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# Orinary Human Personhood

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Theologians, philosophers, psychologists and others have long pondered the category of the person. In the founding texts of Generative Anthropology, one can locate reflections on topics such as the subject, identity, free will, body and soul, the mind-brain distinction, intentionality, and spirituality. But curiously, one does not find a text devoted by title to orinary personhood. To fill that lacuna is one goal of this study. My other goal is to analyze a passage that has long puzzled me. I quote from Gans's "*Amo quia absurdum*" (1995):

God as the orinary object of human love is also the orinary person. But from the minimalist perspective of generative anthropology, this orinary person is not understood as human. Personhood is not in the first place characteristic of me, but of the sacred Other whose humanity is not primordial . . . but derived.

The person in its orinary instantiation is not, strangely, to be understood as human; personhood is characteristic first of the sacred or divine Other. The humanity of the Other is "not primordial . . . but derived." (1)

To desire human personhood would not mean to wish a blasphemous appropriation of the central object-divinity on the scene of representation, but it would mean a desire to have something like the unique personhood of God. Perhaps we need a separate account of orinary *human* personhood in order to continue to respect that attention to the God-human difference that orinary thinking inherits from religion. Exploring that possibility, my argument has two aspects. First, I suggest that a useful test when wondering if a thing (human or not) might deserve personhood is to ask: *can you love it?* The lovability of objects determines the chances of their becoming persons, in keeping with the hint that personhood belongs first to the sacred Other as an object of human love. (2) The idea of the lovability test rests on the assumption that love opens up the Other (including myself as other) to personhood, whereas resentment erodes and blocks personhood.

Second, I pursue a thesis: *the humanity of the personhood of the sacred other cannot be derived from the public esthetic center without the competing mediation of the private erotic center.* (3) My inclination to foreground the erotic in orinary human personhood fits with the lovability test. Although many loves flourish without the erotic (friendship, affection, charity), the erotic inspires love as nothing else does. The most universal image of human love is that of the erotic couple; maybe it has a kind of rival in the image of mother and child--but whence the child? Although it is absurd or impossible for a human to desire erotic reciprocity with God, as if one could exclusively "have" God as one's lover, (4) by contrast, to "have" another human person is most certainly possible. Furthermore, the invisible afigurality of God in the First Person permits the Divine's transcendence of human difference. By contrast, human persons without figure would cease to be persons; persons are visible, beautiful, finite, vulnerable, mortal... figures of desire.

Although it is not in the spirit of generative anthropology to list distinctions in a quest for terminological purity, two qualifications will help prepare for the extrapolation of these notions.

First qualification. To be a self is not quite yet to be a person. The *self* designates rather a denuded, anesthetic entity lacking both the concrete bodily vulnerability and the power to create meaning that belongs to the person. "He is a wonderful person" sounds fine; "he is a wonderful self," awkward. "She is a giving person" makes sense; "she is a giving self" rings oxymoronic. The undesirability of the reputation of "selfish person" tells all: the self is not the person. To have achieved *personhood* and to have *personality*, to be personable, to have personal relationships--those are goods. But to have a self--well, we all have one of those, it takes no work to have one of those; having a self makes no distinction--what can one do with oneself? The erotic self--especially--knows that what it can do with itself is limited. (5) (The erotic *person*, however, may seem limitlessly beautiful.) In the originary event, the moment of consciousness of self is the moment of resentment. In resenting the sacred center, we first experience ourselves as violently dispossessed by it. Originary *selfhood* would thus be resentfully but not interpersonally human. In naming the sacred Object only as object of resentment, we are not yet naming God as a person: the sacred Other whom we selfishly name in resentment is not the divine Person whom we name in love. By contrast, to love God as originary Person is to love something of the way the sacred central Object has moved and moves us. Likewise in human exchange, the self-dispossession of resentment opposes love. We cannot have true love for the one against whom we feel real resentment. (6) These contrasting associations of the self with resentment and the person with love, it seems to me, are worth preserving.

And yet there is value in owning the mere originary self as a kernel of sign-using consciousness prerequisite to personhood. Individual agency, free will, moral responsibility: several founding texts of Generative Anthropology affirm the value of the contributions made by these categories to the project of our self-understanding. (7) Acclamations of even a resentful free will are a valuable counterweight to the post-structuralist denials of agency that would sever the connection between our internal scenes of representation (i.e., our imaginations), and the many external worlds, local and global, where exchanges of signs and things produce concrete results and where ethical performances have often incalculable consequences for good and evil. (8) Anybody who uses language is a self endowed with free will; to use the sign on the scene of representation is to be a human self. (9) My first qualification aims simply to spotlight the fact that a self consumed by resentment militates self-defeatingly against the openness to exchange of others' personhood, and therefore against its own. Resentfulness is parasitic on love. (10) The totally resentful self is not yet a person because such a self must abolish without loving the otherness of the center, and the desire to abolish the center makes exchange with others as centers, as persons, impossible. (11) Distinguishing between selfhood and personhood may, therefore, illuminate the boundaries between originary resentment and originary love. If I am consumed by resentment of the other, I have not stepped back from myself to recognize the otherness in myself. (12) I have not learned to imitate the sacred central Other withdrawing itself in the founding move of erotic activity from which human personhood is derived.

Second qualification. Personhood is not reducible to *identity*. To assimilate a person to all or a selection of his or her identities is to do violence to him or her. The lovability test may be well applied here. The expression "I love you for yourself" intends its supplemental "for yourself" to disassociate the real person as center (free, creative, unique) from the nonessential identities peripheral to it (identities professional, social, political, economic). There is something mysterious about this recalcitrance of the human person to identity-marking, something related to the weird arbitrariness of all names, something we might understand on the model of the inaccessibility of the afigural God of the First Person. (13) As the name of God is not "God" but we feel God must be named, so the identifying marks are not the human person but we feel persons must be identifiable. We cannot see a human person without the identity he or she is wearing at any instant as a mask; but a whole person includes an invisible but willful presence animating, wearing, behind, the mask. In submitting to that invisible will, we are acknowledging the reality of the person.

The resentfulness of *self* without personhood is complemented by the "thinness of political-collective identities" that Gans has noticed, a thinness that fits with this distinction between person and identity. (14) A person takes up a collective group identity when he places the ballot into the electoral box, sings the national anthem amidst the crowd in the stadium, or raises his fist at the demonstration. But such identities (responsible voter, citizen-and-fan, frustrated protester) are just not personal in the way that those expressed by laughing at dinner with friends, reading to one's children at bedtime, or walking hand-in-hand with one's beloved are personal. I suspect political activists may be scandalized by this formulation. But I stand by it: one understands one's love for one's country and one's political cause on the model of one's

love for erotic partners, family and friends--but not the reverse. As ordinary resentment of the center-as-public-other is parasitic on ordinary love of the center-as-*personal*-other, so is group secondary to personal identity. (15) As I will try to show, for the sacred central Object to be personally--individually--loved, it must be named as something more and other than the object of our collectively identical resentment. The erotic, personalized center must be experienced as withdrawing itself from our desire and mediating its own desirability apart from our desire for it. The seeming self-withdrawal of the center is *the* erotic move. Love when helped along by the erotic, therefore, lets the central object *be* in its self-mediating personal integrity even while wishing to have the central object all to itself, as an equal in reciprocal exchange. Thus human love must first become conscious of the central object as a Person before it can love it; but that requires consciousness of the erotic effect that the central object has aroused in us. And the erotic is an effect that we cannot help but take personally.

The two qualifications complete, let us turn to this study's main thesis: *the humanity of the personhood of the sacred other cannot be derived from the public esthetic center without the competing mediation of the private erotic center.*

What is the erotic? It is a component of desire dependent on an act of imagining. The imagining reduces the mimetic triangle between subject, rival, and central object to an intimate duality between subject and object of desire alone. This formulation might appear to break heretically with the mimetic theory of desire, but triangular mediation persists in the erotic. The difference is that in the dyadic erotic relation, the "central object alone" *appears* from the periphery to have become self-mediating. In the erotic, it is as if the central object has always mediated its own desirability. Triangular mediation will never have "gone away" as an historical fact: the knockout beautiful woman or the killingly handsome man, het, gay, bi, straight, who desires her or his own self-centralizing erotic prowess, desires it because, first, *others* desired it. Personhood first belongs to the Other; philosophical barbs obtrude, therefore, if I seek it in myself alone. On the other hand, it obscures things to overvalue the indebtedness of erotic relations to their origins in social triangularity, for the valuable erotic illusion creates a new reality. The sacred power of erotico-sexual love between persons, if it is only imaginary, only an illusion, belongs among those illusions impossible to peel away from the real--not dissimilar to the "illusion" that I am a unique person with free will, the "illusion" that I have a soul.

How exactly do those on the periphery experience the erotic effect or recognize the central object as an erotic one? What happens is that the sacred central Object *seems to withdraw itself from our desire.* (16) The erotic object withholds itself, as if self-conscious because aware of being desired. The self-withdrawal is a move the object makes, drawing more attention to itself. The scenic tension between periphery and center does not collapse. Rather, the radical corporeality and figural attractiveness of the central object takes into itself, or absorbs in self-withdrawal, even more of the attractiveness that has been already generated by center-periphery tension. An erotic object in self-withdrawal intensifies our awareness of the "objective" (inevitable pun) content of its tantalizing bodily otherness, its self-spotlighting figural uniqueness, as if its centrality could allow it to subsist on the basis of its material being alone. Witnessing the erotic body in the center, we see the desirable artist and work of art as one: the artistry of the erotic is to make of oneself a beautiful, desirable *person* whom the would-be-loving other wants to have.

It helps to differentiate the experience of the object as erotic from experiences of it as sacred or esthetic. When we experience a central object as sacred, it appears to us as inaccessible to appropriation, forbidden by communally-sanctioned decree, the force of its objective inaccessibility awe-inspiring, terrifying. The sacred object blocks even hints of the most private fantasy of erotic intimacy with itself; to imagine having human sex with the sacred One, the Creator, is to draw a blank. When we experience the object as esthetic, the oscillation between imaginary possession and recognized inviolability, in permitting imaginary possession itself, initiates desiring activity in one's imagination. One imagines having it to oneself; one ponders the object-other as something desirable in its specificity. But the formal mediation necessary to the esthetic is not assimilable to the personal self-mediation necessary in erotic experience.

We may continue to explore the distinction between esthetic and erotic. You may find the genius of the fascinating singer-songwriter inspiring you to wonder what dinner with him or her would feel like, you may dream of meeting the creator of the enthralling fictional world of the novel, but an erotic fantasy about sexual consummation with the singer-songwriter or novelist is beside the point of your appreciation of his or

her artwork. The artwork has its source in the individual will of the person, certainly; it is not naïve but mature to imagine beyond the work to the individual intention-bearing person, and the person might well be imagined as erotically desirable. But the dreamed-of erotically enticing creator-as-person is detachable from his or her work: that detachability is a presupposition of the fantasy. The artist as maker-of-art is separate from the artist as "ordinary" person, as God the creator of everything is separable from the creation, as I the person am separable from my masks, my changeable identities, even my body, as the only one who can re-present that body to others, making of it something more than animal meat or molecular packaging. Furthermore, the artist needs a public; lovers do not need a public and seek a place apart from the public. (17)

In the erotic, I am alone with the person that the central object has become. The personhood of the erotic object makes the difference between it and the esthetic. I experience the erotic other as unique, particular, a person with whom I want to consummate a relationship, not a body-thing I want to consume because others find it beautiful or scarce. It does not trouble me if a work of art that I love has value for other people, but I am troubled if the object of my erotic desire attracts the erotic interest of others. If a man remarks that he finds my wife beautiful, it might be said he flatters my taste. But if he says he finds her sexy, irresistible, *really attractive*, he violates an intimate sacred space that she and I together have made. He's asking... for a fight. The peacenik aficionados of free love might challenge my implicit validation of pugnacity here, but I would reply that their love is "free" only to the extent that they have made no real erotic investment in it. The genuine erotic object risks drawing toward itself more, not less, violence, than the esthetic object. *Casual sex* may not be oxymoronic, but *casual love* is. The erotic object is both more vulnerable and less exchangeable than the esthetic, because the erotic object is almost always a human person, an anthropological truth with ethical consequences. (18)

With erotic desire, then, the central object seems to withdraw itself *on its own* from the periphery, as if beginning to vanish, as if in danger of being lost to us. It is as if the object has become its own person, as if the object has... a will of its own. Although we stop with dreams of imaginary possession in esthetic appreciation, we do not stop there with the erotic. In the erotic, we dream, not of consumption but of consummation--the consummation of an exchange with an invisible personal Other willfully expressing himself or herself with body: skin, flesh, muscle, bone, eyes, lips, mouth, face, flesh, sweat, blood, breath. Esthetic experience is episodic, finite, bounded, dependent on the closure of the sign; even the best poetry will not bear endless rereading. Erotic otherness is the foundation of the limitlessness of true love, for we can never "have" enough of the one we love truly (because we can never really "have" a *person*.) One's beloved in his or her self-mediating erotic personhood is not just a seeming divinity, not just a work of art, but something even better than these--a human person like me with whom I wish to exchange the most intimate material and spiritual details.

Once we experience the erotic effect being aroused in us by the sacred center, we become capable ourselves of arousing it for others (Gans, *Signs of Paradox* 112). With that notion, nothing seems problematic. However, to claim that a nonhuman object can begin to behave or perform like a peripheral subject seems problematic. How would a deified non-human central Object become apparently self-mediating, erotic? We need a description of the self-withdrawal of a *nonhuman* central object.

Returning to the lovability test, let us ask: when might a nonhuman object begin to seem lovable? Recall that love is not only the deferral of resentment but also the renewal of the promise of care, grounded in a sentiment of tenderness for the other. Tenderness for the vulnerability of the Other provides a clue. Our experience of the self-withdrawal of the object adds to it a supplemental quality of radical otherness, the otherness of its content as separable even from esthetic mediation. That otherness is rooted in its material vulnerability. The central object in its victimary status, we suspect, we anticipate, will be destroyed--it will be annihilated, consumed, gone. Its self-withdrawal is like its seeming to go away. We might say that the erotic's dependency on an intuition of the radical otherness of the object's content originates in the scenic sensation of its vulnerability to being sacrificially *lost*--its being destined to vanish, to disappear in sacrificial violence. Thus the tenderness that must accompany true love.

Among erotic objects of desire, a store-bought birthday cake does not spring to mind. But if, say, it is a one-of-a-kind birthday cake in the shape of a guitar (yes, a guitar) that it has taken your devoted partner all day long to make--a beautiful birthday cake that must be photographed for posterity--then your feeling

that it will somehow be a sad thing to eat it is not a childlike misgiving, but a non-esthetic effect of the material thing revelatory of an erotic component in its content. Your resistance to its being consumed adds to the desire aroused by its beauty: what will be lost is this one cake, in its particularity and personality. Even if someday another cake that looks just like it gets baked and presented, that copy-cake will not be *this* one. Anticipated as lost, the eroticized birthday cake is self-withdrawing from your gaze as you prepare to consume it. The "oneness" of the personal has its origin in the oneness of the sacred central erotic Object self-withdrawing from the scene of representation.

While the self-withdrawal of the central object is in reality an effect of the mediation of the desiring periphery, the illusion of the self-withdrawal of the erotic comes with and comes from an intensification of our sense of the object's physical finiteness and vulnerability, an intensification of our sense of its exhaustibility in time, its ephemerality. Something about these qualities resists their being assimilated to the esthetic, to the effects of oscillation between the object-as-referred-to-by-the-sign and the sign-as-signifying-the-object. Material finitude, bodily vulnerability, exhaustibility, ephemerality, mortality--maybe it's not naive to name these qualities of central objects facts of nature, facts of life; the relations between the erotic and the facts of sex and generation are not distant. Such qualities in themselves mediate the desirability of the radical otherness of the content of the object, so as to make its desirability appear partly independent of scenic mediation. Radical material otherness can never be "had," in the sense that I can never myself know the interior wholeness of the birthday cake. New lovers want to eat each other up; but to consume the object is not to know it as in *being* it; such knowledge is simply impossible. One is condemned to "have" only one's own personhood.

Moving toward the target of a model of self-conscious originary personhood, it is time to celebrate the intimacy between the figural resources of the human body and our thinking about human persons. Whatever myriad attributions of sacred personhood we have made over the centuries to culturally significant nonhuman objects--consider the deification and naming of goats, lambs, bears, eagles, leaves, trees, lakes, rivers, mountains, valleys, cliffs, peaks, rocks, stars, planets--our intuitions of originary *human* personhood must have emerged only after some long acquaintance with rituals that witnessed the *human body as occupant of the center of the scene of representation*. Philosophers who have puzzled over personal identity have thus frequently connected the continuity of the body to that of the person. Setting aside odd cases of nostalgia for the sportive animal disguises worn by the sacred Zeus and his ilk, setting aside likewise the enthusiasm of some post-humanists for future sexual congress with high-class robots, most people today still sanely, soundly "privilege" the image of humans loving humans in recognizably human bodies. Nevertheless, we must not lose the edge of the analysis of the exemplary once-special birthday cake as nonhuman object: we can intuit a continuity between a non-human object in the sacred center self-withdrawing and the human body as object in the sacred center withdrawing itself from our desire as we anticipate its *lostness*. The anticipation of lostness is key to understanding how the sacralization of the erotic human body is irreducibly an effect of scenic structures rather than the result of a cosmologically determined biological destiny. In other words, the sacralization of the human body as a personal thing would derive from collective action on the scene of representation: in the first place, from the nonhuman object's seeming self-withdrawal from the center of the scene of representation.

Consider now a suggestion that the origin of human personhood may be one with the origin of erotic self-mediation. The ironically self-mediating erotic subject-other offers a minimal model of human self-consciousness. Not consciousness of oneself using just any sign to name the center, but consciousness of oneself *using one's own whole body as a sign by which to name oneself as the center*. Perform this introspective test. Imagine yourself in a social scene, a dinner or party or dance. You find yourself surrounded and alone in the center and you notice that all the people on the periphery--who knew? --suddenly "want" you erotically. They all want consummation with you, the person. Now they want you because you yourself have become aware of their erotico-sexual desire for you: now you are self-withdrawing. Seeming thus to enjoy being desired by them, you add, by apparently resisting it, to their desire for you. The situation imposes a paradoxical self-consciousness on you as the central object-become-eroticized-subject. *Here I am in the center in the flesh, but what significance have they on the desiring periphery attributed to my body, what a significant thing (suddenly, apparently) is this body of mine! I must will myself to control it as if it were other than me!*

This scenario begins to answer the question--under what material conditions could a human who has

learned to name the nonhuman Other object in the center have no choice but to name *himself (or herself)* as subject-and-object at once? The quality of such an instant of recognition of your erotic centrality would be equally embarrassing and exhilarating, flattering and constricting. For consider that because you are erotically desired *equally by many*, to choose the one of your preference from the desiring periphery is necessarily to disappoint all the others. What can you do with yourself in the *public* erotic center? Alas, embodied human, you are not a demigod; you cannot float upward and away, nor can you dissolve into mist. You have no choice but to stay incarnate while you self-withdraw ironically from the force of the desires that have extra-centered you. The paradox of the *self-consciously* erotic human center, experienced on the inside, is that even to ignore the erotic attentions of the periphery, even to pretend indifference to the plural desires for you, only increases their force. (19)

No human person could endure such a centrality of awkwardly surrounded erotic objecthood. Contrary to fantasy, such encirclement by multiple competing partners making equally intense sexual offers would mean lots of cultural work rather than a lazy plenitude of appetitive satisfactions. If the sexy beast surrounded by eager would-be lovers is in fact a human, then he or she will feel more tied to a stake of involuntary centrality than be leaping serenely from romp to romp, no strings attached. No wonder people prefer to go steady for a while or get married. Because public erotic self-mediation is not really a viable option, it is from erotic self-mediation that minimal human personhood is derived.

Consider, too, that reciprocal erotic exchange is only imperfectly modeled by linguistic reciprocity. Rather in the way that there can be only one sacred central Object-other at the communal origin of the sign, you can give yourself erotically as only one person--which means that you signify yourself with the sign of your one body, no matter how beautifully you adorn, ornament, or modify it, doing fifty push-ups, dressing to kill, gussying up your long hair. The language of erotic signs is the language in which "the sign" you exchange is your person embodied, the person of your body. The investment one makes in one's body as a sign is at least as expensive as any individual contribution to communal investments in the cultural overhead required by ritual. I can exchange all the words of my community's language that I know, easily; I can perform the many gestures I have learned for participation in my community's rituals, easily. But I have only one body by which to indicate that I am myself prepared for erotic exchange, one body to share in an acts of sexual love. (20)

Incarnate in a human body paradoxically aware of itself as a sign of the body--self-conscious as one body and will, thing represented and representation--the ordinary human person comes into being. I am a body, totally incarnate; but incarnation means that I must be ironically aware of my spirit and will as things separate from my body. (*How can they find me so beautiful? I must freely will myself to continue being beautiful!*) Erotic self-mediation models minimal personhood, for in it, one is paradoxically all oneself and not oneself at all. My personal predicament is alienatingly inescapable because although I am subject to others finding me desirable, the alienating inescapability is *mine, all mine*: only I am at that instant the central erotic object-subject. (21)

This minimal opening into personhood hypothesizes a pragmatic crisis every bit as paradoxical as that of the generation of the ordinary sign itself. The sparagmos is the dissolution there; here, the dissolution will be the transgressive formation of the erotic couple, detaching its dyadic interactive self from the public scene. (22) Thus personhood suggests a model of transcendence that is provided by the unit of the loving couple, the private rival to the public sacred center. The immediate solution to the impossible irony of being sexually desired by all on the periphery is the sacrificially creative one of choosing one partner, and in reciprocal exchange with that one, forming the private sacred of a true love relationship, a shared world of meanings, exchanged words and things, hearth and home, food and furniture, walls and windows, and maybe babies. Babies, newborn children: humans who enter the world bearing in the very material features of their flesh a miraculous blending of physiological signs, their bodies freshly resembling and reassembling the bodies of the adult persons whose act of love in the flesh engendered them. If the ordinary scene of human personhood had not always helped us do better at producing children, then we would not be here now to ponder it. (23)

We name our children. In the apparent universality of the way that rituals of naming accompany crises in the erotico-sexual life cycle, there is perhaps some corroboration for a model of personhood that privileges the erotic. For it is in the nature of a person to merit a name: even anathema presupposes anonymity; the

scapegoat gets named before it gets killed. Individuals change names when they marry; the married produce children who are named not long after birth; when they reach sexual maturity, initiatory rites add a name to mark them as potential parents now themselves. That acts of naming and renaming accompany the mimetic crises of erotic-sexual activity in the human life cycle lends some support to our intuition that a minimal model of personhood may best be captured by a reframing of erotic self-awareness and self-withdrawal.

And yet there would be a deep, real danger in stopping here with the child-entailing erotic alone, this neat fitting of the cultural to the biological. Such fitting, or collapsing, almost always betrays the reduction of the scene of representation to something less and other than the scene of representation and human being.

For starters, another moment in the life cycle does not quite fit with any of those just mentioned: the moment of death. More or less a stranger to the erotic, unlike birth or initiation or marriage, not biologically fruitful, personal death presses reflection on personhood to a new level. It does so no matter how much hard cultural property one might pass to one's living-on heirs. Generative Anthropology offers reflection on personhood the advantages of minimal scenic thinking, freedom from the futile search for the perfectly logical proposition that might stand as a Super-definition of the human person above all considerations and questions. Simply to say that a person is a lovable one may solve a lot of problems. The metaphysician who demands a foolproof category of "person" independent of human interaction is missing from the outset the whole point of a minimal scenic anthropology like the one advertised here, which would insist that personhood, like any other human activity, is fundamentally mimetic and interindividual. If it makes me philosophically uneasy (for example) that no predication whatsoever of the type *I am and do thus, therefore I am a person* will escape paradox, if it makes me anxious that my personhood depends entirely on what others do with and for and to me, well, I must understand that I am always already welcome to the club, welcome to the class, welcome to the world. The club is humankind, the class is history, and the world is the one where we have always been free only to share. (24) Metaphysics will not solve the problem of personhood, for we did not at the origin and do not now need sentences to be persons. Language, yes; sentences, no; naming precedes predication, chronologically and ontologically.

Meanwhile, I do not mean to mock the anxious person who seeks in metaphysical principles some lens through which to look at the faceless spectre of death and not go blind with incomprehension. For trying to stare down and get into focus the annihilation of one's personal consciousness is no easy thing. The line taken by Lucretius and much later by the supremely complacent David Hume, the line *I was not around before I was born so not being around after I die troubles me not*, is a flippant evasion that cancels the "I" by presupposing the meaningfulness of the world without the "I." *How noble and stoic and generous am I! I will calmly let the world exist without me when I am dead and gone!* But real originary thinking about one's personhood asks the question of the *meaning* of one's personal life, an ethical rather than an ontological question; and it values the irreversible contribution however small made by each human life to the course of human history. When we meet the Divine Interrogator at the gates of the afterlife, the question will not concern, I expect, how the world wagged before we were born and how it will wag now that we have been required to absent ourselves from it. The question will be *what meaningful things (good, beautiful, charitable, honorable) have you done with your time? Whom did you love, and how?*

There is another real danger in stopping with a model of personhood in the mind-body unity of erotic centrality. The danger is flagged by the reader who asks this: how does such a conception include children who die before sexual maturity, people who never have sex or beget children, people with disabilities that affect sexual performance, people in conditions demented or comatose, babies not yet born? Are these non-erotic bodies not persons?

Originary thinking's model of personhood, like its model of Divine self-performance, would be interactively Trinitarian. The minimal personhood proposed in the crisis of bodily erotic self-consciousness opens gracefully toward maximization in spirit. The simplest way to notice that opening toward spirit is to say that once the human individual is aware of its erotic body as the sign of itself, he or she is free to *take possession of that body in ways other than the erotic*. The minimal presupposition is that as a person, one must have awareness of one's freedom to use one's body *ironically, to use it as the inadequate sign of one's merely re-presented self*. From that awareness, in effortless metonymical steps, the things one does with one's body--the food one cooks, the tools one makes, the garments one fashions, the dwellings one

builds, the love one makes, the children one raises--all these *acts of the body* become acts of a person. The body once discovered as the expressive material of the minimal person is opened up to the maximal performance of both myriad erotico-sexual gestures and every bodily gesture imaginable. Those whom one might fear to have excluded are included by way of this effortless pluralizing of personal bodily performances.

Furthermore, Generative Anthropology acknowledges the connections between the humanization of the sacred Object and the attitudes and ideas that have flowed from the world-historical Christian revelation. (25) Other philosophers and anthropologists--among them Emile Durkheim, (26) Marcel Mauss, (27) Louis Dumont, Martin Hollis, (28) and David Bentley Hart, (29) have claimed that accounts of the category of the person should award a starring role to the Christian doctrine of the incarnation and its influence on Western individualism and the notion of the meaningful career. But before we consider the vocation of Jesus, the Incarnation itself, to think over the difference between the God-kings of the archaic empires and the God-man of Christianity is worthwhile.

In the archaic empires, rulers claimed to re-present the gods in their very persons; Roman emperors claimed demigod status, to represent again the gods in their persons. The difference Christianity made was its lending dignity to all human bodies, even the "defective" or damaged body. In Christian personhood, the divinely-sanctioned dignity of the human body regardless of its erotic desirability is affirmed. How does this happen? It happens as Christianity eroticizes the invisible soul. For what is faith in the eternal significance of the resurrected body of the Crucified, if not faith in the significance of a *non-erotic* figure that occupies a scene of representation where the structure of intergenerational exchange is not corporeally genetic, not dependent on the material history of one's flesh-and-blood family, but spiritually freed to create a history of adoptive relations of non-erotic self-giving (affection, friendship, charity)? The leper, the cripple, the outcast and the ugly may belong to the center of the scene of representation. Thanks to the Incarnation, self-mediation may now deny the erotico-sexual body altogether: one may occupy the center of the human scene even if no other human finds one's body erotically tempting. Asceticism and eroticism become paradoxical twins, fully alive only when accompanied by the other as coeval rival. The figural sexiness of Greek secular esthetic culture fuses with the austere iconoclasm of Jewish monotheism. The universalization of the dignity of the human body fuses with the eroticization of the invisible, willed soul of the human person. The person self-mediate his or her desire for his or her own divinely-sanctioned, finite and vulnerable, but memorable and meaningful, soul.

Gans has hinted that it is not so naive to think of God as a person. (30) Presumably he would extend the idea in suggesting that it is not so naive to insist that the historical personhood of Christ is essential to the historical rootedness of Christian theology. Perhaps we must concede that the Passion narrative partakes of the esthetic structure of any other tragedy. Even so, it remains true that not to take the tragedy of the passion "personally" is not to get its point. One loves Christ not because he sacrificed himself in some inscrutably bizarre ransom arrangement with a deranged vengeful Father. (31) Rather, one loves Christ as one believes that his living and dying were intended to mean something, and the intention was directed at us. His crucified body was to signify; it was no accident, no side-effect, no random surprise. The meaningfulness of the non-erotic body is guaranteed by the Holy Spirit, who guaranteed its originary meaningfulness by inspiring the memory of Divine vulnerability and giving access to the voice of Divine forgiveness.

The doctrine of the Incarnation seems to insist that the body of Jesus is a human body *unlike* that of any other human, that his bodily self-sacrifice is unique among such human sacrifices, something done "once and for all." Jesus as God in his victimary, figurally unique Objecthood is one with the invisible will of God the Father as afigural and inaccessible. Whatever bodily performances we in imitation of Christ on the periphery might manage to bring off in ascetic self-discipline or charitable self-denial, the doctrine of the Incarnation suggests that nothing matches what the Divine Human has done. Following this implication of the Incarnation, we feel our love for God Incarnate must have nothing to do with the erotic.

The problem in this naming of an absurdity and the accompanying prohibition is that it risks voiding the scene of any orientation by which our relation to the Divine body in the scenic center might be personal. To restore the personal connection, the solution is not a bottomless pity and compassion for the Crucified one. Certainly, such pity must be a big part of any respect for the historical Jesus. But on this point, it is

worthwhile to register that Gans has had the courage to propose that in the relation named love, even in that naming love of the Crucified, *one does not treat the beloved as abject or victimary*. (32) How might one love the body of Christ while getting beyond the victimary temptation to see him simply as a victim? The answer, I think, is to ask about the meaning of what he did with his body, which returns us to our minimal model of personhood. The minimal model of personhood seeks to establish scenically the self-conscious use of one's intention-bearing self. What the Crucified reveals is that the intention-bearing body given in loving self-sacrifice may well prove just as historically powerful as the body given in erotic exchange. The history of the erotico-sexual genetic human community generates its non-monstrous rival in the adoptive history of a loving "spiritual" humankind.

And at that point, the problem of the prohibitive naming of an absurdity is solved to the extent that pondering the Incarnation teases us into the thought that the body of Jesus is somehow just like ours and Jesus somehow a person just like us: not kept at a forbidding distance, but approachably intimate. For if we are to imagine the body of Jesus as really that of a fully human being after all, then we must imagine him as human in the first place and so *choosing* to become God, choosing to recognize God in himself, and imagine ourselves as able to witness that choosing. (33) Jesus in humanness would have chosen to self-mediate in submitting to the will of God in himself, God-as-himself. His choice would have included submission to a sacrificial vocation; the submission would have been self-mediating. Jesus was not God-robot. He was God-human. If we are imitating the self-giving charitable love of the Crucified, we are imitating the choice of the fully human Christ.

Not to take the tragedy of the passion "personally" is not to get it. We on the periphery *can* put ourselves in the tragic place of the Divine Incarnate, to the extent that we can grasp Jesus' Divine self-choosing as meaningful. That self-choosing is one with the self-withdrawal of the central object: we cannot think it without thinking the lostness of the Divine Object. From our perspective, Jesus' choice of his sacrificial destiny is one with his self-withdrawal from the finite, historical, worldly scene of merely-human interpersonal exchange. His may not be thinkable as an erotic self-withdrawal, but it certainly may be understood as a personal and bodily self-withdrawal.

That is why those who see Jesus as another sacrificial mythic hero just do not "get" him, or the "it" he is trying to give them. His was a self-mediation of the spirit, not the body. His self-mediation of the desirability of his body was not the thing (for who would wish his or her body to be crucified?). His was a self-mediation of the desirability of his quest for his soul--his oneness with God (a quest which necessitated his victimary destiny). (34) In imagining that quest, we find the merely human being of Jesus "attractive" in a quasi-erotic way--beautiful--and we picture him as a particular historical actor like us, rather than a mythical deity like any other. Our freedom so to imagine his personhood is what might make him the one God Incarnate rather than another exotic but replaceable demigod such as those who ruled in the archaic empires. We might learn to think of the Incarnation as "erotic" in the attractiveness of its infinite meaningfulness.

A Trinitarian model of human personhood is completed in the mystery of Spirit, the personal sacred center neither as inaccessible will nor as victimary object but rather as mediator of meaningfulness. For meaning is a blessing of the center as source of spirit. (35) From loving the one sacred Object-other at the origin, we come to love each other as sacred centers in the end. We love each other as persons. The periphery has vanished; each of us is a sacred center. (36) The originary sacred center as Person has wanted nothing other than to have us taking up our own human personhood, after all. To be human is to be blessedly endowed with originary human personhood.

## Notes

1. A similar formulation appears in *Signs of Paradox* (1997): "The first personhood is attributed to the sacred center as the originary desire-object and the model for the actions of human desire-objects in the life-world" (*Signs of Paradox* 112). Likewise, the following, in 2007: "But it [the postmodern revolt against authority] ignores the fact that the individual before the existence of the center is *not yet* a subject; his appetite, mimetically enhanced, is not yet desire. Humanity is born from the sign in relation to whose originary referent [humanity] is always *second*" ("[Transcendence and Cultural Will](#)," *Chronicle* 350, 3 Nov. 2007). ([back](#))

2. Gans: "... any object of desire may occupy the scenic center, and we may love another person, an animal, or even an object to which we attribute imaginary personhood..." ("[Age, Love, and Culture,](#)" *Chronicle* 63, 19 Oct. 1996). ([back](#))

3. To acknowledge one of the many puzzle-pieces of the background context of this thesis: "The couple as self-contained unit in which sexual pleasure is exchanged constitutes an 'other scene' that rivals the community assembled around the central sacred object. This rivalry is not a mere structural homology but a mimetic relation" (Gans, "[Originary Thoughts on Sexuality,](#)" *Chronicle* 220, 25 Nov. 2000). ([back](#))

4. The personhood of God must be conceived of as paradoxically particular only in its universality. God can be the One for all humans together at once, the One both resented and loved, but God can never be the one erotic other for any one of us individually. It is simply unthinkable, which unthinkability tells us something about interpersonal human love as opposed to our love (if we have any) for God. ([back](#))

5. To illuminate this poverty of the self in Trinitarian terms, God the Father-master who enforces with terrible absoluteness the inaccessibility of the central object is not yet God in three persons--and the forms of human action inspired by the center as awe-inspiring inaccessible Being forbidding any intimacy are going to be in the first place acts of resentment. ([back](#))

6. Regarding my deployment of the phrase "true love," consider this from Gans: "But beyond the recipes for multiple orgasms, these publications are primarily focused on finding and keeping the right person, not merely as a spouse, but as one's 'true love.' However corny this term appears in an academic context, it sells in a popular one because true love, in all its simple transparency, is what people want--it is what we need" ("[Carnal Knowledge,](#)" *Chronicle* 109, 20 Sept. 1997). ([back](#))

7. "Today, identity has been reestablished with a vengeance and, however collective and victimary it may be, that is on balance a good thing. The most resentful identity is better than none at all" ("[Models of Identity,](#)" *Chronicle* 103, 2 Aug. 1997).

"GA's problem is that it is indeed an anthropology, that it affirms that culture is made by people, [made by] 'selves' if you like, whereas our cultural specialists have been deconstituting and deconstructing the self . . . for the last 150 years" ("[Resistance to GA,](#)" *Chronicle* 110, 27 Sept. 1997).

"The human self is a user of signs in a community of like selves, with all the uncertainty that such an individual-collective entity suggests. Yet the arrogant dismissal of this truth by the overweening bourgeois Self should nonetheless not lead us, however understandably, to affirm that we have no selves at all" ("[Mind and Brain,](#)" *Chronicle* 133, 18 April 1998). ([back](#))

8. In the context of the Paul de Man scandal, Gans notes "that the ethical dereliction implicit in the denial of the responsible self [goes] beyond simple inconsequence. If I cannot be identified as accountable for my acts, then all evil is possible" ("[Models of Identity,](#)" *Chronicle* 103, 2 Aug. 1997).

"Treating criminals as moral agents rather than as amoral creatures subject only to stimuli and conditioning provides both more effective deterrence by strengthening the causal link between crime and punishment and a better chance of rehabilitation by contributing to the criminal's self-respect" ([Chronicle](#) 61, 5 Oct. 1996). Notice the hint of erotic self-mediation in the phrase "self-respect": the moral self in its self-respect has taken steps to becoming a person, a self aware of the desirability of being something in itself. ([back](#))

9. "The self-conscious self is the sign-using self; we become conscious of our selves only when we can talk about them, and we talk about them in the first place to others" ("[Mind and Brain,](#)" *Chronicle* 133, 18 April 1998).

"The originary model of freedom is the communication of a necessary deferral of appetite by means of a freely emitted sign. What is free is not the mere fact of deferral, but the *intention* to communicate it, *which makes the process of deferral more than the mere inhibition of an appropriative gesture*" ("[The Four Freedoms,](#)" *Chronicle* 348, 1 Sept. 2007) [emphasis added]. ([back](#))

10. It is worth noting in this regard that the serpent in the Genesis account of the Garden of Eden is the figure of pure resentment in the story of the Fall of Man. ([back](#))

11. "But the resentful dream of defiguration is parasitic, as are all such [resentful] dreams, on the figure that concentrates in itself the mimetic power the resentful subject wishes to destroy" ([Chronicle 3, 29 July 1995](#)). ([back](#))

12. Consider the implications: "what the resentful subject always *really* demands from the central authority he claims he would abolish" is "a new degree of self-knowledge to justify its role" ("[Transcendence and Cultural Will](#)," [Chronicle 350, 3 Nov. 2007](#)). ([back](#))

13. I am not loved for my identities. Pile up the proofs of them--my birth certificate, university diploma, driver's license, professional credentials, marriage license, union membership, credit card, title to insurance, passport, last will--pile up the material items guaranteeing my group identities and make a bonfire. I confess the comfort of such documentary reassurances has value (losing one's wallet is always a crisis of the first order), but that I can imagine standing and watching such an imaginary bonfire demonstrates that the sum-total of my identities is not my personhood. ([back](#))

14. "The thinness of political-collective identities is concomitant with their resentful nature" ("[Models of Identity](#)," [Chronicle 103, 2 Aug. 1997](#)). ([back](#))

15. It is no coincidence that the revolutionary slogan went *the personal is the political* and not the reverse. The copula *is* hides the desire for a movement of the energies from one sphere of action into another sphere of action. People impatient with the pace of political change understandably like the idea that the powerful erotic energy of *the personal* might be mediated to effect change in the public sphere. The slogan aims to move what is rightly believed to be the powerful erotic energies involved in personal relationships--*the personal*--into the public sphere. And this dreamed-of movement promoted by the slogan (as if simply to say it is so will make it so) aims to overpass the tedious, tiresome, detailed labour of negotiation and campaign and compromise that goes into real political activity (that is, democratic political activity rather than coercion, conquest, conspiracy and *coup d'etat*). Complete the chiasmus: *the political is the personal* does not carry the same delicious frisson of shock. It does not, because one is not intuitively attracted to the fantasy that representatives of the palace or the state might always be a guest at one's dinner table and witnesses to the goings-on in one's bedroom. ([back](#))

16. For Gans' most sustained treatments of the erotic, see *Signs of Paradox* (1997) 112-120, and "[The Erotic](#)," [Chronicles of Love and Resentment 128, 28 Feb. 1998](#)). ([back](#))

17. Gans: "the erotic creates a microcosm of the human universe that requires no external transcendent figure" (*Signs of Paradox* 114); "Love creates a personal scene of representation . . . with the beloved as its sacred center" (*Signs of Paradox* 114-15). ([back](#))

18. We do not sell or trade wives and husbands in a person-respecting culture where the erotic and the personal are celebrated as one. Sex trade workers trade in sex, not love. They have trade names partly to protect their real persons from the violence of their customers. That sex trade work, however pitifully enslaved or resolutely voluntary its practitioners, lacks something in moral prestige is not an effect of illiberal prejudice but of ordinary intuition. I do not wish to beat the play-acting fool that the favour-dispensing-king already regularly beats, but sex trade work lacks prestige because of the dehumanization entailed, or at least risked, by the bottomless instability of the irony required by the worker's obligation constantly to be pretending that the personal act one is performing is (by some ruse) impersonal. An impersonal "business" model of erotic exchange cannot help but erode the sacrality of the personal erotic; I would suggest that constantly to pretend otherwise will spiritually exhaust and damage all human persons except those most amazingly skilled in keeping an ironic distance from the erotic situations they are in. There may be such amazingly skilled persons working in the sex trades; my point is only that for the majority not to wish to be obliged to develop such skills is not prejudicial but reasonable, or at least as reasonable as any form of preservation of personal self. ([back](#))

19. As for the other direction, you might be bold and encourage your self-objectification, maybe with sultry

come-hither looks or manly *hey-babe* broadcasting. But such encouragement would only increase your vulnerability by leading on all the peripheral desires at once, all the sooner pressing you into to the strategy of pseudo-indifference and self-withdrawal. If you *do* perform gestures of erotic encouragement, you must make them hypothetical, ironic-- to seem to desire *yourself* as a way of disowning your desirability as it is being mediated by others. You must seem to desire not to be desired, which will only increase your desirability. ([back](#))

20. Gans: "Care of the kind merited by the divinity is essentially infinite. The saintliest person cannot love his neighbor in a way approximating his love of God, because he has many neighbors and only one God, and because his devotion to God encompasses that to all his neighbors whereas the converse is not the case"; "But for the one person I care for most, the social institution of the couple, married or not, facilitates the exercise of infinite care"; "Personal mediation tends to take the place of the public mediating function of religion because it alone offers genuine interaction with the mediator" ("[Love, Resentment, and Generative Anthropology](#)," *Chronicle* 100, 12 Jul. 1997). ([back](#))

21. Some of the reflections at this point in the argument are rooted in my thinking about passages such as the following: "The erotic object is self-mediating because we can feel it deliberately resist our desire. Only a person, a subject of 'free will,' is truly capable of such resistance..." (*Signs of Paradox* 112). ([back](#))

22. Gans: "What threatens the social order is . . . the fact that their [the sexual couple's] mutual desire 'naturally' expresses itself in language"; "But, as Bataille makes clear, sexual relations are *always* transgressive. Marriage as a rite of passage is not simply a permitted move in a game; it is the conferral or a right of transgression equivalent to the right to eat the (normally forbidden) totem animal at a ritual feast" ("[Originary Thoughts on Sexuality](#)," *Chronicle* 220, 25 Nov. 2000). ([back](#))

23. This remark is perhaps a transmutation of the following enigmatic formulation: "The minimalism of originary thinking encounters the erotic as a 'temptation' that it cannot encompass but only refer to obliquely. The erotic is recalcitrant to originary theory, for the very reason that the purpose of cultural deferral is to permit it" (Gans, "[The Erotic](#)," *Chronicle* 128, 28 Feb. 1998). ([back](#))

24. Gans: "However incommensurable the 'author-function' may be from any worldly interaction, both author and reader know each other to be, not 'functions,' but human beings. What we are primarily linked to and separated from by the deferring mediation exercised by all signifying practices is not 'language' or even God, but each other" ("[What is an Author?](#)" *Chronicle* 129, 7 Mar. 1998).

"The brain as an organ cannot account for the mind because 'mind' is not something physical contained within the brain. . . . It is a virtual, interpersonal reality that subsists in human culture and in which we participate. Our certitude that we are thinking beings is not illusory; but the instruments of our thought are signs that we share with others and that have no meaning outside of this interaction" ("[Mind and Brain](#)," *Chronicle* 133, 18 Apr. 1998).

Or again: "the individual human Subject . . . never really exists except in interaction with a human community. The deconstruction of the individual subject is an avowal of the mutually mediated nature of human desire" ("[Deconstructing the Subject](#)," *Chronicle* 163, 20 Mar. 1999).

"Just as ideas are now thought to reside in the brain not in specific neurons but in interactions among neurons, so do the signs of language and culture exist not in individual minds but in the interactions among human beings" ("[Body and Soul](#)," *Chronicle* 194, 15 Jan. 2000). ([back](#))

25. Gans: "Christian dramatization of the soul's struggle for salvation, along with its secular derivatives, is arguably the driving force in the West's historical success. The more advanced the exchange system, the more individual participants are obliged to invest in their own 'story'" ("[We Are All Buddhists Now](#)," *Chronicle* 242, 25 Aug. 2001). ([back](#))

26. On the inclusion of Durkheim in this list, see Collins 63. ([back](#))

27. Marcel Mauss: "It is Christians who have made a metaphysical entity of the 'moral person' (*personne*

*morale*), after they became aware of its religious power. Our own notion of the human person is still basically the Christian one" (19). ([back](#))

28. Martin Hollis: "the notion of a person in Greek tragedy . . . seems to me to have a category of self implicit in it. What then is modern? It is, I think, the idea that we construct our own social identity. Without Roman law and mediaeval Christianity, I doubt if the idea would have come to make sense. It needs notions of individual person and private spiritual substance" (230). ([back](#))

29. David Bentley Hart: "even Christianity's most implacable modern critics should be willing to acknowledge that, in these texts [the canonical gospels] and others like them, we see something beginning to emerge from darkness into full visibility, arguably for the first time in our history: the human person as such, invested with an intrinsic and inviolable dignity, and possessed of an infinite value" (167; for other pertinent passages on the link between Christian faith and the emergence of fully humanized conceptions of personhood, see 180, 203, 208, 211). ([back](#))

30. Gans: "the originary central object, defigured in the *sparagmos*, reveals to us the permanence of the Being--*undecidably person and Idea*--that sustains the human" ([Chronicle 3, 29 Jul. 1995](#)) [emphasis added]. ([back](#))

31. For the background of this remark--in an account of how the history of Christian doctrines of the atonement should be radically rewritten from the perspective of Girard's anthropology--see Anthony Bartlett's powerful book *Cross Purposes: The Violent Grammar of Christian Atonement* (2001). ([back](#))

32. Gans: "Influenced by . . . Levinas, a recent vogue emphasizes the abjection of the Other as an appeal to our Care. But while recognizing (through 'tenderness') the other's mortality which s/he shares with me, love never treats the Other--not even the Crucified--as denuded or abject, in a word, as *victimary*. What I see in the beloved Other, beyond mere human vulnerability, is her sacred power to give and take away meaning from my world" ("[Love, Resentment, and Generative Anthropology](#)," [Chronicle 100, 12 Jul. 1997](#)).

Compare this remark from "[Moral Heroism](#)" ([Chronicle 237, 9 Jun. 2001](#)): "We may associate the moral integrity of the post-millennial era with a categorical imperative derived . . . from the scenic configuration of the originary hypothesis: act in such a way as to diminish--first locally, then, as far as possible, universally--the amount of resentment in the world. We would do better to devote ourselves to *persons rather than victims*, and lend our support to others who try to do likewise" [emphasis added]. ([back](#))

33. It may be appropriate to juxtapose the following not-unrelated remark from Gans here: "Foucault's exclusively discursive orientation leads him to omit from consideration the most fundamental category of textual authority: that of *the witness*, whose authority comes not from subjective but from *objective* experience. Memoirs of people involved in historically important or simply unusual events always find an audience" ("[What Is An Author?](#)" [Chronicle 129, 7 Mar. 1998](#)) [emphasis added]. We might describe those humans whose memories nourished and nourish the model of personhood provided by the Christian revelation as members of the community of witnesses to the "objective experience" of the origin of the *maximal* humanization of the scenic center. ([back](#))

34. Gans: "The 'sublimation' of eros into agape occurs at the point where the object of the mediating Other's own (self-)desire is understood not as a physical image of the desirable but an immortal 'soul'" ("[The Erotic](#)," [Chronicle 128, 28 Feb. 1998](#)).

"When the Western tradition renounces worldly desire, it is in the service of the individual soul's *spiritual* desire--a desire that can still arguably enter into an inter-human dialogue--rather than the search for Nirvana" ("[We Are All Buddhists Now](#)," [Chronicle 242, 25 Aug. 2001](#)). ([back](#))

35. Gans: "love possess spirituality. The *spirit* is the agency that preserves the shared meanings of language"; "the Spirit is the center as the locus not of figure but of meaning. Spirituality is communication in and through the transcendental guarantee of the spirit" ("[Generative Spirituality](#)," [Chronicle 66, 9 Nov. 1996](#)). ([back](#))

36. Gans: "The freedom of the periphery to intend a center has become the freedom of the peripheral self to intend itself as a center" ("[The Four Freedoms](#)," *Chronicle* 348, 1 Sept. 2007). ([back](#))

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## **"Le Cor" and "La Mort du loup": The Scenic Imagination in Two Poems by Alfred de Vigny**

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### **Introduction**

Lyric addresses a lack. It might be the removal of the poet from the plenitude of life, or his disappointment in a shrunken present as compared to an expansive past (René Girard's *broken promise*), or the intolerable emptiness of mere "buying and selling," as William Wordsworth once put it in a famous sonnet. The advent of the bourgeois market in the early nineteenth century indeed intensified the poet's sense of living in a late world, which offered no room either for the heroic gesture or for the chevaleresque distinction thereby gained. The last hero, Napoleon, rescuing France from the Revolution, nevertheless proved a disaster for the nation, as François-René Chateaubriand and Lord Byron would both lament. The new, middle-class order based on the market rejected Bonaparte's Caesarean style of governance with its signature military adventurism. The July 1830 revolution imposed a middle-class monarchy that existed through popular sufferance. Adolphe Thiers, asked by the organizers of the insurrection to name a monarch, notably did not offer the crown to the Duc de Reichstadt, Bonaparte's son; he offered it to the Duc d'Orléans, also known as Louis-Philippe. The first act of the new government was low-interest loans to small businessmen. Nor did the new society of shopkeepers and consumers, peaceable though it was, appear to place any great value on *artistic heroism*--rather the market demanded a popular art that assumed the legitimacy of the status-quo and appealed to the largest possible public. Such an art is not individually distinct but functionally anonymous, even when it carries a byline.

"The Romantic esthetic," as Eric Gans has written, "appears in the specific historical conditions of the birth of modern bourgeois society" (*Originary Thinking* [1993] 165) and immediately assumes an "oppositional stance" (165) with respect to that society. Whereas "the neoclassical esthetic" of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries served to legitimate the social order by reconciling the individual to it, the new "Romantic esthetic" reinforces the individual's sense of alienation from the leveling system of exchange. It is natural and predictable then that what the Romantic proposes against the banal present is, typically, a bygone era whose fullness would compensate for the vacuity of the existing order. From Rousseau to the Brothers Grimm to James Fennimore Cooper, this is almost uniformly the case. Writes Gans: "Romanticism is in principle a radical esthetic, a return to the origin, even if the radicalism of the Romantic generation itself remained abstract in the face of the concrete tasks of artistic creation"; and "all art since the end of the neoclassical era may be called Romantic; once the self's own experience becomes the guarantee of the originary event, no modernism, however radical, can exhaust the potential of this opening" (181).

Romantic artists show marked interest in savages, antiquities, rural people, customs of the countryside, and figures from classical and medieval legend. Present-day survivals of such phenomena likewise appeal to the Romantic's cultural nostalgia. In this way, Adamic loneliness would be another mode of what Gans calls the "return to the origin." Almost anything that is not a token of the commercial present, as the Romantic sees it, is preferable to the shop-keeping world, with its annoying predictability and purely banausic concerns. The very precariousness of life in earlier ages or in remote and uncivilized locales recommends them in compensation for the tedium of a bland modernity. The sympathy can extend all the way to the animal world.

Alfred de Vigny (1797-1863) possesses some of the traits of an oppositional Romantic, and two of his poems, "Le Cor" (1826) and "La Mort du loup" (1843), offer paradigmatic illustrations of Romantic textuality

as what Gans calls the *return to the origin*. In both, the poet expresses his nostalgia for the distant and the archaic, and he articulates his dissatisfaction with the banality of contemporary life. Yet these two poems illustrate another, paradoxical aspect of Romanticism also noted by Gans: "The Romantic lifestyle," which begins in the assumption of the *oppositional stance*, "is in fact a preparation for life and career in a market society" (166). In the bourgeois order, "the scenic world of culture is no longer analogous to the scene-less world of the market" (166) so that "the scenic center is no longer public but personal" (167). But precisely by taking up the *oppositional stance*, the Romantic artist creates a commodity, namely his perspective, of which he is suddenly the unique purveyor, and what "is thus affirmed is precisely what is required by the bourgeois order, where supply and demand replace ritual interaction as the basis for exchange and distribution" (166). Together, "Le Cor" and "La Mort du loup" demonstrate this cycle of alienation through deliberate opposition with final reintegration into the general pattern of market exchange.

The two poems demonstrate another phenomenon, not mentioned explicitly by Gans but implicit in his idea of Romanticism as an investigation of origins. In both poems, Vigny singles out the violence of the bygone era as the element of interest. In "Le Cor," Vigny asserts violence to be an essential constituent of the archaic world, which makes that world preferable, in part, to the modern one. In "La Mort du loup," however, the poet recognizes the same violence as morally tainted, something to be renounced.

## I.

"Le Cor," Vigny's re-telling of the Roland legend, seems to come first in the chronological sequence although the compositional dates of Vigny's poems are not entirely certain. "Le Cor" shows both a more pronounced oppositional stance on the part of the poet and a greater endorsement of violence or at least a greater willingness to exploit violence on esthetic grounds. Vigny casts the poem in four sections: (i) the poet's reverie, (ii) Roland's death scene, (iii) Charlemagne's return, and (iv) the concluding expostulation. The first section establishes the esthetic receptivity, and even the prophetic clarity, that constitute the *bona fides* of the poet; this section also invokes images of a vanished age whose fullness would compensate for a presumably deficient present. "The heroic ages are favorable to poetry," as Chateaubriand wrote, "because they have that antiquity and that uncertainty of tradition which are required by the Muses" (*Le génie du Christianisme* 262). The people of archaic ages, says Chateaubriand, "were at the same time savages in body," hence in a manner sublime, while being "civilized in mind" (264), more or less. Something of Chateaubriand's sense of archaic humanity is at work in "Le Cor," but for Vigny the historical era differs from the present age particularly in being articulated around moments of brute force; it differs as well in the clear relation of audience to authority, or of periphery to center.

Vigny's lyric subject consistently valorizes the numinous center over the banal periphery; Vigny hesitantly endorses the valorization. The center, the place of authority on which attention habitually fixes itself, constitutes the locus that the poet would like to appropriate for himself. The commercial world, by contrast, exhibits no center; it is dispersed, atomistic, and autonomous in its parts. By offering his revelation, the poet hopes to give form to the formlessness of mere exchange and to become salient within the new formation. "Je sens en moi," Vigny delivered in his diary in 1835, "le besoin de dire à la *société* les idées que j'ai en moi et qui veulent sortir" [I feel in myself the need to say to *society* the ideas I have within me and that want to emerge] (*Oeuvres poétiques* 421).

"Le Cor" begins with an egocentric affirmation:

J'aime le son du Cor, le soir, au fond des bois,  
Soit qu'il chante les pleurs de la biche aux abois,  
Ou l'adieu du chasseur que l'écho faible accueille,  
Et que le vent du nord porte de feuille en feuille.

I love the sounding horn, of an eve, deep within the woods,  
Whether it sings the plaints of the threatened doe  
Or the hunter's retreat but faintly echoed  
That the north wind carries from leaf to leaf.

The poet reports to his audience his own esthetic sensitivity to the sound of the hunting-horn, whose distinct acoustic signature represents, in the text, the pre-bourgeois order of feudal society, as exemplified in the combination of privilege and brutality of the hunt. The hunt is first of all an ancient activity, appropriately revisited by someone intent on a conjuration of origin; and the hunt, it should be noted, is an activity that became highly ritualized under feudalism. The hunt's antique pedigree and its ritual character set it apart from anything in the modern, shopkeeping way of life. We note how the hunt assumes its structure through the intentness of all the participants on the quarry. The hunted animal in effect forms the sacred focus of the hunters considered as an *ad hoc* community acting in close coordination and in accordance with an existential goal.

This communal resolve thus has a recognizably ritualistic *Gestalt*. The market, by contrast, tends to de-ritualize life, dispersing authority from the central, sacred locus to the social periphery. In so doing the market provides the model of modern informality. One notes how the sound of the horn reaches the poet from deep within the woods, reminding him of shadowy and unseen precincts; it functions as the emblem of a wild world, sufficient unto itself, in stark contrast to the middle-class domesticity of towns and cities. A hunting-horn is thus not something that belongs to the usual acoustic experience of city-dwellers. They are more likely to hear the clatter of wagons and the rattle of shutters on the shop-windows, a cacophony of city-sounds that might occur in a novel of bourgeois life designating an all-too-familiar place far from the poet's refuge.

It is the poet, therefore, whose attunement to archaic values has permitted him to feel the entrancement of "le son du Cor." He apparently enjoys the freedom to venture outside the civic world--this, too, distinguishes him from the bourgeoisie--into the precincts of nature and rural life. There he enjoys the rare experience of seeing and hearing great displays of floral and faunal spontaneity without the distraction of the social mass. In his journal, in 1831, Vigny wrote that solitude constituted "une retraite où l'âme se puisse recueillir en elle-même, puisse jouir de ses propres facultés, et rassembler ses forces pour produire quelque chose de grand" [a retreat where the soul can retire into itself, take profit from its own faculties, and concentrate its forces to produce something great] (*Oeuvres Poétiques* 419). In his solitude, then, and in confronting the forest wilderness, the poet finds his better self, preferable to the modern person because unmediated by the artificialities of modern existence. He comes to know again the feudal world that modernity has swept away, oblivious, it seems, to its archaic values of adventure, loyalty, and heroism in action. Nature here impresses itself on Vigny not only as the background to archaic human activity, but as an instance of the sublime. One should recall Thomas Weiskel's observation, made apropos of a discussion of Immanuel Kant, to the effect that, "the sublime moment offers to reason an occasion for self-recognition" (*The Romantic Sublime* 42).

Reason seeks intellectual clarity and helps to regulate life, but it does these things by drawing down the store of vitality and sapping the communal sense of ultimate meaning; reason is analytical rather than organic, methodical rather than spontaneous. According to Weiskel's analysis, glimpses of sublimity intimate to the percipient "man's ontological destiny" (44) and open the way to a revelation of "final things" (42).

Not only, then, does Vigny's lyric subject enjoy elite access to precincts of authenticity where he can, in Weiskel's terms, enjoy the experience of "self-recognition"; he also obtains knowledge of a deeper human condition than the one realized in the humdrum of commercial activity. The city-dweller by contrast possesses little familiarity with the forest world, which the faraway tone of a hunter's horn betokens; the bourgeois has little familiarity either with the sublimity, or so Romantic thought supposes, that lies beyond the appearances of the merely economic aspect of the world. The poet's privilege in his access to and possession of this knowledge, along with a certain implied superiority to the uninitiated, is precisely the point.

Nor, it follows, are the poet's readers likely fully to empathize with the quarry's plight as the hounds pursue her implacably. The animal's presumed terror represents a state of heightened emotion that the regulated orderliness of civic life under a bourgeois regime eliminates. The poet, however, remains aware of this dramatic and above all violent event, with its accompanying affect. The horn-call, emanating from the distance, speaks candidly of "les pleurs de la biche aux abois," pressed in flight by the hunter's dogs and destined to die under their assault. Weiskel, in his chapter on Burke, speaks of Romantic sublimity as not so much "the feeling of terror itself," but rather "a response to terror" (87). In the image of "la biche," indeed,

one encounters the first important *scene* evoked by the poet, a scene with primitive sacrificial overtones. This is indeed the mode and moment of a "return to the origin," in Gansian terms, and a complicated "response to terror" in Weiskel's. If the poet's presumptive announcement of his fondness for the sound of the horn seems unmotivated, his invocation of the lethal moment when the hounds bring down their quarry nevertheless fixes attention and establishes the logic to underpin the image.

The echo of the musical signal, carried by the north wind from leaf to leaf, reinforces the notion of distance, while telling that the quarry has been taken, that the predator has triumphed over the prey. Night, distance, predation, the unseen nobleman in the woods--all these symbols stand opposed to the normative order of things and belong to the very medieval epoch that the bourgeoisie has left, definitively, behind.

The hunter belongs presumably to the upper hierarchy of the barons and counts, a society of privilege, and one, significantly, that may exercise ritualized violence, as in the hunt. Vigny once confided to his journal that the common classes did not understand art. As Vigny writes: "Le peuple, il faut l'avouer, n'aime en France ni la musique, ni la poésie" [the people in France, one must admit, loves neither music nor poetry] (*Oeuvres poétiques* 419). It is likely that people's comprehension fails them, Vigny suggests, because the masses take no part in the activities from which art is born; rather, the bourgeoisie satisfies itself almost entirely with "vaudeville."

In the second stanza, Vigny raises the stakes: Here the aggression seeks its victim not in an animal but--so Vigny unavoidably implies--in a human being. Many a time the poet has heard, in some distant vibration of a wanderer's horn, a quality even more portentous than the quaintly musical, which sometimes makes him smile but more often than not makes him cry: He has heard, he says, the "bruits prophétiques" that sounded the death-knell for the knights of legend.

Que de fois, seul, dans l'ombre à minuit demeuré,  
J'ai souri de l'entendre, et plus souvent pleuré!  
Car je croyais ouïr de ces bruits prophétiques  
Qui précédaient la mort des Paladins antiques.

How often alone, in midnight shadows concealed,  
I have smiled to hear it, even shedding a tear!  
I thought to hear sounding prophetic plaints,  
Declaring the death-knell for knights of old.

The poet's ear thus becomes the acoustic witness of death, the demise, in particular, of bigger-than-life figures from feudal legend. The term *paladin* stands in opposition to the implied term *citoyen*. The present world belongs to *le citoyen*, the old world to *le paladin*. The poet allies himself with the knight against the citizen. The knight is authentic, a free agent, charged with the defense of civilization against its enemies; his existence is full. The modern citizen, whose ethos the poet would disavow, is inauthentic, and his existence vacuous, for he merely submits to the bourgeois order, keeping his shop, paying his taxes, conforming to the trends. He does not, in the archly Romantic view, engage in largesse or nobility and perhaps fails even to recognize them. So moving is the heroic world of the ballads in its archaic fullness, indeed, that the poet takes inspiration and launches suddenly into a two-stanza apostrophe of the Pyrénées: "O montagnes d'azur! ô pays adoré!" The boulders of "La Frazona" and the "cirque du Marboré" become, under the poet's inspired assertion, a uniquely enchanted site where one can hear and understand "les airs lointains d'un Cor mélancolique et tendre." Seen under an archaizing optic, nature itself comes humanly alive.

Once again the poet has positioned himself in the center of the scene; he directs his audience's attention ("C'est là qu'il faut s'asseoir, c'est là qu'il faut entendre" [it's there that one must sit, it's there that one must listen]), and in effect nominates himself as the one in touch with this more meaningful world, which his readers probably cannot know without his mediation.

The adjectives chosen by the poet to describe the horn signal, such as "mélancolique et tendre," recall his equivocal description just a few lines earlier of his feelings whenever he hears the faraway music. Sometimes he smiles, sometimes he cries. Both passages betray the poet's undecided feelings about what

the horn symbolizes in this poem: Violent death. Weiskel provocatively notes that Romantic sublimity can take the form of a "mixture" of opposite emotions, such as "terror and delight" (88) and he quotes Burke's formulation that sublimity amounts to "a sort of delightful horror, a sort of tranquillity tinged with terror" (Weiskel 88 [Burke *A Philosophical Inquiry* (123)]). Weiskel, in another reference to Burke, notes how the Romantic poet's experience of sublimity sometimes consists of "an *episode in melancholy*," ennui and alienation from the social round having played their part in making the individual ready to receive especially powerful influences from outside the sphere of everyday experience. In the case of Vigny's poem, the "melancholy" tone carries us, by association, to the violent scene.

The subsequent stanzas (5 and 6) further exploit the allure of a partially concealed violence. The beauty of nature does not appear in a pristine way; nor does the poet feel that he can be absolutely candid about it. On the contrary, as anguish, danger, and death inhabit even the somewhat idyllic scene of a traveler lingering in the countryside, one must report this circumspectly. Vigny's representation of nature in "Le Cor" suggests what Weiskel calls "the traumatic sublime" (97). To appreciate forest, mountain, and field, one must possess the fortitude to withstand the tumult and turbulence in the struggle for life that take place within these phenomena. If the poet appeared to love nature in an exemplary way, this appearance would stem from his ability to confront the suffering that nature entails without flinching, or at least to conceal his faint-heartedness from others.

## II.

In every image that Vigny gives us of nature in "Le Cor," one finds hints and traces of something inimical:

Souvent un voyageur, lorsque l'air est sans bruit,  
De cette voix d'airain fait retentir la nuit;  
A ses chants cadencés autour de lui se mêlent  
L'harmonieux grelot du jeune agneau qui bêle.  
    Une biche attentive, au lieu de se cacher,  
Se suspend immobile au sommet du rocher,  
Et la cascade unit, dans une chute immense,  
Son éternelle plainte aux chants de la romance.

Often the traveler, upon the noiseless air,  
Imposes his resounding voice of bronze;  
The bleating stutter of a lost lamb  
With his cadences harmoniously combining.  
    An attentive doe stands rock-still, unconcealed,  
Poses herself on the granite height,  
While her cry eternal the great cascade  
Makes one with the sagas of old.

The "quiet air" offers a static image, but the "voice of bronze" ("d'airain") breaks the silence. A kind of violence has already entered the scene: the violence of a human intrusion, however legitimate, on pure nature. But under the metallic designation the merely human intrusion becomes something else--the intrusion of the technical order, for "bronze" belongs to metallurgy, and to the social complication that metallurgy implies. For the Romantic imagination, this intrusion of the technical into the natural constitutes the essential sacrilege. That the transgressor might justify his transgression redoubles the offense from the Romantic perspective. The "voice" in Vigny's stanza belongs to the hunter, among others, and so carries with it the overtones of predation *qua* profanation. The lamb whose bleating Vigny describes as "harmonious" is a classical candidate for immolation, with both Biblical and pagan associations. At the last minute, Jehovah offers to Abraham the kid that he might substitute for Isaac. Jesus is the familiar "lamb of God." "The bleating lamb," says Vigny's contemporary Chateaubriand, "has something in it tremulous and wild, like the rocks and ruins among which he likes to climb" (*Le génie du Christianisme* 149).

The doe in her setting likewise constitutes a sacrificial image, this one created by the poet himself in his opening stanza where he makes this species the object of the hunt; the poet invokes the doe again as a

recurring image elsewhere in the poem. We note that the doe apprehensively *listens* attentively to the horn, which signals the proximity of her pursuers. The anthropomorphism of this intentional act indicates the doe's apprehension over the hunters' approach; the intention itself forecasts imminent violence. Even the setting, with its great waterfall and its rocky summit, hints at the possibility of accident, injury, and death. The falls especially have a Tarpeian character; the sound of the waters becomes, in Vigny's phrase, an "eternal lamentation," as if for unnamed victims. Once more, we encounter the deep-seated ambiguity of the poet's response to violence revealed. Lethal events attract him, but they also call forth the sense that is required "lamentation" on behalf of the deceased.

Vigny in these lines subtly blends the vulnerability of hunted animals, the danger of the cliffs, and the "moaning" of the waters--sacrificial images all--with what he calls "les chants de la romance." Once again, as throughout the poem so far, the poet's appreciation of the beauty of a numinous alternate world ("j'aime le son du cor") serves, not so much to justify, but to explain the violence (as in the customs of the hunt, or the Crusades, or Charlemagne's wars against the heathen tribes) on which such a world may rely for its cohesion, just as the hunters achieve unity at the expense of the quarry.

When the poet explains that he now wishes to regale readers with one of the old epics, he indeed returns them to a pre-bourgeois world, that namely of the paladins, those larger-than-life figures, whom he has previously evoked. Like the natural world, the paladin-world is a world of enormity, of struggle, and of stratagem; it entails the deaths of heroes whose souls, as the poet suggests, speak "avec la voix du Cor." Similarly did the cries of the tortured doe mix with the hunter's horn at the beginning of the poem. Both are cases of pure *sonance* functioning in an ostensive mode to draw back a specifically modern consciousness to its own primitive origins. There is thus something restless and disturbing in the memory of the chivalrous age. There is also, however, a certain election in being receptive to that memory because the souvenir represents an intensification of an otherwise *devitalized* consciousness. "L'ombre du grand Roland," Vigny tells us, "n'est donc pas consolée" [the shade of great Roland is therefore not consoled].

For a poet sufficiently sensitive, one not dulled by bourgeois routine and the blandness of popular taste, echoes of ancient deeds still resound, provoking the renewal of vital awareness. The poet, again privileging himself as a central figure, will now articulate for his audience what they cannot hear, or do not remember, but which he senses clairvoyantly before him. As before, in the references to the hunt, the poet's description of the victim undermines his attempt to valorize the older social order. For, as we have noted, Roland, killed by the Moors, rests uneasily in death. The paladin's posthumous unease demands moreover that the poet of the present age revisit the circumstances of his death. It is as though there were something unfinished in the narrative of Roland's exploits.

The second and third sections of the poem offer the reader Vigny's version of the hero's death from *La chanson de Roland*. As he does with respect to the natural scene, with its hunters and voyagers, Vigny's lyric subject evaluates the epic scene, with its knights and infidels, as preferable to the modern order, a default-judgment of Romantic thinking. Readers come upon Roland himself in the vale of Ronceveaux, surrounded by the Moors just as, in the first section of the poem, the hounds had surrounded the victim:

Tous les preux étaient morts, mais aucun n'avait fui.  
Il reste seul debout, Olivier près de lui,  
L'Afrique sur les monts l'entoure et tremble encore.  
"Roland, tu vas mourir, rends-toi," criait le Moor[.]

The bravos lay all dead, but none had flown.  
He remained afoot, Olivier by his side,  
While on the hills the host of Maghreb glowered yet.  
"Death comes for you, give yourself up," cried the Moor.

Weiskel says in his study that, "Greatness emerge[s] from the heart of defeat" (44). The death of Roland in "Le Cor" illustrates Weiskel's thesis. Roland in the ambush in this way resembles the poem's first image, that namely of the doe, killed by the dogs. The doe cries out as the dogs close in. Roland, sole survivor of the stalwarts, prepares to face his own death by a fierce enemy. In the first image, the sounding horn signals the moment when the dogs leap upon their prey; in the second, as the infidel closes, Roland will

sound out his call for help on his own horn of ivory.

Roland resembles also the second animal placed by Vigny in the nature-tableau, the one who stands attentive and immobile at the top of a rock. Roland himself stands alone, listening to the insults of the Moors calling to him; the hostile shouts, like the signaling horn, augur a fatal result. When boulders tumble down from the cliffs and into the waters below, recalling the huge cascading waterfall of the earlier scene, Roland like the deer leaps to the top of one of the rocks and prepares his defense. One discovers a further parallelism: Roland's capacity to stare death in the face resembles the poet's willingness to look into the reality of nature, despite the violence that he finds there, and to identify the rightness of the victim's struggle. Nothing in the ethos of commerce could prepare a modern person to understand Roland's heroism, and the moment must appear as what Weiskel calls a "discontinuity . . . between what can be grasped and what can be felt as meaningful" (21). The meaning resists being spelled out; it can be "grasped" only by identification between the poet and the object of his contemplation. To translate the archaic significance into bourgeois language would violate the symbolism.

This, then, is the ultimate Romantic scene, repeated now three times in the poem: As a group intent on violence surrounds its victim, the decisive moment remains out of view, but we infer it from the subsequent traces. The scene with Roland (minus the moment of his death) thus acquires pivotal importance in the poem. The ambivalence betrayed so far by the poet over the question of dignity and violence finally gives way, for now someone comes to save the victim. Roland's death might have been inevitable both as history and as poetry, but morally speaking, from the vantage of modern morality, Roland merited rescue. While the poet might well prefer to be elsewhere than in the bourgeois world, his embrace of an older order nevertheless cannot stand. The past age was too cruel. We should empathize with the victim. The sanctity of life outweighs the sublimity of death. When rescuers at last do heed the cries of the lost compatriots, as signaled by Roland's horn, they are Charlemagne and his nobles.

Whereas in the images of Parts I and II of "Le Cor," Vigny gives glimpses of minimal communities of hunters and detached, solitary wanderers, whose tie to society is tenuous, yet in the images of Part III, he shows us a larger society. Charlemagne's army on campaign obeys the laws of structure and organization. Its existence is variegated, the soldiers being differentiated into special roles. While its purpose is war, it brings with it troubadours and priests, and it can halt in camp for rest and relaxation. Charlemagne and his knights talk among themselves. The soldiers listen to a musician, drink wine, and flirt with shepherd girls. When Roland's horn finally sounds this same community rides to his rescue at Charlemagne's command:

Arrière, chevaliers, repassons la montagne!  
Tremble encor sous nos pieds, sol trompeur de l'Espagne!

Go back, knights, over the pass again!  
Tremble once more under their feet, treacherous soil of Spain!

The plural forms (*chevaliers*, *repassons*, *sous nos pieds*) emphasize the group. When the peers arrive, Roland has met the fate that seemed to await the animal in stanzas 5 and 6. Roland has been sent reeling from his rocky perch and lies dead in the waters below, his cries for help ending in death. The image thus assumes the characteristically centripetal form of a ritualistic tableau: the sacred object at the center surrounded by a community for which it supplies a unique focus; the community contemplates that object with the awe that death-by-violence typically calls forth. Readers become part of the galvanized periphery of this scene as they are drawn into it vicariously.

Has Roland's soul now found consolation through the poet's re-telling of the tale? It would seem so. For now, at the end of the poem, in one final line, the poet returns to his opening image but with some significant differences:

Dieu! que le son du Cor est triste au fond des bois!

God! But the horn calls sadly from the depth of the wood!

The similarity with the beginning of the poem is obvious. The sound of the horn still comes from deep

within the woods. The hunt belongs to an archaic order; the locus of its emanation lies at the maximum of remoteness from the bourgeois milieu. The horn hides within and sounds forth from the obscurity of dense nature. As does anything deliberately concealed, or by design only half-revealed, the horn signal exercises its predictable fascinating power on the consciousness that becomes--or is made--aware of it. The unseen horn becomes divine and oracular, the active *spirit* of the nature-realm.

But certain essential features, not shared, differentiate between the first and last images. The sound of the horn now makes the listener sad: Not bittersweet, or now sad but now happy, or any other ambivalent feeling; but unequivocally melancholy, as much as to say that the subjectivity implied by the poem now perceives in the *son du cor* an order that draws its cohesion troublingly from victimage. The adjective "triste" marks a preliminary, although not yet a definitive, step toward rejecting that archaic world. The invocation of God ("Dieu")--not really a religious invocation here, but more of an emotional outburst--shows the poet having recourse to a vocabulary that implies an ethical order, an ability to judge right and wrong. The poet judges at last that what "le son du Cor" signals, however awesome or alluring, is nevertheless brutal and unjust.

The "Dieu" of this line has replaced the "je" of the opening lines. Not that the poet is not still imaginatively present in the scene, mediating his discoveries for his readers; but he has declined to emphasize his singularity. To step away from subjectivity, in context, is to step towards objectivity. While the poet refrains from aligning himself with any collective, as the poet of "La Mort du loup" does, he does minimize the ego-assertion with which he had begun the poem. Withdrawing the first-person brings the composition a step toward the reintegration into society that Gans' theory of the Romantic esthetic proposes, and that "La Mort du loup" more fully engages.

If "Le Cor" gave an instance of what Gans calls the oppositional stance, then "La Mort du loup" will provide the example of coherence within the community. Weiskel would recognize in "La Mort du loup" the "reactive . . . phase" (24) of the Romantic sublime, in which "a fresh relation between the self and its object" (24) leads to a reconciliation with the existing world. Read in the context either of Gans's claims about Romantic sociology or Weiskel's about Romantic psychology, "La Mort du loup" is the more emblematic of the two poems. It both describes a "return to the origin," giving us at the same time a glimpse into ethical enormity, and explicitly acknowledges the need for the poet to participate in the world and in the market--or to be reconciled with an order which, whatever its defects, cannot be wished away and in which therefore the poet must perforce live and adapt. Nevertheless, the later poem still has much in common with the earlier poem. It focuses on the allure of something primeval to which the bourgeoisie can find admittance only by attending to the poet's mediation.

### III.

Consider the ominous imagery with which "La Mort du loup" opens:

Les nuages couraient sur la lune enflammée  
Comme sur l'incendie on voit la fumée,  
Et les bois étaient noirs jusques à l'horizon.

The clouds swirled around the flamboyant moon,  
Like reeks of smoke across a pyre  
And the woods were deep and black into the distance.

Here, as in "Le Cor," atmospheric prodigies augur imminent violence. Vigny has all but placed us again in the midst of the first scene of "Le Cor," the one evoked by the sound of the hunting horn, for we ("*nous*") are immediately involved in the grim task of tracking an animal through the woods. The wandering wolf pack has left claw-tracks that show in the soil. As readers vicariously follow the spoor, they also descend from the bland present guiltily into the sanguine, viscerally exciting past. The chase gains on its quarry. The communal awareness concentrates on the prey. We note, however, how Vigny has transferred the terms. At the beginning of "Le Cor," the poem remains under the direct control of an ego (a "*je*") who marks himself off as alone and therefore as apart from the social context.

The unseen hunter of "Le Cor," whose musical signal resounds in the faraway woods, appears to be equally alone; the term for him occurs, as we have remarked, in its singular, not in its plural, form. If he were not alone, then he would be part of a minimal group. But the vocabulary of the stanza fails explicitly to acknowledge the group. In "La Mort du loup," however, one discovers hunters in the plural with whom the narrator of the poem shares an *ad hoc* community. He is a participant in, rather than a contemplative observer of, the scene. His use of the first-person plural indeed implicitly extends that community to his readers.

Thus *we (nous)* together find ourselves in pursuit of the prey; *we* belong to the harrying interlopers of the natural realm. Through the fog and the brush the poet catches a glimpse of the wolves:

J'appерçois tout à coup deux yeux qui flamboyaient,  
Et je vois au delà quelques formes légères  
Qui dansaient sous la lune au milieu des bruyères,  
Comme font, chaque jour, à grand bruit sous nos yeux,  
Quand le maître revient, les lévriers joyeux.

Suddenly I saw two eyes that flamed,  
And I saw beyond them two slender forms  
That danced under the moon, upon the heather,  
As hounds do for the returning master in salubrious joy  
Making a great palaver with each leap as we watch.

The incendiary metaphors speak of heightened emotions, the adrenal rush, and indeed the life-or-death character of the hunt. The phrase "tout à coup" reinforces the gathering sublimity of the event and foreshadows the climax of the chase. The hunted animals have indeed acquired a majestic, larger-than-life quality as the party closes in upon them. Their eyes become fiery against the nocturnal backdrop of fog and darkness. This ocular fire recalls the sacrificial "vapeurs de flammes" that presage Roland's death in "Le Cor." Vigny now endows the harried creatures with an aura of preternatural virtue. The wolf-pups, whom the poet sees at play, do resemble their domesticated counterparts, but with one striking and unexpected difference: "Les enfants du Loup se jouaient en silence." By cliché, wolves snarl or growl and their pups yelp. Here, the animals disport themselves soundlessly, with remarkable self-mastery and comportment. Their silence derives, says the poet, from the fact that they live under the constant threat of "l'homme," who is, without qualification, "leur ennemi."

"Leur ennemi" is--consistently with the interpretation so far--indissolubly identical with the first-person plural, the "nous," of the community formed by the hunt and joined, vicariously, by the reader. The pups' silence links them with the attentive and immobile *biche* that appears in the vicinity of the falls in "Le Cor." The she-wolf reminds the poet of the female animal who suckled Romulus and Remus, in the legendary age before the insuperable breach separated humanity from its bestial cousins in nature's bourn, before man became the animal's enemy.

The male wolf now makes a suicidal stand against his attackers, dogs and men, in order to save his mate and the two wolflings.

Le Loup vient et s'assied, les deux jambes dressées,  
Par leurs ongles crochus dans le sable enfoncées.  
Il s'est jugé perdu, puisqu'il était surpris,  
Sa retraite coupée et tous ses chemins pris;  
Alors il a saisi, dans sa gueule brûlante,  
Du chien le plus hardi la gorge pantelante,  
Et n'a pas desserré ses mâchoires de fer,  
Malgré nos coups de feu qui traversaient sa chair,  
Et nos couteaux aigus qui, comme des tenailles,  
Se croisaient en plongeant dans ses larges entrailles,  
Jusqu'au dernier moment où le chien étranglé,  
Mort longtemps avant lui, sous ses pieds a roulé.

The sire-wolf forward stepped, his forelegs tensed,  
 Digging with his claws for purchase in the dirt.  
 He judged himself lost, overtaken he was,  
 Encircled, with every escape cut off;  
 Then by the throat seized our bravest hound  
 In his fiery maw with one fatal snatch  
 And would not forfeit his toothy grip  
 No matter our bullets burned his flesh  
 And our sharp knives, like talons,  
 Plunged and tore among his guts,  
 Keeping his strangle hold  
 Until at last he dropped the dead assailant at his feet

Anthropomorphic the attributions might be (the male "judges himself lost" as though he were capable of reason), hence anathema to the skeptical consciousness. Vigny paints a powerful tableau nevertheless. This moment constitutes the real scene-of-origin in the poem, made startling and memorable by the collective knife-blows of the tormenters and the victim's hopeless struggle. It is the scene of death that opens "Le Cor," but in which the poet did not show the critical moment, choosing instead to concentrate on ornamental aspects of the ancient sport rather than portray the sanguine reality of its logical conclusion. In Roland's death-scene, too, Vigny omits to give any direct depiction of the hero's destruction, only of his preparation for it and of the later discovery of the corpse. In "La Mort du loup," however, Vigny spares no element of the truth. As the wolf collapses under the collective assault ("nos coups"), he becomes "tout baigné dans son sang." The recurrent second-person pronouns reinforce the insight that this is how a community constitutes itself, in the collective expenditure of violence against a victim.

In *Homo Necans* (1972), Walter Burkert notes the connection between the hunt, whose telos is mainly practical, and ritual: "In the hunt, one might argue, killing is not ceremonial but practical and subject to chance; its meaning and goal, both quite profane, lie in obtaining meat for food; a wild beast must be seen in opposition to a tame animal. And yet the very similarity of hunting and sacrificial customs belies such a distinction. Killing can become ceremonial even among hunters" (15).

Burkert reminds us that the hunt affords the generative occasion of the *Männerbund*, the immemorial society of men: "At the core of this new type of male community, which is biologically analogous to a pack of wolves, are the acts of killing and eating" (18). "La Mort du loup" gives us no eating, but it does give us a graphic depiction of killing. Note how "La Mort du loup" also adjusts another aspect of the "Roland" section of "Le Cor." There, Roland is the one, who dies for *us*, but he does not die by *our* action; he dies on the contrary, by *enemy* action, at the hands of infidels. (Invaders of the land!) The community--Charlemagne and his knights, defenders of the Holy Roman Empire, separated briefly from their compatriots led by Roland--reunites around the fallen hero and then destroys the enemy. In "La Mort du loup," by contrast, the human community appears on stage already united and intrinsically aggressive; it constitutes a ferocious alliance, which forms a "sinistre croissant" around its noble and innocent quarry. The phrase "sinister croissant," we note, is applicable to the Roland saga with another connotation.

As in "Le Cor," Vigny hardly distinguishes between good-guys and bad-guys. No member of the human community can escape implication in the violent iniquity; and just so does the violent iniquity unify those complicit in its perpetration. The wolf dies without a growl or a whimper, just as the wolf-pups play, that is to say, silently. Wolfish silence signifies wolfish innocence. Speech belongs to the guilty. An episode of preternatural quietude now follows the violent passage.

In that quietude, the first-person plural of the "nous" reduces itself to the discrete "je," as though individuality were generated by the act of collective violence. The "je" is indeed quick to separate himself from the pack of hunters whom he had previously joined, and whom he now disdains as they set off in pursuit of further sacrificial offerings in the form of the mother-wolf and her pups. But that "je" almost immediately gives up his own voice in order to let speak vicariously through him the victims themselves, first describing the fleeing mother-wolf's ethical imperative to save her young, and, finally, channeling the anguish of the fallen male wolf. If the poet had hitherto yearned for the centeredness of archaic ritual, he would now find himself unwilling to countenance the acts requisite to such centeredness, and he does:

J'ai reposé mon front sur mon fusil sans poudre,  
 Me prenant à penser, et n'ai pu me résoudre  
 A poursuivre sa Louve et ses fils, qui, tous trois,  
 Avaient voulu l'attendre, et, comme je le crois,  
 Sans ses deux Louveteaux, la belle et sombre veuve  
 Ne l'eût pas laissé seul subir la grande épreuve;  
 Mais son devoir était de les sauver[.]

I leaned my pate against the smoking barrel,  
 Taken in thought, while yet resolving not,  
 To keep the chase after the she-wolf and her pups  
 Who, all three, would willingly have made the stand.  
 But for the wolfings the mother, somber widow now,  
 Would not have forsaken the sire in his stand,  
 Obliging instead to save her little ones.

The poet attributes to the she-wolf the thought that she must act now to save her pups from hunger and so prevent them from ever making the "pacte des villes / Que l'homme a fait avec les animaux serviles" [the pact of the cities / That man has made with servile animals]. The poet apostrophizes the wolves and by extension the whole of the animal kingdom as "les premiers possesseurs du bois et du rocher" [the first owners of wood and rock]. Yet that "pacte des villes," forged by humanity, has the same aim as the she-wolf's bestial and inarticulate resolve. This resolve would entail the protection of the defenseless and the provisioning of life. Recognition, however reluctant, of the necessity of the "pacte" balances, on the other side of the equation, both the oppositional individual's nostalgia for the pre-human world and his unease at recognizing that human order springs from the violent unanimity of a "sinistre croissant." As Burkert puts it: "The power to kill and [the] respect for life [are able to] illuminate each other" (21).

The poet cannot escape his membership in the cruel phalanx. If it were the case, as the poet says, that, "seul le silence est grand; tout le reste est faiblesse," [only silence is great; all the rest is weakness] he has nevertheless conspicuously not committed himself to suffer his fate, as do the animal-victims, "sans parler." This is the moral dictum that the poet puts in the mouth of the slain wolf, the victim now held up before the poet's readers as an ideal of existential sublimity. But *la parole* is the poet's very stuff. Language indeed seems to spring, on the occasion described in Vigny's poem, from the traumatic space opened up by the bloody killing. The scene becomes, to use Burkert's language, "a central point where weapons, blood, and death establish a sense of human community" and "the irreversible event becomes a formative experience... provoking feelings of fear and guilt and increasing the desire to make reparation" (21). Vigny's contemporary, Chateaubriand, had a similar intuition, noting that "when a savage pierces a roebuck with his arrows . . . this action is poetic" (*La génie du Christianisme* 263), but modern people by contrast cannot with equal legitimacy take innocent, even animal, life for sport.

Modern people are too much transformed, by their Biblically mediated ability to empathize, to kill dumb beasts with vain and guiltless abandon. (Harming an animal is a criminal offense.) Vigny certainly yields to his own capacity for empathy. In the stillness following the male wolf's death, the poet suddenly feels compelled "to think" about the enormity that has just occurred. Only by exercising language, the unique property of man, can Vigny commemorate the sublimity of speechless animals. In exploiting this human specificity, however, the poet necessarily contravenes the ideal that he has discovered in the animal's stoic dumbness. In offering the vision to an audience, furthermore, the poet indeed affirms his membership not in the sublime but in the market order; he has a commodity, his vision, to exchange, and he is more than willing to set up shop for the vending of it. He is thus a member of what the poem calls "le pacte des villes." As such, he is one of the bourgeois types implicitly demeaned in the early, egocentric and "oppositional" stanzas of "Le Cor." This fact will not be changed by the calculatedly Rousseauvian pose implicit in the poet's Adamic claim to be able to decipher the wolf's silent language on behalf of his otherwise stymied audience.

Gans speaks of "the constitutive hypocrisy of Romanticism" (*Originary Thinking* 166). The paradox of the poet's claim at the end of "La Mort du loup" illustrates the meaning of the term. Yet in "La Mort du loup,"

the poet appears to be aware of the hypocrisy in a way that he is not in "Le Cor." If the poet of "Le Cor" is not quite, in Gans's words, "ontologically prior to the collectivity" (166), he more than hints at his being spiritually superior to it. His commemoration of the medieval past certainly implies a deficiency in the present that those who are *of the present* cannot fathom until the poet has explained it to them. The fact that the poet of "La Mort du loup" has no difficulty in uttering the plural *nous* indicates that he has gone some distance towards relinquishing the "pose," as Gans says, of someone not implicated in the existing order. Of course, the poet of "La Mort du loup" does distinguish himself in any number of ways, beginning with the fact that *he*, not his reader, is the poet, and that *he*, not some other member of the chase, appears to sanction the flight to safety of the she-wolf with her cubs.

#### IV.

The Romantic poet, as Gans writes, opposes himself, by virtue of his special insight, to the rest of society, but "the more subtle Romantic work figures this opposition . . . as the protection or *care* of a weaker and less eloquent figure (usually female) by the stronger poet-narrator" (169). This is the very pattern of "La Mort du loup." Thus like Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*, the Vigny-poet is superlatively sympathetic to animals and nature. Presumably, the poet's audience will approve of the poet's mercy and identify with his regret over the death of the he-wolf and the widowing of his mate. But to admit this is to admit further that the bourgeois audience is, in its way, superior to the archaic world represented by the chase; the bourgeoisie has learned to identify with and admire the selfsame victim, in this case the wolf, against whom the primitive sodality of men acts with fierce unanimity. Neither the hunter celebrated in "Le Cor" nor the rude trackers co-present with the subject-narrator in "La Mort du loup" gives evidence of having any sympathy for the beast at bay.

Gans writes that the content of Romantic art is "cognitive" (170). We might say with equal validity that a type of Romantic art is *theoretical*, that it insists on the active contemplation of the primitivism revealed in the imaginative return to origin. How does this work out in the poem? The opposition between poet and bourgeois audience now seems considerably relaxed. The poet of "La Mort du loup" effectively admits his bond with society. As the existing modern civic order typically does not engage in brutality such as the hunt, it seems indeed less guilty of ignobility than the archaic societies customarily extolled by Romantic poets. The bourgeois order is by no means as interesting as those archaic societies, but it offers a more humane milieu. What remains in the space opened up by this detente? After participating in the killing of the wolf, the poet rests pensively while leaning on his rifle. Late in the poem, the poet puts an unlikely call to mental action in the mouth of the vanquished animal:

Il disait: "Si tu peux, fais que ton âme arrive,  
A force de rester studieuse et pensive,  
Jusqu'à ce haut degré de stoïque fierté  
Où, naissant dans les bois, j'ai tout d'abord monté.["]

He said: "See to it that your soul achieves,  
With all your strength resolved and all your mind applied,  
The same high Stoic dignity,  
That I, forest-born, so proudly to you have shown."

The wolf has shown the poet that everything human, including the highest degree of thought, exists in a genetic relation with primordial violence, for violence has a uniquely unifying and mentally quickening effect. The term *stoic* appears through no accident, since the point of the Stoical system, especially in its Roman expression in writers like Seneca and the Emperor Marcus, is to enable the individual to comport himself decently in a world of violence that buffets him constantly. The poet has earlier given us a reminder of Rome in the image of the she-wolf suckling the divine twins. The wolf can even be said to substitute, in the poetic scheme, for a human victim. Man is the enemy, says the poet, but he is just as much the enemy of himself as he is of the wild beast. "Man is beast to man," is an old and true saying. Thus one of the twin founders of Rome, suckled by a she-wolf, killed the other; and Rome, like France, descended into bloody civil war. Modern France at the time of "La Mort du loup" had only recently emerged from a long period of recurrent insurrectionary disruption.

The revolution of 1789 quickly became a terror and a slaughter. The very logic of revolutionary terror lies in the identification of scapegoat-victims around whose immolation insurgent solidarity can be molded. Napoleon emerged from the terror but quickly embroiled the nation in his military debacles against foreign rather than domestic enemies. A restoration of the monarchy took place, but Charles X proved reactionary and incompetent. While the July 1830 revolution occurred on a smaller scale than that of 1789, it still saw several thousands killed, mainly in Paris, before Charles abdicated, yielding the throne to Louis-Philippe.

This shift of power represented a triumph of the bourgeoisie and coincided with a recovery of the depressed economy. If the placid, market-oriented present had sublimated ferocity into the great pattern of exchange, the bourgeoisie should be congratulated; but it should also be goaded into remembering that the peace of regular exchange is a dispensation expensively achieved and that it was not always so. Nor need it be always so, as recurrent social disruption has made all too clear. Will anything prevent the "croissant sinistre" of the "pacte de villes" from turning its ferocity once again on itself?

Vigny appears to arrive at a decidedly un-Romantic and yet entirely unavoidable conclusion: If we wish to defer violence, we have no alternative but to enter the cycle of exchange by participating in the market; the peace of the market supplies the conditions under which poetic revelations of "originary" can be appreciated, and the poet is therefore really at home nowhere but in the bourgeois society that he pretends to despise. In Vigny, of course, spite is really too harsh a word. The ambiguity that he feels about the anti-bourgeois scenes that he invokes in "Le Cor" is already tantamount to a justification of the modern, largely non-victimary social order, even though the poet retains the pose of opposition. Once again a few words from Chateaubriand shed light on the movement that occurs in between "Le Cor" and "La Mort du loup." We have already cited Chateaubriand to the effect that while primitive violence is legitimately poetic, identically violent acts, in a modern milieu, are not.

Chateaubriand goes on to say that: "In proportion as society multiplied its wants of life, poets learned that they ought not, as in past times, to exhibit every circumstance to the eye, but to throw a veil over certain parts of the picture," whereupon, "having advanced to this step, they perceived that it was also necessary to select" (*Le génie* 264). "Le Cor" is a poem, which, in Chateaubriand's language, conceals and *selects*, in order to create beauty. "La Mort du loup" rejects the poetics of *concealment* and reveals violence for what it is: An origin of consciousness and cultural forms, at the expense of a victim, and one which therefore should not be ritually reproduced in the context of a post-ritual or Christian society.

In this revelatory *logic of the victim*, certain conclusions become unanswerable. If the wolf were a truly noble creature, then it would follow that those who ignore him treat him better, in fact, than those who hunt him down and kill him with their collective knife-blows. If the price of sublimity were death, then it would be better not to incorporate enormities in the regulation of life. The well-ordered life offers a certain optimum of happiness, which happily relinquishes the Dionysiac intensity of antique passions. In the rise of the bourgeoisie, Gans argues, there appears for the first time: "An institution in which the moral or formal equality of membership in the community of exchangers of signs . . . becomes a model for participation in the society of exchangers of things. This institution is the free market" (*Originary Thinking* 59). In the free market, "the equality of participants . . . is their equal capacity to offer their goods and services at an impersonally determined market price"; and "it is by means of the formal equality of the market that the ethical principle of equality makes its long-deferred return to the social order" (*Originary Thinking* 59).

Gans also writes that, "It is the free individual's independence from central control that permits [him] to formulate a strategy of return and ultimately to prevail over the guardians of ritually guaranteed equality" (57). Yet bourgeois consciousness, despite being rooted in the fundamentally moral notion of reciprocity, is not without defect. In particular, it tends to the ahistorical, and it therefore insufficiently recognizes its own historical status as an optimally peaceful condition acquired through centuries of trial and error. The market needs its oppositional figures, like the poets, to remind contemporary humanity, whose thought is parochial and ahistorical, of the contrast between the current civic order and the quite different communal orders that antedate it. "La Mort du loup," for all of the poem's surface Romanticism, does this, and qualifies itself as a remarkably *post-* or *meta-*Romantic poem.

## V.

Born under the Directorate, Vigny understood himself already in his late twenties as a child of catastrophic violence. He responds to a biographical inquiry from Paul Foucher (20 April 1828) by saying, "Ma vie est simple, monsieur. . . . Resté seul enfant d'une famille de Beauce très nombreuse et anéantie par la Révolution, où périrent mes sept oncles" [My life is simple, sir. . . . The only surviving child of a very large Beauce family wiped out by the Revolution, in which my seven uncles perished] (*Plus belles lettres* 25). A few years later, to Auguste Brizeux (2 August 1831), concerning his father, Vigny writes, "Il avait sept frères, La Révolution les avait tué" [he had seven brothers, the Revolution had killed them] (41). The phrase in its repetition acquires a formulaic, even a Homeric, quality, like an epithet: *Alfred of seven uncles orphaned*. The comment is not an aside. Vigny conceives of himself early as a poet and he conceives of the poet in a specific, rather vatic way, as an inevitably unappreciated interpreter of humanity to itself. Thus to Brizeux also (30 March 1831), Vigny had written, concerning the life of letters, "Les parias de société sont les poètes, les hommes d'âme et de coeur, les hommes supérieurs et honorables" [the pariahs of society are the poets, men of soul and heart, superior and honorable]; moreover, "tous les pouvoirs les détestent, parce qu'ils voient en eux leurs juges, ceux qui les condamnent avant la posterité" (40) [all the powers detest them because they see in them their judges, those who condemn them in advance of posterity]. In context the word "pouvoir" also has a special connotation, referring as it does to the Moloch character of the Revolution, which demanded victims and devoured them sacrificially. The year 1830, of course, was the year of yet another revolution, in which Vigny had declared himself ready to take arms for the restored monarchy that the bourgeois uprising would disestablish.

Bertrand de la Salle, in his study of Vigny (1963), declares that there are two types of poet, the type who strives for a musical effect and the type who conjures images that he then offers for contemplation within the framework of his verse. "Chez Vigny," de la Salle writes, "c'est l'image qui prédomine" [with Vigny it's the image that dominates] (64). The seven uncles mentioned in the letters of 1830 furnish one such image, slightly paradoxical because they have been "annihilated," as does the wolf in his final, mortal moments in "La mort du loup," as does Roland when the Muslim ambush falls on him in "Le Cor." Death and violence maintain an obvious connection, but death and nature are no less connected than death and violence. Nature implies death, as part of the natural process or cycle, and it therefore implies the negation of consciousness. The Romantic paradox of Vigny's poetry emerges from the very inaccessibility of the *images* that de la Salle puts at the center of the poet's esthetics.

Consider another of Vigny's letters, this one addressed to Edouard de la Grange (September 1832) in which the opening topic is the natural sublime. Vigny writes, in reference to the Swiss Alps, "Il y a une chose qui doit consoler l'homme de sa petitesse en face des grands debris d'une gigantesque nature, c'est que son imagination soit assez puissante pour planer au-dessus de ces Pyramides lumineuses et les réduire en lignes géographiques en les mesurant sous les pieds, comme il mesure et pèse les astres sur sa tête" [there is one thing that should console man for his smallness before the great wreckage of a gigantic nature, which is that his imagination is powerful enough to soar over these luminous Pyramids and reduce them to geographical lines by measuring them under his feet, as he measures and weighs the stars above his head]. Vigny adds that: "Je ne sais pourquoi j'ai toujours éprouvé une sorte d'indignation, pareille à la colère, en face de ces pierres ou ces eaux massives qui ont la prétention de nous effrayer et qui ne sont, après tout, que les choses stupides dominées par nous; j'ai montré le poing à la mer et aux montagnes et je ne les aime pas, parce qu'elles nous résistent" [I don't know why I have always felt a kind of indignation, similar to anger, before these rocks and massive waters that presume to frighten us and which are after all no more than stupid things that we dominate; I shook my fist at the sea and the mountains and I don't love them, because they resist us] (*Les plus belles lettres*, 45-46).

The foregoing epistolary passages are obviously related to the nature-description in "Le Cor" and "La Mort du loup," most especially to the alpine scenes in the former. The first passage puts brute nature and imagination in a kind of active contest in which the prize goes to imagination. On the one hand the mountains mock man's "smallness" but imagination, the distinguishing human trait, "reduces" the mountains to concepts of geography, quite literally *to images*. On the other hand, consciousness cannot shake off the irrational appeal that nature exerts over it; nature might be "stupid" but it is also "resistant." Mind can represent nature, but it cannot appropriate nature and it cannot rejoin itself to nature while remaining itself. Vigny's nature has the qualities that Generative Anthropology associates both with the esthetic object and with the sign: It fixates attention but refuses appropriation; it becomes an object *par excellence* of the theorizing gaze. Therefore in the case of Vigny it is plausible to speak of what Gans calls

"the scenic imagination," on which the subject feels expelled from the center and forced into interaction with his co-specifics on the social periphery.

In *Chronicles of Love and Resentment* 256, Gans contrasts the Enlightenment's notion of the human scene with that of the Romantic Era. Concerning the Eighteenth-Century mind, Gans writes: "The scenic imagination of the Enlightenment constructs an anthropological genesis for the ancients' timeless conceptions of the social order, but remains on the level of politics, the interaction of represented desires. The language by which we represent these desires does not appear to require a collective scene of origin; it is conceived either as emerging from the indexical signs of natural appetite (Condillac) or as the product of a unique faculty of free contemplation (Herder)." As to the human scene proposed by those who repudiated the Enlightenment: "The Romantics abandoned generative hypotheses for representations of the nature we all presumably share beneath the divisive mediations of bourgeois exchange, and which hold out the promise of the universal harmony that Romantic poets seek to incarnate in images."

These observations imply something, finally, for the actual development of the French nation, especially for its politics, in which Vigny was involved. According to Gans: "Romantic politics, exemplified in France by the most illustrious of [the Romantic] poets--both Hugo and Lamartine sat in the legislature of the July Monarchy and were active in the abortive Second Republic, the latter as its first provisional president--equated shared ideas and images with shared feelings, or, in political terms, with shared *interests*. In conceiving these representations as a source of harmony, the Romantic confuses their deferral of mimetic conflict with the final transcendence of mimetic desire." Earlier we quoted Weiskel on the presence in the Romantic worldview of a "discontinuity . . . between what can be grasped and what can be felt as meaningful," where "grasped" refers to reductive, rational understanding. We ourselves have argued that, in respect of Romantic esthetics, to appreciate forest, mountain, and field, one must possess the fortitude to withstand the tumult and turbulence in the struggle for life that takes place within these phenomena; and if the poet appeared to love nature in an exemplary way, this appearance would stem from his ability to confront the suffering--say rather, the anguish--that nature entails without flinching, or at least to conceal his faint-heartedness from others.

It should be added that, in reluctantly affirming bourgeois existence, the poet must also represent that anguish as irrecoverable in the orderly modern context. Lyric indeed addresses a lack, but it addresses a necessary lack. Two figures of speech, one from "Le Cor" and one from "La Mort du loup," take on renewed significance in this light. In "Le Cor," the poet has heard "les bruits prophétiques" that herald the end of chivalry; in "La Mort du loup," the poet makes reference to "Le pacte des villes," which denotes culture as against nature (man against wolf). To value "le pacte des villes" is to relinquish the atavistic desires conjured by "le son du cor." In so remarking we make way for the further observation that Vigny's poetry is something other --something ethically more developed--than generic Romantic poetry; that it is Post-Romantic, in a delicately self-conscious and anthropologically acute way.

To throw this special quality of Vigny's poetry into relief, one might put "Le Cor" in comparison with an earlier and a later poem on the thematics of the hunt. A useful specimen of earlier poetry would be Gottfried August Bürger's *Wilde Jagd* (1773), which Vigny might have known. A useful specimen of later poetry would be Jens Peter Jacobsen's *Gurresange* (1886). Here are the opening lines of *Das Wilde Jagd* in French:

Le cor retentit, on entend les cris du départ. Le coursier du comte hennit et s'élançe. Derrière lui se précipitent les valets et les piqueurs; détachés de la laisse, les chiens frappent l'air de leurs aboiements, ils se jettent à travers les champs, les ronces et les prairies.

C'était le jour consacré au repos et à la prière. Les rayons du soleil doraient le clocher, tandis que le son harmonieux et mesuré des cloches appelait les chrétiens à l'office du matin. Déjà s'élevaient vers le ciel les chants pieux des fidèles assemblés.

The horn sounds, one hears the cries of departure. The neighing steed of the count struts forth. Behind him rush the grooms and huntsmen; detached from the leash, the dogs hit the air with their barking, they lope through the fields and bushes and

grasslands.

It was the day dedicated to rest and prayer. The rays of the sun gilded the steeple, while the harmonious, measured ringing of the bells called Christians to the morning service. Already, sending skyward pious chants, the faithful assembled.

A bit later, "Le son du cor s'accorde mal avec la voix pieuse des cloches et les chants du matin, lui dit d'un ton plein de douceur son compagnon de droite; reviens sur tes pas, ta chasse ne peut être heureuse aujourd'hui; écoute ton bon génie et ne te laisse pas guider par l'ennemi des hommes" [The sound of the horn sits uneasily with the pious voice of bells and singing in the morning, said in a gentle tone his right-hand neighbor; retrace your steps, your game can not be happy today, listen to your good spirit and do not let yourself be guided by the enemy of mankind]. Bürger (1748-1794), drawing on a medieval Danish legend, employs incipiently Romantic vocabulary to tell a story, the pointed moral of which is far less Romantic than it is Protestant and conventional. The Count, in flouting the obligations of the Sabbath, brings damnation on himself; he suffers the punishment of conducting the hunt eternally, without respite, in a ghostly, undead condition. In Walter Scott's English: "Still, still shall last the dreadful chase, / Till time itself shall have an end; / By day, they scour earth's cavern'd space, / At midnight's witching hour, ascend."

In *Gurresange*, Jacobsen (1847-1885) turns Bürger's version on its head by validating the rebellion of the Count, identified by Jacobsen with the semi-historical character Valdemar of Gurre. Valdemar makes a Byronic break with God:

Herre, ved du vad du gjorde,  
Da du Tove fra mig tog?  
Ved du at det var min sidste  
Fristed, hvorfra du mig jog?  
Herre, rødmer du ej af Skam,  
Det var den fattiges eneste Lam?

Lord, wittest thou what thou hast done  
When thou from me my Tove dost take?  
Knewest thou not t'was my last asylum  
When thou hunted'st me forth?  
Lord, reddenest thou not from shame  
That thou took'st from this poor herdsman his only lamb?

The first line, "God, knowest thou what thou has done," echoes the Gospel and arrogates to Valdemar Christ's own victimary primacy. Valdemar even says that God *hunted him* ("du mig jog") *from his last refuge*. Jacobsen despite his late date is emphatically Romantic hence also militantly anti-conventional: Society for Jacobsen is the nemesis of individuality and authenticity. Sanctifying marriage, for example, over love, which is the topic of the just-quoted lines, God should "redden from shame."

*Das Wilde Jagd* belongs to the Pre-Romantic esthetic, of which *Originary Thinking* asserts that in it "the . . . subject remains focused on the sacred center, but has already become aware that it is human desire that is supplying its language" (162). The symbol of order in Bürger's poem is the church steeple, picked out by the sunbeam, but the action belongs to the blaspheming Count. Jacobsen's *Gurresange* (the title is in the plural) belong to the Romantic esthetic, of which *Originary Thinking* asserts that it is "in principle hostile to the market" (166). Romanticism constitutes itself as "oppositional culture" in which "individual experience of the originary becomes a demonstration of the 'unnaturalness' of the market" (166). "Le Cor" and "La Mort du loup" fit neatly, however, in neither category. Vigny understands what an Arch-Romantic like Jacobsen does not. *Originary Thinking* formulates the insight this way: "The role of the individual as thus affirmed [by Romanticism] is precisely what is required by the bourgeois order, where supply and demand replace ritual interaction as the basis for exchange and distribution" (166).

The recentness of the Revolution--in which the "seven uncles" fell--has effectively deglamorized sacrificial violence for Vigny in his creative maturity; yet Vigny understands the relation of esthetic interest to the trophies of sparagmatic action. It is the original sin of the de-ritualized market to owe a debt to something

that it, in its adoption and internalization of Gospel morality, has once and for all renounced and that it cannot re-institute without deconstituting itself. The modern self-conscious moral person must satisfy himself with representations. "Le son du Cor," for example, as entrancing as it might be, must take its place as reportage carried, as the poem puts it, "de feuille en feuille," by the winds. "Feuille en feuille" is nicely ambiguous, for it can mean "leaf by leaf" or "page by page." For the modern consciousness, ritual has become "romance," Vigny's term, or textuality, as contemporary critics like to say.

*What? "Romance" is the modern substitute for religion?* Perhaps. The sacred center, no matter how much the subject yearns to recreate it or to be it, is from now on a matter of representation, another ambiguous word extending from the theory of language and consciousness to the practice of politics and the making of justice.

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## **"A Democracy of Touch": Masochism and Tenderness in D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover***

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One of the central themes that critics identify in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* by D. H. Lawrence is the juxtaposition between the vitalist and rationalist mental outlooks and life attitudes, with the former, epitomized by the gamekeeper, Oliver Mellors, associated with the realm of nature, natural order, fertility, and life force, and the latter, representative of the sterile and efficient era of the industrial class society, exemplified by Clifford Chatterley. Aligned with (and mapped onto) this division is another binary opposition--that between mental life and life proper, or to put it more judgmentally (as the author's sympathies are unmistakable here), between serene intellectualism and lusty sensualism. I return to this familiar ground, covered multiple times by the critics in the past, in order to shed new light on the notions of sexual mastery and submission in specific connection with vitalism. I will look at the patterns of dominant and submissive behavior that arise in the novel with the goal of demonstrating that these configurations of mastery and subservience represent instances of masochism in its classical formulation as a sexual or psychological perversion of deriving pleasure from pain (both in a direct and figurative sense).

The hypothesis that I aim to authenticate is that masochism is a "late" phenomenon in the history of representation, which accompanies vitalism's reaction to modernity (and by modernity I mean a modern late-capitalist technological society characterized by the so-called *natural attitude*), while at the same time allowing a revealing glimpse into the internal contradictions of vitalism itself. The mental outlook of vitalism, a philosophy championed by D. H. Lawrence, was formed, as I will argue, as a backlash against what it perceived as the technocratic civilization's insensitivity to human temporality and the consequent disempowerment of man. But in its attempt to bring things back to human scale, vitalists rebel against the notion of transcendence and strive to return to the prelinguistic moment before the origin of language.

My point of departure will be Julian Moynihan's observation that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* "dramatizes two opposed orientations towards life, two distinct modes of human awareness: the one abstract, cerebral, and unvital; the other concrete, physical, and organic." He relates this comment to a passage from Lawrence's essay "Apropos of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*," where the author says that "There are many, many ways of knowing, there are many sorts of knowledge. But the two ways of knowing, for man, are knowing in terms of apartness, which is mental, rational, scientific, and knowing in terms of togetherness, which is religious and poetic. . . . We have abstracted the universe into Matter and Force, we have abstracted men and women into separate personalities--personalities being isolated units, incapable of togetherness--so that all great relationships are bodiless, dead" (67). Lawrence's elucidation of the meaning of his own novel should be seen as legitimate, for it is agreed that he has explicitly written a programmatic text (roundly criticized as ideological), with the main character serving as his explicit mouthpiece in condemning the reigning cultural values. He insists that the valorization of intellectualism divorced from feeling and sensation fragments human existence and leaves it barren and empty of meaning (Clifford's stories are meaningless), while tenderness and loving connection (Connie and Mellors' love) are capable of lifting sexuality from the realm of animal nature and transforming it into something that is genuinely human. In the quoted passage, Lawrence aligns the reductionist approach to knowledge with modern technocratic civilization, and opposes it implicitly to the second way of knowing, that of togetherness. This other way of knowing belongs to vitalist aesthetics and worldview, which *Lady Chatterley's Lover* can be seen as promoting. It has been read as an apology for vitalism. Therefore, I will preface my discussion of masochism with some expository remarks on the problematics of vitalism, in order to contextualize my further analysis.

The valorization of cerebral existence is at home in the world of the chattering classes to which the appropriately named Chatterleys both belong, albeit in somewhat different strata. Connie, whose provenance from an intellectual and cultural elite has supplied her with "an aesthetically unconventional upbringing" (662), has her formative encounter with the life of ideas as a young girl in Germany, where she discovers freedom and the thrill of intellectual debate in a mixed-gender company of students. At this stage, "it was the talk that mattered supremely: the impassioned interchange of talk. Love was only the minor accompaniment" (662). It was men that "insisted on the sex thing like dogs" (662), but to women, it was the passionate and intellectual interchange that held the main attraction, and sex was something to which they consented reluctantly. Later, she continues her association with intellectuals--both aristocrats and commoners--via her husband Clifford's bohemian set, all of them fashionable literati of London society. Since Clifford, who is paralyzed from the waist down as a result of his war injuries, is impotent, his connection with Connie is solely an intellectual one. She is actively involved in his writing career, reading his stories, encouraging him, and serving as a hostess to his circle of intellectuals. It is suggested that Clifford has a premonition of Connie's impending desertion, and this is probably why he so ardently about insists that a mental connection, created as a consequence of "an integrated life built on a habit of intimacy" (691), is everything, while casual sex is nothing. He is therefore trying to talk Connie into having a child by another man that would be raised by Clifford as the heir of Wragby. To Connie, on the other hand, it is the mental life that "[begins] to feel like nothingness" (691), and her spiritual awakening is intimately bound up with her sexual awakening, which she experiences with her lover, and her husband's servant, Oliver Mellors.

The juxtaposition of vitality versus sterility is set up between the worlds of Lady Chatterley and her lover, on the one hand, and Clifford and his set, on the other. The affair between Connie Chatterley and Oliver Mellors takes place in a rustic hut in the wood that belongs to the Chatterleys estate and begins simultaneously with the renewal of life after the winter, accompanied by a vivid, poetic portrayal of the advent of the spring, punctuated by the minute details of the change of flower blooming seasons. The lovers, Connie and Mellors, their bucolic surroundings, and their affair, narratively framed by the life-affirming progress of the spring, are associated with words such as "vital," "alive," and "life," and allusions to vigor, viability, pliancy, and fertility are frequently invoked in this connection. Thus, trees in the forest, surrounding the love nest, are described as "powerful beings, dim twilit, silent and alive" (739); the oak trees have "powerful trunks . . . , round and vital" (719), and the pine-tree under which Connie sits is an "erect, alive thing" that is "elastic, and powerful, rising up" (714). Early spring daffodils are "so bright and alive" (714), while a newly born pheasant chick is "the most alive little spark of a creature in seven kingdoms" (732-3). Even these smaller things are powerful in their own way: the daffodils are "so strong in their frailty" (714), and the pheasant chick is "so cheeky" and "so utterly without fear" (733).

People too are described in a language evocative of plant life--their sturdy bodies giving an impression of being firmly planted in the earth or gravitating toward it. Thus, Connie's sybaritic father has "stout thighs" that are, like tree trunks, "strong and well-knit, the thighs of a healthy man who had taken pleasure in life" (828). It is suggested that Connie inherits her sensualist nature from her father. Connie's figure, as she looks at herself in the mirror, is also spoken of in organic terms with her breasts "pear-shaped" but "unripe," her "down-sloping" curves having retained some youthful "down-slipping richness," are becoming "sapless" and "going unripe, astringent" after years of celibacy (703-704). In this scene, before she embarks on her affair with Mellors, Connie perceives herself as drained of life (her "vitality is much too low" (709)); only in her buttocks, it appears, "life still lingered hoping" (704). Sex with Mellors, however, has a reinvigorating effect on her. In addition to her newly feminine body contours, she feels rejuvenated inside. During their intercourse, "her womb, that had always been shut, had opened and filled with new life," and so "in her womb and bowels she was flowing and alive now" (747). In fact, it is her "whole self [that] quivered unconscious and alive, like plasm" (774). Mellors, in turn, is originally depicted as a "pistil of an invisible flower," "a little frail and quenched," although still as "curiously full of vitality" (713, 689). After their sexual encounter, he tells Connie: "I thought I'd done with it all. Now I've begun again." And after she asks him "Begun what?" he replies "Life" (735). She echoes his sentiment later to Clifford when she says that "the life of the body is a greater reality than the life of the mind: when the body is really wakened to life" (815).

Even their body parts become anthropomorphized by the vitalistic description and transformed into independent agents. Thus Connie is stirred by the feel of Mellors "warm, living buttocks" and struck by the

"small, bud-like reticence and tenderness of the penis" (773-774). His penis is "proud" and "lordly," "Like another being!" and Mellors agrees that "he's got a will of his own" (798). As an expression of their wonderment at the potency and autonomy of their sexual organs, the lovers invent pet names for them, John Thomas and Lady Jane. These synecdochic replacements for their bearers are meant to divorce the love story and the characters from their specific content and elevate them to the level of the universal, where they become simple archetypes of man and woman. In line with this organic, pagan thinking, their genitalia become associated with the source of all life. For Mellors, Connie's "bottom" acquires the significance of a sacred, Atlas-like being that "could hold the world up" (806). In a symmetrical way, Connie thinks of his penis as the "root of all that is lovely, the primeval root of all full beauty" (774).

Clifford, on the other hand, is shown as a complete opposite to the world of natural vitality. His change of vocation from being a fashionable writer to undertaking the technological modernization of his mines might strike the reader as an odd transition from mental to materialistic existence. But, interestingly, materiality in the novel is not the same as physicality--it is closer to the physis of the natural attitude than to the embodied experience of *élan vital*. Via its association with the alienated world of capitalist production, the former is connected with the cerebral realm of ideas, while the latter to the vitalist one of the body and earth. Even though Clifford is animated by his projects of story-writing and acquiring technical expertise on mining, he remains curiously devoid of *élan vital*. He is said to have a look of "slight vacancy," that "of a cripple" (661), with "his peculiar and rather vacant apathy" (780) and his insides filled with a "terrible hollow," a "void" (750). His stories too, although skillful, clever, and increasingly popular in fashionable society, are empty: "there was no touch, no actual contact. It was as if the whole thing took place in a vacuum" (668). These descriptions evoke an image of a rotting fruit or tree decaying from the inside, which fits in well with the overarching metaphor of a human body as a tree that is rooted in the soil from which it derives its life energy by way of its roots, i.e., legs and buttocks. The paraplegic Lord Chatterley, by contrast, is literally disconnected from the earth as the source of all life. His disability epitomizes his existential condition of being "a negation of human contact" (668) and he therefore carries a void inside, as if something is withering in him. The most striking contrast is symbolically encoded in his mode of locomotion: instead of having an innate, organic connection with the earth, of seeming to grow out of it, Clifford rolls over it in a wheelchair, achieving the most fleeting and superficial of contacts. His lack of relatedness or sensitivity to nature is ironically underscored by the episode when he rhapsodizes about the beauty of the "English spring," while his wheels, in all obliviousness, "jolt over the wood-ruff and the bugle, and squash the little yellow cups of the creeping-jenny . . . [making] a wake through forget-me-nots" (780).

Clifford's motor chair is emblematic of the mechanistic world of capitalist production he embodies in the novel. His seat of Wragby is an impersonal assemblage of living spaces that lack an organic center (762) and that repel his wife with their "mechanical cleanliness and the mechanical order" (669). The views from the estate are marred by the permanent cloud of smoke hanging over the Tevershall collieries that belong to it. The sense of sight is offended by "sharp, wicked electric lights" (736), and the sense of smell by "the rattle-rattle of the screens at the pit. The puff of the winding-engine, the clink-clink of shunting trucks, and the hoarse little whistle of the colliery locomotives" (666-7). These images make the coal works look like a vast, impersonal mechanism that has somehow gotten out of control and is now running amok like a rogue force on relentless offensive against the wooded idyll and without any regard to human concerns. As Mellors climbs on top of a denuded knoll, the industrial world reveals itself in all its intimidating ugliness and crushing insentience, impervious to human presence:

There, in the world of the mechanical greedy, greedy mechanism and mechanized greed, sparkling with lights and gushing hot metal and roaring with traffic, there lay the vast evil thing, ready to destroy whatever did not conform. Soon it would destroy the wood, and the bluebells would spring no more. All vulnerable things must perish under the rolling and running of iron. (736)

This inanimate mechanized world, poised to steamroll over everything standing in its way, just like Clifford's chair, is inimical to life in its organic sense. To Clifford, however, life is the energy that feeds the cycle of simple production which, in its turn, puts into efficient use "the chemical possibilities of coal" (728). As he decides to dedicate himself to the technological modernization of his coal pit in order to make it profitable again, he is struck by "a new sense of power flowing through him:" it is as if "Now life came into him" (729).

These two orientations towards life, the technological and the vitalist, stipulate two types of relationships, according to Lawrence. The working title of the novel was *Tenderness*, and the relationship of tenderness encapsulates Lawrence's ideal of human interaction--something that is spontaneous, unconstrained, and completely free from coercion and dominance, made possible by mutual attunement and keen sensitivity. This model of relationship is valorized in the novel as "a democracy of touch" that will be made possible after "we've shoved the cerebral stone away" (707). The interrelationships between individuals in modern industrial society, conversely, cannot be free and volitional because of its alienated, mechanistic or automated nature. The constitutive components of the mechanical model operate in the mode of "apartness." They interact with each other with the help of sent impulses, which initiate movement and force certain parts to produce work. Conceptually, a mechanism's design is hierarchical, whereby signals are sent along the chain of command, making the principle of subordination endemic to the industrial organization of labor. Not surprisingly, such a built-in necessity of compulsion provokes a reaction by the vitalist with his profoundly anti-authoritarian, voluntarist temperament. One way of subverting established power relationships, explored in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, is, as I will now show, via the outlet of masochist role-playing.

There are several examples of dominant-submissive games played by pairs of characters. I would like to focus on two most striking ones--those between Lady Chatterley and Oliver Mellors, on the one hand, and Lord Chatterley, and his servant, Mrs Bolton, on the other. Connie Chatterley's background is not aristocratic, unlike that of her husband's. Her provenance from the moneyed Bohemian class with its free-thinking tradition gives her some distance to the supposed unbreachability of the class barrier: the principle of absolute separation between the classes does not hold the same sacred status in her eyes as it does for those closer to the noble and plebeian extremes of the social divide. At the same time, it would be an exaggeration to say that she is oblivious to social distinctions. Her ambivalence toward the class system reflects, to some degree, the ambivalent social station of her lover, Oliver Mellors. Even though he comes from a local collier stock and works, at one time, as a humble blacksmith, he has inborn refinement, intelligence, and inquisitiveness that allow him to rise above his station. As a young lad, he courts a schoolmaster's daughter, and together they become "the most literary-cultured couple in ten counties" (791). And later, after he joins the army, he is favorably noticed by a colonel, through whose patronage he is made a lieutenant. After he retires from the army and goes back to work for his former employer, it is a challenge for him, in Clifford Chatterley's words, "to get back to his own level" (718)--a situation that is reflected in the way his speech (confusingly, for Lady Chatterley) oscillates between broad Yorkshire dialect and educated English.

Despite the fact that their respective social positions are not easily pigeonholed, their relationship does entail some degree of indignity (for both). Since in the inherently hierarchical sexual relationship, the male holds the naturally superior position, both Connie and Mellors are denigrated by their sexual involvement. Connie is lowered by her association with a servant, while Mellors is in a humiliating position of having a mistress who is his social superior. It is far from clear which is the more injured party, that is to say, which one of the lovers is degraded more by this connection. Their relationship is initially a power play of mastery and submission until it promises to settle, after Connie gives up her social status, into the culturally stable paradigm of an active-passive/dominant-submissive male-female interaction. (The novel offers, as it were, a happy resolution). In the very beginning, however, the social codes are flouted between Connie and Mellors. The first thing she notices about the gamekeeper is that there is something elusively and insinuatingly defiant in his attitude toward his masters. When Connie first meets him, he looks to her "like a free soldier rather than a servant" (689). The mood of defiance is often conveyed by the look he gives her. Either he "stare[s] into Connie's eyes, with a perfect, fearless, impersonal look" or his look is "laconic, contemptuous, not hiding his feelings" (697) or his face "[takes] an undefinable look of derision," while a "smile of mockery [narrows] his eyes" (702). Such signals sent through facial expressions and body language make Connie realize that "the man [does] not respect her" (697). Even his dialect is used as a weapon in his and Connie's power struggle. When she notices that "his voice on the last words had fallen into the heavy broad drag of the dialect," she suspects that he did that "in mockery, because there had been no trace of dialect before" (688). Mellors, who has taught himself to speak proper English during his army years and gives an impression of being "almost . . . a gentleman" (688) makes at times a conscious choice to revert to folksy speech in order either to parody and mirror his superiors' patronizing and supercilious manner or to humiliate his mistress by reminding her of his low birth and thus, in a perverse

way, to affirm his mastery over her.

But even though Connie "was gifted from nature with [an] appearance of demure, submissive maidenliness" (743), she too is capable of engendering a feeling of inferiority in Mellors, on occasion. "He dreaded her will, her female will, and her modern female insistency. And above all, he dreaded her cool, upper-class impudence of having her own way. After all, he was only a hired man" (716). On a whim, she can pull rank on him or remind him who is in control, such as when she stops coming to their assignations for several days, being well aware that it is impossible for him to come and fetch her. All that the gamekeeper can do is stand impotently outside her house and look at her windows. But while she makes him wait in uncertainty, she herself is uncertain too, "divided between two feelings: resentment against him, and a desire to make up with him" (771). However, as their relationship progresses, Connie lets go of her impulse to be the dominant partner. This change of heart is connected with her lover's gradual awakening within her of her sensuality. At some point, her feelings for him become too strong, too genuine, and so she deliberately erases from her mind an earlier role-image of herself as a Bacchante who is served by her adoring phallus-bearer. She rejects the Bacchanal role model and replaces it with the one of a docile and subservient partner, overcoming her residual fear of "[losing] herself, [becoming] effaced, and she didn't want to be effaced, a slave, like a savage woman. She must not become a slave. . . . She had a devil of self-will in her breast that could have fought the full soft heaving adoration of her womb and crushed it" (747).

The self-will is associated in the heroine's mind with barrenness, and so she willingly gives it up for the sake of love and turns to him with her hitherto hidden side of gentle femininity. Another incentive to abandon self-assertive behavior is provided by the cautionary tale of the gamekeeper's unhappy marriage to Bertha Coutts. Mellors tells Connie how he hated it when Bertha actively tried to bring herself to orgasm by inducing him to clitoral stimulation: "By God, you think a woman's soft down there, like a fig. But I tell you the old rampers have beaks between their legs, and they tear at you with it till you're sick. Self! Self! Self! all self! tearing and shouting!" (792). The horror of the modern female for Mellors lies in her "ghastly female will" (843) of "endless assertion" (722). The epitome of this behavior is Bertha Coutts in her striving toward self-satisfaction. "And it came back on her like a raving necessity, she had to let herself go, and tear, tear, tear, as if she had no sensation in her except in the top of her beak, the very outside top tip that rubbed and tore" (792). The dramatic irony of this confession lies in the fact that this is exactly how Connie brought herself to orgasm with her first lover, Michaelis.

In contradistinction to other relationships he has known, Mellors wants a relationship built on real tenderness. Some of the connotations of *tenderness* are softness, sensitivity, pliability, giving way, lack of resistance. That which is tender will not obstruct, hold out against, put itself forward, or put up a fight. It will yield to the force or penetration of the other to the fullest extent. Indeed, this is how Connie is feeling and reacting: "she felt herself melting in the flame," "she yielded with a quiver," her body is "softly opened" to "the thrust of a sword," "she was deeper and deeper and deeper disclosed," "the quick of all her plasm was touched" (773). Mellors, who thinks "there is no real sex left" and longs to find a woman "who'd really 'come' naturally with a man" (793), finds such a woman in Lady Chatterley. Connie allows him to realize the male fantasy of the vaginal and anal orgasms that do not require a separate pleasure organ, like the clitoris--experiences that build on responsiveness rather than self-assertion and willfulness. This is the model of human love that the novel promotes--a tender touch to the core of one's being, made possible by "primordial tenderness, such as made the world in the beginning" (773). Connie's first vaginal orgasm is a transformative moment, whereby she "knew herself touched, the consummation was upon her, and she was gone. She was gone, she was not, and she was born: a woman" (773).

But an even more symbolic act of giving up control and willing self-abasement occurs in the last scene of the protagonists' love-making when she and Mellors engage in anal sex. For Connie, it felt like "Burning out the shames, the deepest, oldest shames, in the most secret places. It cost her an effort to let him have his way and his will of her. She had to be a passive, consenting thing, like a slave, a physical slave. . . . She would have thought a woman would have died of shame. Instead of which, the shame died" (823). Here it is also appropriate to recall that another connotation of *tender* is "sore" or "painful," which correlates with the strong probability that the act of anal intercourse was probably quite painful for Connie. This submission of Connie to Mellors, the archetypal woman to the archetypal man, through the symbolic act of the murder of shame is portrayed in the novel as the ultimate triumph and redemption of love. Yet, at

bottom, however, this is a quintessential act of masochism, which involves not only humiliation but physical pain.

The necessary submission of a woman to a man brings up another point about power relationships. Vitalists do not deny the centrality of power. The words *power* and *powerful* are used as frequent descriptors of nature in the novel that have clearly positive connotations. The color of celandines is "the powerful yellow of early summer" (767). Old trees in the forest "seemed a very power of silence, and yet a vital presence" (700). They are "powerful beings, dim twilit, silent and alive" (739); and they have "powerful trunks . . . , round and vital" (719). But the difference between the power of nature and civilization is that the former is a natural, and the latter an unnatural force. By making one of the main protagonists a paraplegic and physically helpless man with great economic (his mines), social (his title), and even intellectual (his stories) influence and power--and thus letting him rule three central areas of human endeavor--Lawrence underscores the unnaturalness of the second type of power and displays his distaste at the way power relations play themselves out in civilized society. This is something that could be witnessed in the battle-of-the-wills relationship that exists between Clifford Chatterley and his nurse, Mrs Bolton.

The relationship between these two is also fraught with shifting power dynamics. Mrs Bolton, who is a local woman with nursing experience, is hired to take care of paraplegic and wheel-chair-bound Clifford in order to help relieve Lady Chatterley. She has "a very good opinion about herself . . . from having bossed the sick colliers for a good many years" and is therefore "in her tiny way, one of the governing classes in the village" (710). As in the case of Mellors, her social position is ambiguous, and she is somewhat of an upstart. "The masters! In a dispute between masters and men, she was always for the men. But when there was no question of contest, she was pining to be superior, to be one of the upper class" (711).

When she arrives at Wragby, Mrs Bolton is, at first, shy and uncertain. "Clifford made her feel small, and like a servant, she accepted it without a word, adjusting herself to the upper classes" (711). Soon she begins to relax, getting used to her master and regaining a sense that she will eventually "have him in her power. He wasn't so very different from the colliers, after all, when you lathered his chin, and softly rubbed the bristles" (712). But things turn out to be more complicated, and the two soon embark on an escalating relationship of mutual control and manipulation. Mrs Bolton is said to have "that queer sort of bossiness, endless assertion of her own will," but Clifford has "a finer, subtler will of self-assertion than herself" (722). While she offers her services to him with a "soft, caressive, subservient, yet managing voice," he defies her and gains the upper hand by having things done purposefully his way, not hers, by, for example, telling her to take away the hyacinths that she has so carefully arranged or deliberately putting her on indefinite hold with her shaving services. It can be said that she gets back at him by catering to his intimate and hygienic needs, which paralyzed Clifford cannot perform for himself, and which would certainly involve some indignity on his part. Mrs Bolton derives satisfaction and a sense of power from handling his helpless body: "She loved having his body in her charge, absolutely, to the last menial offices. She said to Connie one day: 'All men are babies, when you come to the bottom of them'" (722). Clifford one-ups her by playing on her class insecurities when he embarks on the project of educating her. First, he teaches her to type and take dictation, then to play board games, which, to Mrs Bolton, are seen as aristocratic pursuits. While Clifford "enjoyed it, it gave him a sense of power," Mrs Bolton is thrilled, on her part, because "She was coming bit by bit into possession of all that gentry knew, all that made them upper class" (723). But there is yet another level to her excitement--her realization that she is making herself indispensable to him, which is "her genuine thrill," and a power on top of his power (723).

Connie notices, at one point, that Clifford is treating a much older Mrs Bolton "as if she were half mistress, half foster-mother to him" (731). "Only when he was alone with Mrs Bolton did he really feel a lord and a master, and his voice ran on with her garrulously as her own can run. And he let her shave him or sponge all his body as if he were a child, really as if he were a child" (729). Gradually, their relationship grows in intensity in order to culminate in a weird sexual game of infantile regression at the moment when Lady Chatterley announces her departure. "Clifford became like a child with Mrs. Bolton. He would hold her hand, and rest his head on her breast, and when she once lightly kissed him, he said! "Yes! Do kiss me! Do kiss me!" And when she sponged his great blond body, he would say the same! "Do kiss me!" and she would lightly kiss his body, anywhere, half in mockery.

And he lay with a queer, blank face like a child, with a bit of the wonderment of a child. And he

would gaze on her with wide, childish eyes, in a relaxation of madonna-worship. It was sheer relaxation on his part, letting go all his manhood, and sinking back to a childish position that was really perverse. And then he would put his hand into her bosom and feel her breasts, and kiss them in exultation, the exultation of perversity, of being a child when he was a man (851).

Mrs. Bolton was both thrilled and ashamed, she both loved and hated it. Yet she never rebuffed nor rebuked him. And they drew into a closer physical intimacy, an intimacy of perversity, when he was a child stricken with an apparent candour and an apparent wonderment, that looked almost like a religious exaltation: the perverse and literal rendering of: 'except ye become again as a little child'. –While she was the Magna Mater, full of power and potency, having the great blond child-man under her will and her stroke entirely (851).

And this relapse into childhood and complete abandoning himself to the power of Mrs Bolton is taking place all the while Clifford is enjoying a very successful career as an industrialist and himself becoming a more powerful man than ever before ( "a new sense of power flowing through him" (729)). The distinction between two kinds of power, natural and unnatural, are illuminated by the two types of relationship, (biologically-)normative between Connie and Mellors, and perverse (between Clifford and Mrs Bolton).

These instances of willing humiliation and self-abasement can be readily identified as masochistic behavioral templates. Although the original meaning of masochism defines it as pleasure derived from physical pain, the term takes on a less restrictive, psychological connotation almost from the beginning. Theodor Reik writes that the idea of mental masochism came to designate "not a somatic relation but the idea of submission and dependence as the essential element in the pleasure experience" (198). It is, indeed, the latter that is mostly applicable to the games the characters play. In his turn, Sigmund Freud identifies three types of masochism: *erotogenic*, *feminine*, and *moral*. Erotogenic masochism is the basic expression of masochism that underlies the other two. The physiological explanation of the erotogenic masochism is "libidinal sympathetic excitation" which accompanies the physical sensations of pain and unpleasure. The reason for this, as Freud hypothesizes, is that "nothing of considerable importance can occur in the organism without contributing some component to the excitation of the sexual instinct."

What the libidinal co-excitation, which gives us the sensation of pleasure, really masks is the death drive. According to Freud, the death drive is one of the regulative principles of the life processes in the organism. Much criticized as a supposition, because it is always fused with the life drive and cannot be detected on its own, the death drive is manifested through the Nirvana principle, which strives to reduce all excitation to zero--a desire to return to the mineral state of being, as it were. But because an organism tends toward self-preservation, the libido acts on behalf of the life drive in order to mitigate or render innocuous the destructive energies of the death drive. It does this in such a way that "it remains inside the organism and, with the help of the accompanying sexual excitation described above, becomes libidinally bound there" (418). This is what *primary erotogenic masochism* is about. Another way to disarm the death instinct is to turn it outward. Diverted toward external objects, the death drive turns into pure aggression, expressed as the "instinct for mastery or the will to power" (RF 214). When directed towards outside objects and placed in the service of the sexual function, the death drive becomes sadism. But part of this sadism can be diverted back onto the self, creating the phenomenon of *secondary masochism*.

The other two kinds of masochism have the erotogenic masochism as their physiological foundation. Feminine masochism is observed in men who have fantasies or playact scenes of being tortured to achieve sexual release. Freud calls this form of masochism feminine, because men are put in "a characteristically female situation" often involving fantasies of being raped or castrated which stem from some childhood sense of guilt and a desire for punishment. Guilt and punishment aspects make feminine masochism a transitional form on the way to moral masochism, which is a more complete reflection of the competing life-governing principles.

Moral masochism no longer makes physical pain a requirement. The suffering that the subject is addicted to is more often than not psychological. The unconscious sense of guilt is assuaged by punishment imposed by the *superego*, which serves the function of the guilty conscience. The superego is one of the compartments of the psyche that has internalized the collective parental voice of authority after the Oedipus complex has been transcended. It is locked into opposition with the *id*, which is the instinctual faculty governed by the

pleasure principle. The resulting course of action is negotiated by the reality principle, representing the *ego*, which enables the postponement of pleasure and temporary toleration of unpleasure in order to maximize future gains and make the organism more fit for survival.

In the case of moral masochism, the subject is plagued by an especially harsh consciousness. The overweening sense of guilt produces the situation whereby the ego is both plagued by the sadistic superego and plagues itself via its own capacity for masochism. As Freud says "the sadism of the superego and the masochism of the ego supplement each other and unite to produce the same effects" (425). The symptom of this condition is the resexualization of the Oedipus complex, manifested by a regressive return to the Oedipus situation. This condition is highly applicable to Clifford, who overtly regresses to the role of a baby with Mrs Bolton. It can also be argued that there is a regression to the anal stage. Partly, it consists in his enjoyment of Mrs Bolton's "menial offices," and partly, it is expressed through Clifford's association with money (money being a symbol of feces) and industrial production ("the house was full of the stench of this sulphurous combustion of the earth's excrement" (667)). But Connie's and Mellors' self-conscious humiliation are also recognizable instances of moral masochism.

Thus even though the underlying explanation of masochism in Freud is monocausal, attributed to the existence of the death drive, its actual workings seem to be two-fold. On the level of the unconscious, masochistic tendencies are explained by the death drive, but on the conscious, psychological level it appears to be the artifact of the human capacity for advanced planning and theory of mind (insofar as we find the superego remonstrating with the id about the desirability or foolhardiness of a certain future course of action), and by extension, of representation. Other theorists of masochism also saw something in the very nature of representation that engenders masochism and renders it perhaps not as counterintuitive as it seems initially. Thus, according to Jacques Lacan, the masochist is not his own agent, but the means and instrument of the Other's *jouissance*. He identifies himself with a common object or an exchange object and acts out his desire on an imaginary stage.

For Theodor Reik, masochism is the disorder of "anticipation," as it were. Its three main characteristics are: 1) the special importance of fantasy (for the subject, "it represents a preliminary which is indispensable, a *conditio sine qua non*" (209); 2) the suspense factor ("the tendency to prolong the tension, while we meet with the opposite intention, of resolving the tension, in normal sexual life" (223)); 3) the demonstrative feature, a kind of exhibitionism, through which the masochist wants to demonstrate to the world his humiliation. He sums up the motto of masochism as "victory through defeat" in the way Christ is victorious at the moment of his greatest humiliation. The masochist subject "submits voluntarily to punishment, suffering and humiliations and thus has defiantly purchased the right to enjoy the gratification denied before" (361). In other words, he "loses all battles except the last" (363). Masochistic experience creates the tension of anticipation that vacillates between pleasure and unpleasure, with the anxiety transformed into pleasure by an act of self-mastery. Reik comes close here to understanding that masochistic behavior, by building on overcoming the fear of representation, engages with the very structure of representation that effects a gap between the given and the imagined. At the same time, he does not go far enough into exploring the *scenic* aspect of representation. The latter is revealed by the third, demonstrative, feature of masochism, which shows an insight into the way a masochistic fantasy is not only "anticipatory," but also public. It engages with the community of speakers by taking place on the public stage.

For Jean Laplanche, masochism originates from *primal seduction*--the original, non-symmetrical, exposure that a child has to the other (an adult), which generates a message that the child has to interpret, presumably "entirely infiltrated with unconscious and sexual significations to which *adults themselves* do not have the code" (127). The masochist response comes as the second moment--that of self-consciousness--which arrives on the heels of and in response to the first moment, that of the awareness of the other. This first moment has the character of an interruption, and is bound to be experienced as painful, "For the necessarily traumatic intervention of the other must entail--most often in a minor way but sometimes in a major one--the effraction or breaking-in characteristic of *pain*" (209). Laplanche criticizes Freud for going astray in taking a turn towards a theory of drives. The problem with drives is that they are endogenous, arising within the solipsistic, monadic ego. He, on the other hand, characterizes human sexuality as "exogenous, intersubjective, and intrusive" (198). The other impinges from the outside in the form of an enigmatic message that demands to be translated, and it is the opacity of this message and the uncertainty as to its exact content and context that are experienced as painful. At the same time, because of the

intermingling of self-preservationist and sexual physiology, to the extent that they "originate at the same place, in relation to the same source" (128), adult messages acquire unconscious sexual connotations that can induce an auto-erotic response, which is repressed and is later retrieved as a masochist fantasy. What is relevant to my discussion in Laplanche's theory is his intuition about the importance of exogeneity, the centrality of the outside and the other to the constitution of subjectivity.

Gilles Deleuze also deserves to be mentioned as someone who, unlike the other masochism theorists, emphasizes a complete distinctness of masochism from sadism, but also draws strong connections between masochism and the theater of fantasy. He describes masochism as the phenomenon of acute self-consciousness that strives to rid itself of the anticipated punishment. An act of masochism is demonstrative, imaginative, aesthetic, and suspenseful. Its object is to incapacitate the superego by disavowing the mother and abolishing the father. What comes to the forefront in Deleuze's interpretation of masochism is its temporal and scenic, one can say theatrical, view of the way the masochist operates. "In masochism we find a progression from disavowal as a process of liberation from the pressures of the superego to suspense as incarnation of the ideal" (127). (Deleuze's example of disavowal is the boy child's denial: "no, the woman doesn't lack a penis"). The difference between a disavowal and regular negation is that "Disavowal is a reaction of the imagination, as negation is an operation of the intellect or of thought" (127). The moment of disavowal is followed by a suspenseful awaiting of the birth of the ideal ego as a "narcissistic ideal of omnipotence" (129) that creates a happy resolution to the problem of anticipation. (In Freud, by contrast, it is the superego that has the upper hand, but we can remind ourselves that both the ego and superego are aspects of the self, and thus both interpretations of masochism incorporate an anticipation of a triumphant overcoming of adversity that comes via the dynamic of elevation through humiliation or victory through defeat). Another important aspect to which Deleuze wants to bring the reader's attention is masochism's contractual nature. Thus, the narrator of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's novel *Venus in Furs* signs a contract with Wanda, obligating both of them to a temporary mistress-slave relationship. While the sadist would impose his will through an institution, the masochist thinks in contractual terms, the main difference, in Deleuze's opinion, being "the free consent of the contracting parties [that] determines between them a system of reciprocal rights and duties" (77). To sum up, the common thread of the above theories is a desire to overcome the trauma of representation by closing up the gaps it has injected between the self and the other of consciousness and the now and then of anticipation.

While the above theories recognize the problematics of "exteriority," René Girard brings all the various strands together and explains masochism with the schema of a mediated desire. Masochism is an inevitable desire of an impossible ambition. The masochist imitates the desire of his model, the path to which is paved by insuperable obstacles. In fact, the desire is unfulfillable--it is what Girard calls a "metaphysical desire [that] always ends in enslavement, failure, and shame" (176). Why would the masochist choose from the outset such a hostile mediator who creates such difficulties for him? Why would he not choose someone more favorably disposed? Because this is the very definition of the masochist: "We are masochists when we no longer choose our mediator because of the admiration which he inspires in us but because of the disgust we seem to inspire in him" (178). But choosing someone who despises him, the masochist virtually assures that his desire is constitutionally unfulfillable. On the one hand, Girard writes, the imitator is very lucid in observing the connection between his choice of the mediator and the obstacle. On the other hand, this makes him appear even more strikingly blind when he, nevertheless, "tries paradoxically to satisfy his desire by rushing towards the obstacle, thus making his destiny one of misery and failure" (179). Girard cautions, however, that we should not be precipitate in concluding that the subject really desires shame, humiliation, and suffering. On the contrary, he desires something that is a complete opposite--"his mediator's divinity, and for this divinity he will accept if necessary . . . shame, humiliation, and suffering" (182). By choosing the most difficult mediator that could be conceivably imagined, the imitator aims to master and overcome himself in an extravagant feat of ambition. It is a form of self-deification, as Girard notes, and not of irrationality. What "the masochist desires [is] exactly what we ourselves desire: autonomy and god-like self-control, his own self-esteem and the esteem of others; but by an intuition of metaphysical desire more profound than his doctors possess . . . he no longer hopes to find these inestimable treasures except at the side of a master whose humble slave he will be" (183-84). Thus the half-blind/ half-clear-sighted masochist will continue striving to attain divinity by conquering an impossible obstacle that is constitutionally unconquerable. The built-in futility of this scenario cannot be properly understood until we grasp the triangular structure of desire, which is never naively straightforward but always mediated.

But there is an even more minimal and theoretical way of grasping the ambivalent desire of masochism. We can by now perhaps see that all of the above explanations present different ways of grasping the pragmatic paradox that arises with the origin of language. The paradox consists in the keeping in simultaneous focus the dual relationship the sign user has with the object and other participants on the scene of representation: the first is the one of prolongation, and the other of joint attention. As Eric Gans says: "Symbolic reference cannot derive from the 'horizontal' relation of appetite; it entails a 'vertical' relationship of *différance* that is at the same time one of interdiction. The sign substitutes for the thing only because the thing itself cannot be appropriated. But this interdiction only increases the participants' desire; the energy invested in this desire maintains the attraction between center and periphery that constitutes the uniquely human phenomenon of the scene" (SI 3). In other words, "the member of the original community cannot possess the desired object, because the desire arises only when the object is not possessed" (EC 28).

The contradiction that is engaged here is not only formal but psychological. The simultaneous awareness of the desirability of the central object and the absolute impossibility of possessing it cannot be experienced as anything other than painful. Yet the symbolic act of the ethical sharing of the object between language users is, at the same time, empowering and liberating. Surely there is a sense of mastery attendant in the possibility of dividing (or multiplying) a symbolic object into an infinite number of parts and thus assuaging wounded sensibilities and putting all competing desires on an equal footing. Thus the sense of powerlessness inscribed in the act of representation is constitutionally intermingled with the sense of mastery and overcoming in a way that is typical for masochism. It seems then that masochist dynamics are inherent in the mechanics of representation. It is tempting to conclude that masochist tendencies become pronounced late in the history of representation. They grow together with the acute rate of the growth of our cultural self-consciousness, reaching the level of conscious awareness with the crossing over of some qualitative barrier of insight into our linguistic predicament. Masochism is a sophisticated game of role play staged with a great degree of self-awareness on an imaginary scene of representation and thus is ancillary to modernity, insofar as the latter is characterized by the problematic of exaggerated self-consciousness and alienation.

We have thus far seen how Freud's masochism of the superego aligns with other theories of masochism that attribute it to representation. Yet Freud's conception of masochism is richer. There is another factor yet unaccounted for, namely that of the death drive, which is operative on the lowest level but subtends the aggressive impulses of the sadistic superego. On the face of it, it is not immediately apparent how the death instinct, which is originally envisioned as the disintegrative force that pulls the organism down to the inorganic level of the organization of matter via the mechanics of the Nirvana principle that binds pleasure to the reduction of excitation, how this death instinct transforms into something seemingly entirely different--a "separation" anxiety, so to speak, of representation that is transmuted into a force of aggression put into the service of the superego, which unleashes it sadistically against the ego.

Many later readers of Freud have viewed this identification of the death instinct with the aggressive instinct as highly problematic and have found Freud's contention that libido rescues the death instinct and co-opts it for the purposes of life and survival unconvincing. Havi Carel in her analysis of the development of the death drive in Freudian theory writes that the death drive is developed by Freud as a general metaphysical principle that formally unifies various self-destructive phenomena but does not provide a generative view of their constitution and interrelation. Some contradictions between its various elements are irreconcilable. For example, masochism, in seeking unpleasure, tends to increase tension. But if it acts as an expression of the death drive then how is it possible for it to work in opposition to the Nirvana principle, which aims to discharge tension? (52). Carel suggests that it might be prudent to discard the Nirvana principle altogether. But should one postulate something like the aggressive drive? Carel thinks that this would also be problematic because "replacing the life/death duality with sexuality/aggression duality has its limitation" (59) "Aggression does not lend itself to the concepts that make up the drive. . . . It does not delineate a specific domain . . . , it has no somatic source . . . [and] it does not provide a model . . . of development" (58).

Carel has pinpointed correctly, in my opinion, that aggression does not fit the criteria for being a drive. Yet aggression is a phenomenon in its own right with anthropological origins. In its direct or inverted form, it subtends the masochist's feelings of guilt or anxiety. Whether it is the sadism of the superego in Freud, or the intrusive assault of the Other in Laplanche, or belligerence directed at the superego as the

representative of the figure of parental authority in Deleuze, or the defiant push by the anxious consciousness towards the ending of suspense in Reik, or the deliberate choice of the most hostile mediator in Girard, everywhere we find that masochistic behavior does not arise from a purely conceptual conflict but is psychologically motivated by an emotionally charged and combative attitude expressive of an animus toward the other or the "othered" self. Generative Anthropology has identified this impulse as mimetic desire, which originated in the raw aggressiveness of the competitive and imitative instincts of animal social hierarchies but was harnessed and became transformed into the anxiety- and tension-laden paradoxical structure of representation.

If, however, we place the origin of masochism in unresolved mimetic desire, does this mean that we should discard Freud's death drive explanation and the Nirvana principle? I suggest that we keep them. The death drive uncovers an important intuition by the vitalists about the temporal aspect of discourse which is, in my view, an indispensable component in the theory of masochism. What Freud's drive-based view of human behavior has to recommend it is that it provides an important "energist" or energy-oriented perspective that is capable of explaining the trajectory of the stagnation and renewal of meaning, which, in its turn, helps us understand why a periodic repetition (in the form of ritual reproduction) of the originary event is a necessary feature of the scene of representation.

To rethink the meaning of Freud's death drive, I would like to recast it in energist terms. The seemingly odd idea of a drive that urges the human organism to return to an inorganic state would make more sense if thought of as *entropy*. In energist language, the mechanistic and organic paradigms represent two different thermodynamic models--those of a homeostatic system, on the one hand, and a far-from-equilibrium dynamic system, on the other. The former represents the processes in an ideal Newtonian system. It is a system without a death vector and without the dissipation of energy, but one in which one kind of energy is fully converted into another. Such would be a system fully described by the pleasure principle (lacking the economic contradiction introduced by the death drive). According to the homeostatic principle, any loss of energy--due to hunger, exhaustion, loss of heat--would produce an unpleasurable tension that would demand some action to restore the lost energy. The subject would then eat, rest, warm himself up, and thus recover the homeostasis. This is the logic of life preservation, of infinite replenishing, of exchange without loss. In the world of homeostasis, there is neither temporality nor attenuation--a condition that manifests itself as the unchecked expansion of the modernist will-to-power.

By contrast, the entropic model of psychic processes recognizes the dissipation of energy as a fact of life. The increase in entropy for isolated systems expresses the aging of the system. (OC 258). The so called *arrow of time* is associated with the evolution of dynamic systems toward states of higher probability, which means entropy increase (OC 253). Ilya Prigogine, who has written extensively about the thermodynamics and physics of irreversible processes, notes that the arrow of time makes its first appearance in the description of thermodynamic processes that are far from equilibrium. This is the domain of organic life and self-organizing systems that do not obey simple laws of Newtonian physics, which are time-reversible. In fact, a certain idea of irreversibility already exists for linguistic systems--it is the idea of the irreversibility of reading. This is a point made already by Paul de Man: once you have read something, your reading cannot be undone. The new meaning that the reading has generated cannot be erased. It has entered the "cosmic" cultural text and will stay there "forever." But Prigogine's arrow of time is more complex than a simple irreversibility. In far-from-equilibrium systems, entropy is part and parcel of the production of (new) order. He is describing highly unstable states where even tiny fluctuations can be the cause of principally new system behavior and properties on the macroscopic scale, leading to self-organization and the growth of complexity. Prigogine identifies such states with dissipative structures.

An interesting feature of dissipative structures is that they constitute so-called high-affinity systems, that is to say, systems in a coherent state, all parts of which are mutually implicated. The nodes of mutual entanglement occur at moments of crisis, called bifurcation points. These are moments of instability / discontinuity in the evolution of a far-from-equilibrium stable state, at which the system could jump off into another state. They can also be seen as moments of possibility--of choice even--for the system of restructuring itself at a higher functioning, more coherent state. But they can start losing coherence and descend into a less organized state of dissipated order. Prigogine's theory should be of interest to humanists because it presents a satisfying model of novelty and eventfulness, but also of decline and dissipation. The vitalists' idea of *élan vital* finds its justification in this or similar models of self-organizing

dissipation systems. The entropic view complicates the homeostatic model, suggesting that homeostasis is an idealization. In reality, the pseudo-homeostatic system never reaches the point of full restoration, but squanders energy and order at every cycle until there is no more to lose. From this perspective, something akin to a Freudian death drive (a desire to return to an inanimate, inorganic state, which would indeed be an entropic loss of order) does exist and is distinctly different from aggression, which is directed at survival and reproduction, and thus at an increase of complexity. This too comes into play in the description of masochism insofar as it can be recognized as a phenomenon of vitalist rebellion against the "natural" (Newtonian, homeostatic, anti-entropic) attitude of modernity. What the vitalists are rebelling against is the world of excessive distances and in consequence, dramatically diminished possibilities, all created by the natural attitude.

The model of reality that underlies the natural attitude is conducive to the creation of excessive distances, that is to say, distances that exceed the "human scale," as it were, because it is infinite, timeless, and unchecked. The technological world it has helped to create exists in the constant state of acceleration and growing efficiency, giving some justification to Martin Heidegger's charge of *gigantism*. Martin Heidegger (himself, arguably, a vitalist) situates the questions of nearness and de-distancing within the context of phenomenological spatiality. According to him, the subject (Dasein) encounters other beings in their nearness, that is to say, in the same region of space that belongs to the horizon of the immediate and spatially contiguous experience. "What is 'near' lies in that which is in the circle of an average reach, grasp, and look" (BT 99). As for remote objects (that are "useful things"), Dasein is comported vis-à-vis them in a way that is spatially directed and interested, i.e., phenomenologically intentional, by bringing them into nearness. Bringing into nearness means eliminating distance by whatever means necessary--the process Heidegger calls *de-distancing*: "Da-sein is essentially de-distancing" (BT 97). With the development of modern technology, the capacity to de-distance rises dramatically. Increasingly remote, heavy, fast, or elusive objects can be reached and manipulated with the help of prosthetic extenders--mechanical arms, transportation and communication devices. The latter attest that the notion of acceleration need not be understood literally. "With the 'radio,' for example, Dasein is bringing about today de-distancing of the 'world' which is unforeseeable in its meaning for Da-sein, by way of expanding and destroying the everyday surrounding world" (BT 98).

The more remote objects can be manipulated, the greater the manipulator's sense of mastery over his environment. But, at the same time, the more remote (in different senses of the word) the objects become, the weaker the kinesthetic link between the experience of physical manipulation or maneuvering the object and the responsive feel of the object's yielding, obeying, or giving way. There will certainly come a point at which some "naturally" felt barrier is exceeded, and the distance between the expended effort and the awaited feedback will become too great. The resistance that Dasein will need to overcome to bring a desired object into nearness will no longer be commensurate with the required effort.

In the area of culture, the unchecked growth of physical distances corresponds to the rapid "virtualization" of significance. Individuals with the highest cultural status can lack any and all high status characteristics inherited from animal hierarchies, such as physical size, strength, aggressiveness, physical attractiveness. An almost complete disconnection exists between social status and any instinctual remnant of an emotional response to physical alpha characteristics. It may astonish and humiliate people, like Mellors, that the world of technology is ruled by small, insignificant, debilitated men in nondescript clothes. These men can rule the world by extending their virtual tentacles further than should be humanly possible and wielding hitherto unthinkable symbolic power in more ways than what the vitalist mind can bear.

Clifford, as already mentioned, is a case in point. Physically decrepit, sexually impotent, emotionally disconnected and intellectually insignificant, he is, nonetheless, a figure of power and influence. From the vitalist's perspective, his success in business and literature is "unearned." Connie's father, for example, pronounces his son-in-law's stories to be shallow--"there's nothing in it" (669)--and would probably attribute his fame not to any intrinsic qualities but to being able to ride the crest of fashion. His later financial prosperity owes itself to his willingness to exploit his workers and a kind of cunning that is "devilish" in nature, according to the narrative's perspective. Throughout the story, he is called void or empty, consistent with the view that there is a kind of absence at the heart of modernity that is created by an ever-widening gap between human intention and its realization, whether through an "unnatural" distance between desire and its fulfillment or an unbearable suspension between the signifying gesture and

its meaningful deliverance, wrecked by the increasingly remote and non-responsive technological world-by-proxy. Clifford Chatterley is thus an apt symbol of the world of remotely-controlled virtual reality. He has conquered the two worlds of success that count-- artistic success, having become a fashionable and highly paid author, and the world of industrial production, having become a prosperous industrialist who has multiplied his fortune. Being a hereditary aristocrat, he already has the badge of distinction in the last remaining realm of success that would complete the sum of most people's desires.

It is Clifford's purely symbolic power, measured in that virtual commodity, that medium of universal exchange, that Mellors roundly despises. He sees how money has corrupted the young people who work for wages, turning them into consuming machines. "Their spunk is gone dead. Motor-cars and cinemas and aeroplanes suck that last bit out of them" (802). Marxist criticism of capitalism holds a similar view. According to Herbert Marcuse, the capitalist organization of labor has precluded happiness and simple hedonistic pleasures. Because of "antagonistic work relations," Marcuse writes, "labor is performed not in accordance with the capacities and needs of individuals but according to the requirements of the process of profitable production" (172). Therefore "Labor and happiness are essentially separated" (172). Their coming together can only be possible under the conditions of unalienated labor in a non-antagonistic society.

For Marxists, this is the society of the future, but for Mellors, it is the past. In traditional societies, as Mellors envisions, men engage in activities that involve movement, strength, physical skill and prowess, competitiveness, touching--both for the sake of bonding as well as measuring themselves up against other males in ways reminiscent of archaic rituals that have preserved the connection with dominance ranking within animal societies. We can surmise that for Mellors, physical, hands-on competitiveness that is more closely tied to the natural order is also more meritocratic. Regrettably, in the era of modernity, this outlet for creative activity has been abandoned because "Their whole life depends on spending money, and . . . they've got none to spend" (857).

Mellors calls for the return of the simplicity and honesty of traditional pursuits (that would presumably reveal the natural hierarchy among men) and for bringing back bright and extravagant clothes instead of insipid and identical business suits, which, because of the disconnection to the real, have lost their markings of prestige. In his letter to Connie he writes: "If the men wore scarlet trousers as I said, they wouldn't think so much of money: if they could dance and hop and skip, and sing and swagger and be handsome, they could do with very little cash. And amuse the women themselves, and be amused by the women. They ought to learn to be naked and handsome, and to sing in a mass and dance the old group dances, and carve the stools they sit on, and embroider their own emblems. Then they wouldn't need money" (857). In another place, he says: "An' I'd get my men to wear different clothes: appen close red trousers, bright red, an' little short white jackets. Why, if men had red, fine legs, that alone would change them in a month. They'd begin to be men again, to be men! An' the women could dress as they liked. Because if once the men walked with legs close bright scarlet, and buttocks nice and showing scarlet under a little white jacket: then the women 'ud begin to be women." (804).

In an earlier draft, Lawrence has Mellors refer to "a sort of tribe-room" where men "in scarlet breeches" could "meet to dance and sing and play and wrestle." The reference to a tribe reinforces the idea of an ancient, bonding-forging rite. Lawrence himself published an article called "Red Trousers" around the time of the publication of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, where he called upon British men to reject the drabness of the Industrial Revolution's business suit uniform and instead "stroll down the Strand and Piccadilly . . . wearing tight scarlet trousers fitting the leg, . . . then the revolution against dullness . . . would have begun" (352). David Bradshaw suggests that Lawrence might have been influenced, among others, by the Futurist Manifesto, a movement whose philosophy is compatible with vitalism.

The image of red trousers, a white jacket, and the accompanying images of swaggering, hopping, and skipping, bring to mind an picture of a bird--a stork or some red-legged sea fowl, which struts around, asserting its position in the animal hierarchy. A strutting red-legged bird is an image of virility (for example, a rooster's legs turn red during the period of sexual maturation). Again, this is compatible with the idea of a return to the times when human pecking order had some proximity to the simple logic of animal hierarchies expressed in size and strength. For Mellors and fellow vitalists, there is something obscene in the way an insignificant and emasculated man, like Clifford, has corralled such riches of symbolic significance that are overly removed in scope from any symbolic dividends that a central figure of imitation can earn in a real-

sized circle, such as in the context of a song, dance, or a jousting tournament.

The early physical connection between the size of the circle of participants and the distance to the interdicted object of desire has been broken. And here we possibly have another explanation of masochism--a rebellion against gigantism, which places a desired object at too great a distance, too far for it to sustain a dangling illusion that it could possibly be reached, the illusion that is impossible but that might be necessary in order to uphold the pragmatic paradox. Disempowered by distance that exceeds human scale, the masochist wants to be able to feel again in order to recover his mastery over the surrounding world. He can conjure up nearness only by inflicting pain upon himself, even if the price of regressing dangerously close to the moment of human origin is too high. What the masochist's resistance expresses is a recognition that meaning has an expiration date. When meaning gets stale, it grates. Connie recognizes this when she walks home one day: "'Home!' . . . it was a warm word to use for that great, weary warren. But then it was a word that had had its day. It was somehow cancelled. All the great words, it seemed to Connie, were cancelled for her generation: love, joy, happiness, home, mother, father, husband, all these great, dynamic words were half dead now, and dying from day to day" (698). In a symptomatically metonymic way, Connie transfers her frustration with contemporary civilization onto men in power: "Even the snaggy craggy oak-trees put out the softest young leaves, spreading thin, brown little wings like young bat-wings in the light. Why had men never any newness in them, any freshness to come forth with! Stale men!" (780).

This encapsulates an admission there is not only growth in the material universe, but also attenuation and senescence. Phenomena can excite our curiosity and strike us with newness, or they could cause our attention to flag when the newness has begun to wear off. Events could come as timely or inopportune, while ideas could feel up-to-date or obsolete. Narrative action could be precipitate or delayed. One important intuition that vitalism has against the natural attitude is that the bracketing of temporality is too reductive and misses something of fundamental importance in human experience. This intuition is encoded in the temporal dimension of the sign, its deferral. Deferral could be understood both structurally, as infinite postponement (as a messianic promise, an asymptotic progress of history, or, for a modernist writer like Clifford, the undecidability of language), and temporally. The latter means that things are experienced from within our temporal situatedness: they could, for example, come "too early," or it could be "too late for them."

The theory of joint attention, a reciprocal ability of language users to understand that they are attending jointly to a common object or person, has been proposed by cognitive scientists as a necessary evolutionary milestone for the origin of language. In attention, we have another temporal phenomenon. It has a natural span, as well as a dynamic profile: from being intense, in the beginning, it scatters and is used up towards the end. But even more fundamentally, joint attention is evolutionarily linked to the converging appetitive gesture of prelinguistic protohumans. Appetite, which subtends the origin of language, is a temporal experience that has duration and cannot be deferred forever. All this underscores the dual nature of discourse--along the old Saussurean synchronic and diachronic poles, to be sure, but in the new light of Generative Anthropology. On the one hand, language is structural and atemporal. A linguistic sign is permanent and eternal, in some sense. Once it is formed, it can be said to continue to exist (somewhere in the world of Platonic forms) and to signify even after the language itself is forgotten. On the other hand, it can also be said to have a living history, a "built-in obsolescence," to have run its course, after which it loses its freshness and excitement and becomes "stale." This is familiar to us from the linguistic phenomenon of dead metaphors and clichés. The ossified language of political ideologies with their ready, hackneyed phrases serves as another reminder of the living and evolving nature of language, which stays always ahead of our attempts to harness it.

The sign is temporal because mimetic desire which gave rise to it is temporal. And desire is temporal because it retains the memory of appetite. Without the temporal dimension of desire, without appetite and attenuating memory, we would not have ritual. Gans writes that "Ritual was born when the memory of the communal peace brought about by the presence of the sacred object in the originary scene led the community to seek an occasion for the reproduction of the center-periphery structure of that scene" (OT 91-92). And elsewhere he explains that "significant memory retains not merely the deferring function of the sign but also its referent," (EC 43) the desire for which will come back because "The appetite satiated in that context will recur as desire that cannot be satisfied by the object itself but only by its renewed presence on the public scene of representation" (43). Thus, ritual, the reproduction of the originary event,

will be recurrent because the effectiveness of the deferral weakens with time, while desire is constantly reawakened. Put another way, there is a tension between the theoretical and pragmatic dimensions of language. From a theoretical perspective, the separation between the periphery and center is the absolute one of "vertical transcendence," and the desire for the sacred object in the center is therefore structurally unfulfillable. But in practical terms, the sacred must be periodically reaffirmed or renewed through ritual due to our flagging attention and the unsustainable tension of permanent deferral. The originary event needs to be reinforced from time to time because of the entropic character of language.

From the thermodynamic point of view, it is interesting that the vitalist love affair is described in the language of heat and energy. Sexual desire is compared to a flame or a candle, and the most desirable aspect of the relationship between the sexes, according to Mellors, is warm-heartedness: "I believe if men could fuck with warm hearts, and if women could take it warm-heartedly, everything would come out all right" (795). Connie and Mellors exchange kisses of warmth (736), and an image that is frequently evoked is that of melting (as in forging or foundry-work--it is fitting that Mellors used to be a blacksmith in his earlier life). These references describe Connie's sexual experience as "exquisite and melting her all molten inside" (746) or like "curious molten thrilling that spread and spread" (798). Mellors reduces her to "the molten center of womanhood" (746).

New life is also associated with warmth. Thus, pheasant hens are "proud . . . in all the heat of the pondering female blood" and "are warm with their hot, brooding female bodies" (732) (the etymology of brooding is connected with heat). Connie thinks it is "warm and lovely to hold a child" (744). Sexuality is pure creativity. "As Mellors' seed sprang in her, his soul sprang towards her too, in the creative act that is far more than procreative." His orgasm is described as if "the bowels of compassion kindled between them" (843), and when he justifies to Hilda, Connie's sister, Connie's unplanned pregnancy, he says: "The Lord blew a bit too soon on the spark" (847)--the allusion to the spark of creation is unmistakable here.

The vitalist's response to excessive distance is to remove distance entirely. The initial title of *Tenderness* evokes, as mentioned, the feeling of complete yielding and sensitivity to each other, especially on the woman's part. The description of Connie's vaginal orgasm, her coming to experience "primordial tenderness" where she is "deeper and deeper and deeper disclosed" and "closer and closer plunged the palpable unknown" while "further and further rolled the waves of herself away from herself" until "the quick of all her plasm was touched" (773), paints such an ideal of absolute responsiveness with zero distance. Thus, Connie "knew herself touched, the consummation was upon her, and she was gone. She was gone, she was not, and she was born: a woman" (773).

By becoming converted to a vitalist worldview, the two protagonists are redeemed, insofar as they transcend the problem of improper masochism. Mellors realizes that he need not be ashamed about his lack of means and lower status. "He realized as he went into her that this was the thing to do, to come into tender touch, without losing his pride or his dignity or his integrity as a man. After all, if she had money and means, and he had none, he should be too proud and honourable to hold back his tenderness from her on that account" (843). On the receiving end, the feminine passivity that is celebrated here brings to the fore the dual meaning of the word "suffer" as something one experiences or undergoes but also as the feeling of pain or distress. Being the sufferer, Connie, at the end of the novel, can embrace feminine masochism proper.

The zero-distance model of love that the novel promotes, that of a tender touch that reaches the core of the other, overcomes the problem of separateness, alienation, mutual misunderstandings, and competing interests. It transcends the paradigm of Newtonian physics (and the natural attitude), subject to the reductionist, the-whole-is-the-sum-of-its-parts logic, and is instead more in line with the "new physics" of today, such as quantum mechanics and far-from-equilibrium thermodynamics, that theorizes *non-local* effects (such as constitutive parts of the system acting in concert with each other as if they can "read each other's minds"--instantly). In thermodynamics, as Prigogine explains, collisions between particles create correlations that lead to the emergence of new orders of complexity. The irreversible arrow of time can be understood "as a flow of correlations" (FG 48). But correlations also create ensembles of particles that act coherently, as one whole. In Prigogine's formulation, "the second law of thermodynamics . . . implies a departure from locality" (421).

In other words, the physics of far-from-equilibrium thermodynamics brings together as inseparable and interconnected several strands of thought that do not fit in Newtonian physics (and the natural attitude): the arrow of time, emergence, creativity, mortality, pregnant moments of possibility (points of bifurcation), and non-locality (entanglement or coherent behavior). Perhaps the necessary link between the phenomena above can appear not immediately intuitive, but it is nonetheless the core of vitalists' intuition about the structure of reality. One could cite Heidegger, as an example of a vitalist thinker, in whose philosophy the questions of temporality, possibility, and belonging are inextricable from each other. It may be justified to say that vitalists were ahead of their time if, by "within-timeness," we imply a conformity with accepted scientific theories. Socialist theories that postulate the desirability of non-antagonistic societies with non-alienated labor are another domain where vitalist ideas have taken root.

The vitalist worldview is one of sadness and elation. Elation--because it knows itself as capable of creativity. Only a vital, bodily relationship of touch between a male and female can attain to the ultimate act of creation, that of bringing about a new life, of which the Newtonian model of exchange and interplay is not capable: neither via a scintillating conversation in a fashionable salon, nor an intellectual exchange of ideas or economic commodities, nor trendy, avant-garde art that is all the rage. Modernist art, in its turn, is presented as barren and out of touch with what is essentially human, and, therefore, Clifford's writings are "meaningless," there being "no touch, no actual contact" (668).

The plastic arts side of the modernist movement is represented in the book by Duncan Forbes, who is Clifford's counterpart in the field of avant-garde painting. "His art was all tubes and valves and spirals and strange colours, ultra-modern" (848). But to Mellors, despite the paintings' "purity of form and tone," their overall effect is eviscerating: "It murders all the bowels of compassion in a man" (848). And Connie concurs with him that Duncan's art is just so many "empty tubes and corrugations" (849). Symbolically, Clifford, who epitomizes "a negation of human contact" (668) and for whom "sex . . . [is] just another form of talk, where you act the words instead of saying them" (680), is himself sterile and therefore needs for his wife to bed another man in order to produce an heir and save the baronetcy.

The life-affirming message of vitalism, however, is also tinged with sadness because of its facing bravely the entropic question of mortality and obliteration. Here one can bring up Heidegger again with his unflinchingly stoic "being-toward-death." One could perhaps say that because it is mindful of death, as a phenomenon central to life, the vitalist worldview can be seen as fundamentally tragic. And this is why masochism as self-aggression will always hover somewhere on the periphery of the organistic, energist, celebratory philosophy of life.

As a movement, vitalism was a response to the cultural forgetting of the temporal dimension of the originary sign and the withering of language. An interesting linguistic feature of the novel is that everything is repeated twice (or even more times). Phrases and memorable descriptor words are repeated either right next to each other or within the span of a paragraph, so that the first mention is still retained in the short-term memory, making the two words of phrases chime with each other. The effect of this literary device is similar to but also different from the stream-of-consciousness narration in a modernist novel. Instead of concatenating ideas impressionistically or creating a chain of allusions, this technique creates an illusion of placing the narrative within real time. It is as if the narrator had said something, then heard himself saying this and had a compulsion to repeat it as if to convince himself of the truth of the statement. It perfectly captures the real-time, "interactive" nature of discourse that unfolds on the scene of representation (even if it is taking place in one's head) and therefore carries within itself a dramatic, extemporaneous, performative dimension with an imaginary interlocutor who is always present on the scene. Stylistically, the novel with its short sentences, exclamations, and repetitions has the quality of unstudied carelessness or improvisation, as if the narration is unfolding in the "now." This gives the language of the novel the sense of robustness, rhetorical power, and strong presence.

Certainly, the attunement to temporality that gives the story its resonance and momentum does suggest that there is some truth in the belief in language's tendency towards obsolescence (as per Connie's observation that "All the great words . . . love, joy, happiness, home, mother, father, husband, all these great, dynamic words were half dead now, and dying from day to day" (698)). But vitalist philosophy, according to Eugene Rose, who describes successive stages of nihilism in recent Western history, is an even further descent into the denial of truth than the "realist stage," which roughly corresponds to the scientific

and materialist worldview of late-capitalist society. While the previous stages still speak of "eternal truths," even though these no longer mean what they used to mean, the vitalist wants to dispense with truth altogether. Rose quotes Nietzsche's quip from *Beyond Good and Evil*: "The falseness of an opinion is not for us any objection to it. . . . The question is, how far an opinion is life-furthering, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps species-creating." What this denial of truth indicates is that while the vitalists are astute in diagnosing the problems of modernity, they themselves are blind to the structural, atemporal, and transcendent dimension of language and skeptical of the sign's ability to signify so as to create eternal meaning. In the terminology of Generative Anthropology, they are dismissive of the absolute distance that must be maintained vis-à-vis the sacred center. Or to put it another way, they misunderstand the sacrificial nature of language, and, according to Eric Voegelin's GA-compatible view of history, engage in a gnostic rebellion against transcendence.

In the end, what vitalists want is to regress beyond language. It is not just the past they long to recover, it is a mythical past that never was. It might initially seem, as we observe Connie and Mellors running naked in the woods and braiding flowers into each other's pubic hair, that they style themselves after neo-pagans in an ambition to retrieve a long-forgotten tradition that predates corrupt and irredeemable civilization. This would appear to be supported by the symbolism of exchanging one sacred for another. While "there's nothing sacrosanct about a silver tea-pot" (717), according to Connie's response to Clifford's complaint that she was not home on time to serve tea, the site of Connie and Mellor's love-making, the little shed in the pastoral surroundings of the woods, serves as "a sort of little sanctuary" (715). Pseudo-religious characterizations, such as references to Connie "playing Bacchante" (815) and Mellors as "the great god Pan" (857), as well as the description of both of them as "the sons of god with the daughters of man" (774), also point us in this direction. However, theirs is a religion without a sacred--or with a very limited, metaphoric sacred, in the same sense in which the ideas of "the Body" or "Love" are sacralized. In reality, their ideal communion is not mediated by the sacred center, it is purely dyadic. There is no divine presence in their shed that will witness and authenticate their union. They are gods unto themselves.

But can someone who denies language leave a written history? Those who embrace life, death, change, vigor can certainly create a new life. But would it be akin to a life of a tree or animal in the forest, given that they cannot preserve the record of it for posterity? Ironically, it is Clifford who is originally expected to give his wife's child his name and inscribe him into the Chatterleys line of succession. If the occurrences within life that vitalists so ardently celebrate cannot be written down and transmitted then can they legitimately be referred to as events of human history? In Mellors' last letter, he writes that he believes in their private Pentecost, "the little forked flame between me and you" (857). "The Old Pentecost," he writes, isn't quite right. Me and God is a bit uppish, somehow" (857). He is rewriting the original Pentecost, which celebrates the event of the appearance of the Holy Spirit that descends in the form of the tongues of fire. It does so in the presence of the disciples, who themselves start speaking in tongues and are thus enabled to preach to and convert the unbelievers. Its structure reproduces the originary event, a kind of initiation, extrapolating it to the global linguistic community, wherein everyone is united in the presence of the sacred. In our case, however, the Pentecost is private, it does not engage any central presence, uniting Connie and Mellors through the tines of the flame's fork. This a religious ritual involving only two people.

The urge to escape the scenicity of language is also reflected in the gamekeeper's "private" language. Mellors is an educated man, an autodidact and a reader; yet he purposefully chooses to slide back from educated English into a countrified dialect, marked as illiterate. Partly, as has already been discussed, he does it in order to humiliate and mock Connie (and her sister Hilda). But it can also be partly attributed to a desire to leave civilization and written language behind and go back to a mythical oral past. He refuses to be categorized as someone who is going to leave a mark behind him. To a "what are you?" question, he replies: "You may well ask. It no doubt is invisible. Yet, I'm something to myself at least. I can see the point of my own existence, though I can quite understand nobody else's seeing it" (841). He is an artist without a work of art, a silent genius, with his only creation (symptomatically, not to his name) being his and Connie's baby. And even this conceit is difficult to sustain because the story is, after all, written down as a book, and the author, who speaks through the character, does very likely care about the fate of his literary output.

Writing a manifesto about the abandonment of language presents a true conundrum, and one could ask whether it is not resolved here by a convoluted act of narrative masochism. That this is so can be ascertained by interrogating the choice of authorial perspective. Even though the author's social, political,

and aesthetic views are ventriloquized by Mellors, it would be a mistake to conclude that he is the author's alter ego. First, there is the fact that there are only one or two moments when we are given access to his consciousness. Against this hypothesis also speaks the aesthetization and sexualization of the gamekeeper's image. The descriptions we read of him do not portray him in stereotypically masculine terms. He is depicted as someone fine and delicate, of "exquisite, delicate manliness" (797), compared to a pistil of a flower or associated numerous times with whiteness and slenderness. In these passages, he is seen through Connie's eyes, both as a refined thing of beauty and a sexual object: he has "slender white arms" and a "lambency [of] the warm, white flame of a single life," "his velveteen breeches slipping down over his slender loins," "his white slim back . . . curved"; he is "slender, quiet and quick" or "white as milk, with fine slender muscular flesh" and "slender sensitive loins" (701, 716, 797). There is also a mood of seductiveness attendant to his early appearances in the novel. Again, we are seduced through Connie's eyes, as he seems to be dismissive of her in such a way, as per Girard, so as to incite her attraction. Thus, he gives her an "impersonal look," or even a "cold, ugly look of dislike and contempt," or "his eyes narrowed . . . with impudence," and the smile on his lips is "mocking or teasing her" (688, 717).

The descriptions of Connie as a sexual object, on the other hand, are not equally convincing. Her attributes are referred to appreciatively by Mellors himself, such as, for example, when he says that she "got the nicest arse of anybody" (806). Yet his sexual attraction is not transmitted to the reader through the text itself. Connie is described in almost masculine, or, at least, not sexualized terms, as "a ruddy, country-looking girl with . . . [a] sturdy body, and slow movements" (661). She is said to be attractive but never shown in a seductive light from the narrative or some other character's points of view. Instead she remains throughout the narrative a neutral locus of the authorial perspective and a receptacle of pure experience. Insofar as the dominant narrative frame of reference is that of Connie's consciousness, it can be said that it is the consciousness in the authorial position that is seduced and sexually dominated by Mellors. This is not to make inferences about the novel's possibly homoerotic undercurrents. Although the vivid description of anal sex from the perspective of the passive partner lends support to such a reading, this is beside the point. The idea here is rather that a masochistic perception is not only thematically but also structurally embedded in the point of view from which the narrative is told.

But there is another perspectival layer I would like to address. An interesting thing about this novel is that it makes no pretense of telling the story from the viewpoint of an impartial omniscient narrator. The authorial consciousness is unabashedly prejudiced, opinionated, sweeping us forcefully along the emotional landscape of the unfolding act of narration. However, if we step out, for a moment, from the partiality of the account and treat it as an independent collection of facts, we may be struck by how "unfair" the author is to one of the characters, namely, Clifford. We are talking about a man who became paraplegic fighting a war and who, instead of sinking into despair, reinvented himself not once, but twice, becoming successful both times, a man, finally, who is willing to raise another man's child as his own. To any impartial observer, he would seem to have some admirable qualities. And yet he is portrayed in the novel with unrelenting antipathy, almost revulsion. If it were accepted that an author had ethical obligations towards his characters in owing them a modicum of objectivity, then a strong case could be made that D. H. Lawrence has violated the writer's code of honor in the case of Clifford Chatterley.

His distaste for Clifford knows no bounds, and it grows worse as the story progresses. He is introduced as a pretentious, intellectually shallow, emotionally absent, supercilious, turgid bore, who lacks literary talent yet is lucky to become a celebrated writer because his brand of "Clever, rather spiteful, and yet, in some mysterious way, meaningless" (668) writing happens to fall in with the reigning style. At next glance, there appears something more seriously, organically and spiritually, wrong with him. On the one hand, he is presented as robust, with a "healthy-looking face, . . . broad and strong," (661), even growing portly. But, at the same time, something that is wrong inside of him begins to show through the exterior. We are told that he is "the slight vacancy of a cripple," that "something inside him has perished" with his injury, that "there was a blank of insentience" (662). It is as if some inner rot is invading him, which is consistent with the yellow tint with which he becomes afflicted and which is medically connected to his liver, but metaphorically to his recurrent fits of rage. With the hiring of Mrs Bolton and Connie's losing interest in him, his condition degenerates. By the time he abandons his writing career and throws himself into the study of mining, he is almost completely changed. Outwardly, he appears to be a ruthless capitalist, "an amazingly astute and powerful [man], a master" (730). But "Inwardly, he began to go soft as pulp," like other self-made industrialists, who are "of a mental age of about thirteen, feeble boys" (728). He is "becoming almost

a *creature*, with a hard, efficient shell of an exterior and a pulpy interior" (730).

And finally, when he finds out that Connie is leaving him, he regresses to the weird state of an adult infant, playing perverse sexual games with Mrs Bolton. On receiving his wife's letter, he dissolves into hysteria. "Any attempt to rouse his manhood and his pride would only make him worse: for his manhood was dead, temporarily if not finally. He would only squirm softer and softer, like a worm, and become more dislocated" (851). What can be a more decisive, merciless, and brutal blow to a hated character than depriving him of manhood and turning him into a worm that is growing progressively softer and pulpier until it is certain to be squashed under somebody's foot? With such an eruption of animosity toward a character, a question that suggests itself is whether this is not an act of disavowal we are witnessing--"no, I am not Clifford Chatterley!"--which in turn suggests that the narrative is covering up an authorial projection onto a figure of absolute abjection. While the author wants to be Mellors, in whose mouth he puts his vitalist credo, he suspects that in reality he is Clifford. Who would be a more fitting figure of identification for the author than another highly literate character and writer? Lady Chatterley's is a less literate consciousness than Lord Chatterley's, and the gamekeeper's than Lady Chatterley's, disclosing a reverse correspondence between the ladder of affection--from despised Clifford, to neutral Connie, to idealized Mellors--and the distance of identification.

In the revealed mimetic configuration, Connie is the object of a triangular desire, the apex of the triangular configuration between the three protagonists, Clifford as the imitator, Mellors as the impossible mediator, and Lady Chatterley as the prize. But the choice to align the dominant narrative point of view with Connie's consciousness obscures and disavows the authorial position of an identification with Clifford and idealization of Mellors. The former's position of the abject in the novel is an inversion of the sacred position that his own wife holds in his eyes. We are told that Clifford both "worship[s] Connie" and succumbs to "a secret dread of her" (729, 730). He falls into the state of "a queer, craven idolatry, like a savage, a worship based on an enormous fear, and even hate of the power of the idol," and is living in a "half-subservient dread of her" (729, 730). Although with the opposite sign, this idol worship is structurally analogous to the abasement of Clifford Chatterley in that they both capture an aversion to touch in the fear of being contaminated that is attendant to the position of the sacred.

Jacques Derrida traces both polarities of the sacred to the idea of the *unscathed*, which, in English, is etymologically related to Old Norse *skaða*--to hurt or injure. For Girard, abhorrence and worship would be the two successive stages of mimetic contagion, when the act of the extirpation of the scapegoat from the community's midst flips into its opposite, a belated recognition of its divine nature. But more fundamentally, this ambivalence towards the sacred captures the underlying ambivalence towards the moment of the origin of language, which establishes peace by instituting the ethics of reciprocity while at the same time giving rise to the existential human condition of an unsatisfiable desire. This underlying ambivalence prompts us to return to the question of whether it would have been better to not have invented language at all. Would we have been better off? While many critics of civilization differ in their diagnosis of when things went wrong--with the onset of Secular Humanism, Enlightenment, or Marxism--radical primitivist philosophers of the John Zerzan type (which could be seen as modern heirs to vitalism) point their finger to the very moment of the origin of language. The originary interdiction of the sign is the source of the masochist's self-recognition and self-disavowal. The author's investing Clifford with abject qualities and placing him in subjection to Connie (and, by extension, to Mellors) aims at the symbolic destruction of a literary Clifford within himself as a way of resolving the dilemma of writing a book about non-writing. Perhaps the act of writing a novel about a character who chooses to efface himself into oblivion is itself a circuitous act of masochistic victory through defeat?

## Abbreviations

BT--*Being and Time*  
 EC--*End of Culture*  
 FG--*Is Future Given?*  
 OC--*Order out of Chaos*  
 OT--*Originary Thinking*  
 SI--*The Scenic Imagination*

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**Anthropoetics 16, no. 2 (Spring 2011)****Violence and Truth in Clint Eastwood's *Gran Torino*****Antonio Machuco**

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**Abstract**

This article presents a thematic analysis of the latest movie that Clint Eastwood has directed and participated in as an actor, *Gran Torino*. We claim that *Gran Torino* is a cinema masterpiece. To support this view, we show that the subject of the movie is the mechanical logic of violence, its evolution and the possible ways of stopping it; Eastwood's intuition about violence follows the same logic that underpins René Girard's work: The leading character in the movie, Walt Kowalski (Clint Eastwood), displays his understanding of violence with outstanding conceptual accuracy, of a kind which none of Eastwood's previous movies has reached. We show that the crucial moment of the movie is the scene where Walt Kowalski sacrifices himself to end violence and for others (a Hmong community) to live. We stress that the movie explicitly states that this scene is a recreation of the Passion of Jesus Christ, and that such a Passion is the revelation of the dynamics of violence and the only way to really bring it to an end. We then show how the character of Walt Kowalski is both a summary and sequence of the different roles that Eastwood played throughout his acting career. If, almost to the end of *Gran Torino*, Kowalski is still the god of violence, typical of other Eastwood movies ("Dirty" Harry Callahan or William "Will" Munny, for example), he finally breaks away from those characters. That, we claim, explains why Eastwood recently said that *Gran Torino* was probably the last film in which he would participate as an actor.

\* \* \*

Clint Eastwood's *Gran Torino* was released in cinemas in 2008. A quite well received movie, it represents the culmination of Eastwood's fifty-year career as actor and director. And culmination is indeed an appropriate term because, in a paradoxical way, it is a logical consequence of many other roles that the former mayor of Carmel has played over the years. It is as if *Gran Torino*'s narrative structure summarized the careers of the characters once played by Clint Eastwood, such as The Man with No Name, the detective "Dirty Harry" Callahan or William Munny.

The film, using the usual Clint Eastwood themes, centers on the problem and dynamics of the transition from the perspective of the hero of violence to the point of view of someone who, by sacrificing himself, aims to definitely break the cycles of violence. This evolution is described with outstanding conceptual rigor. As a matter of fact, we claim that *Gran Torino* displays in a cinematographic context some of the fundamental insights of René Girard's anthropology. The structure of the movie reveals the same logic that underpins Girard's work: the collective dynamics of gangs, the reciprocity of violence, the acceleration of reprisals, the role of initiation rituals, the relationship between gift and violence. Furthermore, *Gran Torino* shows how the actions that led to the sacrifice of the main character in the movie, Walt Kowalski (played by Clint Eastwood), represent the only true way to definitely break with violence. In that sense, *Gran Torino* is, in an explicit way, a representation of Jesus Christ's Path of the Cross. As in Girard's work, in *Gran Torino* the figure of Jesus Christ is the one that denounces violence and finally breaks with its vicious circle. If we look at the whole path of Clint Eastwood as a film actor from this point of view, we consider it to be a major cultural event that he, in his final movie as an actor, should play such a *figura christi* as Walt Kowalski.

\* \* \*

The film begins with the funeral of Walt Kowalski's wife. She never appears in the film and it might be thought that her death, and her funeral, would have the reconciling effects among the living that death and funerals usually have. Above all, the reconciling power of the dead should exert its effects on his family. None of this happens, however. The dissension between Walt Kowalski and his family is the dominant theme of the funeral: dissension between Walt and his granddaughter, of whose "modern" behavior he clearly disapproves; and, finally, tension between Walt and his son and daughter-in-law. There is no actual violence, only a not quite verbalized dissent (marked by Walt's disapproving spitting at his granddaughter). The tension between Walt and his family will last throughout the movie, but for the moment we only have a testiness that barely reaches the real violence that is the main subject of the film. In any case, Walt is a lonely man without a family.

The increasing rivalry, the escalation towards violence, follows immediately. Walt is clearly a "conservative" American, an employee of the once thriving U.S. automotive industry. Successive waves of immigrants led a Hmong community to move into the Detroit suburban area where Walt lives. (1) A family belonging to that community settled just next door to Walt's house, displaying their specific cultural practices. The relationship of mutual antagonism between Walt and the matriarch of the Hmong family is the theme that follows the episode of the funeral. The antagonism is reciprocal, made visible by words and gestures, but at the same time it is somewhat camouflaged, because the mutual verbal invectives remain largely unintelligible due to the viewer's inability to understand the Hmong language. The linguistic difficulty does not, however, prevent the antagonism between Walt and the matriarch from occurring through the mutual spitting that ends the scene.

So far, the latent violence has taken place between pairs of individuals. The movie comes to its real issue with the arrival of a member of the Hmong family, Vang Thao Lor (Bee Vang). He appears as the target of a gang of Mexicans, who cover him with all kinds of insults and threats. Thao is subject to mindless violence, whose sole purpose is to feed the gang as a gang. Thao's salvation occurs immediately afterwards, with the appearance of another gang, this time a Hmong gang. This group intervenes to save Thao from the other one, no longer triggering violence between individuals, but now between *gangs*. Following a scene of extreme reciprocal verbal violence, where the weapons only appear discreetly in the two cars sitting side by side, the Hmong gang saves Thao from the Mexican gang.

At the next moment the movie develops the logic of violent gangs. The Hmong gang, led by Fong "Spider" (Doua Moua), Thao's cousin, carries out the actions that are typical of the collective logic of gangs. After some initial resistance, the gang tries to bring about Thao's *initiation*, aiming at his acculturation, integration, and assimilation into the gang.

Rituals of initiation are among mankind's oldest cultural forms. (2) In this case, the action that brings about the initiation operates as a classic *rite of passage*. And, as with most similar rituals, the present one normally consists in an act of disorder, an offense. The offense is a crime, but in a context from which, strangely enough in twenty-first century America, public authorities (the police) will remain singularly absent. The ritual offense that must be carried out by Thao is the theft of the *Gran Torino*, a legendary car that Walt himself had helped build in his days as a worker at Ford, and which he maintains with particular dedication. The theft of the *Gran Torino* is Thao's initiation ritual.

The ritual goes wrong. Walt realizes that someone is trying to steal his car, and Thao has to flee. The failure of the ritual prevents the passage and integration of Thao into the gang. In a sense, his initiation into the order of violence has failed. We can imagine that the subsequent story of the film would be totally different if the ritual of initiation had been successful.

For the moment, Thao remains in a sort of no-man's land. Despite the failure of the ritual, the Hmong gang tries again to assimilate Thao. It is at that moment that Thao's true initiation occurs: instead of being assimilated, initiated, by the Hmong gang, he will be so by Walt. This begins to happen when, despite the opposition of the family, the gang tries to take Thao away: Walt shows up and blocks the attempt. If the Hmong gang saved Thao from the gang of Mexicans, now it is Walt who saves the disputed boy from his previous saviours. But he saves him in a crescendo of violence, because he saves Thao with a gun in his

hand, the first time that weapons actually make an appearance. However, the approach taken by Clint Eastwood and represented by Walt Kowalski begins to change. Whereas until then violence (and rescue) take place in a setting of 'all against one' (both gangs against Thao) or 'all against all' (the fight between the gangs); now *it is one against all*. A singular figure begins to emerge, one that will gradually escape the logic of the reciprocity between gangs, and the unity of each gang against a single individual.

Nevertheless, at this moment of the movie, the figure of Walt still embodies violence, and all the main characters of the film (with two exceptions) will also embody it. Kowalski is the man who, through violence, restrained the violence exerted by the Hmong gang on Thao. He will later emerge as Thao's good model, as opposed to the bad model formed by the Hmong gang. Then--just after Thao's failed ritual--the film enters a different stage. While the previous phase was marked by the negative reciprocity of the violence between gangs and individuals, now a form of positive reciprocity emerges. As always, Eastwood directs as an accomplished anthropologist. So, the figure of the *gift* appears when, in gratitude to Walt for saving Thao, his neighbors place some offerings at the door of his house.

Walt does not immediately react to the positive offering by positive reciprocity. At the moment, positive reciprocity is overshadowed by the logic of reciprocal negative violence in a scene in which Walt talks with a Catholic priest, Father Janovich (Christopher Carley). The priest had already made an appearance in the film, and his role will become increasingly important. Now, he warns Walt about the extreme violence that seems to be building, urging him to "call the police." In fact, the role of the police is precisely to prevent the escalation of violence between private agents. But Walt dismisses the idea, stating the "need to act quickly," just as he acted quickly in the Korean War in which he had fought.

It will then become clear *that all action takes place within a pre-judiciary order in which there are no rules and no mediating entities that could prevent the rising level of violence*. And, indeed, almost to the end of the movie, the police will be oddly absent. Since the action takes place in twenty-first century America, and Clint Eastwood doesn't film events and narrative structures whose occurrence is nearly impossible, such an omission is extremely significant.

Mindless violence returns almost immediately. This time it is a pack of black men who block the path of Sue Lor (Ahney Her), Thao's sister, and her boyfriend. The pack, with the usual obscene verbal violence, expels the "coward" boyfriend and clearly anticipates Sue's rape. But it turns out that Walt saves Sue. Watching the scene, Walt feigns pulling the trigger of a gun with his fingers, before actually producing a gun.

Walt Kowalski first saved Thao from the Hmong gang, and now saves Sue from a pack of black ruffians. The result is that Thao and Sue's family--still an extended family with some of the characteristics of families in traditional societies--will increasingly renew their presents to Walt. He finally seems to accept this apparent logic of gift giving, evolving from the negative reciprocity that he shared at the beginning of the film with his Hmong neighbors to positive reciprocity. Always in accordance with well-known anthropological facts, this reciprocity is celebrated by a festive meal. It would appear that Walt himself was acculturated by the Hmong, and that the old dissensions--which can be dated back to the time when Walt fought in the Korean War--have disappeared. However, as the remainder of the movie will show, what really happens is that the Hmong neighbors began to see Walt *as their new god*, their god of violence who saved Thao, first, and then Sue. The transition towards the regime of gift-offering and positive changes is always grounded on a previous initial act, a foundational act, of violence.(3)

Indeed, Walt is now becoming the god of violence to the Hmong family. He will be seen as an agent of positive reciprocity within that Hmong community, and as an agent of their negativity towards the others, outside. He becomes the potentate of this fragile community. At the right moment, the community will remind him of this.

For the moment and before that happens, before the accumulated tensions reappear with an entirely destructive force, the scene where Walt and the Hmong community share a meal marks a significant shift in the atmosphere of the movie. If until then violence--a certain kind of still contained violence--reigned, now positive acculturation replaces it, at least for some time. It is the time marked by Thao's repentance, when he confesses to Walt that he was the author of the aborted theft of the Gran Torino. Thao undergoes a new initiation, but a good initiation this time, driven by positive values. As stated above, the bad model of

the Hmong gang is replaced by the good model that Walt now turns out to be. He initiates Thao in the value of work, in the prospects of a normal adult life, perhaps even rooted in university studies. The movie then goes through a set of sequences that last a little under a third of its length, following the initial phase of violence and paving the way to the final reign of violence.

Walt has acculturated Thao, and to that extent he has created a profound dissent in the Hmong community, taken as a whole. He separated Thao from the gang as he also separated the gang from Thao's family. Basically, Walt has been sowing violence. He had previously somehow anticipated what he was doing, and it is that reality that will be imposed in an increasingly unavoidable form. The third part of the movie will display the relentless *acceleration* of violence. From now on the pace of the movie will be vertiginous.

Everything starts with the response--a response that was bound to come--from the Hmong band. The response begins by being centered on Thao, who suffers a new kind of "initiation" at the hands of the gang. Thao, who broke the unanimity once desired by the group, will be put at the center of a circle formed by the members of the gang. The gang members then brutally punish him by burning his face with a cigarette. It is a new ritual, but one now closer to the pure form of violence, in which a pack of men encircle and punish a single man. At that moment the vicious cycle of violence finally accelerates: *until then, physical violence had never existed*. There had been only verbal violence and simulations of weapons being fired. Now, there is actual physical violence. The cycle will unfold in an accelerating crescendo.

It is the nature of violence to appeal to more violence, "violence attracts violence," precisely. And the problem is that each person is always *responding*, without anybody being able to know exactly who started it. If, earlier on, in the first stage of the movie, Walt resorted to violence (albeit not consummated physically) to contain other forms of violence, he will now resort to an increasing level of violence with the sole purpose of *directly responding* to previous violence. It is the first time that he really *responds*. Only later will he fully understand the vicious circle in which he became the main actor.

Walt replies to Thao's burning by raising the stakes: he waits until one member of the Hmong gang is alone, punches and kicks him until he is left unconscious, in a scene filmed with such appalling realism that the viewer has to experience the brutality of the act. As is the case with the best moments of Clint Eastwood's movies, violence now is not the senseless, fanciful, implausible violence of the majority of films that so delight millions of viewers. It is realistic violence, which displays its own naked and mindless brutality.

Violence is an escalation of difference towards indifference. This dynamic is, until its absolute end, masterfully displayed in *Gran Torino*. Initially, violence was only verbal. Then, there are simulations of shots being fired. The response comes in the form of burns. The response is always a difference from the previous level and prepares indifference by a new kind of difference: brutal punches and kicks. The counter-response can only be a further escalation of the difference towards indifference.

The Hmong gang will in fact respond. Always according to well-known anthropological facts, the band will respond obliquely, to the side, as it were. The gang will not respond directly to Walt (who was the aggressor of one of its members). The band unleashes its revenge on Thao's family.

This is the logic of reprisals, which go from the "periphery" to the "center." The reason is that, although it was not directly responsible for the violence someone is responding to, the "periphery" is usually the weakest link. Only later will there be an attack on the central target. That is what the gang does: it attacks the "periphery" instead of the "center" (the central target), which is Walt Kowalski. And the gang does this by *shelling* the home of Thao's family (the periphery). If the difference is still operating, in the transfer of reprisals from the central target to the more vulnerable periphery, the truth is that the escalation continues with the shift *from punching to shooting*. This is the escalation of violence: those who respond raise the stakes in a vertiginous acceleration of time.

At this point, when the film speeds up dramatically, it is clear that Walt finally begins to understand the cycle in which he has been involved, and to which, at the same time, he has decisively contributed. This reflection by Walt (not yet quite explicit) is interrupted by yet another response from the Hmong gang.

After strafing the house, the gang picks up Sue, who is raped and brutally beaten. It is only then that blood appears, this link between life and the menstrual cycle, on the one hand, and death, sex, and rape, on the other. At the same time, in an odd way, all this takes place in Detroit in the twenty-first century, with an absent police force! As mentioned above, this means that Clint Eastwood wants to direct the dynamics of violence that unfolds in the private space of reprisals.

After Sue's brutal beating and rape, Walt goes back to his "reflections." But not before, in an act of rage--the rage of someone who understands the fire that he had ignited and so understands the origin and dynamics of violence--he has mutilated himself and bled. The *wounds* in the hands of Walt are displayed in an ostensive way. To the viewer, this scene is barely understandable at the time, and in fact it will only be clear in the light of the unusual ending of the film. In the scene that follows, Walt becomes even more explicit about his "reflections" when he talks with the priest Janovich. The dialogue is always accompanied by several shots that highlight Walt's still wounded hands. He says that "Thao and Sue will never have peace in this world as long as gangs are around," finally realizing that the cycle of violence has no end, and that only death can follow and replace it. But the priest Janovich does not seem to fully understand what he is hearing, and instead points out that "he (Walt) knows what Thao expects." And then asks, what will he, Walt, do?

At that moment, the audience knows perfectly well "what Thao expects." And what Thao "expects" is also what his family "expects." Is it not the case that Walt is their god of violence, the avenger of the received offenses? And what Thao and his family "expect" is clearly what the viewers also begin to "expect." What else could be "expected" from someone with Clint Eastwood's record? We could even say that everyone was not only expecting, but rather *desiring*, Walt's response. And what everyone was expecting was evidently a violent response, at least at the level of the earlier violence. It should be a response of such brutality that it would have to move in the circle of death.

We must confess, perhaps in a personal way, that at this stage of the film we asked ourselves some questions. In fact, Walt seemed to give clear signs of not being inclined to continue the cycle of reprisals. It was apparent that he had understood that this could only lead to more destruction. But then, as the priest asked, what will Walt do? Only two possibilities seemed to be open. Either Walt would do what everybody "expected," perhaps thinking that some final deaths could put an end to the cycle of violence; or, the priest's interventions seemed to suggest, he would try some form of "understanding," some kind of "dialogue." But this latter possibility seemed to be completely discarded by the structure of the film. It seemed impossible for some kind of mediation between enemies in the blood to exist. The outcome appeared mysterious. Personally, we confess that we never anticipated the extraordinary ending of the film.

Walt has taken his decision. He has to solve some minor problems, including locking in his house a Thao mad with rage and thirsty for revenge, and for whom Walt could not do what everyone was "expecting." But Walt has other ideas. He goes to an open square in front of the Hmong band's house. They were also "expecting" him.

The scene that then takes place is a remarkable one, even if taken in the light of criteria of analysis that consider a cinematographic work as pointing only to itself, and therefore with no reference. However, the final scene will *refer*, and refer to the source of the truth. Walt arrives alone at the front of the house. The members of the gang appear at the doors and windows--in a larger number than usual, so that they almost constitute now a real crowd--displaying some perplexity about the way Walt presents himself. With an increasing dramatic intensity, Walt begins by saying:

"I've got to jump on your way."

At this point, one might think that Walt is telling them that he came "to cross their path," in the sense of being a barrier that exerts a still greater violence than the gang's violence. In other words, Walt is announcing that he has come to "respond."

We are quickly disabused of such an interpretation. Walt demands fire from the members of the band. At that moment, neighbors of the gang's house show up to witness the events. Walt puts his hand in his pocket (will there be a weapon?), raises his arms and utters the capital phrase:

"No, me I have got the light."

Believing that Walt will pull out a gun, the crowd responds in unison, riddling Walt with bullets. He then falls into a position that forms a cross. We quickly learn that Walt had no weapon. The police arrive. The gang is arrested. We witness Walt's funeral and the union of the living that usually follows death. In the final scene, Walt's will is read, which gives Thao the Gran Torino, contrarily to the family's hopes.

The ending of the movie, the reading of Walt's will, etc., is a happy ending that makes the movie abruptly step down from its previous extraordinary level. It is a totally conventional ending that could have been replaced by many others. Clint Eastwood possibly found it necessary, for commercial reasons, for the sake of the viewers' habits, or for others reasons, to end the movie in a conventional manner. Above all, and we think this is the main reason, this ending was chosen in order to *produce an effect of catharsis of the drama that has just been narrated*. The drama is somehow erased and the viewer can leave the theater on a more familiar territory. It is as if, after all, Clint Eastwood's genius is still present when he chooses a conventional happy ending, deliberately targeted at the public's reactions. However, in truth, the ending of the movie is the scene in front of the gang's house, Walt's murder and the arrival of the police. We claim that this final scene, to which we now return, is a Passion.

\* \* \*

We can now evaluate Walt Kowalski's final decision. He understood that the stupidity and brutality of violence only generate more lethal and indiscriminate violence. And he understood that his actions had also contributed to the unfolding of the cycle. He then made his decision. Not exactly that he "has repented" or that he has thus "atoned his guilt." Walt clearly shows that his decision is an objective response to the objectivity of the situation: either the continuation of violence that will eventually devour everybody, or-- what? The *sacrifice* of himself, by which he puts an end to the cycle of violence. This is the only and truly radical solution to the problem. It is also the only one that men never follow. The usual solution is what everybody "was expecting," or what places the solution on someone else's shoulders.

Walt sacrifices himself so that the others might live. He offers his sacrifice so that a community could be viable. Is this a solution that has appeared at some juncture in mankind's history? Clint Eastwood is quite explicit on this point, and it definitely captures the anthropological dimension of *Gran Torino*. In the truly final scene, Walt embodies the Passion of Jesus Christ.

This is the movement of the film: from the mechanical cycle of violence to its end and *denunciation*. It is the movement in which Christ is sacrificed for the sake of humanity, to redeem all its past crimes and prepare for the coming of the Kingdom of God, the realm of positive reciprocity of all men in love. The Passion of Christ, as described in the four Gospels, is the denunciation of all forms of violence and points the way to mankind's redemption. With his sacrifice, Christ redeemed all past crimes, denounced the nature of violence, its mechanical nature, its injustice; in other words, Jesus Christ wanted all men to live. That is exactly what Walt does: he denounces lays bare, before everyone's eyes, the truth of violence, breaks away from violence and thus he wants the others to live.

None of this is "interpretation." Clint Eastwood's films, and in particular *Gran Torino*, require very little "interpretation." The allusion to the Passion and to Jesus Christ is fully explicit. Remember that Walt begins by saying:

"I've got to jump on your way."

Next, Walt apparently asks the members of the gang if they "have light" (to light a cigarette). More precisely:

"Do you have light?"

After a few interjections from the members of the gang, and in a crescendo of dramatic intensity, perfectly marked by the direction, Walt raises his arms as if already forming the figure of the cross on which he will

fall, and says:

"No, me I have got the light."

"No, [not you], but I bring light." The light that Walt brings through his death is the light of truth, the truth about the violence of the violent. Walt makes public, brings to light, the truth about violence. He displays--through his unjustified murder--in broad daylight for all to see, violence as something purely destructive and absolutely meaningless. It should be strongly pointed out that just before the exact moment when Walt says that he "brings the light," Clint Eastwood films the appearance of *witnesses*. These are the witnesses--in fact, all of us--whom the sacrifice of Walt is addressed to.

It's true that the role of the witnesses has some ambiguity. Their role can be interpreted in the light of the scene following Walt's murder, when the police (finally) arrive. Then, in fact, the witnesses can testify against the gang in a criminal case (as referred to by a policeman). But the permanent absence of the police and the entire organization of the script show that Clint Eastwood's primary objective is to show an anthropological situation of the near absence of judiciary power, that is, a situation in which the violence that men are capable of is displayed. But, contrarily to what happened to Jesus Christ, where the killers acted with impunity (even backed by the powers of the time), Walt's killers will be punished. Walt stopped and denounced violence through his death and, additionally, through the legal punishment of the violent. These murdered an innocent, unarmed man in an orgy of collective violence. So, we can say at the same time that Walt's sacrifice was a foundation for a future condemnation and that it was a light directed to the witnesses. Both ideas converge in the sacrifice and *denunciation* of violence by Walt.

Walt Kowalski is a *figura christi*, a repetition of the Passion where Jesus Christ was killed. In the instant before being riddled with bullets and falling in the shape of the cross, the figure we all know is that of Jesus, he says in an almost imperceptible whisper:

"Hail Mary, full of grace."

All this is literally visible in the film. However, another interpretation should also be briefly mentioned, one that could claim that Walt's death was a sort of "calculated suicide." Perhaps such an interpretation is based on two or three scenes of the movie we have so far omitted. This applies to the scene in which Walt received the results of medical exams that apparently (this is not entirely clear) indicate a poor state of health. It is also the case of two scenes in which he spits blood, confirming, again, health problems. But should we say that Walt gives his body to the bullets because he was in bad shape, that he takes advantage of the Hmong story to commit suicide? This is totally implausible. A suicide is a negative, self-destructive act, not the foundation of anything. On the contrary, Walt sacrifices himself so that violence can be stopped and so that the others can live. Therefore, it is a positive act, quite opposed to any suicide.

But we think that what has been said is not enough to truly understand the singular position of *Gran Torino* in Clint Eastwood's career. Something else should be briefly pointed out.

\* \* \*

In an interview, [\(4\)](#) Eastwood said that *Gran Torino* was probably the last film in which he would participate as an actor. This statement may be construed as an admission that "he is old" (Eastwood is 78), and, as himself admits in the interview, it may not be easy to find roles for actors of that age. In any case, we think that decision is a logical one if one considers the path that leads Eastwood to the portrayal of Walt Kowalski in *Gran Torino*.

Let's remember in very broad lines Clint Eastwood's career. He was the impenetrable and ruthless gunman in the trilogy that began with *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), where he played the Man With No Name. He was then the detective "Dirty" Harry Callahan, this relentless vigilante, always on the razor's edge between the implementation of private justice and public justice, restoring order by ruthlessly killing rioters. He brought violence and triumphed by violence.

In 1992 he directed the rightly acclaimed *Unforgiven*, a story of cycles of violence caused by a huge moral

and criminal offense: disfigurement of a prostitute by stabbing. Eastwood is William "Will" Munny, a retired gunman who returns to work and, at the end of the film, carries out a general killing. He is the god of relentless violence that comes in the final night and destroys all his enemies. As always, the order restored by death is brought about at the hand and by the gun of the hero, who embodies violence. As in other movies, in *Unforgiven* the intentional killing of men is represented as what it is in itself: literally what brings peace by eliminating those who, alive, are an obstacle in the path of others, and who, dead, are no longer such an obstacle.

As has been pointed out, and as is exemplified by the final actions of "Dirty" Harry or "Will" Munny, violence in Clint Eastwood's films nearly always has a cathartic effect, both for the other characters and for the audience. This effect is caused by the murders carried out by the gods of revenge represented by Eastwood. It is a founding violence, in the sense that it brings peace through brutal killing, through the murder of an enemy at the hands of the god of violence. This is Eastwood's typical character, his "brand image": the ruthless avenger who restores order with shots and produces a catharsis when the troublemaker is eliminated.



"Dirty" Harry in *Dirty Harry* (1971).



"Dirty" Harry in *Sudden Impact* (1983).

A more recent example is *Blood Work* (2002). The film tells the story of Jasper "Buddy" Noone (Jeff Daniels), who finds a pseudo-justification of murder by claiming that the bodies of the dead may be used to save other lives. "Buddy" Noone illustrates an archaic sacrificial logic, in which death is justified because it saves the lives of others. But those that are killed are victims that we know were innocent; so, for us, rightly, "Buddy" Noone is just a psychopathic killer, whatever the arguments emphasizing sacrifice with which he disguises himself. In the film, Clint Eastwood is the former detective Terry McCaleb. He is once again the ultimate god of violence who finally kills "Buddy" Noone and thus restores order (*catharsis*).

In most of his films, those that made his "brand image," Eastwood is always the active agent that brings peace through death. However, we can see in some of the latest movies an emphasis of the moral dilemmas and a prelude to the absolutely unique position taken by Eastwood in *Gran Torino*. The great example is *Million Dollar Baby* (2004). In a movie filled with almost unbearable violence, Frankie Dunn (Clint Eastwood) faces the dilemma of practicing euthanasia on Maggie Fitzgerald (Hilary Swank). The dilemma is a serious one, and here we no longer find the usual Eastwood who quickly gives death to his enemies. It is after all euthanasia, and it could certainly be argued that Frankie kills Maggie to put an end to her suffering.

Therefore, in most of his films, Eastwood is the relentless gunman/detective, the judge who is both the god and the angel of death. According to the usual sequence of these films, Eastwood is the judge who punishes the disorderly offenders, often with some physical disabilities. In *Million Dollar Baby*, the disability is acquired, and Frankie Dunn inflicts death for love, no longer for revenge.

If, at least until *Million Dollar Baby*, the usual logic of Eastwood's films was followed, in *Gran Torino* Walt Kowalski will also punish the pack of rioters. As stressed above, it was just what everyone was "expecting." But now we fully understand that Walt Kowalski/Clint Eastwood represents the end of the gunman and of the god of death. In *Gran Torino*, the *perspective is inverted*. The ending of the movie inverts the point of view of Clint Eastwood's previous roles, just as Walt Kowalski's role is inverted when he becomes the victim rather than the avenger. In its narrative structure, *Gran Torino* represents Clint Eastwood's whole path. Kowalski/Eastwood *himself is now the victim of the crowd* (the gang). The sacrifice is not the sacrifice of others for order to prevail. The sacrifice is now, finally and for the first time in Clint Eastwood's work, the

sacrifice of himself and not, we emphasize, of *others*. It is the sacrifice of his own life to end violence and for the others to live, not the death of others at the hands of the god of violence for order to be restored. It is a radical solution to the problem of violence that Eastwood has always pondered. It is a unique and singular solution. It is a Passion. When Clint Eastwood embodies such a Passion as an actor, when he takes the logic of violence to the extreme--its absolute denunciation through self-sacrifice--then, in fact, it is the end of the road for Clint Eastwood as a film actor.

### Notes

1. The Hmong is an ethnic group originated from Southeast Asia. ([back](#))
2. Cf. René Girard, (1977), *Violence and the Sacred*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. ([back](#))
3. René Girard, Idem. ([back](#))
4. Cf the interview to Rich Cline, available at: <http://shadows.wall.net/features/eastwood.htm>. Ac. 02-07-2009. ([back](#))

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**Anthropoetics 16, no. 2 (Spring 2011)****The Dying of the Epic****John O'Carroll and Chris Fleming**

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**Epic Hypotheses**

This essay inquires into the nature of the epic. Few dispute that the term has meaning, applying minimally to a genre of verse. (1) To ask for definition is to ask what something is. In the dimension of the epic's whatness, however, we discover an even more essential whenness, which makes ours a temporal hypothesis. The epic has a time, and that time, we contend, is past. Notwithstanding the long and slow process of the way in which the genre is dying, the epic continues to haunt our conceptions of narrative and of story, and to inflect subsequent genres, so that today, for instance, a Hollywood film might seek to capture a little of its reflected glory.

Our hypothesis is a provisional one. It should be tested, *a posteriori*, against popular counter-hypotheses. There are three of these. *First* is the idea that the term "epic" is no more than an adjective that became associated with particular verse forms, but is now just as well attached to other newer forms of narrative art. In this view, the epic is a scattered feature of any culture, arising here and there, be it in a stone-age tale of warriorhood or an excessively long rock concert (especially one invoking Stonehenge, Druids, and Middle Earth). The *second* counter-hypothesis, poststructural in nature, shares features with our own (for instance, the link between the establishment of the epic and sacred violence) but would question our version of its epistemological form (such as our insistence on points of genesis, for instance). A *third* view, one founded in literary textual analysis, is a formalist hypothesis: it concerns the view that the epic is to be thought principally as a textual form. That is, the epic is to be contrasted, for instance, with the *dramatic* or the *lyric*, and is not in any significant sense indicative of broader cultural logics; the logic, causality, and effects of the epic all remain firmly embedded within the fictional universes it invokes.

About each of these there will be little further to say, because it is possible to make a number of initial clearing observations either by way of showing their non-pertinence, or by suggesting how they are related to our own exploration. The first hypothesis, semantic (and perhaps pedantic) in nature, differs from the others in not engaging with recurring cultural or aesthetic forms, because its nominalism--like the proverbial cop at the crime scene who continues to announce, with diminishing credibility, "there's nothing to see here"--declares in advance that meaning is simply a product of naming, and never the other way around. Accordingly, where such forms become increasingly salient to an inquiry, this approach becomes proportionately useless. About the second (anti)hypothesis we might make this observation: the work of Derrida may question genesis, but has its own operational category of "greatest irreducibility" in place of the origin; one may concur with Derrida's insistence that all formal systems are capable of being deconstructed, and yet insist that more can be said. The epic--as with the case of *écriture* presented at the

outset of *Grammatologie*--can be said to be dying *but not dead*, a case of closure (*clôture*) not the end (*fin*) (14). Hence even in its dying, the artworks of today still participate *in* the epic, even if they can never actualize it or "do" it again.

The formalist hypothesis, likewise, is not at base an alternative explanation to our own, but is--like deconstruction--simply insufficient in itself. More positively, "modern" formalist theorizations of the epic are predicated on a long and valuable set of precedents, and these are essential in at least a descriptive sense to all other variants, including our own:

Epic poetry agrees with tragedy to the extent that it is the representation in dignified verse, of serious actions. They differ, however, in that epic keeps to a single meter and is in narrative form. Another point of difference is their length. . . .(Aristotle 38)

These features--serious actions (and heroes), high verse style, and above all, a story rather than drama structure--are in part what enable us to recognize the epic poem, and are perfectly acceptable criteria--even if they do not explain anything about *why* the epic came into being *where* and *when* it did, the cultural field with which the epic intersects, and *why* we have been witnesses to its two thousand year process of dying. That is the task of the present essay.

In launching our distinctive inquiry into the dying of the epic, we do need to consider the question of the *genesis* of the epic. After all, if the epic is temporally bound it has not just an end, but also a beginning. So even if lies outside the purview of a paper on the dying of the epic, it is worth spending a bit of time thinking about how it came to exist at all. There is a gulf between the words of Gods, and the incantations that have come down to us from different civilizations (witness the earliest Vedic literature for instances)--and the epics that followed in a string of civilizations. In this respect, Gans has written that

The beginnings of secular narrative may be traced to the Babylonian *Gilgamesh Epic* of around 2500 BC at the end of which--assuming the original story ends, as scholars generally believe, with Tablet XI--the protagonist loses the herb of immortality or rebirth. Although Homeric epic and later, Athenian drama take most of their material from myth, they view myth not from the point of view of the gods, agents of transfiguration, but from that of the mortals engaged in the tragic *agon*. (*The Scenic Imagination* 8)

The epic, then, is the first of the profane texts *on* myth, *on* divinity. It concerns human attitudes to divinity, *from the human point of view*.<sup>(2)</sup> From this standpoint, it is now possible to state our principal hypotheses.

We define the epic *first*, as a form of expression linked in an originary sense to sacrifice, and *second*, as a form that has a deep relationship to the sacred in general. Because of its history in Greece (whence its name), we do not seek to assert in a strong form the sacrificial dimension of the epic, even if we hold that there, as elsewhere, the epic has a deep relationship to it. In asserting rather more strongly the relationship to the sacred, we say *third*, that it entails not just sacred writing, but an aspect of the profane. Part of our hypothesis about the nature of the epic concerns the nature and fact of its dying. *Fourth*, therefore, it will be our task to indicate why we agree very substantially with Cesáreo Bandera's contention that there is a "historical failure of the epic" (176). For us, as for him, in a world where the sacred loses its terrifying force, the epic has no initiating role whatsoever, except as a memento of the price of acquisition of our security.

### **Sacred Stories: the *Mahābhārata***

Since our account of the epic is necessarily tied to changes in culture, we need to explore those events that have come to foreclose the possibility of its existence. Our way into this is to look at the history of a few signal instances--and, initially at least, merely note what changed. We begin with works roughly contemporary--the *Mahābhārata* and the Homeric epics. At least in the way they are traditionally conceived, the two works are thought to occupy very different aesthetic and religious terrain. We're not so convinced.

The *Bhagavad Gītā*, a brief (700-verse) passage folded into the (1.8-million-word) epic narrative, the *Mahābhārata*, offers us the following scenario: two great armies are facing each other, Arjuna's army, the Pandavas on one side, and his relations, the Kauravas or Kurus on the other. Arjuna's hope for peace has

failed, and the sides are arrayed for war. Arjuna, himself a fierce warrior, is the hero of the epic, and in a process earlier in the narrative has chosen to have an unarmed Krishna as his charioteer--and adviser. At the crucial moment before battle, Arjuna is suddenly seized by doubts. The doubts do not concern a fear of losing, but rather that he will be *killing his relatives*:

And Krishna said, "Arjuna, behold  
The Kurus gathered here."  
And Arjuna beheld  
Fathers, grandfathers  
Venerable teachers, uncles, brothers, sons,  
Grandsons and comrades,  
Fathers-in-law and friends  
Standing there in either host. (280)

Seeing this, he was "filled with deep compassion" and questions the very point of the battle. This is a crucial turning point in the narrative, setting up the decisive moment of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, the unfolding of sacred truths of a people. Arjuna says

My limbs give way (beneath me)  
My mouth dries up, and trembling  
Takes hold upon my frame:  
My body's hairs stand up (in dread).  
(My bow) Gandiva, slips from my hand,  
My very skin is all ablaze;  
I cannot stand, my mind  
seems to wander (all distraught). (280)

In response to this extended line of questioning (it continues for stanzas beyond these), Krishna thereafter reveals the nature of the world to Arjuna, and also, gives him (and his subsequent Hindu followers) instructions on how to live in it, and to accept the world's apparent contradictions and injustices. But although the contemplative and transcendental moment itself is supposed to transcend time, it still needs to happen *within* it. This is also a *story* after all. [\(3\)](#)

Arjuna's arguments are reasonable enough: it is wrong to kill his own extended family, it is bad luck to fight "mine own folk," that he is murdering descendants and relatives as yet unborn--and that the victory would be pointless anyway (280-81). It builds to a simple climax: "I will not fight" (283). To this, Krishna "faintly smiled" before embarking on a lengthy explanation on the nature of reincarnation and immortal imperishability (284ff). In the course of this, he touches on the role of sacrificial behavior in the universe. The Gods need the humans to make sacrifices, he explains, because sacrifice "sustains" them, and the "evil" ones who sacrifice merely for themselves live in vain (292). Moreover, Brahman might be born from the imperishable, but is also "forever based on sacrifice" (293). The English word should not mislead us. What is invoked by "sacrifice" in Hindu thought is a world away from the kind of sacrifice performed by Christians when they symbolically reenact Christ's sacrifice, but it reminds us--if we need reminding--that sacrifice is closely related to the ancient sacred. [\(4\)](#)

Crucially, the epic enables a crossing-point or "interface" between humanity and divinity, something that is arguably essential to *all* religions--or at least those with transcendental ambitions. Krishna has to bestow a timeless eye to Arjuna (who would otherwise be destroyed by the divine disclosure); the revelation is recounted, in epic style, as an *event*:

Sanjaya [the narrator] said:  
So saying Hari [Lord Krishna],  
The great Lord of yogic power,  
Revealed to the son of Prithā [Arjuna]  
His all highest sovereign form. (329; our insertions)

The result, despite his protection, is sheer terror, itself mediated by a narrative of what he has seen:

throned Gods, celestial serpents, "glory shining on all sides," and all the "worlds shudder--how much more I!" (330-31).

In the *Mahābhārata*, we have almost the quintessential epic, a superb and large scale account of a clash of armies, headed by individuals we learn to care about as the narrative progresses, all of it rendered in elevated verse-form. In the midst of the story, what is more, the terror of the sacred is revealed, and the weakness of humanity before an all-conquering destiny. If, as Aristotle says, we are to look up to the epic hero, and to be moved by his drama, then this text (even more than the *Rāmāyana* which is also a central epic of Hinduism) lets us see the key features of the genre in action.

## Classical Greece and Rome

Unlike the *Mahābhārata*, the *Odyssey* is no longer part of a living religious structure. Perhaps this is why Greek texts like the *Odyssey* are often seen as just stories, as precursors to novels perhaps. It is certainly possible to read them that way; the *Odyssey* is after all, a terrific story. (The editor of the English translation suggests he can "describe the *Iliad* as a tragedy and the *Odyssey* as a novel" (Rieu, in Homer 10).) They are also apparently "poems" (10). We nevertheless do see what Rieu means, as willful as his reading is: there is a plot such as we might find in a novel: a shrewd and worthy leader seeks unsuccessfully to bring his crew back home, but he, alone deserving, prevails, and reclaims his rightful place at the head of the household. The ingenuity of the story, the trials of the hero, the way it is written--all these things were a marvel then, and they remain so.

It is a great story--but so too is the *Mahābhārata*. The point is that the narrative aesthetic does not exhaust the text's resources--there is a sacred fount at its centre. Just as the *Mahābhārata* (a Sanskrit word, but one recognizable in modern Hindi as designating "great" Bharat, i.e., a great tale of the descendants of Bharat) tells the story of a people, so too does the *Odyssey*. Like the *Mahābhārata*, the *Odyssey* is both a story and a sacred text. As in the *Mahābhārata*, the Gods mix freely with some of the human actors, and influence actions and outcomes. Both texts "teach" through their stories. Where Krishna actually explains the morals to Arjuna, morals in the *Odyssey* emerge through actions. Odysseus could seem, to a Judaeo-Christian eye, to be somewhat boastful, even deceitful, but a reader caught up in the narrative world he inhabits cannot ultimately fail to be touched by the qualities taught through his characterization: loyalty, bravery, and at times, even compassion. The cruelty of the Gods to the lost and wandering hero as he makes his way from one desperate scene to another reinforces audience alignment with him. No individual could stand such torture--by the story's end, when he is finally thrown up utterly alone on the Ithacan shore, we are moved to sympathy for the hero's determination to do something very understandable--to get back home to his wife (208).

The qualities of the hero are more than merely narrative qualities. As in the *Mahābhārata*, these are the qualities of the epic hero, who in many respects, is touched by the divine. We go so far as to suggest that these idealizations make no sense without the framework of the sacred that lies behind them at every turn. In this view, the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* are not just entertainment, but share a common ground in generic terms with the great Hindu texts we have just been discussing. All tell of the exploits of heroes, all are guided by and inflected by the gods, and all are written in the highest and most serious styles of their cultures. Such is the pattern of the epic.

This brings us to the *Aeneid*, a text written some eight hundred years later. When, however, we read its opening lines, we sense a somewhat different note being sounded:

I sing of arms and of a man, a man who first from Troy's coast came as an exile by fate to the Lavinian shore. By those above, *this* was the man who, tossed violently about on the depths or on the land and unforgotten by fierce Juno (on account of whose rage he was to undergo many trials) who was to establish the city and its Gods in Latium. Whence the Latin kind and the fathers of Alba [Rome]; whence also the high walls of Rome (II1-7)

The author is Virgil, the work the *Aeneid*. At one level, the text recreates the world of the *Iliad* only to splice a completely different people's history into it (for we are back in Troy, and the story is told again, but

from the other side). Virgil's often-cited opening resonates once the rest of the epic is known; at first the words mean little. The deities introduced in the first sentence are the same ones we later see gathered up from ruined Troy, and indeed, the trials themselves are recounted by sea and by land in the books that follow. Only after these things are understood, can we see the sense and the force of those opening lines.

The poem differs from all the epics written before it in that it was commissioned, and it was written by one man. This, therefore is no unconscious outpouring, but is rather a deliberate and deliberated piece. Virgil, in other words, derived a pattern from the Homeric and other then extant epic-cycle originals upon which to base his own masterpiece. He was not to know, of course, that those who wrote before him were not single individuals like "Homer" or "Sanjaya" which were names for collective cultural achievement. That is, in his act of imitation as it were, he was to create something so original that it could never again be repeated--even though his very act of creating it produced the desire to do just that in those that came after him.

In the personification of "pious" Aeneas, we find the embodiment of an imagined civilization. As our student edition would have it:

The *Aeneid* is an epic poem. Now without attempting to define epic poetry, let us point out its general characteristics. An epic is a type of narrative poetry. It deals, therefore, with a story, a connected series of events. But it does not aim merely to tell a story for its own sake, as does simple narrative poetry, but for the sake of a higher meaning and intenser feeling. . . . In the concrete, therefore, the action will generally center around (1) a hero or heroic characters (2) some mighty work to be achieved with steadfast courage, (3) a courageous struggle with unusual difficulties in carrying out this high purpose. (Henle 67)

Beyond the storyline itself, we get this account (echoing Aristotle down the ages) of the writing:

A metrical system will be chosen which is at once (1) majestic and elevated; and (2) flexible, to fit the changing mood of the narration and to avoid the monotony which is a constant danger in a long poem. (67)

The meters of Latin verse, it should be remembered, are based not on stress patterns or on syllable counts as in modern European verse, but on vowel lengths.

The power of the *Aeneid* lies at least partially in the establishing work in the second book. The city of Troy, in a pattern familiar to city-states of the time, ringed by its defensive wall, breached by the giant wooden horse, has a shell like structure. Inside the shell, we discover in a vision presented in the very act of its withdrawal, an inner life. In this place of concentric circles, the inner sanctum is where the sacred and courtly life took place, something that Virgil takes great care to humanize, and to individualize. We learn that Aeneas himself had in happier times used a hidden passageway to move between buildings, that from these rooftops, the sea could be seen. We learn these things not from scene-setting, but either from memories being triggered as he moves or from acts of destruction by the invaders, notably the terrifying--and pedagogically significant--figure of Pyrrhus. We learn about the beauty of the throne room not from descriptions, but from the account of Pyrrhus smashing not just the door, but also the door jamb on which the door itself is mounted. We see the wisdom and merits of King Priam not through accounts of his earlier heroic days, but as he faces death. When, about to rush to the aid of the others, he displays wisdom in heeding his wife's words that it is pointless; but then, when Pyrrhus, with great brutality slays his son before him, he shouts that Pyrrhus has betrayed even the standards of his fierce father, and then, in the pathetic lines, "sic fatus senior telumque imbelles sine ictu coniecit" (thus the doomed old man threw his spear, but without any effect), (2. 1544), we are prepared for the even greater brutality of his death, announced after a derisive response simply with the words "Nunc morere! [Now die!]" (2, l.550). The character, so carefully personified by Virgil, then has his head torn from his body, the trunk thrown onto the shoreline, "sine nomine corpus [a mere body without a name]" (l.558).

In small scenes of great pathos of the kind just described, Virgil forces us to bear witness to the unbuilding of a civilization, a cosmology, an entire order of life. Virgil's sympathies with those whose lives are destroyed prevails throughout the epic, and is part of the way in which the hero is assessed. In his eyes,

however successful someone like Pyrrhus might be in battle, his brutality and lack of piety makes him the very opposite of a hero. Virgil also shows what it means to be defeated. Repeated, but again always fleeting, laments for lost Troy, her now failed deities--just pathetic little things to be gathered up by the fugitive remnants, occur in these terrifying pages, and on the basis of them, the quest not just for a new city, but for an entirely new civilization begins.

*The Aeneid*, perhaps, is the last text that can truly be called an epic. The complexity of claiming for it the same kind of place as that inhabited by texts like the *Odyssey* or the *Mahābhārata* does raise problems. It does not take much to see why--it is an authored book, one with a dedicated aim in mind, a single writer, yet one commissioned to the task, and one whose work was accepted and read for centuries to come as the defining account of Rome. It is at one level a strangely *modern* kind of statecraft, albeit one that pre-exists modern states. Imbued as it was in the epic cultures and histories that formed it (such as the Greek schools the Romans kept going), the "revivified" form lives not just through the genius of its author but also through the genuine idealization of Greek culture on the one hand and the deification of the eternal city/empire of Rome on the other (which is why it is precisely not modern in its statecraft or political and chauvinistic apologetics). To be sure, we read it through a prism of our own. There are also those who now shun it because of its life after the conversion of Rome--the poem is a staple of Catholic cultures in particular--just as there are those who have loved it as "literature." Even if the reader does not accept our claim that it is an epic in the full sense we have identified in the mixed profanity and sacredness of the *Odyssey*, it is an important and undeniable way-station on the road to whatever we think of the epic today--and its inspiration to Christian writers afterwards is the next field we must examine.

## After Virgil

Virgil's accomplishment, unfinished as it is, remains the last of the great epics in the true sense. Virgil was not very long dead before his masterpiece found an authored riposte. Lucan's *Pharsalia* (or *De Bello Civili, of Civil War*) rejected, apparently utterly, all aspects of Virgil's project except the epic form itself (and even it was transformed). In place of the mythologizing vividness and pathos of Virgil's work, Lucan wrote in quick oratorical phraseology called "*Sententiae*" (which just means phrases, but which alludes to the oral rhetorical tradition (Conte 442). Where Virgil based his text on a mythic event in the deep past to articulate the sacred genesis of Rome, Lucan very boldly used his to attack the overthrow of the republic by Julius Caesar. This was brave indeed in an era when "Augustus Caesar" styled himself as such to establish continuity with Caesar's legacy. Crucially, Lucan's epic is based on history, real recorded history such as was available to him through literary sources, and living memory. As Conte says, this makes it not just "annalistic" and slightly wearing, but also, it entailed a denunciation of a "fratricidal war, of the subversion of all moral values, and the arrival of the kingdom of injustice" (443), with the result that the author effects a "systematic refutation" of everything Virgil had attempted (444). Conte takes as a particularly striking example of this Lucan's deliberate reversal of Virgil's promise that the new Rome would name those places "now without name," turning that into the prospect that one day "omne Latinum/fabula nomen erit" ("the fairytale will be of the whole Latin name") (446).

If we step back a moment, we see that while the *Pharsalia* partakes of the epic, it is not an epic in anything like the same sense as its predecessors in Rome, Greece, or India. The text resembles something more akin to a cross between a polemic and a modern historical drama. The issues can be vital, and controversial, but the genre has changed. That said, Lucan's epic *participates in the genre*, without, if we might put it thus, entirely fitting *into* it. There is not sacred value in the sense of the earlier epics, but republicanism is reified into something worthy of sacrifice, and we even sense the author's courage in putting his own life and reputation on the line in creating such a devastating critique. Later, in Europe, republicanism in France and the United States would take on just the same quasi-sacred value, as would nationalism more generally. These "ideas" are deemed worthy of common sacrifice, and, as Benedict Anderson points out, death (7). But we have still moved away from the epic that Aristotle described, from Homer's tale that folds both lived divinity and heroic human exploits into one single text.

## Dante and Tasso

After Virgil, there were "modern" attempts to write in this high style, but--unlike the situation with tragedy

in France and in England--the results were rarely attended by any real order of success. There were curiosities, such as the "rediscovered" thirteenth book of the *Aeneid*, but this was written in medieval times. The significance of this text is less that it finished the unfinished masterpiece, but rather that it showed the esteem in which Virgil was held in Christendom, making it seem all the more remarkable that no successor appeared. In fact, only three texts since the fall of Rome can really claim both to have had the sweep of earlier epics, and the project of mixing the profane and the sacred in an elevated way that makes the epic what it is.

The first of these texts is the *Divine Comedy*, a text written by Dante Alighieri from 1317 onwards (Dante 376). Neither is it any coincidence that the narrator of Dante's *Divine Comedy* has as his first guide the figure of "Virgilio"--Virgil--as he travels through the underworld. For anyone versed in the epics of classical times, the text Dante presents is something of a shock. In fact, the opening volume of the three-part work (the others are *Purgatory* and *Paradise*), the *Inferno*, on which our attention is focused, is a horrific text that catalogues the terrors and torments of hell in great detail. The *Inferno* opens with the narrator's dreamlike state being interrupted by his encounter with the deceased author of the *Aeneid*. Virgil introduces himself as the one who has been born *sub Julio* (under Julius), who was a poet (*poeta fui*), and who composed lines on the "son of Anchises" from Troy (10-11). The choice is apt enough: the narrator, and indeed, the author of the *Divine Comedy* itself, will be guided by Virgil, the earlier writer and model (11ff).

As we make our way into this strange yet attractive text, the influence of the *Aeneid* proves to be at once profound and strangely narrow. Virgil, the pious guide, like Aeneas, and perhaps Virgil himself, is a kind of character-model. Unlike the earlier text, where the adventures involve not just piety but also fighting and love, the *Inferno* offers a different kind of drama, if drama is even the correct word for the procession of things the strange pair witness. In terms of action, indeed, it is as if the entire setting of the *Inferno* is drawn from book six of the *Aeneid*. In that book, we are introduced to the terrifying Charon, the *portitor* (gatekeeper) and ferryman of the ghosts of the dead fortunate enough to have the right to cross the water. Dante adds a brilliant touch of his own by appending a notice to the gates of hell. The sign concludes with the celebrated phrase, *Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate* (Leave all hope, you who enter!) (26-27). There follows in Dante's account the journey across the Acheron, as in the ancient model, and then his progression through the nine levels of hell.

The narrative logic of the *Inferno* is also very different from that of the *Aeneid*. Where the wanderings of the *Aeneid*, like the *Odyssey* and *Iliad* before it, were made up of an epic purpose that entailed a *variety* of travels and battles, the *Inferno* progresses by gradually moving more and more towards the ultimately awe-inspiring and powerful, the figure of Lucifer. This is finally reached in canto 34, when the two travelers arrive at "Judecca" where sinners are frozen like insects in ice, and a three-faced Satan hangs suspended gnawing on three particular sinners, Judas, Brutus, and Cassius (353-55). From this point, of course, things can only improve--and they do--as Virgil guides his companion out, and he can make his way towards paradise.

The distinctness of the narratives raises the question of how it is even possible to see the *Divine Comedy* as an epic. Even setting aside the array of adventures a hero like Odysseus has, even Aeneas does more than *visit* the other-worldly domains. All of the strife of Aeneas' experience in book two (the pathos that elevates the poem in the first place), the tragic romantic failure in book four (the incineration of Dido), not to mention the destined journey on to Italy in the later books and the warfare with Turnus--none of this finds any equivalent in Dante's great work. In certain respects, indeed, the *Divine Comedy* is more akin to the genre of the fabulous journey or travelogue than an epic. Even at its worst, we never feel any sense of hazard for his "hero." Indeed, unlike Aeneas who goes into the underworld with his sword drawn, or fights battles with his men, or Arjuna who fights, or Odysseus who is threatened with death by an array of impossibly challenging threats (not just forces of divinely ordered nature like whirlpools, but sirens tempting him, Circe with her drugs, the Cyclops, and so on), this narrator never swings a sword in anger. He is, to put it mildly, an epic hero unrecognizable as such to any culture that generated epics. He has no heroic stature, his feats are remarkable through what he witnesses but not for what he actually does, and the journey itself is as much a psychological study as it is physical. The writing, it is true, is superb, and Dante generates powerful pathos from the plight of those he imagines being tortured. But that is not really the stuff of epics--or at least had not been up until this time.

With Tasso, the case is somewhat different--and less important to our inquiry. In 1581, Tasso published *The Liberation of Jerusalem*. In terms of meeting the criteria for epic narrative structure and pattern, Tasso's text is closer to the epic genre than either of the other two literary masterpieces we are surveying from post-classical Europe. Moreover, he invokes the muse to "ennoble" the verse so that he might mix without offence "fictions light" with "truth divine" (Tasso, I.ii). Once again, this is a feature of the epic. Moreover, Tasso's poem celebrates a crusader who goes to liberate Jerusalem. As a result, the travel narrative is in the same family of narratives as the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*. In the text, God also addresses the hero, Godfrey, directly, as in earlier epics (I.xii). Finally, the poem is written in elevated verse, which Tasso uses to raise the Crusade into a worthy enterprise--and to honour the hero over the various antagonists he encounters.

And yet... it is nothing like those earlier poems. Most obviously, Tasso's poem's claim to greatness is not based in the long and wearying accounts of military exploits on the one hand, and Godfrey's virtuousness on the other. What is touching in the *Aeneid*, or hardened in the *Odyssey*, is tendentious and cloying here. If the poem had depended on Godfrey to animate its action, it would long ago have been consigned to the dustbin. Its charm lies rather in the reader's attraction to the anti-hero Rinaldo (introduced early in the poem), who late in the story is redeemed when he apologizes "meekly" to Godfrey for all his waywardness (especially with women), and joins the fight on his side (XVIII.ii). The narrative therefore at best has a double-barreled interest, and the engaging part of the story concerns the exploits and journey of Rinaldo, not Godfrey who--unlike Aeneas or Odysseus--fails to engage our interest as a character. Thus, despite the fact that Tasso's poem looks most like the ancient epic on the surface, its major achievements lie outside the epic domain--because his heroes are decidedly not elevated characters, but are more like much more modern troubled heroes with psychological issues to resolve.

## Milton

What then of Milton? There are two striking similarities between Milton's project and that of Dante. Both writers laid out their adventure in major parts (Milton two, Dante three), and--what is more--both moved from hell towards heaven. In Milton's case, the journey begins in hell, moves through earth, and in the second volume, *Paradise Regained*, ends in heaven. And, like Dante, there is little disagreement as to which part is better--in the case of both writers, the sections representing hell are superior for reasons of interest than the supposedly climactic conclusions in paradise. Unlike Dante, however, Milton took the very bold step of launching the action by dwelling on the circumstances of Lucifer himself.

The audacity of *Paradise Lost* is unparalleled in the rest of epic literature, and it is remarkable its opening books were not seen as scandalous. The printer's note to *Paradise Lost* sets the grim high tone of what will follow. The meter, he tells us, is

English heroic verse without rhyme, as that of Homer in Greece and of Virgil in Latin, rhyme being no necessary adjunct or true ornament of poem or good verse, in longer works especially, but the invention of a barbarous age, to set off wretched matter and lame meter. (3)

There follows, however, a verse formation that none could have expected. Milton's skill in blank verse had been established in the shorter poem, "Lycidas," and his classical learning was renowned. Yet the sixteen line opening sentence of the poem with its Latinate phrasing and its English clarity announced less with humility than arrogance its relation to the classical muses: to them there is no humble or muted appeal, rather, the Heavenly muse is commanded "Sing" (l.6) and we are told that this poem will not bother with the usual "middle flight" but will straightaway pursue "Things unattempted yet in Prose or rhyme" (l.16). As if that were not enough, shortly thereafter, Milton charges himself--this time with the aid of the Holy Spirit--to "assert Eternal Providence/ and justify the ways of God to men" (ll.24-25).

Milton's use of the blank verse line is unrivalled in English--superior in almost all respects to the Marlovian "mighty line" (from which he obviously learnt much), and even to Shakespearean contortions and set-piece moments of grandiloquence. (5) Milton's power lies especially in the pacing of the line (something evident already even in the opening lines of the youthful "Lycidas")--and the power and elevation of the language of his epic lies in his deployment of something unavailable to his ancient equivalents--the power of modern

accented verse. (6) Examples are redundant, as they are everywhere, but let us take one simply for purposes of illustration. Let us see the way in which Milton himself contrasts the nature of two of the fallen angels as they debate at the famous congress of devils. Witness first Moloch, the rousing no-nonsense heroism of classical rhetoric--or of the English civil war--ringing in our ears:

**My sentence is for op'n war. Of wiles  
More unexpert I boast not. Them let those  
Contrive who need, or when they need, not now.**

/ / - - - / - / - /  
**My sen** tence is for **op** 'n **war.** Of **wiles**  
 / / - / / / / / / /  
**More un** ex **pert I** **boast not.** **Them let those**  
 - / - / - / - / / /  
 Con **trive** who **need,** or **when** they **need, not now.**

The stressed syllables in the second line offer heavy emphasis ("I boast not--them let those contrive); as the tongue stumbles we sense the speaker spitting contempt for the view. The two caesurae in the final line are also superbly timed--as the pentameter pattern returns with heavy emphasis on the words "when" and the repeated word "need" (not to mention the alliteration in the last three words, with the effect of strengthening the penultimate word, "not"). The blunt opening statement, "My sentence is for op'n war," with its implied emphasis on the first two syllables, shows Milton's mastery not just through the meaning of the words--but also in marked contrast with the styles of Belial, who follows with these silken words:

**I should be much for op'n war, o peers  
As not behind in hate, if what was urged  
Main reason to persuade immediate war  
Did not dissuade me most.**

/ / - / - / - / - /  
**I should** be **much** for **op** 'n **war,** o **peers**  
 - / - / - / - / - /  
 As **not** be **hind** in **hate,** if **what** was **urged**  
 / / - - / / - / - /  
**Main rea** son to **per suade** im **med** iate **war**  
 - / - / - /  
 Did **not** dis **suade** me **most.**

Note the sing-song regularity that opens and closes these lines, making a mockery of the speaker, and contrasting with the bluntness of the far more courageous--if foolhardy--Moloch. We see again the matching of character and verse: witness the run of stressed syllables--the third of the above lines races into the fourth with its hissing antimonies (persuade/dissuade) and the final foot's infantilising "mama" ("me most"). In almost any passage, from any part of *Paradise Lost*, Milton's poetic ability is a match for anything that went before, and is certainly able to meet the challenges he set for himself, at least in terms

of versification.

All the more reason to ask then: so what went wrong after book two? It is certainly not a question of ability. Nor are we the first to wonder about this question. Much has been written on the decline of the epic. Yet in our view, only Bandera has tackled the problem as we understand it. For him, it is a question of a relationship to the sacred. In his hands, the question gains sharp articulation:

Whether or not one sees Virgil as an *anima naturaliter Christiana* (a naturally Christian soul) . . . one can see the *Aeneid* as the poem of fallen man, man as the sacrificial founder of his own *civitas terrena* (earthly city), thereby caught in a vicious circle of his own violence, struggling to separate good from evil; in other words, the poem of fallen man, without *the promise of redemption*. In this sense, there is only one successor to Virgil in Christian Europe: Milton. (183)

The problem is, as Bandera rightly puts it,

"fallen man" understood in the sense in which the Judeo-Christian text means it, cannot be a hero. . . . Milton's poem, being the best, simply magnifies the inevitable contradiction of all Renaissance attempts to emulate and Christianize Virgil's achievement. (183-84)

A consequence of the character map of *Paradise Lost* is the inevitable Blakean reading of the poem. Satan displaces Adam as the hero. Satan is beyond salvation, and in his defiance of all that is good, betrays a sensibility we recognize as all too human. As for poor pale Adam and Eve in the poem, we feel admiration neither for their deeds nor for them, despite all Milton's efforts to make it so. (7)

Bandera, like Gauchet and a range of other writers in the Girardian tradition, have pointed to the power of Christianity to make visible the sacrificial logics of human societies. Virgil does not, as Bandera seems to imagine, fall short of the Christian ideal--such a charge makes no sense--but rather, (and this would be the ingenuity of Bandera's suggestions), he is like Christ himself in what he does--he is a *re-presenter of the sacrificial scene*, and just like Christ, he pierces the veil of representation in the very fact that he is able to duplicate the scenes construed by the Homeric epics and the Greek epic cycles in his own tale of the founding of Rome.

## Alexander Pope and The Case of Wagner

There are many ways of telling the demise of the epic. Perhaps, for English-speaking readers, the task is easier than for those of other modern European languages and literatures. In our tradition, the end is explicit. It took the form of a poem called "The Rape of the Lock." This poem, appearing as it did just fifty years after *Paradise Lost*, effectively put the English epic down like a feral animal. If the analogy seems crude, it is nothing to the lacerating wit of the poem, or the incisive sarcasm of its brilliant author. Alexander Pope, like his great contemporary John Dryden, wrote a style of verse that was more demanding than blank verse. Both men wrote in what is called the heroic couplet. This is a pentameter line arranged in rhyming couplets. That such an impossibly demanding verse form should be deployed to put down the ageing beast seems apt enough: the "Rape of the Lock" is what is known as a mock epic, and it details in the highest possible verse form the events of the securing of a lock of hair from an attractive girl's head. If the poem failed to solve the problems with this kind of humour, it is hardly surprising, but we can be quite sure that no one could consider writing an epic poem without having serious second thoughts about whether or not the attempt would end in farce.

Such punctuation did not attend the wake in all languages, however, and the high serious Germanic tradition, with its Romantic/confessional possibilities, left the epic avenue open longer than for most. This brings us to what Nietzsche rightly called "the case" of Wagner. We should recall that the epic mode once had embedded in it actual music. The neo-Romantic composer, Richard Wagner, with his Bayreuth festival and specially designed concert hall, surely must be one, if not the greatest of the contenders for the last modern epic. The Ring cycle, with sixteen hours of music, performed still at Bayreuth for those who make the pilgrimage (and let us not be afraid to use that word when it is apt), was a kind of music that tore up the rules of melody in favour of a chromaticism that, in certain respects, doomed the entire orchestral idiom of which it was part.

Serious events and actions? The ring cycle certainly aspires to that, with its tales of the origins of the German people (or is it of humanity in general?). The scale of the work is monumental, and certainly justifies the name. Dating from the second half of the nineteenth century, it sought to poeticize the rise of the human from the divine in much the way--arguably--that Homer did, when he showed (in the spirit of Hesiod who showed the Olympian gods imprisoning the titans) the prevalence of smaller, weaker, yet shrewder and cleverer beings over great, dull ones (be it over Polyphemus, or indeed be it in Odysseus' actual success in getting home despite the disapproval of the most powerful gods in the firmament).

It is at this point that the first problem emerges. Unlike the *Mahābhārata*, the *Odyssey*, the *Aeneid*, and *Paradise Lost*, the material of the Ring cycle does not reflect direct belief. We know, as Bandera points out, that Milton considered, and rejected, the option of an Arthurian epic (183). His intuition, sound entirely in this respect, was that the sacred is essential to the epic, and it must reflect things the author, and by extension, the author's culture, actually believe. The world of the *Götterdämmerung*, with its weakening gods, is one that by the nineteenth century could only be described as mythic. The nearest anyone could contend to belief would be to hold that once upon a time, the ordinary Germans had believed in it, and that somehow this was what made it special today. The problems with the thesis are obvious, even in terms of the designation of what the Germanic people's belief might, or might not, have been. Paradoxically, therefore, the first failure of this epic cycle lies in its very conception.

Perhaps the best parts of these operas should have been orchestral--as in the powerful opening in E-flat, or the solemn funeral march on the occasion of Siegfried's death. If this were the case, another series of failures could have been forestalled. The orchestral music, as impressive as it often is, is nevertheless not the main achievement of the work. Were it so, we would see it eclipsed by other monumental achievements, such as Beethoven's "epic" Ninth Symphony, with its grandeur, its evocativeness, and even its failures (such as the catastrophic disintegration early in the final movement, when he set Schiller's great poem to a basic marching song).<sup>(8)</sup> In its magnificence, we see the inspiration of much of Wagner's work--and what Wagner himself did not surpass.

The orchestral version of the epic is a patently unacceptable way to deal with Wagner. Examples can be elaborated from each of the operas, and then we need--however inexpertly--to deal with the verse. Surely one of the most powerful moments in the opera occurs in *Die Walküre*, when that character, having been confronted by her father, Wotan, manages to persuade him not to strip away godhead for just any man, but only for a heroic mortal worthy of crossing a line of fire. He, duly inspired, assents with these words:

Leb' wohl, du kühnes  
Herrliches Kind!  
Du meines Herzens  
Heiliger Stolz,  
Leb' wohl! Leb' wohl! Leb' wohl! (III, iii).

And so on. It carries the sense of the action, but not much more (there isn't much poetry for a daughter in being a "herrliches Kind" even though--if we enjoy the music--we as foreign listeners with our merely "operatic" German can go along with it as we, fortunately, miss the nuances of the language). Yet even we can see that these verses about not being able to be greeted anymore by his favourite daughter need music to animate what the words fail singularly to achieve. The stock vocabulary Wagner frequently deploys at key moments like this one weakens the verse further.

Perhaps the success would have been greater had Wagner remembered the sternness of the initial Greek formulation--no drama. Even the poor versification does less damage to a performance of the Ring cycle than does a poor cast or a clichéd visualization consisting of bulky men in horned helmets accosting equally large women with swords and chain mail with sentiments like those cited in the lines above. In ruling off our account with Milton's spectacular failure therefore we intend no criticism of Wagner but rather suggest that the factors weighing down his works may not be those that concern modernity or the epic form in their specificities.

## A parsimonious definition of the epic derived

From all we have seen, we are now in a position to make observations on the nature of the epic. These we lay out in as a simple list in two parts, those things which we regard as essential to the epic, and those things which appear merely to be associated with it.

Essential to the epic are these features:

- The epic is formally described as a creation of elevated characters in elevated language. These formal features are essential to the epic, and reflect the fact that it is an interleaving of the gods and the profane in any society.
- The epic is a narrative form. This is essential to the epic, as it is the one genre that seeks to capture the life and significance of a people in a story that is also--thesis 1--both entertaining and infused with the sacred.
- The epic is large scale. This actually can be derived from the first two points, but needs to be stated. Because it is a tale of elevated characters and of the link to the gods, and because it is a narrative that captures the life of a people, it must be large scale.
- The epic models virtues. The virtues may be those of the heroes alone, or they may be reflected also in the virtues of the gods. All the epics we have traced here from the true epic cultures perform this way: we see it in Odysseus, in Arjuna, and in Aeneas.
- The epic in its time enjoys wide acceptance--the communal authorship is a symptom as much as a cause of this feature. Indeed, the fact that Virgil alone could author an epic shows that authorship is not the point--what is at stake is rather its receptive horizon. Virgil's epic, like those that went before him, was accepted as the main truth of the culture in a way that even those of Dante Alighieri and Milton were not.

Common to the epic are these tendencies:

- The epic tends not to be dramatized. This is not, so far as we can see, essential to it. While we can think of no successful "play" that is an epic, we can see no reason for ruling out the possibility.
- The epic tends to pick up blocks of myth (in the Girardian sense), and enjoys a relationship to it.
- The epic has a relationship to song, and is, for the most part either sung or chanted, however strange this may seem to us today.
- The epic of one society tends to be read as mere story by another. Hence our treatment of Greek and Roman epics; hence to the Christian tendency to read epics like *Gilgamesh* or the *Mahābhārata* as story (as in the Brooks adaptation).

That the epic is dying, we can be sure. That its long afterglow will continue to haunt the memory of all civil societies is even more certain. Embedded in it are the traces not just of histories of lost cultures, but also, of the sacred terrors that motivated them, and inspired them to write their heroes into legend. Their memory haunts all of us.

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## Notes

1. This essay is dedicated to Peter Stevens whose patience in correcting hundreds of pages of translation over the years finds this uncertain reward. ([back](#))

2. Elsewhere indeed, in an argument beyond our purview (yet surely in support of its framing), Gans contends that the Homeric epic gives rise to *culture itself* (*The End of Culture* 7-8). This accords very well with our view – and this is a point of emphasis for our essay – that the epic is *also* a quasi-sacred text – and this is the key to why its death, so long prefigured, is *still* taking place. If Gans marks off the epic's closure more emphatically than we do, we nevertheless concur in our view of its originary significance. ([back](#))

3. Another acknowledgement: Sudesh Mishra's role (in conversation) in helping to develop the thesis about the interleaving of profane and sacred aspects of the narrative in the *Mahābhārata* warrants mention at this point – we acknowledge his endorsement of the idea (but do not blame him for any of our own (mis)interpretations!). ([back](#))

4. The *yagñas* in this tradition concern processes not just of sacrifice but apt reverence (the Hindupedia helpfully explains that while the word implies *worship*, its nearest English equivalent is the word *sacrifice* – because this is part and parcel of worship itself). The entry also makes it plain, however, that the specific strict sense of the term is sacrificial: it entails "offering oblations to propitiate" a deity ("Yajna"). ([back](#))

5. Marlowe, *Dr Faustus*: "Was *this* the *face* that *launched* a *thousand ships*/and *burnt* the *topless towers* of *Ilium*?/ *Sweet Helen* make me *immortal* with a *kiss*!" (Marlowe). These are superb lines: the opening line in perfect iambic pentameter gains its force from the fact it is a question. The hissing throughout the three lines finishes with the words "Her lips suck forth my soul – see where it flies!" the sounds evoking the sucking forth of the soul by Lucifer. ([back](#))

6. But see R.D. Williams' account of Virgil's versification, with its interaction between quantitative and accented patterns (xxvi-xxviii). [\(back\)](#)

7. There is a well known literature on this: the trouble with a lot of the conversation, however, is that while the Milton critics frequently successfully point out the techniques Milton uses to *try* to make his epic fly and his Gods rise (by diminishing the status of the devils and so on), such writers all too frequently leap to the conclusion that just because they can find these techniques in the poem, he actually succeeded in achieving those lofty aims. [\(back\)](#)

8. Wagner was instrumental in training the twentieth century ear that absorbed his musical vision to a view of Beethoven that saw the outburst of cheap melody as the pinnacle of his achievement. As for Riezler's remark that "Probably no one to-day accepts Wagner's view that with the choral movement Beethoven sealed the doom of instrumental music" (199), we can only concur. [\(back\)](#)

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## Anthropoetics 16, no. 2 (Spring 2011)



# Justifying the Esthetic in Kafka's "Josephine the Singer"

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Franz Kafka's "Josephine the Singer, or The Mouse Folk" follows the attempts of a member of a community to understand and explain the art of their only singer, Josephine, and the powerful effect that her singing has on the community that ordinarily has no use for song or diversion. To the Narrator, Josephine's "art" does not appear to be exceptional in itself and does not provide a satisfactory explanation for the power it has to draw the community together and capture its attention so thoroughly. In fact, the Narrator cannot distinguish anything about Josephine that makes her or her singing superior to others in their community. In sound, the Narrator feels that her singing is identical to if not weaker than the normal piping or squeaking that the other members emit constantly and without effort, yet they go out of their way to convene around Josephine when she performs, and there is no denying that her performances have an exceptional, almost drug-like effect on the crowds that form around her. Even in moments of intense danger, if Josephine begins to sing, the perpetually overworked creatures (the title suggests that they are mice, rather than humans) will pause and divert their energies, gathering around her to convene in rapt attention and silence through her performance.

Kafka's story raises some key questions, bringing to mind the delicate and sometimes strained relationship between modern artists and their audience: what criteria are necessary for a performance or piece to be recognized as art, and who is qualified to validate it as such? What is the true source of Josephine's power, and what function does it serve in her community? Should the reader believe the Narrator's suggestion that the artist and her songs are truly unexceptional; that the attention she receives is an act of charity or protection rather than a direct response to her talents? Or, is Josephine correct in thinking that she is the one who protects and serves her community through the "sacrifice" she makes by singing to them? Why does the community acknowledge the effect her songs have on it but collectively refuse to give her the recognition of her art that she requests of them? Using Eric Gans' theory of Generative Anthropology, I will seek to explain the ethical and esthetic function of Josephine's art in the community as well as the Narrator's apparent resentment towards her and the community's unwillingness to grant her the "permanent recognition of her art" (Kafka 372) that she desires.

The Narrator goes to great pains to lay out the numerous difficulties the community has with understanding both the meaning of and the power behind Josephine's song. That she and her song possess power over the others is undeniable, but nobody can define what, if anything, differentiates her from the rest of the community. If their enchantment was with the beauty of her voice, it "would have to give one an immediate and lasting feeling of being something out of the ordinary, a feeling that from her throat something is sounding . . . something that Josephine alone and no one else can enable us to hear" (Kafka 360), which it doesn't do. The sound of her piping alone holds no power; "to comprehend her art it is necessary not only to hear but to see her" (Kafka 361). The community suspects that the art lies in her ability to show them the beauty in something so commonplace that they would not notice or appreciate it without her. The Narrator wonders if "[p]erhaps . . . [they] admire in her what [they] do not at all admire in [them]selves" (Kafka 362). But she insists that her song is a unique, high art that the others are simply unable to understand, and she scorns any comparison between her singing and the ordinary piping of the others. She is encouraged when a distraction from her performance occurs and she is given the opportunity to overcome it and regain the center of attention, proving her power to the onlookers and teaching them "awed respect" (Kafka 363). "Josephine likes best to sing just when things are most upset" (Kafka 364), in moments of heightened danger and distress, and the mouse people invariably exert themselves to meet her

excessive demands. The Narrator suggests that perhaps the community cares for Josephine as they would for a frail child entrusted to their care, and puts great emphasis on "the difference in strength between the people and the individual" (Kafka 365), suggesting that the notion of Josephine being somehow stronger than the masses would be impossible. Josephine, on the contrary, views herself as the people's savior and believes that the gift of her singing is a great sacrifice. She becomes increasingly demanding of the community to relieve her of her everyday duties--to acknowledge her role among them as solely that of their artist--while they stand strong against her on this one aspect, unable to grant her this unheard-of distinction. Despite the Narrator's attempts to appear credible and objective, the only thing we can be sure of is that Josephine's relationship with the community is tense and enigmatic.

Generative Anthropology operates under the hypothesis that all "essentially human" cultural phenomena such as divinity, esthetics, desire and resentment originated at once with the development of language in what Gans calls the "Originary Scene." Signs are exchanged in order to defer violence during this scene, and the human ability to re-create these signs later in time with an understanding of their abstract meaning is born. The esthetic exists in the originary scene when the periphery accepts a sign as a supplement for the centralized object which is the focus of their attention. Esthetics and art function as a way to "transcend the resentment" that the periphery feels when the center appears to deny itself to them (Gans 21). The esthetic object both reproduces the transcendent abstract quality of the central object by referring to and evoking its image within the viewers' imagination, and defers the resentment towards the center as the viewer recognizes the esthetic object as an artificial construction. If the esthetic object is effective, the viewer will continue to oscillate between resentment and deferral, imbuing the object with desirable power each time they witness its transcendent abilities, and demystifying this effect each time they recall its human origin (*Chronicle* 369). The esthetic object will only function if it is deemed to be sacred or significant by the viewer, since it is only a representation of what is desirable in the sacred center and depends upon the audience's ability to experience or imagine the transcendent using the art as a medium. The viewer cannot be ordered to accept or believe the supplement, making art vulnerable to the reaction of the audience.

The tension between the audience and Josephine is not unlike that of any society trying to understand the hype around a new type of art they don't understand. The audience can at once be enthralled and resentful, seeing no reason for the art to be so exalted or important, but feeling excitement or catharsis in its presence nonetheless. It is threatening to observe something occupying the center of attention, the sacred center, if you don't understand why it is there. Often the public's negative reaction is the very reason an artist will rise to fame. Think of the initially negative public reaction to the rise of the impressionists, abstract expressionists, or Duchamp's subversive "Fountain," a found urinal signed with a pseudonym and labeled as "art". While people were initially offended by the works--feeling that their precious conception of high art was being perverted--their views towards the artwork quickly changed. The more attention the works got, the more significant they became, the more artists copied their style, and the more central they became in the public sphere. In an article on fame, Gans explains that celebrities gain power simply by being "asymmetrically known and therefore significant" (*Chronicle* 321). While the initial source of attention may or may not be for a skill or talent that the celebrity possesses, people's attention to, desire of, and subsequent resentment towards the object increase its power, pushing it even further away from the periphery and towards the transcendent (*Chronicle* 321). For an artist who truly believes in the artistic merit of their his or her work, this type of popularity can be maddeningly invalidating. Likewise, a public who suspects that the object occupying their sacred center is there purely because it is popular and not because it has earned its status can be a similarly frustrating experience. While the Narrator of "Josephine the Singer" acknowledges that Josephine's song produces a pleasurable effect for the community, there appears to be an underlying fear that she does not deserve the popularity or central position that she has been given. Josephine, on the other hand, seems to believe that the public does not appreciate her for the right reasons, but her devotion to her art compels her to press on with her performances.

Despite the confusion over the validity of her song or the source of its power, Josephine's singing does--for whatever reason--serve the ethical function of the esthetic. While the community and the Narrator equivocate over its validity, they continuously experience the very power and effect of the song that make it valid. It functions as a release from daily tension and as a central object upon which they can all focus: the audience, normally constantly in motion and chatter, "sits in mouselike stillness; as if [they] had

become partakers in the peace [they] long for" (Kafka 362), and even those who oppose the validity of her art "are soon sunk in the feeling of the mass, which, warmly pressed body to body, listens with indrawn breath" (Kafka 364). Gans explains, "the pleasure of the esthetic effect is . . . implicitly shared by the human community; the peaceful sharing of the esthetic experience is a guarantee of communal harmony, in contrast with the mimetic rivalry provoked by the "shared" desire for a real object" (*Chronicle* 261). The collective appreciation of the moments of peace that surround Josephine is the closest her people come to transcending their rigorous, stressful realities. They are able to collectively enjoy an effect without competing with each other for it, and experience the "'pleasure' of the deferral of violence" (*Chronicle* 260) that is inherent to the esthetic effect. Josephine's insistence that "she is singing to deaf ears" (Kafka 363), and the similarities between her "singing" and the ordinary "piping" that the other members of the community have noticed help to re-create the "paradoxical structure of identification with and alienation from the central figure" (Gans 156). The community's alienation from her art, caused by their sense that they do not understand or have access to the importance or highness of Josephine's song in the way that she perceives it, increases the mystery surrounding what appears to be a divine center. In this case they believe that her art is capable of transcending their basic understanding or comprehension, therefore it appears mystical and obtains more importance than it originally had. This is evident in the Narrator's fixation on her art, despite his hesitancy to validate it as such. At the same time, the identification with the center and the similarities the community sees between Josephine's singing and their own piping and squeaking maintain the periphery's fantasy and illusion of the possibility of obtaining the space in the sacred center, or at least attaining a level of understanding about the art that no one else has. The danger of this is that if the audience identifies with her too well, they will begin to question her central position.

Despite her insistence that she be acknowledged as different and separate from the other members of the community, Josephine depends upon the acceptance of her art by the public. She attempts to guard the validity of her song against any scrutiny or challenge to its value that may threaten its continued effectiveness: "she denies any connection between her art and ordinary piping. For those who are of the contrary opinion she has only contempt and probably unacknowledged hatred. . . . Josephine does not want mere admiration, she wants to be admired exactly in the way she prescribes" (Kafka 362). This does not mean that Josephine's art is not actually art, but it does mean that she recognizes the threat of disillusionment. René Girard helps us to understand Josephine's resentment towards the public she depends on through his theory of mimetic desire: "Only someone who prevents us from satisfying a desire which he himself has inspired in us is truly an object of hatred" (Girard 10-11). The audience (which in this case is the object of hatred) at once makes Josephine's art possible by recognizing it as such, and threatens its continued existence through possessing the capacity to evaluate it and deem it unworthy. Her authority and importance are mediated through the public view of her, which puts her in competition with them since they also exist as the only thing preventing her from achieving her goal of ultimate recognition and validation.

The Narrator in "Josephine the Singer" struggles over whether to give Josephine's singing the power and authority of a valid sacred center. He recognizes her apparent ability to create a moment in which the community reconvenes to appreciate and rally around a central focus, but he is not convinced that Josephine or her song are in actuality worthy of the place they occupy (or the place that she demands to be elevated to). He asks: "It is her singing that enchants us or is it not rather the solemn stillness enclosing her frail little voice?" (Kafka 362). Is her song really worthy of the attention and reverence it receives? Or is it the process of convening, of watching, the "ceremonial performance" (362) and the communal experience of the song that gives it power? Despite his apparent efforts to present an objective and academic examination of Josephine's role in the community, the Narrator relays her story with a negative slant (Mahlendorf).

The Narrator's "equivocation [which is] so noticeable in his presentation of the people's position was necessary to preserve the fact, or myth, if you will, of his impartiality . . . however, it becomes quickly obvious that our narrator's perspective is limited, despite his posture of omniscience" (Sattler 412). He describes Josephine as "sarcastic and arrogant . . . vulgar . . . [and] frail" (Kafka 362). He believes that her demands are "excessive," (Kafka 364) and unworthy of the physical danger they pose to the community. While he admits that Josephine is quiet among her generally noisy people the Narrator "pretends an omniscience he does not have" (Mahlendorf 203). His explanations of Josephine's motivations appear to be purely speculative, so that the negative, power-hungry portrait he paints of her winds up saying more

about himself than it does about Josephine. One explanation for this is that Josephine poses a particular threat to the Narrator himself, who is the only other individual character within the story. "Amid an a-cultural, a-historical species that ostensibly practices neither music nor history, the singer and the Narrator stand as diacritically marked ciphers. Both constitute difference . . . and create difference. . . . But as a member of the mouse folk the Narrator can no more maintain difference than can [Josephine]" (Norris 377). "The ulterior motive is differentiation; [Josephine] wants to be regarded as a goddess; i.e. to have her difference acknowledged" (Norris 373). Similarly, Ursula Mahlendorf suggests that the Narrator wishes to define himself as "an intellectual interested in exploring in thought the nature of music (art), of mousehood, and of the role of the artist and art in an oppressed people" (Mahlendorf 221). While the Narrator may believe that his main motivation is that of intellectual exploration, the underlying resentment in his narration suggests that Josephine's position as an individual puts her in direct conflict with him, and her position of power mediates his own desire to occupy the center scene. The community as a whole may resent and question Josephine for attempting to occupy the center without specific proof of distinction, but the Narrator who views her as an internal rival appears to resent her on a more personal level. In "No More Masterpieces?" Gans explains that "[t]oday we no longer believe in masterpieces, because we have no desire to admire those who produce them" (*Chronicle* 27). Our unwillingness to grant social distinction to artists inhibits our ability to grant their artwork or performance a similar distinction. It is this unwillingness that Josephine attempts to combat within her community.

The mouse folk are a community in danger. The stress and tension of impending violence will tear their community apart unless they can find a way to re-create the effect of the originary scene, with its resulting deferral of violence and release of tension. Josephine's piping in the midst of "grave decisions, is almost like [their] people's precarious existence amid the tumult of a hostile world" (Kafka 367). Her struggle mirrors and validates their own struggle against the ever-present threat of violence and death. Through observing her they can mediate and justify the value of their own perseverance in the face of opposition. A similar phenomena happens to any country or community under siege; in moments of danger, an individual who embodies the ideals of the nation (for America it is often the underdog) will function to inspire a sense of unity and solidarity among the people. The people identify with her struggle; they feel that it is an emblem of their own national struggle, like a metaphor for the mousefolk's own "precarious existence." The Narrator explains: "Josephine exerts herself, a mere nothing in voice, a mere nothing in execution, she asserts herself and gets across to us; it does us good to think of that" (Kafka 367). But the identification with her is too close for them to grant her a position that is higher than theirs. It is their sameness that gives them strength; to elevate her would be to remove the element of closeness they feel to her at the center of the scene and break the fantasy of occupying the space themselves. If Americans were to reward a glorified everyman by giving him money and prestige, he would cease to be an equal and would therefore lose his function. Josephine is central purely by the fact that she is able to get through to the community in moments of crisis and that she is willing to try, but not because the community is able to recognize anything inherently sacred or powerful in her song. Josephine is a compelling folk artist demanding the recognition and elevation of a classically trained musical genius.

Ultimately, Josephine faces the same problem of esthetic expression that any artist of the modern era faces. Gans believes that Christianity, through its "foregrounding of the moral equality of all" (Gans 148) challenges the audience's willingness to accept the authority of an individual purely because of their public status. If every man is deemed equal and worthy of the love of god, a justification from the center of why he deserves to be in the sacred position more than any other member of the audience becomes necessary. Why has he alone been elected to occupy the center? The lack of distinction between Josephine and the Narrator explains the undercurrent of resentment throughout the narration. The community as a whole "surrender[s] unconditionally to no one" (Kafka 371), but Josephine's need for distinction drives her to demand recognition and release from her day to day responsibilities entirely. She believes that her art is something powerful and unique, but she depends upon the community to validate her artwork and mediate her own importance for her. Since she doesn't believe that her listeners understand her art for what it is, she instead asks them to acknowledge her as their national artist--an honor and position that would solidify her role as protector and savior. "She reaches for the highest garland not because it is momentarily hanging a little lower but because it is the highest" (Kafka 373); if the community were to recognize her singing as equal in value to the physical labor she can provide, she would entirely transcend the laws and customs of the community, therefore justifying her position in the sacred center. If Josephine cannot adequately convince the Narrator or community that she belongs in the sacralized position (whether she

does in reality belong there or not), the audience will resent her for attempting to fill it; she becomes their internal rival and apparent equal who stands in the way of their appropriation of the center. "Josephine the Singer" appears to be an account of this careful game modern artists must play with their community in order to achieve the esthetic effect necessary to gain public acceptance and ethical function (a game that Kafka himself was all too familiar with).

In his other works, tortured, misunderstood or ignored artists such as the Hunger Artist or even the character of the land surveyor in *The Castle* either cannot receive or cannot maintain acknowledgement or recognition for the skills they know they possess. Kafka's artists are devoted to their art with their entire being, much as he was. Writing consumed his life, his body, and his mind as he adopted a rigorous lifestyle of near starvation and gymnastics to support it (Anderson 141). Josephine is not insincere in her performance as an artist:

[I]t is as if from everything in her that does not directly subserve her singing all strength has been withdrawn, almost all power of life, as if she were laid bare, abandoned, committed merely to the care of good angels, as if while she is so wholly withdrawn and living only in her song a cold breath blowing upon her might kill her. (Kafka 363)

Artists know within themselves that their art is true, but without public interest they cannot achieve their goal, whether it is to produce the aesthetic effect, or to have this effect recognized to the extent that they feel is appropriate. "The claims of the artist are not denied; rather they are put into perspective." The artist's desire to occupy or knowledge of belonging in the center of the scene may be valid, but society will not necessarily agree--a predicament that Kafka struggled with throughout his career as a writer (Sattler 417). While Josephine's art does seem to have served a pleasant if not necessary function among the community, she is unable to convince them that she or her art are entirely worthy of her desired position in the sacred center. Despite her demands for "public, unambiguous, permanent recognition of her art, going far beyond any precedent so far known" (Kafka 372), the community cannot grant her this position when they have no proof of her superiority beyond the fact that she chooses to perform.

In the end, when their refusal of her demands forces Josephine to flee from the public eye, the community acknowledges that her presence will be missed: "how can our gatherings take place in utter silence?" (Kafka 376), they ask. But their inability to validate Josephine's position in the central scene render them unable to recognize the ethical function of the esthetic that her performance serves. Josephine represents the struggle of the modern artist to justify the value and position of his or her art amidst a community of democratic equals. While the community can feel the power of her song, they cannot rationalize it, and refuse to grant her the position of the divine center for her apparent ability to possess it alone.

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## Anthropoetics XVI, 2 Benchmarks

Articles based on papers delivered at our **2010 GA Summer Conference** in Utah make up half of this issue. **Andrew Bartlett's** extended version of his paper is a pioneering extension of GA to the conception of personhood, Christian, psychological, and erotic. **Marina Ludwigs'** study of Lawrence's vitalism in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* demonstrates among other things the usefulness of the originary hypothesis for analyzing the scene of sexual masochism. And we are very happy to publish Westminster student **Eleanor Scholz's** lucid study of Kafka written under **Peter Goldman's** tutelage.

The other articles include a study of Alfred de Vigny's poetry by **Tom Bertonneau**, our most faithful contributor, a sweeping essay on epic by the prolific Australian team of **O'Carroll and Fleming**, and a provocative look at Clint Eastwood's filmic oeuvre by **Antonio Machuco**, a new contributor from Portugal.

### About Our Contributors

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**John O'Carroll** is co-author with Bob Hodge of *Borderwork in Multicultural Australia* (2006) and, with Chris McGillion, of *Our Fathers: What Australian Catholic Priests Really Think about their Lives and their Church* (2011). With Chris Fleming, he has published numerous articles in a variety of journals, especially *Anthropoetics*, and with him has contributed to *The Originary Hypothesis*, a collection of work on the work of Eric Gans edited by Adam Katz. He also writes about literature (particularly Australian and Pacific

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