perform. In the novel's penultimate chapter, instead, Stella's inability to fathom why Robert could sell England to the enemy—the question why he does not have "more of a stake in the country"—is revealed as a much more tortuously circuitous performance of "something" against any possible arrival of meaning. Roderick, Stella's son, sensing that his mother needs to talk, says:

"You see, really I haven't got anything that I *can* say. I am so sorry, Mother; because there must be something."

"No, I don't think there is. In which case, I had no right to tell you. One has no right to tell anybody anything as to which there's nothing to be said: Robert felt that. But you did ask me why he was on the roof."

"Perhaps I should not have asked? It was what I wanted to know."

"No, I'm glad you asked.—Because there of course there is something to be said. There must be. There's *something* to be said"

After a while, Stella repeats her plea for her son to say something:

"I cannot help expecting something from you: I must."

"I couldn't bear to think of you waiting on and on for something, something that in a flash would give what Robert did and what happened enormous meaning like there is in a play of Shakespeare's—but, must you? If

there's something that *is* to be said, won't it say itself? (336-337 emphases original)

Knowing that there is nothing to be said, Stella paradoxically insists that "of course" there is something to be said. Between nothing and something, then, is an enigmatic compulsion of discourse. Saying, in the novel, continues not because there is a suspense to be gradually resolved, but because there's a necessity to continue to create something in order for the ending not to be ended: for the (non-existent) referent to be perpetually deferred in a nonrepresentational space. Although Roderick clearly does not want his mother to wait for nothing in her forlorn hopelessness over two lost lovers, his dramatic irony about an (implausible) Shakespearean "enormous meaning" ends with an empty question that, in pointing back to itself, seems to merely repeat the chiastic posing of Stella's questions in Chapter 2 ("What, then? Then what?).

To be sure, what drives the suspenseful mood of Bowen's spy fiction is a referential lack, yet again and again the novel's extraordinary movement of "something" only effectively turns back upon itself in the strange mode of tautology or chiasmus. Rather than striving to reach an unobstructed referent, that is, the novel's self-referentiality dramatically solidifies a claustrophobic space that is made up wholly of words. We encounter a singular example of the collapse of discourse and space in the description of Stella's flat on Weymouth Street in Chapter Three when Roderick visits his mother. Staring at the lit white lamps and their reflections in dark glass pictures, Roderick finds that while all this does not look like home, "it looked like something—possibly a story" (48). The antithesis of home is not any alienated space one could perceive but rather its radical dematerialization. The claustrophobia in *The*

Heat of the Day, as such, is created by not simply by Bowen's fine-grained, "realist" descriptions of shady objects that saturate the novel's interior settings (of the shut windows, harsh block-out blinds, closed doors, nightlight shadows, empty rooms, and deserted staircase), but also by a far more chilling, and much neglected, fact that all these physical objects, and the alienated space they create, might all be swallowed in an instant by a fictional space of "something" no less hallucinatory than a story.

2) CARELESS TALK

Why is Bowen so repeatedly drawn to the frenetic compulsion of "something"? What are the political implications, indeed, of this type of "uncertain speaking" discourse that insistently refers to nothing but itself? If we take a step back for a moment, we find that the tortuous abstraction of the discourse of the novel in fact reveals not a merely "aesthetic" predilection, but rather Bowen's keen awareness of the cultural moment of her time. In 1940, the Ministry of Information launched a propaganda campaign aimed to instill in the public mind that gossiping on the level of everyday life could inadvertently leak national secrets to the enemy. Entitled "Careless Talk Costs Lives," the campaign would deploy materials ranging from biblical precepts against gossiping to thriller short films (most famously *All Hands*, *Dangerous Moments*, *Now You're Talking*, all directed by John Paddy Carstairs). Yet what made the most lasting impression in the public, and proved to be the most effective device, were a series of posters created by the artist Fougasse, penname for Cyril Bird. In these posters, ordinary unsuspecting people are often portrayed as engaging in casual conversations in public establishments while faces of Hitler lurk

behind in the background, apparently eavesdropping and stealing information (See Fig. 1).

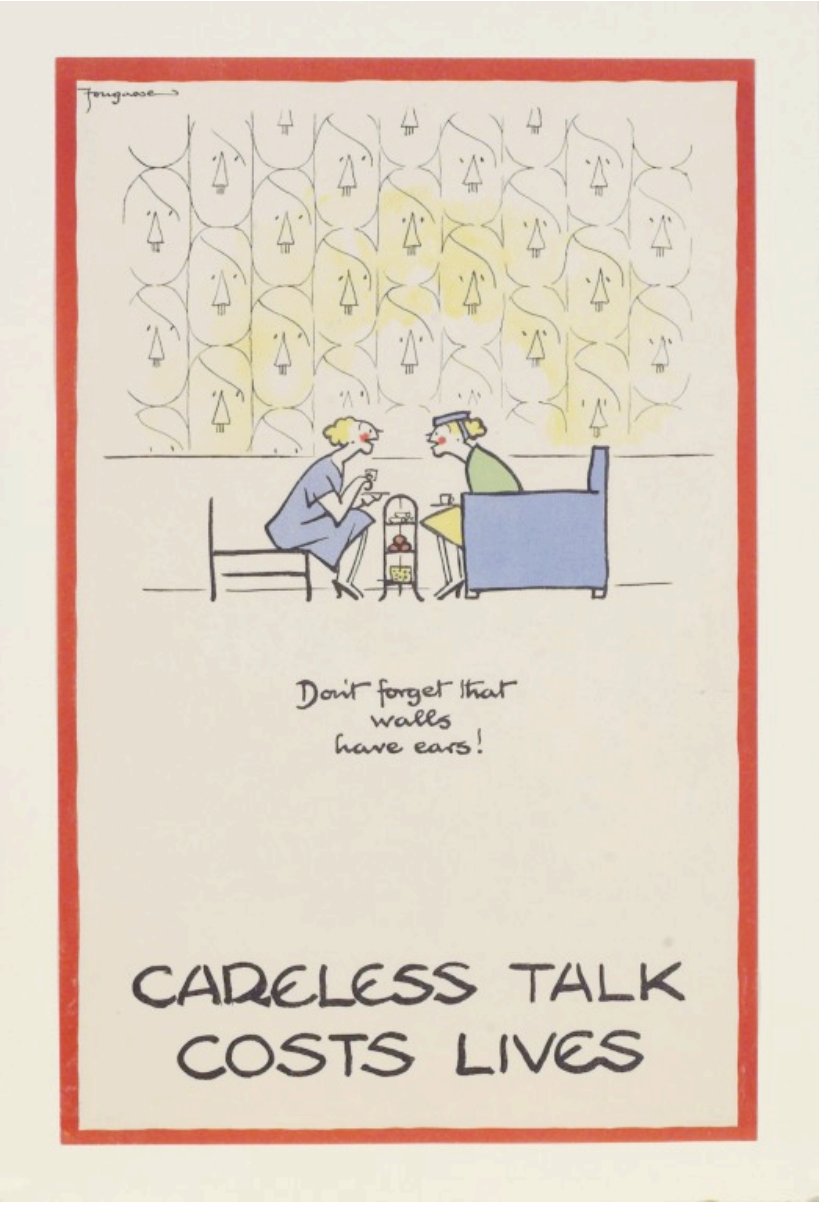

Fig 1. “Careless Talk Costs Lives,” Fougasse

Bowen's fascination with the "Careless Talk" campaign is clearly manifested in *The Heat of the Day*. Like Bowen herself, who was notably asked by the British government to report on the mood in the neutral state Ireland, Stella is too employed in a fictional secret organization presumably linked to the Foreign Office, engaging in "secret, exacting, not unimportant work, to which the European position since 1940 gave ever-increasing point" (24-25). When Stella is informed that her love interest might be a Nazi spy, Robert's love is inevitably cast with the suspicion, in her mind, that he may be merely acting all along as a lover while actually stealing information from her. "I should say," as Harrison tells her, "that if I chap *were* able to act in love, he'd be enough of an actor to get away with anything" (39).

But careless talk also occurs in the novel in another configuration. Stella understands that if Robert turns out to be really a spy, it would only turn her into a "spy twice-over" under the scrutinizing eyes of Harrison. Always attending furtively outside Stella's flat on Weymouth Street, indeed, it is Harrison who assumes the eavesdropping ear for the most part. In Chapter 5, Bowen presents one of the most tantalizing conversations between Stella and Robert in which our heroine, visited by Harrison just two chapters before, discreetly asks if her lover might be hiding any secret from her. Adjusting his necktie in her bedroom, Robert replies:

> "Perhaps he [Harrison] listens for careless talk." Robert yanked himself out of the deep armchair to stand scrutinising some part of his reflection in the mirror over the fireplace. "Don't you agree," he asked, "it's about time I scrapped this tie."
>
> She answered: "Why—who's been talking carelessly?"

"Everyone, I imagine. You know how *I* talk."

"Only know how you talk to me. I don't count."

"Then why don't you ask Harrison, since we hear he knows me.—Darling, it isn't that I'm not interested in your friends, but I do wish you'd give your mind to this tie question." He untied the tie, pulled it off and, having sat down again, examined it closely under a lamp. "A bit off," he said, "honestly, don't you think?"

He passed it to her. She said: "Yes, perhaps a bit off."

…..

"The thing is," she cried, kneeling by him with the tie in her hands, "that really I cannot judge any tie you wear. Just as I cannot judge . . . How should I feel, for instance, if somebody tried to tell me something preposterous about you."

"Or you wouldn't simply tell them to go to hell—no?"

"How should I even know if it *were* preposterous?"

"Then you simply cannot tell me about this tie?" (111)

Suppose Harrison, in this scene, is not simply brought up as a subject but overhearing the conversation in the background. Attempting to frame Harrison into a Nazi spy, Robert poses as an innocuous ordinary person and in effect reverses his position from the background as a hearing wall to the foreground as a speaking person. Yet the "secret information" that the romantic couple may be unsuspectingly trafficking to each other is not exactly any national secret but, intriguingly, Robert's tie. It is obvious here that Bowen wants us to read the tie as a metaphor for Robert's "tie" with

the enemy. Unable to "judge" whether the tie should be scrapped once it falls to her hands, Stella symbolically implies that she cannot "judge" Robert's complicity with the enemy, either. But Stella's failure of judgment is not exclusively a moral failure. If I cannot judge your tie with the enemy, Stella asserts, it is not because I cannot judge your action but because I cannot judge whether Harrison's words about "something preposterous" can be trusted. Stella cannot judge the tie, in other words, precisely because she cannot determine if it is meant to be read literally (as a random tie) or metaphorically (as Robert's tie with the enemy).[7] Instead of centering a scene of "careless talking" around a hidden secret, Bowen turns the hidden secret into an indeterminably significative object from which an endless discourse of "something" emerges as its interpretation.

For Bowen, the propaganda campaign clearly breeds a particular mode of discourse that, as Céline Magot points out, "thrives on vague words or expressions having no referent in the conversation." The perpetual inability to make an informed decision, as it is dramatized in Stella's situation, may also be said to allude to Bowen's larger description of the neutral state of Ireland "who desired to counter both Nazi and British political rhetoric."[8] Yet in Bowen's fascination with Robert's tie, I would suggest, we encounter in fact not quite a predicament of so-called "undecidability" alone, but instead a crucial shift from a political discourse of leaking to a literary discourse of reading, from eavesdropping to interpreting, which allows Bowen to

[7] I am therefore arguing against the prevailing thesis that *The Heat of the Day* is predominantly a symbolist text. While it is true that symbols (e.g. the tie, the gloves, the boat, etc.) permeate the novel, I am arguing that there are also other linguistic features in the text that defeat our capacity to read those objects as symbols and that their significative uncertainty, in addition, might surprisingly reveal a different sort of motion (such as the motion of intratextual circulation) Bowen sheds light upon.
[8] Megan Faragher, "The Form of Modernist Propaganda in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day*," *Textual Practice* (Vol. 27: 1, 2013), 49-68.

effectively place the question of political action at the heart of the possibility of interpretation. In the subplot of the novel, which concerns Roderick's inheritance of Mount Morris, Bowen poses a similar question about action and interpretation. With his "idealisation of pattern," Stella's son is about to inherit the Irish estate; but as he is reading the will, he encounters a thorny question of interpretation. Unsure if the lawyers might have taken out two commas in one of the most crucial lines of the will—"In the hope that he may care [,] in his own way [,] to carry on the old tradition" (95)—Roderick is tasked with the self-imposed burden to make an interpretative decision on his ancestral relation to "tradition." Between his idealization of pattern and the predicament of reading, between the "forms [of Mount Morris] that loomed and dwelled within him" (351) and his inability to fully determine his relation to them, Bowen here fundamentally repeats the same question of what it means to act—to con*form* oneself to a recognizable (political or familial) situation—in the face of endless possibilities. If the propaganda campaign asks nothing but the British civilians to recognize the potential omnipresence of the enemy, Bowen instead asks how it is possible to recognize any form, any pattern or scenario, when it might be, at any moment, torn asunder by the possibility of absolute nonmeaningfulness. That action may arise from an interpretation that has strayed far away from authorial (non)intention may indeed be the central concern of the novel.

3) THE SHAPE OF FASCISM

As a fiction writer, Bowen is fully conscious of the perverse operation of discourse. In the same year *The Heat of the Day* was published, an exchange of letters

between V.S. Pritchett, Elizabeth Bowen and Graham Greene was published on the question, "Why Do I Write?" In response to the widespread postwar pressure on writers to be of "great public service,"—to be "a reformer, a public benefactor" at a time of social repair— Pritchett first lays down what appears to be an age-old aesthetic doctrine: that social service, though worthy of its own, should not become subordinate to the artistic conscience of finding the "best words, the best images, the best design for what was in [the] imagination." "If any social passion entered into the story," Pritchett adds, it should only "be of a diffused and personal kind." The rest of the exchange between these three writers would indeed center on the question of the potential danger on the writer's part to succumb to state sponsorship and the moral demands of society. Characteristically vocal about the importance of maintaining artistic independence, Greene clamorously elevates "disloyalty"—not only to the Cold War ideology from the bourgeois states but also to "some invented ideology of the [writers'] own—at once a "privilege" and a "duty" writers owe to society. Yet when it was Bowen's turn to chime into the conversation, what appeared to be a garrulous, noble topic suddenly fell into an odd sort of silence:

> What do I think? About the artist, or imaginative writer, and his or her relation to society. About his, her (your, my) response to the challenge of the times. Yes, it is probably something we should ask each other. When I am asked by an outside person, a non-writer, I do not seem to know what the question means. Or rather, I do see that it must mean something, but almost any answer I can put up or give remains almost totally meaningless to me: bluff or patter.

> The question—put by an outside person—makes a crook of me, and I resent that. I feel inclined to say: 'Ask no questions and you'll be told no lies.'

Bowen here appears to be only a tongue-in-cheek reply to the self-ingratiating question on writers' artistic conscience. But in its stunning echoing of Stella's sentiment, the line, "it must mean something," gives a powerful performance of Bowen's own speaking as a structural necessity in this circumstance. Because I do not understand your question which demands my response, Bowen suggests, anything I say is potentially meaningless to me even though it has the appearance of truth: hence my damaged status as a "crook." Yet Bowen, here, does not simply acknowledge the pervasive fictiveness in discourse but in fact also performs it. For in offering her apparently earnest response to the question, Bowen turns to her own fiction, *The Heat of the Day*. "Ask no questions and you'll be told no lies," strikingly, is a line spoken by a minor character, Ernestine Kelway, Robert's sister, when she pleads her brother to respect Stella's silence upon her return from Mount Morris where she investigated Robert's alleged crime. "May nobody think in peace?" Ernestine asks Robert. "They say it is most restful of all to make the mind a complete blank, but as *I* know, it is easier said than done. In any case, ask no questions and you'll be told no lies" (206). The injunction to close all the bluff and patter into silence, Bowen earnestly shows us, is in fact a betrayal of silence insofar as it can only be *in quotation*. Reverted from discourse, silence reverts to the discourse of Ernestine.

In the context of "Careless Talk," for Bowen, verbal danger indeed lies not only in the inadvertent disclosure of secrets to the enemy; it lies also in what could perhaps be understood as the impersonal nature, or condition, of any discourse as it is

incorporated within the process of narrativization. In her numerous essays on the topic, including her pedagogical essays for younger writers, there is one word that is repeatedly given the most privileged status: "shape." Amongst all other narrative categories such as time, character and style, Bowen argues that:

> Shape is possibly *the* most important thing. Obsessed by shape in art, you and I may forget the importance of shape in life. It could be that your and my non-writing lives are simply margins around the non-stop story, that we focused internally on writing. But I shouldn't wonder if it were the shape, essentially, that the reader, the mass, the public goes to the story for. The idea of the possibility of shape is not only magnetic, it's salutary. Shapelessness, lack of meaning, and being without direction is most people's nightmare, once they begin to think—and more and more people are beginning to think, clearly.

Bowen's doctrine about shape is arguably a translation of the principal tent of literary formalism: that shape is indispensable for *any story* to the extent that it confers the possibility of perception and therefore the possibility of meaning.[9] In rendering "life" suddenly intelligible, moreover, shape allows for the possibility of the fusion of our lived experience (our "non-writing life") and the story we read and, in the process, freezes the potential of the utter meaninglessness of death: "To the individual, the possibility … that his death should be insignificant, is unbearable." Shape guarantees

[9] One of the best formulations of the centrality of form in any story, in my view, is found in Lee Edelman's queer critique of education. "However attenuated, qualified, ironized, interrupted, or deconstructed it may be," he writes, "a story implied a direction; it signals, as story, a movement that leads toward some payoff or profit, some comprehension or closure, however open-ended. This leading toward necessarily entails a correlative "leading from," the "leading from" or "out of" at the root of "education." Edelman and Lauren Berlant, *Sex, or the Unbearable*. (Duke: Duke University Press, 2014), 3.

the aesthetic function of art, therefore, by collapsing the distinction between a fictional shape and a human shape. In the absence of shape, to think is to die.

Yet all for her innocuous evaluation of the privileged status of shape in literature, Bowen's essay acquires a sinister tone when she calls the idea of the possibility of shape "magnetic" and "salutary." In the context of the immediately postwar period in 1948, it is impossible to not read the language of fascism into these celebratory words as a deadly glorification of shape, or as what Hannah Arendt calls a "self-fulfilling logic" of totalitarianism. As literary theorists such as Phillippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Paul de Man later bring to light in regard to the question of aesthetics, literary formalization would indeed become the very mechanism by which ideological totality is secured through its flattening symmetricalization.[10] In Bowen's own fiction, too, we find a crucial depiction of the lethal dimension of shape when the narrative turns to Robert's confession in Chapter 15. Pressed by Stella to explain how he could do what he did, selling out his country to the enemy, Robert answers with his contempt for this "racket" he calls freedom:

> Freedom. Freedom to be what?—the muddled, mediocre, damned. Good enough to die for, freedom, for the good reason that it's the very thing which has made it impossible to live, so there's no alternative. Look at your free people—mice let loose in the middle of the Sahara. It's insupportable—what is it but a vacuum? […] As far as what's nothing can be anything, freedom's

[10] De Man, "Aesthetic Formalization in Kleist," *Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983). See also Cynthia Chase, "Trappings of an Education," for a more comprehensive analysis of de Man's critique of aesthetics in his writing career, *Responses: On Paul de Man's Wartime Journalism*, ed. Werner Hamacher et al. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 44-79.

> inorganic […] We must have something to envisage, and we must act, and there must be law. We must have law—if necessary let it break us: *to have been broken is to have been something* (302 emphasis mine).

Robert's justification of his treason, in most studies of the novel, is often understood as reflecting Bowen's larger critique of the middle-class sensibility. "While Nazis make and front for the Enemy," Bowen remarks elsewhere at one point, "we have bred our own, and deadlier, enemies. These are waiting, these may try to come back: laissez faire, subservience, smugness, habit-of-mind." As Allen Hepburn argues, "Robert Kelway, as the product of such an environment, perpetrates treachery out of self-interest and out of belief in his class-entitled superiority."[11] Yet in his impassioned defense of his action, Robert clearly also echoes Bowen's literary doctrine on shape to its most extreme effect. If to think without a shape is unbearable, Robert's notion of freedom as a "vacuum" precisely discloses nothing but the unbearability of shapelessness. In Robert's eyes, the middle-class is nihilistic not because of the stereotypical attitudes associated with the bourgeoisie but because, suspended in the middle, it destroys the possibility of representation. In Stella's first visit to the Kelway family in Holme Dene, for example, when Stella observes the furniture and general interior arrangement of the house, it is tellingly not the middle-class itself, but the impossibility to give it a shape, that troubles her: "You could not *account for* this family headed by Mrs. Kelway by simply saying that it was middle-class, because that

[11] Hepburn, "Trials and Errors: *The Heat of the Day* and Postwar Culpability," *Intermodernism: Literary Culture in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain*, ed. Kristin Bluemel (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 137.

left you asking, middle of what? She saw the Kelways suspended in the middle of nothing" (125 emphasis mine).

The alternative Robert proposes in his confession is "law." This is not law in the criminal sense in that one may break it, for Stella would indeed reply: "But law—that's just what you break." Instead, this is law in the patently *formal* sense in that it may "break" people into *something*. Robert repeatedly tells Stella that it is not the plural "orders" but the singular "order" that he is following (308). Further, when Stella complains that "it's not just that they're the enemy, but that they're horrible—specious, unthinkable, grotesque," Robert again asserts that she is mistaken by judging them in plural form: "Oh, *they*—evidently! But you judge it by them" (308). What the shape of the "law" accomplishes, by contrast, is that it subsumes the heterogeneous qualities of each individual into the singular "shape" of the homogeneous "something." Yet, paradoxically, the assimilation of the real human shape into the abstract "something" is not the destruction of the human faculty but rather the *beginning of sight*.[12] It is the capacity of literal seeing—not some abstract "grandeur-mad" "vision"—Robert repeatedly tells Stella that the "law" bestows upon him (301). To be broken into something, in Robert's view, is thus to allow for the possibility of perception and cognition to arise at the expense of the referential singularity of each individual. If Robert becomes sympathetic with Nazism, it is because in it he finds the shape of the law amidst the nihilism of liberal democracy's shapelessness.

[12] Robert would go on to trace the beginning of his notion of "beginning." It starts from the Dunkirk evacuation, from the political lies told about the heroic action in it. Knowing about the lies, he says, "bred my father out of me, gave me a new heredity" (307). For a brilliant in-depth discussion on Robert's notion of "beginning" in relation to the novel's larger question of heredity, see Corcoran, *Elizabeth Bowen*. Specifically, he argues that Robert's view represents "a defeatism endemic to post-1918 English culture, and incarnate in his father; so that his political realignment is more than a politics: it is the refusal of a genetic heritage" (176).

4) CALCULATING EYES

In its dramatic unfolding, Robert's ideological confession thus appears to bring the text to the full disclosure of its critique of aestheticization. And yet, almost against all readerly anticipations, Bowen's text quickly extinguishes its flaring climax in its matter-of-fact return to the quiet humdrum of private life, to the romantic negotiations of Stella and Robert, by the end of the same chapter. *The Heat of the Day* is excruciatingly frustrating in this sense. Insofar as the text persistently returns to the romantic life of Stella, we seem to be eternally deprived of any understanding of how the text may strive for a political engagement significant enough to be worthy as the text's dénouement. Despite the confession of Robert's political leanings, and despite Stella's painstaking attempt to understand her lover's decision, the chapter ultimately frustrates us in its hazy, almost anti-climactic resolutions. Having discovered the truth of Harrison's allegation, we are still barred from any clear moral judgment on Stella's part. "She tried to say 'Robert!,'" we are told, "but had no voice. She looked at the door: it was incredible that anyone loved so much should be still behind it" (312). Moreover, although Robert dies from falling off the roof of Stella's apartment in his attempt to escape, the narrator refuses to tell us whether his death is ultimately an accident or a murder, thereby preventing us from knowing whether Robert was given any proper punishment he deserves. This narrative non-disclosure is uncannily repeated by Stella's act in the final chapter. When Stella is asked to report to the inquest what she saw the night Robert died, she deliberately conceals the truth and instead frames a vague story so that, as the narrator claims, England's face could be saved: "For, with regard to Robert the silence behind the scenes never broke: what was

most to be noted about his death was its expediency—the country was spared a demoralizing story" (340). If the novel persists in its propagation of stories despite Robert's climactic disclosure, then, it seems only because the political confession (as only a synecdoche) is assimilated within the larger framework of the novel Bowen undertakes to highlight, and critique, as an all-encompassing, constrictive shape.

Indeed, instead of framing Robert alone as the condemned figure, Chapter 15 ultimately turns to a dramatic reversal between Robert and Harrison. Hiding his political beliefs all these years, Stella discovers, Robert turns out to be the one with a secret agenda instead of Harrison. At this moment of realization, Bowen's tone also turns patently gothic when Stella begins to detect the facial similarities between the two men. Echoing the repeated focus on Harrison's double eyes in the early chapters, now the free indirect discourse turns to Stella's inspection of Robert's "calculating eyes" (310): not only of the way he "measures things" but also, just like Harrison, of the way he turns everything into substitutable figures under the overarching framework of something. "I calculate—that's my life," Harrison says earlier. "It's not what I've done I've liked—it's all one to me what I do—it's doing it; that's what has been the thing" (152).[13] On hitting the high point of the narrative, then, Bowen subordinates the political and moral crime to the novel's insistence on the predominance of fiction and its logic of substitution,[14] to the seeming trivialities of

[13] One might also interpret Harrison's favorite phrase--"putting two and two together"—as an allegorical sign of the larger figural structure of the novel.

[14] This, moreover, might echo what many critics notice the circular structure implied in Robert's allegorical statement. "Don't quarrel now, at the end, or it will undo everything from the beginning. You'll have to re-read me backwards, figure me out—you will have years to do that in, if you want to" (304). For a deft analysis of "re-reading," see Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, *Elizabeth Bowen and the Dissolution of the Novel* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), esp. the chapter called "Sheer Kink."

romantic love instead of the theatrics of political decision. If Bowen's novel represents what Maud Ellmann calls "the incursion of history into private life," it seems equally correct to call it, in a much more bizarre fashion, *the incursion of private life into history*.

5) MISCARRIED LOVE

What does personal life ultimately bring to the impersonal realm of history? The portrayal of personal attachment, in Bowen's text, has been understood by many as an acknowledgement that human beings are "capable of anything" under exigent circumstances.[15] But this "moral lesson" we might glean from Bowen, if we look at the more complicated arrangement of the novel, is far from conclusive on the pseudo-mimetic relationship between private history and public history. To be sure, leaking of secrets create a specular relation between interpersonal drama and international relation. However, the mirror Bowen creates is far from smooth and clear; in fact, like the "tarnished theatre" we found in Chapter 1, the mirror in Wisteria Lodge, a symbolic meeting place that mediates the political relation between England and Ireland, is also "tarnished," like a "relic of some vanished ballroom" (81). If what Robert's confession ultimately reveals is a logic of mirroring substitution (instead of a revelatory climax) that secures a narrative circularity, it is perhaps because Bowen wants us to question this mirror: to understand how its mimeticism functions and how its mimeticism, in its propagation, might actually work to conceal its apertures.[16]

[15] Corcoran, 182.
[16] In her essay, "Mirrors are Magic," Bowen writes about the enchanting qualities of the mirror in modern life. They are "far from going: they spread, they breed and increase" in our daily lives, so much

The relation between Stella's life and her political world is most extraordinarily brought up during Harrison's second interview with Stella in Chapter 7. In this scene, which contains one of the most difficult passages of the novel, Stella finds herself, suddenly and involuntarily, conjuring a series of love figures upon staring at her enclosed living space:

> She looked from the armchair proper to Robert, to the armchair commandeered by Harrison, but found herself thinking of neither of these—or rather, Victor, her vanished husband. Why of Victor now? One could only suppose that the apparently forgotten beginning of any story was unforgettable; perpetually one was subject to the sense of there having had to be a beginning *somewhere.* Like the lost first sheet of a letter or missing first pages of a book, the beginning kept on suggesting what must have been its nature. One never was out of reach of the power of what had been written first. Call it what you liked, call it a miscarried love, it imparted, or was always ready and liable to impart, the nature of an alternative, attempted recovery or enforced second start to whatever followed. The beginning, in which was conceived the end, could not but continue to shape the middle part of the story, so that none of the realisations along that course were what had been expected, quite whole, quite final (146).

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so that any breakage of the mirror would result in near-neurosis. The imperative, then, is to conceal the breakage: "Although one might brave out the fear [of the breakage], or laugh it off, it stays potent in others, for which, reason, a mishap with a mirror must be concealed, as instinctively, hurriedly, as one conceals the fragments," *People, Places, Things: Essays by Elizabeth Bowen* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 202.

In looking at her confined living space, Stella seems to produce an equally confined genealogy of history in the form of a narrative. Yet significantly, what is brought up, for the first time, is also the forgotten beginning of the narrative and its thwarted afterlife. In the context of Stella's sudden meditations on her own love history, this forgotten beginning clearly signifies her first love for her husband, Victor, who was killed from the war. Upon seeing Harrison, who is blackmailing her love in exchange for Robert's safety, Stella thus inscribes not only Robert, but also her forgotten husband Victor, into a genealogical chain of love figures. Yet the creation of this chain of memory invokes a slightly different pathos when Bowen's voice-over suddenly turns to Stella's meditation on history writ large. In creating a mirror of love figures, this personal chain also mirrors, beyond its internal spatialization, a chain of political events in the twentieth century much broader than Stella's personal history: "In these last twenty of its and her own years," the narrator says, "she had to watch in it what she felt in her—a clear-sightedly helpless progress towards disaster. The fateful course of her fatalistic century seemed more and more her own" (147). Just as Stella's romantic history is ill-fated in her inevitable sacrifice to Harrison, the political history of the twentieth century seems to be as well successively jumping into its fateful catastrophe.

The passage, in so doing, thus creates a metaphorical relation between personal history and public history. However, in the passage's insistence on the interference of the forgotten beginning, and not just on status of forgetting itself, Bowen also conveys, importantly, the possibility of some kind of (literary) action instead of a mimesis: within any story (both personal story *and* political story), we are told here, is

the possibility of a radical intrusion, an "imparting" that threatens to break apart the continuum of a stable narrative or meaning: that promises, but never realizes, "an attempted recovery or enforced second start." Though Stella's life and the century's life might be mired in the catastrophe of a muddled middle, what Bowen's own novel does, as a story, might indeed be said to be an attempt to locate the positing of a beginning that has been forgotten or erased. The passage, in this sense, is highly allegorical insofar as it instructs us how we should read the novel itself. If the first half of the twentieth century seems to be a helpless progress towards a fateful catastrophe, Bowen's novel does not seek to merely *represent* the political story through Stella's interpersonal drama, but in fact also *act upon* it—the perceived meaning of WWII as an irreversible "fate" of the century— through the novel's own textual comportments.

Despite Bowen's frustrating reluctance to give the story a clear-cut moral ending, we find the first subversion within the haunting intrusion of the forgotten beginning of Stella's own life. A few chapters before Robert's confession, Stella gives her own confession on the effaced origin of her story with Victor. While she has been telling people that she divorced Victor before his unexpected death, Stella reveals unexpectedly to Harrison, in Chapter 12, that it was in fact Victor who walked out on her. For "who, at the age I was, would not rather sound a monster than look a fool?" (249) At stake in this sudden revelation is not only a question of saving face as she claims; it is also a question of the missing link between an origin and the story one assumes. Stella clings to a story of her monstrosity, we are told, but its origin can no longer be traced. "Where, at the start, the story came from I don't know." "Whoever's

the story *had* been, I let it be mine. I let it ride, and more—it came to be my story, and I stuck to it. Or rather, first I stuck to it, then it went on sticking to me: it took my shape and equally I took its" (251). The forgotten beginning turns out to be not a known fact, but rather "a shape" borne out of unknown, perhaps accidental, causes. Uncannily, this "shape" is revealed not only on the level of Stella's confession but also on the level of the novel's free indirect discourse. Back in Chapter 7, as the novel brings out Victor for the first time, Bowen's voice-over takes on this fictional shape and tells us, ostensibly through Stella's consciousness, that Victor has been "corrupted before death by undoings and denials of all love" (147). The power of the shape lies not only in the elimination of truth, indeed, but more radically in the elimination of the origin (including the narrative origin of Victor) from which it springs.

However, if the accidental force of this story is erased in the birth of an all-consuming shape, we find nonetheless remnants of another beginning in the story of Stella and Robert. In a flashback to 1940 when London was bombed during the Blitz, Bowen describes how the couple encounters each other when everything boils down to the question of bare survival. Stella and Robert fall in love and create a "hermetic world" in which love swallows both within it and sustains itself by its "inner force" (102). The romancing force is unmistakable. Each detonation of a bomb on the street marks the "demotion of an entire moment" and allows the couple's passion to be instantly rekindled anew (104). But the time-obliterating force of their love is also the paradox of love. For what their passion brings about, in the exigent circumstances of the war, is also an underlying tension between creating a "continuous narrative of love" (108) and "stay[ing] forever on the eve of being in love" (105), between

continuum as the condition of narrative and chance as the condition of love. Indeed, despite the novel's fascination with the idea of the completeness of love—"perfect love," "true love," "love's unamenable truth," "consummation of love," "love's sweetest part," or "agonizingly modern love"—their romance is consistently depastoralized in the reminders that Stella and Robert meet only by "accident" (210):

> [T]here is no so such thing as being alone together. Daylight moves around the walls; night rings the changes of its intensity; everything is on its way to somewhere else—there is the presence of movement, that third presence, however still, however unheeding in their trance two may try to stay. Unceasingly something is at its work (218).

If their romantic love has been enabled by the wartime exigencies, Bowen suggests, there is also a "third presence" that unceasingly meddles with the hermetic formation of the shape of their narrative. This third presence is not the embodied presence of the third wheel, Harrison, insofar as he remains patently substitutable with Robert in the logic of the novel[17]; the "third presence," instead, is the remainder of the accident of their love, the forgotten origin that must impart within a congealed story what remains unfulfilled, unrealized, unarticulated. If the romantic affair between Robert and Stella is perverted by a hermetic self-enclosure at the cost of moral responsibility, that is, Bowen installs within it the interfering presence of its forgotten origin: "the power of what had been written first," in its spectral return, as a potential intrusion to the perversity of the shape. In Bowen's text, personal story does not tell us how love might simply parallel with the war in its drama of trust and betrayal; it discloses,

[17] Most critics I have read would indeed interpret the "third presence" as Harrison, who inserts forces of history into the private life of Stella and Robert. See, for example, Ellmann, *Elizabeth Bowen*.

instead, what must remain only an unarticulated possibility of "alternative" at the heart of the origin, an "enforced second start," when the world is seemingly mired in an irreversible progress toward disasters. Bowen turns to a romantic drama, it might be said indeed, in order to disrupt the totality that the psychological narrative of a fatalistic mid-century, of a stuck middleness, necessarily congeals in its reified pervasiveness.

6) "SHE WAS JUST LAUGHING"

We might fully grasp the traces of beginning, however, only if we finally return to examine the *beginning of the novel itself* and its impact on the overall structure of the text. Why does the novel open not with Harrison's nighttime visit to Stella's flat, nor with Roderick's inheritance of Mount Morris, but with a chance encounter of Harrison and a young woman named Louie in a park where orchestra music is played? Among the details of the thwarted transmissions of sound between the theatre and the surrounding lawns we have seen, Chapter 1 pays intriguing attention to the possibility of speech from Louie's uncouth mouth:

> It was big; it was caked round the edges, the edges only, with what was left of lipstick, inside which clumsy falsified outline the lips turned outwards, exposed themselves—full, intimate, woundably thin-skinned, tenderly brown-ink as the underside of a new mushroom […] Halted and voluble, this could but be a mouth that blurted rather than spoke, a mouth incontinent and at the same time artless (8).

Critics have traditionally interpreted Louie as either a figure of testament to the orphaned futurity of Ireland or as a figure of feminine subversion of British property and rule,[18] but what does it mean, I will ask, that *in the beginning of the novel* is a blatant figure of clumsy, unsophisticated sounds? Indeed, in one of the final chapters where Louie is reading the newspaper and finds out from Stella's witness to Robert's death that she is not as virtuous as Louie thought she was, we are brought further to the possibility of complete muteness: there are only "blanks in Louie's vocabulary which operated inwardly on her soul; most strongly she felt the undertow of what she could not name" (345). If Stella cannot help but tell another story about Robert at the inquest to save England's face at the expense of hers, Louie seems to figure the possibility of putting the stubborn "shape" of discourse to its final disfiguration.

The "blurting" mouth, at the novel's beginning, in fact continues to breed other similar figures, most notably the mysterious emissions of laughter from Harrison and Ernestine. While Harrison's laughter might be ultimately explained by his detective motives, Ernestine's laughter is much more enigmatic. When Stella visits the Kelways for the first time in Holme Dene, what she notices right at the start is indeed Ernestine's unprovoked laughter:

> Disengaging herself from their company with unnecessary force, Ernestine shot onwards towards the gate, leaving them to pursue their way to the house. Stella said: "What was Ernestine laughing at?"
>
> "Oh, she was just laughing."
>
> "But she seemed to be laughing before we met her."

[18] See, for example, Robin Truth Goodman, *Gender for the Warfare State: Literature of Women in Combat* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

"Then I suppose she must have seen us first."

If we return to the scene from which Bowen herself extracts in her response to Pritchett's question on artistic responsibility, moreover, we find Ernestine in fact not only asking her brother to stop asking Stella questions but also, in her asking, bursting out "a peal of laughter." When her brother comments on modern society's secret envy of liars, Ernestine "could but laugh." Unprovoked, and utterly extraneous to the plot development of the text, Ernestine's laughter indeed often hovers, as some kind of an ironic commentary, above the love life of Robert and Stella unbeknownst to the couple. Her laughter does not respond to the conversation between Stella and Robert but often occurs at the origin before the couple's entry into the scenes. The irony, as such, is enabled not by the novel's narrative development but precisely by the exchange of author and character on the site of textual production. Insofar as Ernestine figures the presence of the author as the forgotten beginning of the novel, the laughter as an intrusion of a narrative shape lays bare what may be understood as an unceasing operation of parabasis in the text; it names a rhetorical moment in which Bowen suspends simply narrating the action of the plot and instead addresses, within an ironic distance, the fictive shape of her own novel.[19] Ernestine's beaming mouth, much like Louie's blurting mouth, is thus perhaps also Bowen's disfiguring mouth. In his study of "Arendt's Laughter," Yasco Horsman points out that the philosopher's now-platitudinous phrase, "the banality of evil," has been widely misread as a concept

[19] One may argue that the free indirect discourse in the novel also shares the same function of ironic distancing. On the close relation between parabasis (a rhetorical term) and free indirect discourse (a narratological term), see J. Hillis Miller, "'Material Interests': Conrad's *Nostromo* as a Critique of Global Capitalism," *Joseph Conrad*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Bloom's Literary Criticisms, 2010), 151-168. On the characterization of irony as a "permanent parabasis," see Paul de Man, "The Concept of Irony," *Aesthetic Ideology*, ed. Andrzej Warminski. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 163-184.

to describe Eichmann's behavior. Far from a concept, he says, it describes instead "a 'stumbling block' that makes it impossible to understand him in any human way; it points to a moment of nonunderstanding, which occurs precisely when we seek to apply our faculty of judgment and are confronted with its failure."[20] In Bowen's text, too, moments of blurting and laughing, against the political backdrop of "careless talking," tell us less of an articulate response from the author than an ironic distancing from the way in which narrative, like "bluff or patter," expands.

The force of this irony, however, is only most powerfully brought up in Robert's confession. In his attempt to escape Stella's flat through the roof, an enigmatic privation of communication occurs before both turn to convulsive laughter. When Stella tries to bring the long conversation to a close, Robert is peculiarly blocked from any hearing. Then:

> He laughed as it would have been possible to weep, thrown round towards her on an elbow driven into glissading cushions. It was a laughter of the entire being, racking as it was irregular in its intakes upon his body, making his face a mask of shut eyes and twisting lips, convulsing the rest of him in a sort of harmony of despair at the situation and joy in her […] She under this compulsion began to laugh too, though rebelliously, with bewilderment and uncertainty: it was only by laying her cheek to his, as though either to extinguish the laughter by sheer weight or draw out of him into her its unholy cause, that she comprehended. She then had to laugh entirely (321-322).

[20] Horsman, *Theaters of Justice: Judging, Staging and Working Through in Arendt, Brecht, and Delbo*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 42.

In its transmission, from Robert to Stella, laughter remains indeterminable in its political significance. But it is precisely in the transmission of this laughter that Stella, paradoxically, comprehends. Her comprehension is *not* an understanding or some tacit pardoning of Robert's crime—far from it; it is instead the understanding of history's paradox: the impossibility to undo what her lover has committed and the necessity, as Robert asks her to do earlier, to "reread me backwards [and] figure me out" (304). Stella may comprehend, that is, only insofar as she, too, engages in the ironic laughter of the text, reading traces of an "enforced second start"—of what the story of their love could have been—from the origin whose unfolding is irreversibly perverted by its shape. If Bowen observes that the "twentieth century's development […] has been in some directions so violently forced, in others so notably arrested as to seem hardly to be a development at all," we might indeed finally take *The Heat of the Day*, as a mid-century text, as Bowen's attempt to *re-read* the perverse developments of her deeply violent century, whose beginning could hardly be traced and yet still exerts its impact, as ironic laughter, on the body of her narrative.

Chapter Four

A World of Suddenness

In recent critical theory, love finds itself often caught in debates about the extent to which it can adequately attend to the difference of the other. While some theoreticians argue that love is an ethical concept because it forces the self to be opened up by the foreignness of the other, others argue that love is aggressive narcissism in disguise and therefore cannot be considered ethically reliable.[1] To this current impasse of love I would like to respond with my reading of one of the most representative novels by Graham Greene, *The End of the Affair*. Praised by William Faulkner as "one of the best, most true and moving novels of my time," Greene's 1951 text is about the journey of a fiction writer, Maurice Bendrix, to discover why he was one day abandoned by the woman he loved, Sarah Miles, a day when London was attacked by the aerial bombardment during WWII. In the quest for the truth, Bendrix at first attempts to reconstruct his love affair into a story of betrayal, perceiving everything Sarah did and said as early signs of her ultimate abandonment. Yet as he continues to investigate the enigma of Sarah's sudden desertion, he reckons that he might not only be grappling with his lost love, but also with a higher level of love from God he cannot empirically verify and must therefore reject. In his search for Sarah's traces in a war-torn London, Bendrix only progressively finds out she has, in

[1]See the exemplary debate between Michael Hardt and Lauren Berlant, in Hardt, "For Love or Money," *Cultural Anthropology* 26, no. 4 (2011): 676-682, and Berlant, "A Properly Political Concept of Love: Three Approaches in Ten Pages," in the same issue, 683-691. The debate continues later in an online interview of both of them. See "No One is Sovereign in Love: A Conversation Between Lauren Berlant and Michael Hardt," *Nomorepotlucks*. (http://nomorepotlucks.org/site/no-one-is-sovereign-in-love-a-conversation-between-lauren-berlant-and-michael-hardt/)

an act of self-sacrifice, renounced herself to God, leaving Bendrix finally in despair and anguish over God's inexplicable possessiveness. Dramatized as an encounter between a jealous lover (Bendrix) and an all-encompassing figure of love (God), Greene's novel raises the singular question of what it means when the invisible force of love, from God and from Sarah, can no longer be assimilated into the narrative of betrayal Bendrix creates as an explanation for Sarah's sudden disappearance.

At the heart of Bendrix's first-person narrative, I would argue, is the attempt to understand a kind of love that cannot be grasped through human perception. Yet this narrative quest for understanding is by no means staged as a progressive journey toward a discovery of divine love, but more profoundly as a repeated confrontation with Bendrix's dogged belief in truthful documentation as a fiction writer, in a certain type of realism that is meant to secure knowledge (both personal and impersonal) of the object depicted. Facing the inadequacy of realism as a genre for representing the singularity of his love affair, Bendrix's confrontation with the repeated occurrences of God's divine intervention is indeed not simply a question of religious belief or disbelief, nor a matter of distinguishing two levels of love between divine love (*agape*) and erotic love (*eros*) as is often suggested, but instead a question of the capacity to find words to convey or to transmit what cannot be perceived and grasped. Love and theology are thus linked around the failure of perception. Far from condemning the impoverishment of human love (the incapacity to extend unconditional, generous love as God does), Greene's novel invokes the concept of divinity to highlight the continuing necessity of language to convey love even at the limits of realism and perception, and even as language may distort love to all forms of

paranoia and narcissism. The singular brilliance of Greene's novel lies in the persistent and moving meditation on language beyond its representational power.

This meditation, however, would arise not simply as a literary question within the novel but also as a historical question about what was, for Greene, understood as the ethical necessity of representation in the wake of WWII. After the global catastrophe, there was an overwhelming sense among the British writers and critics that the high modernist work represented by Woolf and Pound was morally vacuous in their linguistic experimentation free from referential restraints. Recent literary historians suggest that novels written in the 1940s and 50s, which inherit the literary techniques of high modernism but register a desire to return to realism in the name of social conscience, could be categorized as the main feature of "late modernism." Like many of his contemporary, but especially his friend Elizabeth Bowen, Greene was indeed preoccupied with the technical and moral question as a writer of how to write "responsibly" and "conscientiously" after 1945.[2] In what follows, I will begin with an investigation of Greene's literary criticism of the Bloomsbury writers and his struggle to respond to the self-imposed demands of realism. For some of Greene's critical writings about realism, in fact, are directly transferred to *The End of the Affair* as Bendrix's own meditation on the possibility of representing truthfully his love affair with Sarah. Yet at the limits of realism, I would propose, the novel is not a simple meta-commentary about the language of love, but more profoundly an enactment of love's unknowability as it passes on, referentially, to the future through the novel's

[2] The conversation centered on the topic of the writer's "duty" to society between Greene, Bowen and V.S. Pritchett would be later published in 1948 into a book called *Why Do I Write?*, ed. Walter Allen (London: The Spectator, 1948).

intricate modes of transmission. To approach the language of love, Greene's text shows us, is therefore to see language for what it can accomplish beyond its narrative logic. This future, as such, perhaps concerns not merely the language of love as it survives beyond the end of an affair, but also the survival of literary writing more broadly, after WWII, beyond representation and the moral claims of realism.

1) LATE MODERNISM AND THE RECOVERY OF TRUTH

Greene's relation to high modernism is indeed a fraught relation. Although he praised the innovative descriptive styles of Henry James and Joseph Conrad on multiple occasions, he was often critical of the narrative techniques of the Bloomsbury writers like Virginia Woolf and E. M. Forster. *Mrs. Dalloway* happens to be one of his favorite targets. In one of his most well-known critical essays, he writes:

> Mrs. Dalloway walking down Regent Street was aware of the glitter of shop windows, the smooth passage of cars, the conversation shoppers, but it was only a Regent Street seen by Mrs. Dalloway that was conveyed to the reader: a charming whimsical rather sentimental prose poem was what Regent Street had become: a current of air, a touch of scent, a sparkle of glass. But, we protest, Regent Street too had a right to exist: it is more real than Mrs Dalloway, and we look back with nostalgia towards the chop houses, the mean courts, the still Sunday streets of Dickens. Dickens's characters were of immortal importance, and the houses in which they loved, the mews in which they damned themselves were lent importance by their presence. They were

> given the right to exist as they were, distorted, if at all, only by their observer's eye—not further distorted at a second remove by an imagined character.[3]

It is hard not to read Greene's criticism of Woolf's magnum opus without a sense of suspicion. It is not only because, as David Lodge pointed out, Mrs. Dalloway is actually strolling on Bond Street, not Regent Street, but also because Woolf's entire literary project might be said to rest on the singular question of what it means to write the reality. "But I ask myself," she had already foreseen the protest in her 1924 essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," "what is reality? Who are the judges of reality?"[4] Though questionable in its commentary on the spirit of *Mrs. Dalloway*, however, Greene's criticism nevertheless speaks to the heart of the larger sentiment of a generation of postwar writers who were struggling to recuperate the reality that was said to be lost to modernism's experimental language. What does it mean, now, to give Bond Street the immortal existence it deserves instead of burying it in a character's stream of consciousness?[5] The question facing the new generation of writers would thus appear to be the loosening of one's modernist subjectivity in its intractable contact with the realist world—an adversarial world at once perpetual in its intrusion and unassailable to the modernist interiority. Late modernism, in our understanding of Greene's perspective, could thus be defined first and foremost as a question of what it means to recover an empirical reality lost to experimental language.

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[3] Greene, *Collected Essays*. (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981), 91-92.
[4] Lodge, *The Modes of Writing: Metonymy, Metaphor, and the Typology of Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).
[5] If the modernist novel was preoccupied with "Man-alone," William Cooper asserts in 1950, now the contemporary novel is preoccupied with "Man-in-Society." See Rubin Rabinovitz, *The Reaction Against Experiment in the English Novel: 1950-1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 6-7.

In literary studies, late modernism is still a relatively nascent literary period understood to be ensconced in the gap between high modernism and postmodernism. Although the first wave of critics such as Tyrus Miller (1999) and Jed Esty (2003) who came to popularize the period tended to attribute late modernism to the *late work* of high modernists such as Eliot and Woolf in their interwar sensibility of the "shrinking island" of an increasingly weakened England, recent work by Lyndsey Stonebridge (2007) and Thomas S. Davis (2015) have extended the period to the subsequent writers. They argue that what Esty calls the 1940s "Auden-Isherwood generation," a generation encompassing a wide-ranging mid-century authors such as C.P. Snow, Henry Green, Elizabeth Bowen, Evelyn Waugh, and Graham Greene, inherits the literary techniques of their lionized predecessors, but are much more adept at registering the changing world systems in the 1940s—the recovering Europe under the Marshall Plan, decolonization of Africa and the Caribbean Islands and international Cold War drama—through their acute attention to the minutiae of everyday life. Broadly speaking, unlike the high modernists, this new generation of authors is said to perform an "engaged formalism": formalism no longer existent for its own sake but reflexive of world problems in a manner Davis identifies as the "outward turn" of late modernism. Late modernism does not deny the literary experimentation of high modernism outright, he argues, but rather strives to rework them for social and political purposes. If high modernism was interested in the pure linguistic play of logopoeia, late modernism is now interested in concretizing the linguistic revolution in political situations. In Davis's view, "'the revolution of the word' [from the Pound era] "slides down from the airy world of abstract art into a tool

for articulating unauthorized forms of political belonging."[6] The defining difference of late modernism from high modernism thus appears to be a strictly thematic and formal difference: between high modernism's interiority and late modernism's exteriority, between high modernism's purported "indulgence" in language and late modernism's purportedly "ethical" engagement with the world.

Yet, although late modernism is currently being reappraised for the period's inventive styles influenced by the emergent media and their capacity to register the world systematic changes, critics' unequivocal attention to the period's most self-conscious claims about the possibility of writing anything new after the towering achievements of Woolf and Joyce suggests that late modernism is, unavoidably, from the outset a stylistic reaction to the concept of "experiment" from the modernist celebrities. Indeed, while Cyril Connolly (1948) famously announces that postwar literature rings the "closing time in the gardens of the West,"[7] early academic writers such as Rubin Rabinovitz (1967), David Lodge (1977) and Malcolm Bradbury (1993) all attend to mid-century writers' persistent claim that a "realist" literary style, though perhaps inferior, is an ethical necessity—a matter of "conscience"—insofar as it aims to restore truth after decades of so-called linguistic corruption in avant-garde experiments. "The Modernism that developed after the Great War," Bradbury argues in his seminal work *The Modern British Novel*, "was itself an endeavor to capture the new and changed reality, a search for a pared-down, fragmentary language of new

[6] Davis insists, however, that since description in late modernist work is never "some sort of value neutral practice," late modernism cannot be simply construed as a return to realism. On the contrary, he argues that late modernists are alert, even if unconsciously, to *how* the formal response might "conceptualize" the world disorder and its consequences. Davis, *Extinct Scene: Late Modernism and Everyday Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).
[7] Connolly, "Editorial," *Horizon*, December 1949-January 1950.

authenticity, its Revolution of the Word matching the Revolution of the World. After 1945, the situation seemed to be exactly reversed. Language had been a weapon of War, and had been corrupted by it; now truth, documentation, record, the recovery of the damaged sign, were what was needed."[8]

These early critics may be said to pave way to Davis' insight about late modernism's tendency toward geopolitical engagement, but they also seem to be more brutally honest in saying that the literary style of postwar British fiction might be, in fact, a style of stylelessness. It doesn't name the absence of style but rather what Waugh identifies in Greene as a "functional" style where language doesn't feel like language.[9] In the so-called return to realism in late modernism, furthermore, all these post-war writers framed it unequivocally as a matter of conscience; it was stated not so much as a choice as it was a moral necessity to represent accurately the mood of a war-torn Europe. In an important exchange of letters with Bowen later in the 50s, Greene would drive home this argument, but he would also underscore a crucial aspect of moral conscience in literary writing historians of late modernism have yet to acknowledge. "By truth," he states,

> I mean accuracy—it is largely a matter of style. It is my duty to society not to write: "I stood above a bottomless gulf" and "going downstairs, I got into a taxi," because these statements are untrue. My characters must not go white in

[8] Bradbury, *The Modern British Novel* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 273.

[9] Waugh writes, "It is not a specifically literary style at all. The words are functional, devoid of sensuous attraction, of ancestry and of independent life. Literary stylists regard language as intrinsically precious and its proper use as a worthy and pleasant task. A polyglot could read Mr. Greene, lay him aside, retain a sharp memory of all he said and yet, I think, entirely forget what tongue he was using. The words are simply mathematical signs for his thought." Waugh, "Felix Culpa," *Graham Greene: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Samuel Hynes (London: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 93-102.

> the face or tremble like leaves, not because these phrases are clichés but because they are untrue. This is not only a matter of artistic conscience but of the social conscience as well.[10]

From his earlier argument about Woolf's "paper-thin" world, Greene finally arrives at a moral conclusion about the responsibility of language to preserve the independence of the object depicted. But the most philosophical part of this statement consists in something else this time. In stating his belief in representational accuracy, Greene intimates not only the necessity of a particular writing style, but also the necessary convergence of artistic conscience and social conscience. If late modernism involves an engaged formalism, it would mean for Greene not the capacity of literature to refer adequately to the changing world situations; it means more fundamentally the continuity of form and meaning, of perception and cognition. One can no longer write with conscience "I stood above a bottomless gulf" after 1945, Greene contends, not simply because the sentence has no direct bearing on geopolitical concerns, but because it cannot be phenomenologically realized as perceptually true in the first place. Formalism, prior to its social content, is socially conscientious to the extent that artistic writing can find phenomenal equivalents in the empirical reality as its engagement.

We have thus far painted Greene as a realist author in his insistence on truth and accuracy, but any critic who has engaged Greene's work would know that this prolific "story-teller of genius," as Waugh calls him, was by no means a realist in the traditional sense. Indeed, Greene's penchant for sensational actions in most of his

[10] Greene, "Letter to Elizabeth Bowen, November 1948, London," *Why Do I Write?,* 30.

novels are so well-known that most current academic studies of Greene are interested in seeing how his melodramatic plotting was influenced by the cinema and the contemporary tabloid. In literary criticism, however, realism is often seen as incompatible with melodrama. While realism privileges what Fredric Jameson calls the "function of demystification" in order to foreground the incompatibility of romance and social conditions, for example, melodrama privileges the celerity of action in order to facilitate a sensation meant to stimulate the audience. The difference in their aims also means a conventional difference in their narrative structure. If realism politically depends on a believable construction of a social reality in order to showcase the bourgeois resistance to change and revolution, melodrama depends on less believable or impossible coincidences in order to, as Peter Brooks argues, render a moral claim legible in a "postsacred" world.[11] For Greene, melodrama is often not so much a genre as it is a mode of narration necessary to sustain suspense as a practical tool in any given work. Even in his most "serious" work,[12] indeed, Greene is often praised for the dexterity with which he imbues his stories with intense action and espionage mystery. But this penchant for action is linked, strangely, also to a penchant for *debilitation* in action. Brooks' classic study of melodrama as traditionally reliant on sense deprivation—on muteness, in particular—is especially illuminating to our appreciation of Greene's work. "Blind men, paralytics, invalids of various sorts," he

[11] On realism, see Fredric Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (New York: Verso, 2013); on melodrama, see Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

[12] Greene is well-known for dividing his work into two types: "entertainments" and "novels." The former includes blockbuster thrillers like *The Third Man* and *Our Man in Havana* and the latter includes all of his "Catholic novels." It is important to note, however, that he abolished the distinction as early as the 1950s after he has achieved certain fame as a literary writer.

contends, are the "very physical presence [that] evokes the extremism and hyperbole of ethical conflict and manichaeistic struggle."[13] Figures of muteness are not only present in *The End of the Affair* in which God exerts his power on Bendrix, much to his irritation, precisely because the divine figure remains resolutely mute to his requests. Indeed, in his first major contribution to the film industry, his script for Carol Reed's production, *The Fallen Idol* (1948),[14] Greene creates a spellbinding dark comedy where the figure of innocence, a young boy who misperceives an accident as a murder, becomes the center of conflict when he is shown incapable of maintaining the sophisticated lies and deceits in the adult world with his verbal failure. In *The Quiet American* (1955), likewise, American exceptionalism in the First Indochina War is exposed for its naiveté in the figure of Phuong, whose deprivation of voice in the text could be said to evince the possibility of defiance even as it reinscribes the stereotypical trope of the "inscrutable" Oriental. Innocence, in most of Greene's work, is not produced by the spoken words but rather, as Brooks argues, by "emotional utterance, outburst, expressive cadenzas."[15]

In Brooks' analysis of the melodramatic mode in the nineteenth-century fiction, however, the expressive force figured by the verbally hindered characters is not completely antithetical to realism but rather an excess of it. For in their superfluous expressivity, in their "desire to push through surface to a 'drama' in the realm of emotional and spiritual reality," these characters signal a momentary slippage

[13] Brooks, 56.
[14] Nominated in 1949 for the Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay, *The Fallen Idol* is based on the short story, "The Basement Room," Greene wrote in 1936.
[15] Brooks, 63.

of the ordinary world, a world often, in the realist fiction, subordinated to the "interests of the adult" and the "pleasure principle" it endorses.[16] Within the "quotidian existence" at the heart of a realist fiction, then, the melodramatic mode unveils a "repository of the fragmentary and desacralized remnants of the sacred myth" beneath the disenchanted modern world. This mode of irruption, Jonathan Goldberg recently argues in the line of Brooks' argument, is essentially "queer" insofar as the repository, and the erotic possibilities it contains, "are no longer fully determined by and limited to the terms of everyday reality, lived experience, and the bounded significance of conventions."[17] If realism foregrounds a quotidian (economic, social or sexual) experience, melodrama exposes gaps within that experience as its queer surplus.

What, however, are these gaps exactly? In Greene's work, melodrama seems to be often the locus of the revelation of an intensity that would otherwise be inaccessible in the realist mode. As is commonly suggested, the author's images often appeal strongly to the senses, drawing as they do on a wide variety of lush images of "animals, geography, war, childhood and the human body," and yet his characters are almost always "typed by their hypersensitive awareness of a reality beyond their senses."[18] In *The End of the Affair*, this hypersensitive awareness would indeed be that of the possibility of an invisible God *even as* Bendrix holds firmly onto the doctrine of empiricism. Melodrama is an excess to Greene's faith in the truthful representation of

[16] Ibid., 4.
[17] Goldberg, *Melodrama: An Aesthetics of Impossibility*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), xiv.
[18] Dominick P. Consolo, "Graham Greene: Style and Stylistics in Five Novels," *Graham Greene: Some Critical Considerations, ed. Robert O. Evans.* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2009), 61-95.

realism, it seems, precisely because it conveys a reality that cannot be conveyed through sense perception. If Brooks turns to the psychoanalytic "unconscious" of melodrama and Goldberg to its queer erotics, it is not because melodrama is a simple phenomenalization of the impossible; it is rather because melodrama always in some way resists our desire to grasp its meaning through the senses. For Greene to be construed as a "late modernist," then, we must evaluate not only his painstaking insistence on realism as a "return" to a safer mode of narration but also, less obvious to many critics, his oblique acknowledgement of the gaps within realism and other modes of language they render legible.

2) THE END OF LANGUAGE

The End of the Affair, indeed, could be understood as an attempt to investigate the necessity and impossibility of realism in the face of love. Bendrix's faith in realism emerges in the novel first in his meditation, as a fiction writer, on how to give an autobiographical account of Sarah. If literary language has been customarily used in the past to create fictional suspense, Bendrix opens his text by saying, it now seems to be entirely irrelevant to the autobiographical project of telling a truthful story about Sarah. In the opening pages of *The End of the Affair*, when Sarah is first introduced, Bendrix thus writes:

> It has always seemed to me that in a novel the reader should be allowed to imagine a character in any way he chooses: I do not want to supply him with ready-made illustrations. Now I am betrayed by own technique, for I do not

> want any other woman substituted for Sarah, I want the reader to see the one broad forehead and bold mouth, the conformation of the skull (11).

The attempt to document Sarah's physical appearances as accurately as possible at the beginning of a novel is an obvious hallmark of realist fiction. However, rather than simply documenting Sarah's face right at the start, Bendrix ponders if his realist style will be a technique by default or an involuntary force of love. From Bendrix's point of view, realism is the necessary mode of narration for his love because it believes above all else in the unsubstitutability of the object. It is not a stylistic matter but, precisely, an act of love that Sarah has to be distinguished from any fictional character that might exist in his books. The necessity of realism, in Bendrix's first critical reflection, is thus intimately bound up with the necessity of authenticity as the gesture of Bendrix's love.

Yet the question of realism would quickly exceed the question of involuntary writing. As Bendrix retraces the memory of being with Sarah, realism becomes also closely bound up with the surprising recognition of life. In a flashback to 1939, Bendrix reflects on the first moment of falling in love with Sarah while they were watching a film adapted from one of Bendrix's novels. "Suddenly and unexpectedly," he recalls:

> For a few minutes only, the film came to life. I forgot that this was my story, and that for once this was my dialogue, and was genuinely moved by a scene in a cheap restaurant. The lover had ordered steak and onions, the girl hesitated for a moment to take the onions because her husband didn't like the smell, the lover was hurt and angry because he realized what was behind her hesitation, which brought to his mind the inevitable embrace on her return home. The

> scene was a success: I had wanted to convey the sense of passion through some common simple episode without any rhetoric in words and action, and it worked. For a few seconds I was happy—this was writing [...]
>
> Afterwards—we were back at Rules and they had just fetched our steaks—she said, "There was on scene you did write."
>
> "About the onions?"
>
> "Yes." And at that very moment a dish of onions was put on the table […]
>
> […]
>
> Is it possible to fall in love over a dish of onions? It seems improbable and yet I could swear it was just then that I fell in love (32-33).

In this flashback to the first moment of falling in love in a cheap restaurant, Bendrix recalls not only the blissful happiness of knowing that one has found love, but also the happiness of having written something successful put on the big screen: the simplicity of an episode "without any rhetoric in words and action." It is the happiness about one's own successful writing, Bendrix ponders, that is linked to the happiness of finding one's own real life entirely in sync with art. What the passage highlights, then, is not simply an episode of "art imitating life" but, more accurately, of *life imitating art imitating life*. For it is the successful imitation of art (the film) of life (Bendrix's life as a writer) by way of a truthful representation, Bendrix tells us, that allows for the possibility of its reversal: for his own "real" love with Sarah to follow the steak and onion scenography he scripted for his own fictional writing. This episode seems to only reiterate Greene's insistence on the importance of accurate writing in his critical writing, but Bendrix's happiness is no longer simply about a truthful representation

this time but, more profoundly, a truthful representation *"*coming to life.*"* We tend to think of realism as a transcription of life, but in a startling reversal Bendrix's life emerges precisely *because* it can find recognition in his art. Realism is not only reflective of a life but also surprisingly productive of one. If modern realism "begins," as Ian Watt observes, "from the position that truth can be discovered by the individual through the senses,"[19] Greene seems to question, as a self-conscious "realist," if the senses can be immune to the power of fiction in the first place.

In Greene's fictional world, life and art are indeed often self-consciously presented as seductively entwined but fatally incompatible. Just as Bendrix's love is cut short by Sarah's death, the reader cannot see Bendrix's happiness about the permeability life and art without also detecting what that happy displacement might portend. It is not only because of the so-called illusion of immortality art might confer on life, but also because Greene thinks life cannot conduct itself according to the *internal system of art* without encountering some lethal danger. This is a recurrent motif of Greene's writing in the post-war period. In *The Third Man* (1948), for example, a western potboiler writer pursues an investigation of his missing friend but finds himself only accused of "mixing fact and fiction" right before he is chased down by the villain's associates. Bendrix is caught in a similar situation, chased by his own artistic conscience instead of some villains, insofar as his attempt to write a non-fictional autobiography is also mixed up unconsciously with fiction with its own internal law and logic. Fiction is dangerous not because it erodes the framework of

[19] Watt, "From the Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding," *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*, ed. Michael McKeon (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 363-381.

factuality but because its formalization might appear to be *more real* than fact.[20] Just as the villain Harry Lime turns out to be the undead third man and reverses the historical engraving of his death into a mere fiction, Bendrix would also have to confront the reversibility of the truthful representation of love into the fiction of a life that acts mechanically according to the grammar and logic of art.[21] The lover's desire to document love accurately involves a representational dictum of singularity or non-substitution, but it also casts representation as a predicament enmeshed in the confusion of fact and fiction.

Bendrix's second critical reflection on his own writing would indeed emerge, in this context, as a reflection on the relation between the fiction of love and his life as a lover. When Henry tells Bendrix one day early in the novel that he suspects his wife might be cheating on him with a "stranger," he says the only reason why he does not have the courage to visit a detective agency is not guilt, but rather that he does not feel like he has a special case to tell. "Just think," he tells Bendrix, "of sitting there in front of a desk in a chair of all the jealous husbands have sat in, telling the same story . . . Do you think there's a waiting-room, so that we see each other's faces as we pass through?" (10). For Henry, indeed, it is not the guilt of not trusting one's own wife but the shame of being part of the same discourse of jealousy that dampens his motivation to find out the truth. Yet for Bendrix, on the contrary, a lover has all the

[20] For a theoretical elaboration of the relation between fiction and lie, see Paul de Man, "Rhetoric of Tropes," *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979). For a more explicit discussion on the power of the lie to subordinate all human actions to its non-human mechanicity, see Cathy Caruth, "Lying and History," *Literature in the Ashes of History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

[21] On aesthetic theory and its criticism, see Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Men*, trans. Reginald Snell (New York: Dover Publications, 2004); and de Man, "Aesthetic Formalization in Kleist," *Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

reason to be jealous because *unoriginality* is what historically defines a lover: "I could pretend to be jealous lover," he proposes. "Jealous lovers are more respectable, less ridiculous, than jealous husbands. They are supported by the weight of literature. Betrayed lovers are tragic, never comic. Think of Troilus" (10). Bendrix's claim invokes the courtly love tradition in which love, as Andreas Capellanus claims, is understood to be found only outside the institution of marriage.[22] To love is not to find oneself as a singular subject from the "weight of literature" but as being assimilable to the codes and grammar of the fiction of love: to become, that is, aestheticized as a non-historical object of love. Indeed, in this scene where a jealous lover is persuading a married man to embark on a spying mission only for his self-interest, Bendrix's proposal for his playing a jealous lover is not a simple description of a historical fact to Henry but instead staged as a lie by playing a good friend. The historical truth of Bendrix's statement is transmitted, Greene ingeniously shows us, insofar as it is carried out as a lie.

We might think of Bendrix's meditation on love as only an aestheticization or fabrication of subjecthood. Yet a more astonishing aspect of Greene's text, as we move to the erotic dimension of the love story, is Bendrix's progressive revelation of how the war—the aerial bombardment of London—as a collective experience can too be assimilated to the totalizing logic of love. We encounter this capacity of love when Bendrix demands that we see the Total War as the historical backdrop of the love story, repeatedly drawing our attention to the fateful day of 17 June 1944 when the dropping of the VI bomb in his apartment completely changed his life. WWII exists in

[22] Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, trans. John Jay Parry. (New York: Norton, 1969).

the text certainly as a truly historic event with an unprecedented magnitude of destruction palpable enough to seep through every character's daily life, but its impact on the city of London as Bendrix sees it, like Stella in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day*, was less a trauma than a familiar, soothing rhythm. "The bombs between those first daylight raids and the V1s of 1944 kept their own convenient nocturnal habits" (25), Bendrix recalls, echoing Sarah's disappointment when the war is over. Greene's text is certainly not a document of war trauma nor a glorification of violence, but the inextricable relation of love and war is not simply a matter of mutual impermeability, either. Indeed, while both Bendrix and Sarah regard the war as their "disreputable and unreliable accomplice" to their illicit love affair, it is not so much their lack of explicit moral obligation to the fights against the Germans as the capacity of the war to be assimilated to the language of a love story that Bendrix wants to foreground.[23] One recalls what Greene himself wrote from his first-hand experience as a warden for the Air Raid Precaution when the Phoney War was finally replaced by actual bloodshed in London in 1940: "The nightly routine of sirens, barrage, the probing raider, the unmistakable engine ('Where are you? Where are you? Where are you?'), the bomb-bursts moving nearer and then moving away, hold one like a love-charm."[24] Greene, for the novel, could be said to have found indeed a perfect metaphor of the war to describe the explosive, and often erotic, thrill of the love affair. It is the

[23] Sarah secretly wants the war to last longer so that she doesn't have to face the closure of the war while her feelings keep on going after 1945. The affective force of the war is therefore its action as much as its end. It is only after the war, when the peace of the country returns hand in hand with the peace of the marriage, that Sarah recognizes that the love affair is truly blitzed. "People sat on the grass in twos, holding hands," Sarah writes on 8 May 1945 in her diary. "I suppose they were happy because this was peace and there were no more bombs. I said to Henry, "I don't like the peace. (83).'"

[24] Greene, "At Home," *Collected Essays* (London: Bodley Head, 1969).

nocturnal habit of the bombs—the constant "blasting" of buildings, hallways and windows—that gives a sense of complicity to the thrill of the affair as it is, too, a "blasting" of the marital structure. For the love story to be recognizable, the catastrophic world is turned into an equally aestheticized mirror, a specular relation in which the outside becomes entirely formalized according to the principle of the inside. It is indeed the totalizing logic of his love that the War, perversely, *becomes* total. The architectonics of Greene's love story, set in wartime, thus appears to be a strictly formal structure homogenous enough to create a singular perception of love's violent totalization.

3) SARAH'S CHOICE

Greene significantly puts this formal logic to a halt when Sarah's diary takes over Bendrix's narrative in Book Three with a dramatic perspectival shift. Covering the entries from around the time of the fateful bomb in 1944 to her life after the end of the affair in 1946, the diary progressively reveals what Bendrix (and therefore the reader) could not have known before, including what made Sarah leave him unexpectedly in 1942 and her present life in which, Henry and Bendrix suspect, she may be having an affair with "a stranger." The import of Book Three would therefore lie its capacity to allow readers to enter Sarah's interior world for the first time and its demand that we re-read Bendrix's words through her lens. This insight would arrive in one of the most moving moments in the text when Sarah, facing a Bendrix lying and unmoving on the floor covered with debris, makes a promise to God. In her prayer,

she tells God that if Bendrix were to be brought back to life, she would not only believe Him but also stop seeing her lover forever:

> Make me believe. I shut my eyes tight and I pressed my nails into the palms of my hands until I could feel nothing but the pain, and I said, I will believe. Give him a chance. Let him have his happiness. Do this and I'll believe. But that wasn't enough. It doesn't hurt to believe. So I said, I love him and I'll do anything if you'll make him alive, I said very slowly, I'll give him up for ever, only let him be alive with a chance, and I pressed and pressed and I could feel the skin break, and I said, People can love without seeing each other, can't they, they love You all their lives without seeing You, and then he came in at the door, and he was alive, and I thought now the agony of being without him starts, and I wished he was safely back dead again under the door (76).

In making this vow to God, Sarah believes she can go on loving Bendrix because, like our love of God, she believes there is a kind of love that can be divorced from all perceptual experience. Just as people can go on loving God all their lives without seeing Him, she ponders, her love for Bendrix need not end simply because they stop seeing each other. The affective force of Sarah's entry thereby hinges on our willingness to understand her as making a sacrifice of the carnal aspect of love for the survival of Bendrix. If Bendrix "survives," in other words, it is because his return to life must already be interpreted as God's answer to her prayer. It is not a potential misperception on Sarah's part (in that Bendrix did not die at all) but God's mysterious intervention that Bendrix's "life" after the bomb could be understood, precisely, as a survival.

The diary would proceed from Sarah's promise and describe, in the subsequent entries over the next two years, her struggle to keep the promise knowing now that it might have been made in what she calls a "hysterical" situation. However, in a quick succession of events on 3 February 1946, the diary reveals that in attempting to nullify the promise she also unexpectedly made two more promises. The first one occurs as a supposed consequence of Sarah's theological meditation on the possibility of love without a physical body. "Today," she writes on 2 October 1945, "I looked at that material body on that material cross, and I wondered, how could the world have nailed a vapour there? A vapour of course felt no pain and no pleasure." Sarah's realization that "we do need our own bodies" to understand the suffering of Christ finally culminates in her decision to return to Bendrix once and for all:

> Suddenly I felt free and happy. I'm not going to worry about you any more, I said to God as I walked across the Common, whether you exist or whether you don't exist, whether you gave Maurice a second chance or whether I imagined everything. Perhaps this is the second chance I asked for him. I'm going to make him happy, that's my second vow. God, and stop me if you can, stop me if you can (93).

However, in one of the most melodramatic moments in the text, right after Sarah has finished writing a divorce letter to Henry and is prepared to leave on the same day, Henry returns home unexpectedly from a meeting with Bendrix (the very meeting where Henry discloses to Bendrix that Sarah might be having an affair with "a stranger" in Book One) and asks Sarah to "stick it for a few more years." Moved by

"the unbearable burdens he was laying on my conscience," Sarah promises him to stay in the marriage and, in effect, revokes her second promise:

> I said, "I won't leave you, I promise." Another promise to keep, and when I had made it couldn't bear to be with him any more. He'd won and Maurice had lost, and I hated him for his victory. Would I have hated Maurice for this? I went upstairs and tore up the letter so small nobody could it together again, and I kicked the suitcase under the bed because I was too tired to start unpacking, and I started writing this down (95).

Because Sarah promises Henry to stay in the marriage, then, not only is her second promise to make Bendrix happy is nullified, but also her first promise to God is reinstated. The affective force of the diary is thus dramatized now in the struggle not only between Sarah's desire to return to material love and God's invisible intervention that forbids the first promise from being broken, but also between Sarah's attempt to reinterpret Bendrix's life after his death and God's refusal to let the first interpretation be distorted. For Sarah, it is no doubt the intentional structure of God that is being revealed in these unexpected turns of events.

4) DEATH OF THE AUTHOR

Yet, as Greene designs it, it is not just the reader who is reading the diary, but more importantly Bendrix the narrator. Indeed, if the incidents recorded in Sarah's diary happen all too quickly for us find them plausible, it is because Greene wants us to feel the rage over their alleged absurdity as much as Bendrix feels it. Bendrix's rage in the subsequent chapters comes not primarily from the melodramatic succession of

incidents but from the demand that the incidents be interpreted (doubly absurd to him) as God's intervention. The task facing him is therefore a struggle between reading those events as a series of absurd coincidences and reading them as dictated intentionally by a supernatural force. Yet, if we look at the text as a larger whole, this is also an ironic moment because whereas Bendrix had been unable to trust Sarah's words in her absence up to this point in the novel, the diary now appears for him to be an absolutely and only reliable source of truth of Sarah's interior world. The diary's claim to truth, indeed, is secured not only by its definition as holding one's own private thoughts, but also by the fact that it was stolen by Parkis as one of his crucial "Exhibits." Reading a diary, moreover, is not like reading any other text. For in order to find out the "true" hidden meaning, Parkis advises Bendrix, he must not trust her words at their face value but rather learn how to decode her words: "She may be very cautious, but my experience of diaries is they always give things away. People invent their little codes, but you soon see through them. Or they leave out things, but you soon learn what they leave out" (67). To read the diary is to know how to crack the code to get to the unspoken truth of the matter. To the extent that the melodrama of those incidents and promises recorded in Sarah's diary has to be read, it would be read not simply for its implausible abruptness but also for what must be filled *between* those abrupt events into a coherent, non-melodramatic, discourse.

While the diary decentralizes our perspective, then, it also reactivates Bendrix's habit to fill the gaps of meaning as soon as the text returns to his perspective. However, despite this paranoid compulsion, the way in which Bendrix is made to read dramatically poses, for the first time, a technical question on his status as

a writer by the end of Book Three. For Greene, in effect, has Sarah's dairy not framed by Bendrix's voice as in reported speech but inserted into the main narrative as the entire chapter. This is what one might call a metaleptic strategy that allows for Sarah's diary to temporarily intrude upon the narrative voice, suspending not only our perspective of all the actions that have been represented thus far, but also Bendrix's own narrative voice as a figure of the mastery of understanding. As a means of overturning what has been represented as potentially false, the diary transforms Bendrix-as-writer (in control of the narrative progression) into Bendrix-as-reader (susceptible to or embedded within other texts). As Books Four and Five show, the pathos of Bendrix's narration, after Sarah's diary, would indeed emanate from his repeated desire and failure to maintain the figure of a writer: to come to a concluded understanding of how to interpret Sarah's words and to assimilate them within the story of betrayal he has constructed. After a momentary bliss of a re-union with Sarah, she dies of pneumonia in yet another surprisingly turn of event at the end of Book Four. Facing the literal death of the author, Bendrix must confront the possibility that Sarah's postmortem impact might turn out to be a sign of a radically different kind of love he has yet to recognize. If Book Five would finally turn into Bendrix's confrontation with a series of miracles that cannot be "verified" as miracles, then, it would only be because he cannot yet read what *else* is inscribed in her diary as significative—things that cannot be assimilated to the system of the code—in the absence of authorial proof. The relation between Book Three and Books Four and Five would thus be a relation between text and referential verification, between being inside the text and being outside of it.

5) MIRACLES OR COINCIDENCES

Book Five, indeed, is an unfolding of miraculous events Bendrix struggles to interpret as God's intervention in the face of their implausible occurrences and his own dogged atheism. The first miracle occurs as the discovery of Sarah's early "vaccination" of God. After Sarah's funeral, Bendrix meets with her mother in a restaurant where she discloses the long-concealed fact that Sarah was, in fact, secretly baptized when she was one in France:

> "Well, you see, she was one, only she didn't know it. I wish Henry had buried her properly," Mrs Bertram said and began again the grotesque drip of tears.
>
> "You can't blame him if even Sarah didn't know."
>
> "I always had a wish that it would 'take.' Like vaccination."
>
> "It doesn't seem to have "taken" much with you," I couldn't resist saying, but she wasn't offended (136).

That Sarah was secretly baptized now forces Bendrix to confront the possibility that she might have been "taken" by God from the beginning. If Bendrix thinks that their momentary happiness in Book Four was the fulfillment that Sarah finally "belongs" to him, Mrs. Bertram's untimely disclosure suggests that Sarah's death (as the breaking of that fulfillment) might be a fulfillment of a larger spiritual belonging Bendrix cannot recognize. As Bendrix complains, "It wasn't You that 'took,' I told the God I didn't believe in, that imaginary God whom Sarah thought had saved my life (for what conceivable purpose?) and who had ruined even in his non-existence the only deep happiness I had ever experienced" (137). Bendrix's hatred involves not simply the fact

that God stole Sarah's love by stealing her life, but also His present attempt to question the way Bendrix interpreted Sarah's promise of love, his "only deep happiness," which survives her death in the diary.

The rest of Book Five would engage Bendrix's life with what now seems to be the saintly presence of Sarah after her death. His second confrontation with the possibility of a miracle is the private detective Parkis' revelation in a letter that his son Lance, suffering from a chronic fever, was miraculously healed thanks to a "present" by Sarah. It turns out that while spying on Sarah with his father outside Sarah's house, an ill Lance had a chance encounter with Sarah and later in his dream dreamed that Sarah promised him a present. Fearing that his son's condition might turn worse, Parkis obtains through Henry an old children's book owned by Sarah and gives it to his son as the feigned present. Then "when I woke up this morning," Parkis writes, "his temperature was ninety-nine and he hadn't any pain […] Only he told the doctor it was Mrs Miles who came and took away the pain—touching him on the right side of the stomach […]—and she wrote in the book for him" (148). In yet another shock to Bendrix, what Lance thought she wrote for him, as he now inspects the book, is actually inscribed with the following words on the front page by the child Sarah Bertram as "the unformed scribble with indelible pencil":

> When I was ill my mother gave this book by Lang.
> If any well person steals it he will get a great bang,
> But if you are sick in bed
> You can have it to read instead (149).

This "coincidence" would repeat itself in the third miracle, when the atheist non-conformist Richard Smythe, in his visit to Henry's house to see Sarah's body one last time, reveals to Bendrix that his facial deformity—his "strawberry scar"—miraculously disappeared after Sarah had kissed that spot. Torn between his resolute non-belief in miracles and his inability to explain these occurrences, Bendrix finally ends his text with his first prayer: "O God, You've done enough, You've robbed me of enough, I'm too tired and old to learn to love, leave me alone for ever" (160).

While the unexpected arrival of compassion and grace in relation to Sarah's death might be interpreted as a manifestation of God's omnipresent love, Bendrix insists painstakingly through the end of the novel that they might also not be interpretable at all insofar as they could be utterly random. This appears to be the ultimate impasse of the text, one to which critics usually respond by resorting to either a realist claim, in that Bendrix's empirical insistence and failure signifies a general sense of existential crisis characteristic of the postwar British public sentiment, or a theological claim, in that a religious point of view is processed by a highly unsympathetic consciousness such that God's strangeness may be seen at work in a modern, agnostic world.[25] This theological argument, centering on the invisible work of grace by God, ultimately unfolds into a literary argument in which the character of God is said to be the final "novelist" entirely in control of the plot resolution. If Bendrix loses his mind at the end, it is only because God's plot triumphs. The conflict between Bendrix and God, from this perspective, thus seems to be ultimately

[25] See, for example, Mark Bosco, S.J., *Graham Greene's Catholic Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

dramatized as a conflict between two objectives of "writing," between a fiction writer (Bendrix) who wants to write an "accurate" autobiography and another writer (God) who wants to lay down His great design in the human world.[26]

6) A WORLD OF SUDDENNESS

Yet Greene's greatest insight in his novel, I would argue, is not simply that certain physical manifestations of things might be utter coincidences or miracles but, more profoundly, that the entire act of writing itself might be completely random or dictated by an invisible hand. Greene first explicitly motivates us to consider the implications of random writing as potentially dictated by the hands of God when Bendrix, as a writer, wonders how to begin his text in the text's own memorable beginning:

> A story has no beginning or end: arbitrarily one chooses that moment of experience from which to look back or from which to look ahead. I say 'one chooses' with the inaccurate pride of a professional writer […] but do I in fact of my own will *choose* that black wet January night on the Common, in 1946, the sight of Henry Miles slanting across the wide river of rain, or did these images choose me? (1 emphasis original)

The question of how to begin is posed as a questioning of the presumption of free will. Is it I who determines how to start my story *in medias res*, Bendrix wonders, or am I "chosen" by the images beyond the exercise of my free will? Like the indeterminacy

[26] Frank Kermode, to my knowledge, was the first critic who first expressed the view that God functions a "novelist" in Greene's novel. See Kermode, "House of Fiction: Interviews with Seven English Authors," *Partisan Review* (Spring 30, 1963).

of "coincidences" and "miracles," the indeterminacy here involves the incapacity to tell whether an arbitrary act institutes the beginning of a non-arbitrary story, or the act of instituting a story is already subordinate to a predetermined meaning yet to be revealed to the author himself. Yet if we look at the question on a larger scale, the unique status of this question is not only the question itself but also how it is carried out in the text. For the questioning of free will, if we read closely, is not posed anywhere else in the text but precisely at the beginning of it. Unlike Bendrix's repeated encounters with the implausible events around him, the indeterminacy here is not a question of meaning but primarily *a question of questioning itself*; Greene has not only Bendrix pose a question about the act of beginning, that is, but also subordinates his question to the larger question of whether it is possible to see it as a meaningful question. The question of whether the act of beginning is arbitrarily meaningless or meaningfully predetermined is thus inextricably bound up with a much more radical question: *can we know, in the text, if the question of asking us to decide between randomness and overdetermination is there or not?*

Indeed, while the text self-consciously shapes Bendrix's confrontations with the three implausible events in Book Five (the secret baptism of Sarah, the healing of Parkis, and the disappearance of Smythe's facial deformity) as miracles, we could say that the turn of surprises leading to Sarah's unwanted confrontation with Henry in Book Three are as well instances of unclaimed miracles. If Sarah had not decided to go back downstairs to put her divorce letter in the hall, if she had not forgotten her key, if Henry had not come home early that night just in time to see Sarah at the doorway, Sarah might have carried out her divorce. To see this as a series of

catastrophic coincidences would be certainly the point of view of Bendrix who is reading the diary, but are these incidents as such to be read as a determined questioning of their status as either randomness or miracles? For as soon as we realize that these melodramatic incidents could multiply beyond the official three miracles, we discover that there is nothing in the text that could not be seen as potentially participating in this multiplying logic. Indeed, if we look at Greene's novel from a broader perspective, we find out that the word "suddenly" or "sudden" itself appears so frequently, so pervasively without fail, that the entire text could be construed as an invisible chain of metonymic substitution of the same question. "Suddenly" could mean:

1. The suddenness of nature:
- "During a sudden blast of wind and rain [Henry] just caught his hat in time from being whirled away toward the north side" (2).
2. The suddenness of language:
- "I had spoilt the occasion suddenly by a chance word which broke the mood of what sometimes seemed for hours at a time a complete love" (4).
3. The suddenness of a feeling:
- "and then suddenly, unexpectedly, [Sarah] would shatter my reserve with a statement of such sweetness and amplitude" (21).
4. The suddenness of a recognition:
- "Suddenly and unexpectedly, for a few minutes only, the film came to life" (32).
5. The suddenness of personal growth:

- "It was as if quite suddenly after all the promiscuous years I had grown up. My passion for Sarah had killed simple lust for ever. Never again would I be able to enjoy a woman without love" (46).

6. The suddenness of hope:

- Sarah responding to Smythe: "I don't think that has anything to do with [hope] at all. It happens suddenly, for no reason, like a scent" (66).

7. The suddenness of fear:

- Sarah in her diary: "I had a sudden fear that Henry might have changed his mind and sent a telegram to say that he would be home" (92).

8. The suddenness of peace:

- "I have got to be sensible. Two days ago when I was clearing out my old bag—Henry suddenly gave me a new one as a "peace present"—it must have cost him a lot of money—I found a card saying 'Richard Smythe 16 Cedar Road 4-6 daily for private advice. Anyone welcome" (83).

9. And finally, in addition to many others excluded from this list, the suddenness of a bomb:

- "As I ran down the stairs I heard the next robot coming over, and then the sudden waiting silence when the engine cut out. We hadn't yet had time to learn that that was the moment of risk, to get out of the line of glass, to lie flat. I never heard the explosion, and I woke after five seconds or five minutes in a changed world" (56).

These instances of suddenness reveal not simply the indetermination of randomness and miracles, but also the impossibility to decide if their occurrences, as writing, could

be *motivated* to the philosophical question of that indetermination. The numerous occurrences of suddenness might not "know" the question of faith if this word, in its repetition, could be said to exist only to mechanically advance the plot by dint of contiguity or contingency (rather than of necessity), like what Waugh says as a pure linguistic "function…devoid of sensuous details," as the foundation of textual extension rather than its meaning. Whereas Bendrix is baffled by the turn of sudden events in Book Five that cannot be explained in empirical terms, then, we find that this inexplicable suddenness, or this switch, could be traced to every page of the text as the material foundation of its narration. Yet this foundation, or this condition of the possibility of meaning, is always in some sense forgotten insofar as it is inscribed within Bendrix's teleological drive for the singular truth of Sarah's desertion and God's inexplicable possessiveness. "To me," Bendrix confesses already in the opening page of the novel, "comfort is like the wrong memory at the wrong place or time" (1). Isn't Bendrix's overwhelming hate a different kind of comfort, the comfort of self-understanding, that is always "wrong," a misinterpretation insofar as the inexplicable force of suddenness is always reintegrated into the narrative aestheticization? Isn't Bendrix's confession of his text as a record of "near-truth" always a reminder for us of the *gaps* of knowledge within his narration (1)? "Suddenly," to use Jacques Derrida's words, is perhaps the "remainder," or "trace," of a love story that emerges only when Bendrix's search, which is perhaps also our search, for the meaning of those implausible occurrences has been exhausted, depleted, and brought to a standstill.[27]

[27] See, especially, Derrida's reading of Wilhelm Jensen's 1902 love story, *Gravida*, in *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Erin Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

7) THE LIFE OF LITERATURE

However, in the dissolution of the novel into a series of inexplicable suddenness, Greene's writing unexpectedly sheds light on a new kind of life unassimilable to the logic of Bendrix's autobiographical demand for realism (the capacity of realist art to "come to life"). "If I were writing a novel," Bendrix writes soon after Sarah's death, "I would end it here: a novel, I used to think, has to end somewhere, but I'm beginning to believe my realism has been at fault all these years, *for nothing in life now ever seems to end"* (121). The endlessness of life Bendrix speaks of here refers ostensibly to the inadequacy of any autobiography as a representation of life as soon as it is contained by a medium, but the uncontainability of one's life into a book, as Bendrix puts it, is now no longer simply a question about informational length but also a question about the possibility of life arising from within an autobiographical text. "It's almost impossible to disprove anything," Bendrix challenges Henry in their final meeting. "I write a story. How can you prove that the events in it never happened, that the characters aren't real? Listen. I met a man on the Common today with three legs" (139).

How can we know the characters and the events around them *are* real? Perhaps never. But in this undecidability, we may notice something else at work, something that persistently animates the text beyond its representational status. In addition to the proliferation of the word "suddenly" in the text, remarkably, Greene has Bendrix insert in Book One a number of unusual phrases about writing itself: phrases that not

only further baffle our understanding of the framing of the text as either real or fictional, but also the containment of autobiographical writing as a whole:

> 1. I am writing against the bias because it is my professional pride to prefer the near-truth (1).
>
> 2. And there—in the phrase—the bitterness leaks again out of my pen. What a dull lifeless quality this bitterness is (5).
>
> 3. If this book of mine fails to take a straight course, it is because I am lost in a strange region: I have no map. I sometimes wonder whether anything that I am putting down here is true (39).

The temporality of these instances of discourse is peculiar, for they are not only inscribed in a present continuous tense, but also demand that we read the text as though it were presently continuous with the act of inscription itself. The leaking of bitterness, Greene shows us, is not located in the description within the text, but *is* the fluid action of a living text that threatens to undo the status of the autobiography as a solid, self-contained representation of Bendrix's life. The threat of disintegration is not a description, not because the text cannot be apprehended anymore, but because what the "leaking" refers to can only be "there—in the phrase," in the present continuous act of inscription rather than in the "what" that is inscribed. If Bendrix thinks he can accurately portray his affair with Sarah, the act of portrayal seems to keep undoing the representation itself.

The inscriptions of "this," "here" and "there" in the sentences above—what we call the demonstrative in linguistics—are indeed unusual. For instead of referring to other parts of the discourse as demonstrative words usually do, they "demonstrate"

themselves *only* as textual occurrences, to their sheer happenings as writing instead of what is happening in the writing.[28] Like the proliferation of suddenness, these demonstratives do not narrate so much as mark the condition of narration. But unlike the machinelike expansion of suddenness, Greene's self-referential comment on writing does not simply reveal the contingency of writing this time; it also emerges, astonishingly, as a living ambiguity "lost in a strange region," a continuously flowing life uncontainable by any simple documentation and irreducible to the mechanical life of jealousy. If realism's "coming to life" was cut short by Bendrix's discovery of the impossibility of recording and knowing Sarah's love, another life nonetheless arises *as* Greene's writing: not as fiction (as realism was unmasked to be) but rather as an inscription of love—the event of love—whose indeterminably significative status is yet to be accorded and fossilized to the static realm of history.[29] For love to be understood as an event, I would argue, it involves not simply the shattering of the self in the encounter with the other, but also an animation of that shattering, as a potential vehicle of transmission, that carries the pathos of a self-loss to the future. If Michael Hardt suggests that love is "an event that arrives from the outside and breaks time in two," into the dreary time we live and the ideal time of eternity,[30] Greene's novel

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[28] See de Man, "Hypogram and Inscription," *Aesthetic Ideology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), esp. the last section on Hegel's example of "this" in "this piece of paper on which I am writing."

[29] For a philosophical discussion of love as an "event" and its disruption of history, see Jean-Luc Nancy, "Shattered Love," *Finite Thinking* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); and Alain Badiou, *In Praise of Love* (New York: The New Press, 2012).

[30] Hardt, Michael. "The Procedures of Love," *More Love: Art, Politics, and Sharing since the 1930s*, ed. Claire Schneider (Chapel Hill: The Ackland Art Museum of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2013), 161-165.

suggests that the two modes of temporality are also linked in the act of writing, in the animation of the self-loss (the experience itself) into the endlessness of life (the survival from that experience). This animation is not guaranteed by the love affair itself but is always produced by the act of writing as a gesture of love. The philosophical event is, fundamentally, a literary event.

8) TOUCHING FUTURE

How is this vehicle of transmission created in Bendrix's autobiography around this new life? We may, finally, turn to a dream—Bendrix's dream in the wake of Sarah's death—to uncover a series of transmission that would culminate in Bendrix's meditation on the survival of literature. One of the implausible events that Bendrix cannot accept as miracles in Book Five, as we recall, is the unexpected healing of Lance Parkis upon being touched by Sarah's inscription, "the unformed scribble with indelible pencil" which uncannily addresses the future reader about the magical healing power of the book. But while everyone including Bendrix struggles to understand the occurrence as God's intervention, from Lance's innocent point of view his timely savior was not Sarah as a saint but, surprisingly, Sarah as his own mother. "She only spoke to [Lance] once," Bendrix is told in the letter, "but somehow he got the idea that his mother had been like her, only she wasn't" (148). The maternal figure of Sarah could be obviously interpreted as an emblem of unconditional love in the Catholic tradition, but in the text itself, not to Bendrix's understanding, Lance's encounter with his mother "who came and took away the pain" enigmatically repeats a

maternal voice in Bendrix's earlier dream whose meaning he cannot quite grasp either. In his dream, which occurs after Sarah's death in Book Five,

> I was walking up Oxford Street and I was worried because I had to buy a present and all the shops were full of cheap jewellery, glittering under the concealed lighting. Now and then I thought I saw something beautiful and I would approach the glass, but when I saw the jewel close it would be as factitious as all the others—perhaps a hideous green bird with scarlet eyes meant to give the effect of rubies. Time was short and I hurried from shop to shop. Then out of one of the shops came Sarah and I knew that she would help me. "Have you bought something, Sarah?" "Not here," she said, "but they have some lovely little bottles further on."
>
> "I haven't time," I begged her, "help me. I've got to find something, for tomorrow's the birthday."
>
> "Don't worry," she said. "Something always turns up. Don't worry," and suddenly I didn't worry. Oxford Street extended its boundaries into a great grey misty field, my feet were bare, and I was walking in the dew, alone, and stumbling in a shallow rut I woke, still hearing, "Don't worry," like a whisper lodged in the ear, a summer sound belonging to childhood (114-115).

If Bendrix would desperately attempt to debunk each ensuing instance of miracle that soon befalls the people around him as merely a coincidence, the dream suggests that the quest of seeking truth, like the shopping experience in the dream, is first motivated by his realization that the truth exists prior to its false appearances. The dream, in this sense, would appear to be not only a fulfillment of Bendrix's unconscious wish to see

Sarah alive again through a story about anxiety, but indeed also a larger fulfillment of the religious motif of the text as a quest for truth.

However, if we look closely, in this story about anxiety and calmness, Sarah's voice emerges finally not as a calming voice that serves as a figure of a guidance Bendrix could recognize as Sarah's in the dream—"Don't worry. Something always turns up"; it emerges, instead, into Bendrix's waking life as the voice of a mother, a figure neither Bendrix nor Lance could have known or recognized. As Sarah's voice survives beyond the dream and transforms itself, moreover, it is no longer *heard* as a piece of advice in an anxiety-ridden journey, but inscribed in Bendrix's waking life as it is "*lodged* in the ear, a summer sound belonging to childhood." If the dream could be interpreted as a wish fulfillment of Bendrix's desire to see Sarah again, the voice that survives beyond the dream as an indelible inscription suggests that Sarah's haunting power might exceed how it is symbolized by the dream. Sarah's impact, in other words, or her death as her unperceivable impact, is not simply symbolized by her prefiguring status as a saint Bendrix's narration could know (so that he may reject it in his conscious life), but dramatized as an unfinished encounter between love and death graspable only on the level of Greene's writing as an unfinished act of love.[31] When Lance is later healed by the touch of the inscription in Sarah's old children book, the

[31] One might, indeed, read Greene's novel as his autobiography. Dedicated "to C," *The End of the Affair* has been widely read as the author's attempt to cope with the end of his own affair with Catherine Walston, with whom Greene had an affair between 1946 and 1966. It is interesting to note that instead of "recording" his affair in his official autobiography, *Ways of Escape* (1980), which is famous for his avoidance of talking about Catherine, this autobiographical moment only surfaces in a fiction, thus enacting Bendrix's claim about the confusion of fiction and life. For the correspondences between Greene and Walston, see *Graham Greene: A Life in Letters*, ed. Richard Greene (New York: Norton, 2008). For a critical discussion on both the similarity and dissimilarity between Greene's affair and Bendrix's affair, see Norman Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene, Vol. 2: 1939-1955*. (London: Penguin Books, 1996).

motherly figure in Sarah can only return as an unrecognizable trace, "the unformed scribble" no more comprehensible than "the summer sound belonging to childhood." It is not merely Sarah's healing power Bendrix cannot quite see, therefore, but also her re-emergence as a mother's voice from the inscription he cannot quite hear.

The non-recognition in the text seems to hit another impasse in the text in Book Five, dramatized in the final moment when Bendrix, in a fury, tears off the cover of Sarah's diary, like "tearing the limbs off a bird," "wingless and wounded" (158). However, at this moment, after Sarah's remaining materials have been stolen or torn apart, Bendrix realizes with sudden insight that the book he has been working on since 1939 is not working. As Bendrix tells us in Book One, he first became acquainted with Sarah thanks to Henry in a party, whose occupation provided the ideal source material for the book project on civil servants he had just started. Interrupted by the love affair and the war, the writing ultimately became directionless and stagnant. Yet the abortion of the old book project, Bendrix now implies, would simultaneously mark the beginning of *The End of the Affair*:

> I went back home and again I tried to settle to my book. Always I find when I begin to write there is one character who obstinately will not come alive. There is nothing psychologically false about him, but he sticks, he has to be pushed around, words have to be found for him, all the technical skill I have acquired through the laborious years has to be employed in *making him appear alive to my readers* (159 emphasis added).

Though Sarah's postmortem voice cannot be heard, it is nonetheless as an obstinately referential sound—a sound that belongs neither to Bendrix nor Lance—that is carried

on in Bendrix's text as the survival of love that continues to demand and resist our interpretation. Sarah's address to the future reader, in other words, in her prophetic inscription on her old children's book, is not answered or recognized in Bendrix's text, but rather passes on into Bendrix's writing as a question, passes on into a text struggling to become "alive" as it now raises the possibility of religious meaning beyond one's understanding. Far from being discarded, then, the dissemination of Sarah's broken materials is preserved by the text as its materiality. If the text questions its significative status by exposing its material foundation, it is also in turn governed by a referential sound that is lodged at the heart of the production of the text, touching and not touching the reader. It is indeed as a figure of speech, in a generous mode of prosopopoeia, that the life within the text might finally be said to speak, inaudibly, to the future readers who have to decide between truth and false appearances, between overdetermination and utter randomness.

We can grasp the full impact of this address to the future, however, only if we turn to another reflection on writing in Book Five, where Bendrix links his own survival in the wake of Sarah's death to the survival of English literature at large in the wake of high modernism. On his way to Sarah's funeral, Bendrix meets with a literary critic Waterbury, and his apprentice assistant Sylvia, to talk about his work for a journal. However, what would be a serious literary discussion turns out to be only a farcical situation. While Sylvia is helpful enough to show Bendrix how to take the train to get to the funeral home on time, Waterbury is annoyingly insistent on knowing how Bendrix would rate E. M. Forster and the literary value of stream of consciousness:

"You used the stream of consciousness in one of your books," Waterbury said with desperate haste. "Why did you abandon the method?"

"Oh, I don't know. Why does one change a flat?"

"Did you feel it was a failure?"

"I feel that about all my books. Well, good-bye, Waterbury" (123)

Waterbury's reference to Bendrix's abandonment of the stream of consciousness is in many ways a comical satire on the overly institutionalized study of modernism in the 1950s,[32] but it is in fact also a reference to Greene's own experiment of the literary technique in his first published novel, *Our Man Within* (1925). In this highly autobiographical moment, Waterbury himself is as well, indeed, not quite a fictional character but a caricature of the literary critic Cyril Connelly, who on multiple occasions pronounced contemporary literature "dead" in the wake of the narrative achievements of Woolf and Joyce.[33] If Bendrix dismisses Waterbury's insistent questions on the merits of contemporary literature based on the criteria set by the modernist predecessors, it appears that Greene is simply asking us to look forward to the future instead of being limited by the past. However, as Bendrix is now on his way

[32] In *The Reaction Against Experiment in the English Novel: 1950-1960*, Rubin Rabinovitz observes that in most of the reviews and comments published in *Times Literary Supplement* in the 1950s, critics often wrote about the new novels as self-conscious reactions against the high modernist experiments. Many of the novelists, likewise, complained that the interest of the novel has been displaced, in the high modernist work, from common readership to academic criticism to the point that reading the novel has become a chore. "Reading some of the weekend literary columns," Pamela Hansford Johnson wrote in 1949, the reader "finds himself urged to admire some work which, when he buys or borrows it, he finds arid, unenjoyable, and not infrequently incomprehensible" (5). It would be interesting to compare this line of complaints to the frequently-heard current complaint about modernism, within English literary studies, as "elitist" and "irrelevant" to contemporary social concerns.

[33] One of the most frequently quoted phrases by him was this: "Flaubert, Henry James, Proust, Joyce and Virginia Woolf have finished off the novel. Now all will have to be re-invented from the beginning." Connolly, *The Unquiet Grave*. (New York: Persea, 2005).

to the funeral in the company of the apprentice Sylvia, he finds himself once again around the specter of Sarah:

> She had a lot to learn, in the way of books and music and how to dress and talk, but she would never have to learn humanity. She came down with me into the crowded tube and we strap-hung side by side. Feeling her against me I was reminded of desire. Would that always be the case now? Not desire, but only the reminder of it (125).

Bendrix's desire now is not so much the desire to possess as the desire, in the ghostly presence of Sarah, to teach a new generation of literary scholars: not teaching in the form of a didactic training of literary techniques Waterbury embodies but, on the contrary, an attempt to pass on—to transmit—a story about Sarah to a student who finds herself in the threshold between literary history and literary future, between what is known and what cannot be known yet. It is also a teaching that would require Bendrix himself to be inscribed as a student, for it is paradoxically as the specter of Sarah, Sylvia is born as the teacher-student. For Greene, the enigmatic survival of love is therefore intimately bound up with the uncertain "life" of literature after the Second World War; the possibility of literature registers itself not as a simple return to a safe mode of narration as Malcolm Bradbury identifies, but as the transmission of a historical impact—the transmission of "suddenness," perhaps—as it moves forward to the unknown future, from a lover to a student, from a student to the future of literary criticism.

The historical impact of the enigmatic event of love might finally attest to what Greene adamantly defended as the importance of "disloyalty" in the work of any

novelist in the Cold War era. Asked by V. S. Pritchett in a series of letter exchanges in 1948 about the artist's role in relation to the increasing instrumentalization of literature "for" society in postwar Europe, Greene answers that the artist must remain "disloyal," not only to his political affiliations but also to "some invented ideology of their own." An artist, he says, must resist the aestheticizing urge "for consistency, for a unified view," which is not a "conscious advocacy of the dispossessed," but a persistent questioning ("doubt and even denial") of any ideological doctrine, endemic in the postwar bourgeois States, that "must be given their chance of self-expression":

> Perhaps the greatest pressure on the writer comes from the society within the society: his political or his religious group, even it may be his university or his employers. It does seem to me that one privilege he can claim, in common perhaps with his fellow human beings, but possibly with greater safety, is that of disloyalty.[34]

Greene warns us that this questioning on the part of literature, its refusal to close itself off into a unified meaning, is not a virtue that can be perceived. "Disloyalty is a privilege you will never get society to recognize," even though it is simultaneously a duty—the privilege as a duty for the late modernists—the "artist unmistakably owes to society." *The End of the Affair*, I would finally propose, might well be understood as Greene's debt to society. Dramatized as a story *about* betrayal, the novel nonetheless ultimately erodes the fallacious perception of betrayal and, more profoundly, subsumes this overwhelming sentiment to a larger crisis of interpretation and self-understanding. As a postwar novel, then, *The End of the Affair* betrays its own status

[34] *Why Do I Write?*, 31.

as a "love story" about betrayal and, in this second betrayal, defies the paranoid mood of the Cold War by leaving the residues of radical disaffiliations in the text, in the interstices between the personal and the impersonal, between the historical and the fictional. It represents not—or at least not chiefly—an ideological recalibration but a refocused concern about what Greene, along with Pritchett and Bowen, saw as the enduring power of a disloyal language against the reduction of literature into mere propaganda. If Greene's text could be properly categorized as an example of "late modernism," it is indeed defined not by a simple rejection of the "autonomous" power of language often mistakenly attributed to "high modernism," but by a more radical questioning of the fossilization of literary history as it encounters the life of literary language—the language of suddenness, the language of love.

Afterword

Touching Words

In each chapter of this dissertation, I have argued that love emerges as an ethical potential only when it is understood as an action beyond the understanding of the characters (or poet) who experience it. Love cannot be reducible to an individual experience, as my literary works repeatedly show, because it is always in the encounter with the collective that it intervenes, and speaks suddenly, in the historical situations that enforced human conformity: the conformity to the conventional psychological pattern in D. H. Lawrence, to norms of gender expression in Mina Loy, to wartime claustrophobic suspense in Elizabeth Bowen, or to the redemptive appeal of God's presence in Graham Greene. In the stories these authors show, while love might appear to be an inexplicable force beyond human control, it is paradoxically the most human in its persistent questioning of the formation of historical situations that demanded the loss of human specificity.

In the work of Lawrence and Loy, we have discovered how the modernist concept of impersonal love finally encounters a more radical power of infinity that threatens to decompose the human into particles smaller than any Futurist materialism can perceive. As Ursula encounters the rainbow in the final chapter of Lawrence's novel, the transfigurative power of love and self-fulfillment are paradoxically brought together. The stunning performance of infinity in the sublime landscape and the figure of the rainbow, and the poetic dismemberment of a human lover within them, push Lawrence's literary project on the "nonhuman within the human" to the extreme, an

inscriptive force that could perhaps only be discerned by Loy's "impossible eyes." In *Songs to Joannes*, indeed, the "tears" and "laughs" of a woman Lawrence mocked as tritely sentimental turn implausibly into "snowdrops" and "molasses" in Loy's anti-pastoral gesture. In her rewriting of the myth of Cupid and Psyche, the Futurist poet implicitly calls for a return to the Socratic myth about madness and melting as a potential site of resistance against the imperative of transcendence. It would be in the melting of her own poetic words into an illimitable white space, indeed, Loy launches her most radical critique of both romantic love and Futurism.

In Bowen, although we no longer feel the experimental energy of these high modernists, we have nonetheless encountered the extraordinary (and fearful) re-creation of a claustrophobic wartime situation of London that turns out to be entirely structured by stories and fictions. Echoing the "Careless Talks Kill Lives" propaganda campaign in Britain during the War, Bowen opens up a literary space to assess the extent to which one can know when one lives, precisely, within the endless formation and circulation of national stories and love stories. In installing enigmatic figures of origin—especially the figure of a "blurting" mouth at the origin of her own novel—Bowen compels us to encounter the contingent character of the origin of the protagonist's love story: how it is erased in the formation of her love story and how her love story, in turn, sheds light on the larger national story on betrayal and responsibility. In Greene's version of WWII, we found a love story less explicitly interested in the political and the social; but in his angry and forlorn search for empirical proof of God's existence and Sarah's love, as I hope I have demonstrated, Bendrix was too enmeshed in the confusion of truth and fiction. In the face of the

absence of the other, to love might be to follow only a pre-written script of jealousy. However, in the lover's repeated encounters with numerous unlikely occurrences, the novel itself also performs a suddenness—a pervasive and inexplicable turning of events everywhere in the novel—whose random existence can no longer be attributed to God alone. And it is the insistent force of this suddenness, which thwarts Bendrix's attempt to come to any narrative foreclosure, that most unexpectedly transforms the love story into a meditation on survival: not only his own survival as a writer of his event of love but also more broadly the survival of literature in the wake of WWII.

It is only apt to end my dissertation *Modernism in Love* with Graham Greene. In the final section of that chapter, I turn to a pedagogical moment in which Bendrix passes on his love to Sylvia in a conversation about the future of literature. But in the sudden evocation of Sarah at that moment, Bendrix discovers that Sylvia might be only a spectral figure for his dead lover. How may this moment—the recognition that a student of literature is at once the embodiment of a lost love—instruct us about literary study or criticism more broadly? In Sarah's death, and in Bendrix's undying love for her, Greene's novel does not simply represent a past event; it arises also as a *response* to the involuntary desire that the event of Sarah's departure be recorded and remembered. As an action, rather than a simple description, literature carries an intrinsic vulnerability whose memory, if not inscribed and passed down, is always susceptible to a permanent loss. This loss would not be only the loss of love but also the loss of memory. For us, to read literature—and to continue to turn to it—is thus not simply to understand an experience of the other but to always encounter, as future students ourselves, the entanglement of death and love inscribed within it.

As a final note, I want to return to the link between love and literature with which this dissertation started. In recent years, literary studies in the United States have undergone a drastic upheaval in its search for new methodological and affective possibilities. Several prominent critics, seeing the language of "resistance" as tired and tiresome, have begun to ask what a new "phenomenology of reading" could look like if we moved past the usual militant mode of ideological critique toward something that fosters attachment, enchantment, or pleasure.[1] For Rita Felski, one of the most vocal theorists from this camp, the idiom of critique "narrows and constrains what literature is and does; it highlights the sphere of agon (conflict and domination) at the expense of eros (love and connection)." Instead of asking all the time where power is in our predetermination of its manifestation in literature, she proposes, "perhaps it is time to start asking different questions: 'But what about love?'"[2]

Like Felski, I am too invested in the possibility of recuperating love as a lost phenomenology in our current critical climate. But at the heart of love, as I have argued repeatedly in all four chapters, lies a recalcitrant defiance of all senses (the sublime self-disappearance in Lawrence, the illimitable white space in Loy, the blurting traces of contingency in Bowen, and the scattering of random events in Greene) that makes it impossible for us to track it as a felt experience. The words "suddenly" in *The End of the Affair*, or the dismembered landscape into which Ursula Brangwen disappears, or perhaps even the enigmatic sounds from Schubert's hurdy-gurdy man: these elements are not necessarily convertible into the larger significative

[1] I am referring to the widely-cited reading methods proposed by these critics, including but not limited to: "reparative reading" (by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick), "surface reading" (by Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus), and "close but not deep reading" (by Heather Love).
[2] Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 17.

structure of the story that the reader can then extract as, and call, an experience. They can be empirically located in the literary texts, to be sure, but they are by no means intrinsically generative of any aesthetic values humanly conceivable, like wonder or enchantment; they are, in short, always some primal elements *to be* fulfilled as meanings, to be harmonized with the voice that so longs to tell a sensible story. They break the path for meaningful formalization but also exceed it, inexorably, as unforeseeable rupture.

In this excess, aren't we called upon by literature to encounter the social or theological worlds (their past, present, and future) as they are invoked in each specific text? As we touch the material copy of *The End of the Affair,* aren't we as well touched (and perhaps "healed") by Sarah's inscription on her old children's book, now destroyed but scattered and infused into Bendrix's writing, which is also Greene's own writing? Speaking prophetically, Felski argues that our willing receptiveness to literature is indeed what is going to define the "postcritical" age of criticism in the twenty-first century. I will simply highlight two moments in her text to make my final point:

> ["Freudian and Marxist thought" as well as "poststructuralism"] seek to identify and taxonomize misperceptions by subjecting texts to analyses that place them in an unexpected and unflattering light. And both guard against any risk of deep involvement, absorption, or immersion in their object, priding themselves on their stoicism and lack of susceptibility to *a text's address.*[3]

[3] Ibid, 54, emphasis mine.

> "Receptivity," in Nikolas Kompridis's words, refers to our willingness to become 'unclosed' to a text, to *allow ourselves to be marked, struck, impressed by what we read*.… [Postcritical reading] is not idealism, aestheticism, or magical thinking but a recognition—long overdue—of the text's status as coactor: *as something that makes a difference, that helps make things happen.*[4]

To be addressed by the text, to be called upon by literature to make a difference: this is what Felski ultimately calls "freedom" from our ideological burdens.[5] Yet as much as it is freedom, I tend to think, it is also an inescapable responsibility, a responsibility we are bound to take on when Loy, for example, demands that we confront the stark white space in *Songs to Joannes* with our "blind eyes" and "steel eyes." Reading the gaps of meaning that can potentially render "words all white," we are compelled to confront a complete blankness wherein lies a potent, unimaginable "Nothing" against the conventional love plot and beyond the physical confines of the page. Likewise, when we are struck by "something" in *The Heat of the Day*, by that indecipherable "something" at the juncture between national betrayal and romantic attachment, our articulacy as modern critics is also doomed to repeat the contagious "blurting" and "laughing" mouths, even as we might wish we could, like Louie, lay a moral judgment and foreclose the story. Literature does not guarantee what the future has in store for us, but its world-remaking possibility is always there as an address to us by a figural

[4] Ibid, 12, emphases mine.
[5] Felski, 55.

turn if not always as an intuitive feeling.[6] To be tasked to respond to what we do not yet fully know is indeed what my texts implicitly demand. This is neither idealism nor aestheticism, nor—I should add—"deconstructive nihilism," but a sympathetic and searching inquiry of what literature can do what it may not yet say—the only gesture of love as a critic.[7]

[6] On address and literature, see Paul de Man, "Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric," *Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), especially Chapter Five on "Lyric Address"; Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1991); and Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History, 20th Anniversary Edition* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), especially the Afterword on "Addressing Life." On the ability of literature to "strike," see Barbara Johnson, "Melville's Fist: The Execution of 'Billy Budd,'" *Studies in Romanticism* (Vol 18: 4, 1979), 567-599. On literature and being "marked," see Cynthia Chase, "Accidents of Disfiguration: Limits to Literal and Rhetorical Reading in Book V of 'The Prelude,'" *Studies in Romanticism* (Vol 18: 4, 1979), 547-565.
[7] See Ellis Hanson, "The Languorous Critic," *New Literary History* (Vol. 43: 3, 2012), 547-564.