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For three gorgeous days in June, against the scenic backdrop of Victoria's charming Inner Harbor, attendees at the 2014 Generative Anthropology Summer Conference explored the theme of "Deferral, Discipline, Knowledge." The idea of deferral was a nod to GA's roots. Eric borrowed the idea from Derrida, whose notion of différance he combined with Girard's idea of mimetic desire. The result was the originary hypothesis: the idea that humanity originates when mimetic violence (Girard) is deferred by the linguistic sign (Derrida). Deferral leads to discipline and knowledge. The originary hypothesis is the basis of a discipline (generative anthropology), which explains the ethical reasons for the pursuit of knowledge. All knowledge, including scientific knowledge, is traceable to anthropological self-knowledge, knowledge of the origin of the human.

The eighth annual meeting of the Generative Anthropology Society lived up to the high standards we have come to expect from previous years. Indeed, the event exceeded a number of previous benchmarks. The program was fuller, the sessions longer, the funding more generous, and the attendance the highest since Ottawa in 2009. Presenters came from five different continents including North America, Australia, Europe, Asia, and, for the first time, Africa. Thirty percent of papers came from individuals who had not previously presented at GASC. Most gratifying of all, despite the fuller program, the intellectual caliber of the papers remained extremely high. One normally expects a few valleys and peaks over the course of three days of solid papers, but here was a seemingly endless summit. No doubt the cohesiveness of the group, which remained in one location for the duration of the conference, helped to sustain this high level of exchange. Thanks to generous funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, it was possible to hold sessions in the same hotel where attendees were housed. The Inn at Laurel Point provided ideal meeting space, with delicious food and excellent service, all in an unbeatable waterfront location. From a conference organizer's point of view, keeping people in one place was a no-brainer. But I never dreamed that this practical consideration would influence so directly the intellectual content of the meeting. More time together meant more time to talk. And more time to talk meant more intellectual momentum for the conference as a whole.

Of the many exhilarating discussions that unfolded I wish to note one in particular. Thanks to the initiative of Andrew Bartlett, who wrote to Raymond Tallis about our conference and, what is more, successfully applied for a grant from his institution to fund a second plenary speaker, we were able to stage a highlight-reel event at the mid-point of the meeting. After giving his keynote on the spread of Darwinitis and Neuromania in contemporary definitions of the human, Ray was joined by Eric at the podium, and the two engaged in a conversation about generative anthropology's vision of the human. Unusually for a speaker of his stature and reputation, Ray had spent some time familiarizing himself beforehand with generative anthropology. And Eric in turn had taken the trouble to read several of Ray's books of philosophical anthropology. The result was an incisive exchange between our two plenary speakers. It became clear that Ray and Eric agreed on many fundamental issues, including the necessity of reflecting minimally and rigorously on the distinctiveness of humanity, even if they differed in how best to model this distinctiveness. I will not rehearse the main points of their conversation here. Instead I encourage you to witness it for yourself. Video recordings of both plenary lectures are available at the GASC 2014 website. To locate the
Given the richness of the GASC 2014 program, it has not been hard to fill this issue. Six papers were ready for publication by the Fall deadline; and more will be published in the Spring.

Our first paper is by Ben Barber, one of five graduate students to deliver a paper at the meeting. Citing Derrida’s critique of Levi-Strauss, Ben asks why recent theorists like Derrida have viewed language as inherently violent. Ben argues that these theorists have not truly grasped the ethical significance of aesthetic deferral. Turning his eye to the English romantics, Barber finds a similar oversight in Hazlitt’s distaste for the political conservatism of Wordsworth’s later poetry. He argues that Hazlitt misses the point of Wordsworth’s aesthetics, which, Ben says, “pioneers a poetics that imagines the appropriation of the centre by the periphery.”

Our next paper comes from Anthropoetics and GASC regular Ian Dennis. In a rich and provocative discussion, Ian explores the continuum of aesthetic deferral from high to popular art. Pursuing GA’s thesis that market exchange defers resentment more effectively than ritual, Ian suggests that “all high art contains the seeds of its own popularization.” Today the artwork exists in the context of a generalized market that encourages personal desire and, therefore, its corollary, resentment. High art is revelatory of the originary structure of desire, but ethically speaking it cannot compete with the market system, which undermines the center-periphery asymmetry assumed by high art. This breakdown is reflected in the spread of high art from center to periphery—or, to put it as Ian does, from the singular high-cultural mode to the plurality of experiences in pop culture. Ian analyses this transition in terms of a provocative typology of aesthetic feelings, attitudes, and moods.

We were fortunate to have in our company a few regulars of the Girardian conference, including two of Girard’s oldest students, Andrew McKenna and Sandor Goodhart. In his fascinating discussion of Beckett’s masterpiece Waiting for Godot, Sandor argues that despite their obvious differences, Derrida and Gans rely on a conception of time that is specific to the Western philosophical tradition. But there may be an alternative way of looking at time, one that attends more precisely to our contemporary situation in, as Sandor puts it, a “time of disaster.” Sandor finds this alternative in Beckett’s paradoxical play Waiting for Godot.

Readers of this journal will be familiar with the work of Marina Ludwigs. In her dazzling contribution to this issue, Marina examines the structure of epiphanic moments in Virginia Woolf’s To the Lighthouse. Observing that the novel’s ending is often regarded as emotionally unsatisfying, Marina suggests that this dissatisfaction is given by the double frame with which the novel ends. The outer frame, which involves the plot of Lily Briscoe, gives us an authentic epiphany, while the inner frame, involving the plot of the Ramseys, forces the novel to closure. Taking her cue from Raoul Eshelman’s notion of performatism, Marina argues that this complex double structure recreates the revelatory structure of the originary aesthetic sign. Woolf’s epiphanic scenes reflect the complexity of the human experience of events.

I said that a full 30 percent of papers came from newcomers to the GA conference. Our next paper is by one of these newcomers. Yet Kenneth Mayers is no newcomer to GA. On the contrary, he is one of Eric’s oldest students, having attended UCLA from 1984 to 1995, when he received his PhD in Comparative Literature. Indeed, it was Ken who originally encouraged Eric to begin conducting a regular seminar in generative anthropology. We are very glad to have reestablished contact with Ken and to welcome him to our conference. Like Sandor, Ken takes up the topic of Beckett and modern culture, but he reaches a quite different conclusion. Ken argues that Waiting for Godot is centered on the idea of waiting as resistance. This resistance is not merely a resistance to modernism with its aesthetic of cultural mastery. It also thematizes the condition of market society, in which relationships of domination are temporary and contingent rather than permanent. In market society, Ken concludes, resentment can be transformative and constructive rather than, as in agrarian societies, reactive and destructive.

The last paper in this issue is by Andrew McKenna, a longtime supporter of generative anthropology. In a characteristically stimulating and packed contribution, Andrew analyses the structure of irony in Voltaire’s Candide. This irony, Andrew says, consists of two distinct stages. First, there is the knowing smile as we appreciate the humor of the passage; second, there are the tears, when (in an awkward moment of self-conversation between Ray and Eric, click on Ray’s lecture. The dialog occurs at 1:05:58 of his video.
recognition) we see our complicity in the sacrifice of the young slave depicted by Voltaire. Andrew extends this pity for the victim beyond the colonialism of the 18th century to the global economy of the 21st. Guilt is effective only if it changes sacrificial behavior. Andrew's essay provides a caution to those who uncritically extol the virtues of the market. In their singular pursuit of profit, Andrew says, "market exchanges are people-neutral," but this neutrality has a serious downside, which is the neglect of an underlying anthropological truth, namely, "our ineluctable, structural, complicity in malfeasance." As heirs of the Enlightenment, we have freed ourselves from the sacrificial beliefs of institutional religion, but we have not freed ourselves from the anthropological reality of sacrifice.

Next year, GASC returns to High Point, NC, where GA veteran Matthew Schneider will host the Society's ninth annual meeting. The theme of the 2015 conference is "Models of the Human, Analog and Digital." I look forward to seeing you there!
Correlating coherent symbolic structures, or language, with the social inequalities of the established order, many modern thinkers have tended to take an activist stance towards language, designating it as insidiously violent in its maintenance of unjust difference and coercive deferral of action. Taking up the question of why contemporary theory so closely associates violence and language, Gans cites the modern criticism of the binary hierarchies implicated in the events leading up to the Holocaust. As an example of this tendency, he references Roland Barthes’s Writing Degree Zero, which claims that, in the long term, the rhetoric of the voluble eighteenth-century French revolutionary Jacques Hébert prepares the way for the violence of Stalin’s totalitarian rhetoric (“Ecriture” para. 8). In his assessment of Hébert, Barthes suggests that the legacy of activist rhetoric reverberates through history, contributing to an upheaval which would ultimately assist in establishing the very tyranny revolutionaries sought to depose.

In its polemical assertions regarding the appropriate aesthetic response to the late eighteenth-century’s revolutionary ferment, William Hazlitt’s 1825 portrait of William Wordsworth in The Spirit of the Age betrays an anxiety—similar to that of modern theory—that language may be misused to impede rather than hasten the radical critique needed to bring about a more equitable social order. Though he praises Wordsworth’s early poetic efforts as appropriately revolutionary in tone, Hazlitt ultimately voices disdain for the Lake poet’s hollow words, deriding Wordsworth’s poem, The Excursion, as exemplifying his cowardly assent to the inequalities of the monarchal order. In the poem, instead of demanding the realization of a post-revolutionary ideal, as Hazlitt does, Wordsworth figures an interior scene of representation capable of deferring the subject’s participation in the violence accompanying revolutionary upheaval. Examined in light of Gans’s elaboration of Jacques Derrida’s différence, Hazlitt’s and Wordsworth’s conflicting understandings of representation and revolutionary violence take on anthropological significance. By grounding the violence that Derrida attributes to language in a hypothetical originary scene, Gans demonstrates how representation typically functions to defer the conflicts that have historically threatened human communities with deleterious violence. I will argue that the play of différence, as it functions to defer conflict, operates more effectively in Wordsworth’s poetry than Hazlitt’s advocacy of the revolutionary ideal. Ultimately, Hazlitt’s activist rhetoric and Wordsworth’s sympathetic poetic depictions of marginalized subjects represent distinct points upon what Gans terms "the gradient of violence," a continuum which unites extremes of action and representation (para. 7).

Reflecting on the revolutionary tenor of Wordsworth’s early poetic productions as they proceed on the victim-conscious principles of the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, Hazlitt laments the lost promise of revolutionary action, which he perceives as emerging via the poet’s radical departure from the eighteenth century's classical subjects and strictly regulated style. Hazlitt speculates that, having been “taught by political opinions to say to the vain pomp and glory of the world, 'I hate ye,'” Wordsworth contrived “to aggrandize the trivial and add charm and novelty to the familiar” (163). For Hazlitt, Wordsworth’s early poetry excels because “[i]t proceeds on a principle of equality, and strives to reduce all things to the same standard” (161). His early verse, says Hazlitt, “partakes of, and is carried along with, the revolutionary movement of our age: the political changes of the day were the model on which he formed and conducted his poetical experiments” (161).
Supplanting violent revolutionary ideals with subversive representations, Wordsworth's poetry, as it appears to Hazlitt, at first incites and then defers the readers' desire to enact the radical rhetoric of the age. The Excursion's Wanderer and Solitary—like those in Wordsworth's early work—are socially insignificant figures, who dominate the moral centre of the poem and the reader's sympathy via the poet's depiction of the world's indifference to their abject circumstances. Wordsworth's repeated presentation of rustic subjects—first in the rural settings of Lyrical Ballads and then amid the florid language and philosophy of The Excursion—constitutes a class-subverting displacement of what Hazlitt terms common objects' "inherent truth and beauty"—a truth Hazlitt claims that "the great despise, [and] the fashionable . . . ridicule" (1992 [1825]:7: 162, 164). The poems of Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads typically present the reader with a poignant incongruity, wherein a single rustic subject dominates the centre of the poem, while the poet-speaker mediates between audience and poetic subject to illustrate the possibility of valuing those who are most often marginalized by the literary, social, and political establishment. Hazlitt and many other critics read these poems, along with their preface, as radical affronts to the oppression of the dominant order.

Later in his career, in his production of The Excursion, Wordsworth carries out the same program, but expands his project by providing an analysis of how his poetic subversions of the establishment also defer violence via the voices of the rustic characters, whose dialogue makes up the majority of the poem. Hazlitt's negative reaction to The Excursion in his Spirit of the Age derives from his preference for the poignant melodramatic poems of Wordsworth's early career, which provide descriptions of social inequality. To Hazlitt, The Excursion's characters' extended reflections upon the violence-deferring capacity of their own poetic presentation to negotiate perennial social and economic inequalities dampen the possibility of the reader's feeling roused to action. For Hazlitt, The Excursion fails because it explores the role of poetic representation in the deferral of violent revolutionary action, whereas Lyrical Ballads' renderings produce a more emotionally rousing (or literally moving) emotional effect. Though both Lyrical Ballads and The Excursion focus on sacralised rural subjects, The Excursion's reflections on the ways its central figures may promote reflective deferral of action are less effective in inciting political activism than the stark representations of injustice presented in Lyrical Ballads. Hazlitt, seeking a sustained critique of the systemic violence accompanying inequality, castigates Wordsworth for abandoning the seemingly radical discourse of his early work, which he hoped would assist in enacting an equitable social order through violent revolutionary upheaval.

Reflecting upon how Derrida treats the threat of violence in Of Grammatology, Tobin Siebers has interpreted Derrida's notion of différance as a description of a violence-deferring representation, which is the same form of representational deferral that operates implicitly in Lyrical Ballads and that The Excursion's characters explicitly discuss. Interpreting Derrida's analysis of Lévi-Strauss's rendition of the myth of metaphysical presence in his The Ethics of Criticism (1988), Siebers points out Derrida's tendency to focus attention away from the threat posed to human communities by internal violence, a threat which is deferred by substituting representations for competitive acts of appropriation. Siebers claims that despite Derrida's critique of Lévi-Strauss's assumption of innocence, which Lévi-Strauss supposes to exist prior to writing, Derrida joins with the anthropologist in diminishing the importance of the actual violence occurring within Tristes tropiques's "Battle of Proper Names." "That one of" the Nambikwara girls, writes Derrida, summarizing Lévi-Strauss's account, "should have 'struck' a 'comrade' is not yet true violence" (Siebers 86; Derrida 113). For both Lévi-Strauss and Derrida, the true violence appears moments later, when the girls verbally assault each other by uttering their rivals' proper names. Thus, the anthropologist and the theorist both overlook the real import of the incident between the little Nambikwaran girls. Siebers explains:

"The Battle of Proper Names" illustrates with perfection the notion of différance, but only if we understand that the object of deferral is violence. Here the system of writing hinders the escalation of physical aggression. The transgression defers the blow into a representational domain. . . . The real violence of the slap is channeled into a cultural representation that subdues it. Instead of responding blow for blow and provoking a cycle of reciprocal violence, the victim retaliates through a cultural system of exchange.

Siebers' various formulations of différance—not as the violent supplementation of writing for speech or speech for writing, but as a means of limiting violence to the realm of representation—establish the practicality of Derrida's theory of language as founded upon a supplement to the violent act of
In a Chronicle of Love and Resentment titled "Ecriture and the Deferral of Violence," Gans takes up Siebers’ rereading of "The Battle of Proper Names" to demonstrate how post-WWII theory has failed to comprehend the primary adaptive advantage of the symbolic in the emergence of the human species from their proto-human index- and icon-using forbears. For Derrida, writing and violence are the same, but, says Gans, Derrida's "critique of the intersubjective violence of writing . . . is focused on denouncing its myths of innocence rather than praising its capacity for creative destruction" (para. 9). Gans, by turning his attention to this lacuna in Derrida's thought, proposes that cultural productions contain traces of the originary scene's violence-deferring aborted gesture of appropriation (Originary Thinking 8-9). Taking up where Derrida's deconstruction leaves off, Gans argues that "[t]he survival of human society depends on the gradient of violence between action and representation, beginning with the first sign that defers the potential conflict over the central object" in the originary scene (Gans, "Ecriture" para. 7). The legacy of this originary scene is complicated, since its original sign gradually evolves into collectively constructed metaphysical objects, which themselves become the embattled moral ideals determining the course of history. It is with the tensions dividing various symbolically defined cultural objects, or metaphysical ideals, that Derrida’s ethical critique of culture takes issue.

Criticizing Derrida’s focus on the relatively limited violence of representation, Siebers points out that Derrida’s indictment of writing and naming "takes for granted that language makes physical violence possible and ignores the alternative that human aggression may in fact exist in a reciprocal relation with language, generating representations that may either contain its escalation or determine the focus of more violence" (84). A difference in language, and the inequitable ethical import of this difference, Siebers suggests, can become too sharp to be deferred through the language of politics or diplomacy. In this way, Siebers formulates in slightly different terms what Gans calls the gradient between representations that ensure the deferral of violent action and representations that tend to "determine the focus of more violence." Poetry too may serve as a mode of deferring violent action, a possibility which Wordsworth demonstrates in his early and most well received poetic productions.

One of Wordsworth’s most striking experiments in this mode comes in "Resolution and Independence," which appeared in his 1802 Poems, in Two Volumes after the publication of Lyrical Ballads in 1798 and 1800. In this poem, Wordsworth continues to explore the common subjects he centralizes in the Preface, by asserting that "[h]umble and rustic life was generally chosen, because, in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language" ("Preface" para. 6). The revolutionary gesture, not only of using common language, but of choosing low and rustic subject-matter corresponds, as Hazlitt notes, to the idealized vision and attempted institution of an egalitarian society, which convulsed Europe during the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars. At the beginning of "Resolution and Independence," Wordsworth figures the alternately ebullient and downcast emotions of a moor-wandering poet as he contemplates the travails of market life’s agon, he happens upon the leech gather, who, in his religiosity and age, represents an increasingly rare centre of ritual attention, which the poet’s description of the man’s speech indicates:

Choice word and measured phrase, above the reach
Of ordinary men; a stately speech;
Such as grave Livers do in Scotland use,
Religious men, who give to God and man their dues. (95-98)

The speech of the leech-gatherer perfectly reflects that celebrated in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, but it also looks backward nostalgically to a period—and place in the form of the much idealized, but still premodern, Scotland—where the authority of religious representation constituted the ostensibly immovable, unifying foundation of traditional society. On first seeing the man, the poet turns the focus of the poem away from the speaker, who is in the grip of anxiety over the whirling changeableness of market society, instead centering upon the leech-gatherer, whom he describes "[a]s a huge stone is sometimes seen to lie / Couched on the bald top of an eminence; / Wonder to all who do the same espy" (57-59). The poet imagines the leech-gatherer’s common, abject solidity as the basis of his centrality in the aesthetic configuration of the poem, which his metaphor urges the reader—or "all who do the same espy"—to
recognize. Wordsworth’s representation of this rustic figure assuages the angst of the poet, who, at first worried over the difficulty of the man’s way of life, takes him as an idealized image, whom the poet might find peace in reflecting upon. As the leech-gatherer finishes his speech, which shows him to be cheerful and of sound mind, the poet states:

I could have laughed myself to scorn to find
In that decrepit Man so firm a mind.
‘God,’ said I, ‘be my help and stay secure;
I’ll think of the Leech-gatherer on the lonely moor!’ (138-40)

Among the many readings this poem could produce, Wordsworth’s vision of the leech-gatherer accomplishes two things that reflect an anthropological understanding of the scenicity of representation. First, it undertakes a revolutionary act, which is carried out by placing a low figure at the centre of poetry’s aesthetic scene—a scene which is traditionally viewed as the provenance of society’s elite and reserved for the depiction of rarified classical subjects. Second, the speaker hails the representation of the once marginal, now centralized, figure as an object of contemplation capable of deferring resentment in a subject engaged in the tumultuous changes that characterize the rise of modern market society. By centralizing the leech-gatherer, Wordsworth’s speaker does not urge the reader to action, suggesting the necessity of immediately enacting a revolutionary inversion of hierarchy, but represents the aesthetic differences in the social hierarchy as subject to the play of différance in substituting a rustic figure for the usual foci of the traditional highbrow poetic scene. Twelve years later, Wordsworth’s *Excursion* carries on the same revolutionary project, while further attempting to minimize his audience’s resentment through the device of dramatic dialogue.

*The Excursion*’s format as a dramatic dialogue departs from Wordsworth typical lyric form, wherein a lone poetic voice reflects on a scene or subject, to depict a community of subjects collectively focused on natural, common objects, which are mediated through the representations of the conversing subjects’ imaginary visions. By deploying this novel form, Wordsworth attempts to move beyond the usual structure of romantic poetry, in which, as Gans demonstrates in terms of the scenicity of the aesthetic centre and periphery, "[t]he guarantee of first-generation romanticism is that of the peripheral user-creator of the sign" (*Originary Thinking* 169). The early Wordsworth and his contemporaries seemed to say: "Before you can resent my use of representation, you cannot avoid attending to it" (169). However, as Gans points out, "it is naïve to suppose that the emanation of language from the periphery can take place without the conversion of its place of emission into a new center" (169). Aware of his position as an especially voluble, and therefore resented, member of the periphery, Wordsworth, in *The Excursion*, contrives to explicitly accept responsibility for creating a scene focused upon his poet-persona’s emission of a sign, while simultaneously attempting to evade the necessary resentment his pre-eminence guaranteed him by allowing other, non-poet voices to take precedence. As Sally Bushell observes, the conservative critic and founder of *The Edinburgh Review* Francis Jeffery’s negative responses to *The Excursion* reflect his lack of sympathy for Wordsworth’s general poetic strategy of aggrandizing the low and marginal—a strategy Jeffery saw as inimical to the stability of England’s social hierarchy (Bushell 31-32). Projecting his poetic vision into the social centre of England’s literary life, Wordsworth, throughout the early part of his career, speaks for the marginal from the margins and suffers the censure of critics, who are, ultimately, his fellow peripheral and resentful subjects.

In *The Excursion*, Wordsworth tries a slightly different strategy. Instead of dominating the scene with his well known lyricist’s voice, Wordsworth endeavors to cast The Poet’s voice as one of several other voices—those of The Solitary, The Wanderer, and The Pastor—who all participate as equals in a conversation. In *Re-reading The Excursion: Narrative, Response and the Wordsworthian Dramatic Voice* (2002), Bushell suggests that, though there are “limitations in the extent to which we [readers may] accept those voices [in the poem] to be fully dramatized,” the work “is . . . a series of exchanges and debates” (3); at certain moments, the substance of these exchanges reflects how best to avoid resentment via the contemplation of shared signs instead of attempting to appropriate the mimetically desired centre. Such gesturing towards an object without attempting to master it is what his early poems achieve by, as Matthew Schneider argues, deploying “a radically simplified poetic diction and rhetorical style that can only be described as ostensive in order to depict what [Wordsworth] called ‘the primary laws of our nature’” (250). Wordsworth’s 1814 effort to discuss this effect of his poetry in *The Excursion* was poorly received, largely because, as Hazlitt would latter
reflect:

It affects a system without having any intelligible clue to one; and instead of unfolding a principle in various and striking lights, repeats the same conclusions till they become flat and insipid. Mr. Wordsworth's mind is obtuse, except as it is the organ and the receptacle of accumulated feelings: it is not analytic, but synthetic; it is reflecting, rather than theoretical. (*The Spirit of the Age* 1854 [1825]: 129)

In this passage, Hazlitt suggests that Wordsworth should continue to do what he is good at, which consists of reflecting upon emotional states rather than attempting to present a theoretical system, for which he has no skill. Wordsworth's *Excursion* shows the author—a celebrator of children, flowers, and fine views—overreaching his talents, dabbling in prolix attempts at philosophy, and thereby boring and disappointing his audiences' expectations. Thus, Wordsworth's attempt to create a more inclusive, dialogic aesthetic scene—one where Wordsworth invites his readers to understand the principle of deferral he perceives in his works—fails to capture the attention of his critical audience, who reject his didacticism, preferring his usual mode of representing rustic subjects as catalysts for empathetic emotional experience, which mediate between themselves and the necessarily resented poet.

Bushell identifies Wordsworth's attempt, as the poet figure of *The Excursion*, to speak for others as another of the sources of Hazlitt's displeasure with the dramatized dialogue of the poem. "[F]or Hazlitt," writes Bushell, "Wordsworth speaking in his own voice promotes admiration and sympathy. Wordsworth speaking for, or on behalf of, others does not" (29). According to Hazlitt, writes Bushell, "[t]he Romantic mind is interested in processes of understanding, governed by 'a bias to abstraction' . . . and as such unsuited to dramatic representation" (30). It is upon the basis of this aesthetic judgment, Bushell claims, that Hazlitt criticizes Wordsworth's *Excursion*. In Hazlitt's assessment of the practices of good dramatists—who are able to present "[e]ach character . . . [as] a centre of repulsion to the rest; and [show that] it is [the characters'] hostile interests brought into collision, that must tug at their heart-strings" (qtd. in Bushell 30)—Wordsworth and Romantic poets in general are deficient (29):

[F]or Hazlitt, *The Excursion*, placed alongside such a model [of drama], exhibits all the weaknesses of the period as a non-dramatic age, presenting a tendency to debate and speculate rather than to act, a circle of characters who largely 'look the same way' and exploring difference only in order to affirm human sympathies more strongly. (30)

Thus, Hazlitt's disparagement arises in part from his distaste for the relatively static aesthetization of character rivalry in Wordsworth's first extended, multi-character dramatic dialogue. Hazlitt's sense of this inadequacy is compounded by the critic's impatience with Wordsworth's deficiencies in propounding a system and his consequent didacticism. Despite failing to attain to Hazlitt's standards for philosophically persuasive works and excellent dramatic action, the dialogues of *The Excursion* represent the sympathetic ostensive gesture, which Schneider deems characteristic of Wordsworth's poetry.

The lines in which Wordsworth undertakes to provide a system that explains the resentment-ameliorating possibilities of the aesthetic come in the form of a dialogue, particularly in Book III and Book IV, which are respectively titled "Despondency" and "Despondency Corrected." Wordsworth's poem succeeds in articulating an awareness of its modest capacity to defer the enactment of violence, accompanying the revolutionaries' feverish pursuit of idealized presence, which appears in their utopic visions of a leveled social order. Wordsworth suggests that aesthetic representation may defer the resentment that often propels the violent action of revolutionary projects. In "Despondency," the figure of the Solitary laments his pursuit of an equitable present through revolutionary fanaticism, an obsession which takes him dangerously close to committing violent outrages. Admonishing the Solitary against succumbing to feelings of disappointment at the failure of the Revolution and enduring dissatisfaction with England's social order, the sagacious Wanderer states that resentment may be allayed by attending to the idealized peacefulness of animals in their rural setting. "If," the Wanderer states, "with the forward will and groveling soul / Of man, offended, liberty is here": in an aesthetization of nature (4.375-76). He begins to elaborate this vision by asserting that an
The Wanderer suggests that idealized representations of animals function to sublimate the antagonism roused in the Solitary by the envy-producing rivalry inherent in the prevailing social order. The mollification of the Solitary's agonistic desire, accomplished through his internal reflections upon animals' pacific relationship to nature, recalls the aesthetic deferral effected by Wordsworth's humble rustic characters in *Lyrical Ballads*. By situating such lowly figures—animals and the rural poor—at the centre of his poetry's aesthetic and ethical scenes, Wordsworth attempts to orient his audience's attention away from France's dramatic enactment of ritual violence, which dominated his and all of Europe's notice at the outbreak of the Terror.

The impact of the French Revolution upon English poets, and especially Wordsworth, is well known. Wordsworth's *Prelude*, which was begun in 1798 appeared only after Wordsworth's death, is an account not only of a poet's coming of age, but also of his disillusionment with the radical political causes that propelled the unexpected violence following from the first revolutionary acts that culminated in the execution of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. Writing *The Prelude* in 1798, Wordsworth expresses the elation he and his contemporaries felt "When Reason seemed the most to assert her rights / . . . / A prime enchanter to assist the work / Which then was going forward in her name" (*Prelude* [1805] 10:697-700). These hopes were dashed, when, as Wordsworth writes, revolutionaries "now, become oppressors in their turn, / Frenchmen had changed a war of self-defense / For one of conquest, losing sight of all / Which they had struggled for" (11:206-09). A year after Wordsworth began to write *The Prelude*, notes Simon Bainbridge:

Coleridge [wrote] to his friend and fellow poet Wordsworth identifying the Revolution as the theme for the era's definitive poem, writing . . . that "I wish you would write a poem, in blank verse, addressed to those who, in consequence of the complete failure of the French Revolution, have thrown up all hopes of the amelioration of mankind. . . . It would do great good" (Bainbridge 192).

It was, Bainbridge further notes, Coleridge's urgings that "informed Wordsworth's examination of the Revolution's impact in *The Prelude* and *The Excursion* . . . but poems on the events in France had begun to appear very quickly" (192). The early period of the Revolution appeared to the English poets as the realization of a poetic ideal. When reflecting in *The Prelude* on his visit to France in 1790, Wordsworth famously writes that the period was "a time when Europe was rejoiced, / France standing on top of golden hours, / And human nature seeming born again" (*Prelude* [1850] 6.352-4). "It was in such millennial terms," writes Bainbridge, "that many poets responded to events in the early years of the decade, understanding these events through biblical [eyes] . . . as the second coming of Christ, bringing about the end to the old world and the creation of a new one" (200). Referencing M. H. Abrams influential essay, "English Romanticism: The Spirit of the Age" (1984), Bainbridge acknowledges that the increasingly violent disasters overtaking the revolutionary movement caused poets such as Coleridge, Southey, and Wordsworth to recast the notion of revolution, not as a political project to be enacted in reality, but as a personally transformative endeavor undertaken within the individual imagination (201). For the English poets writing at the turn of the century, Abrams states, "[h]ope is shifted from the history of mankind to the mind of a single individual, from militant external action to an imaginative act" (66). Beyond accomplishing an interior revolution particular to the poet's mind, the advent of print culture allowed for the wide and contagious dissemination of this representational revolution throughout England, communicating the revolution's values to the next generation of poets, who, though they scorned their predecessors' inconstancy, maintained similar positions regarding the imaginary's role in the epochal process of social change (Bainbridge 204).

Reconsidering some of these interpretations, in an essay entitled "Wordsworth's Revolutions, 1793-1798," Kenneth R. Johnston retracts Wordsworth's transformation from a supporter of a violent enactment of
revolutionary ideals to a promulgator of a pacific poetry of a revolutionary imaginary. Attempting to refine the simple assertion, derived from Abrams, that Wordsworth's cooled revolutionary ambitions led him to the innovations of *Lyrical Ballads* and the Romantic movement generally, Johnston challenges new historicist Margorie Levinson's influential attack on "Wordsworth for (as she puts it) achieving poetical 'insight' at the cost of socio-political 'oversight'" by examining the "larger arc of Wordsworth's career" (170). Proposing that, within this arc, "Wordsworth 'revolves' from an initially conventional poetry and conventional politics, through a stage of radical politics and conventional but unstable poetry, into a period of radical poetic and unstable but increasingly conventional liberal to conservative . . . politics" (171), Johnston argues that it was largely Wordsworth's concern over the fate of his child, Catherine, and her mother, Annette Vallon, that led him to reconsider his initial enthusiasm for the violent enactment of the revolution, which—in an unpublished letter to Bishop Llandaff (an erstwhile supporter of the revolution who balked at regicide)—went so far as to justify the execution of Louis XVI (170-71). Johnston goes on to tentatively suggest that the news of "the bloody repression of the counter-revolution in the Vendée," where Annette's royalist family lived, impacted Wordsworth's opinion of the Revolution's violent course. As he composed and revised works that grappled with themes of liberal optimism and royalist oppression between 1790 and 1798 (specifically *Descriptive Sketches [1791-2] An Evening Walk [1793], and The Borderers [1796-7]*), he labored under the knowledge that his French family remained under continued threat due to the discord on the continent (177-8). The anxiety over Annette's and Catherine's well-being in the face of the counter-revolution's violence, Johnston suggests, eventually influenced Wordsworth's choice to present the pathetically distracted mother, who is abandoned in a time of war, as the central sympathetic figure in "The Ruined Cottage," a poem which was composed in the period of his anxiety over Annette and Catherine. "The Ruined Cottage" would later appear in the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* and, in 1814, a version of "The Cottage," a poem which was composed in the period of his anxiety over Annette and Catherine. "The Ruined Cottage" would later appear in the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* and, in 1814, a version of "The Ruined Cottage" would become the first book of *The Excursion*. In Johnston's reading of Wordsworth's shift in priorities, far from representing a political ideal to which—under the Tory pressure of Pitt's 1795 "Gagging Acts"—the poet is too cowardly to aggrandize an activist position, Wordsworth's aesthetic turn towards the pathos of the menaced marginal subject arises from his immediately personal understanding of its consequences for those most vulnerable to the effects of violence.

Wordsworth's newfound non-violent commitment receives paradoxical reactions from both ends of literary criticism's political spectrum. The immediacy of his own anxiety via the specter of a potential personal tragedy opens the imaginative poetic capacities for pacifist melodrama, which even Jeffrey, in his excoriating review of *The Excursion*, felt obliged to point out as exemplary of Wordsworth's skill (Jeffrey 7). Though the conservative Jeffrey finds Wordsworth's elevation of common subjects to be disruptive to the traditional hierarchy, he must still acknowledge that the classical effect of pathos is achieved regardless of the gaucherie of Wordsworth's innovations. On the pro-revolutionary end of the spectrum, Hazlitt derides Wordsworth's efforts as diluted manifestations of his former zeal. In his equivocal treatment of Wordsworth in *The Spirit of the Age*, Hazlitt reflects nostalgically on Wordsworth's and the Lake School's former radicalism, while denigrating the movement's more recent efforts as indicative of a lapsed revolutionary faith.

In *The Spirit of the Age*, Hazlitt reserves many of his most cutting remarks for those poets whose revolutionary posture, which he attributes to their defiant choice of common subject matter, appears to wane later in their careers. In the opening line of his portrait of Coleridge, Hazlitt states: "The present age is an age of talkers, and not of doers" (1992 [1825]:7: 98). Coleridge, Hazlitt goes on to argue, is among the age's most inactive talkers. After referring to his inconstancy to the cause of the French Revolution; his failure to bring to fruition his pantisocracy scheme; and his increasing conservatism after the treason trials of 1794, Hazlitt concludes the Paris edition of his portrait with a general reflection on the cowardly lack of political commitment displayed by the period's poets and typified in Coleridge's behavior:

> the poets, creatures of sympathy, could not stand the frowns both of king and people. They did not like to be shut out when places and pensions . . . were about to be distributed. They did not stomach being sent to Coventry, and Mr Coleridge sounded a retreat for them by the help of casuistry and a musical voice. . . . (238)

Hazlitt attributes this tendency to retreat from action into empty representations to both Coleridge and his closest associate, Wordsworth. Coleridge's "words were hollow," Hazlitt continues, "but they pleased the ear' of his friends of the Lake School, who turned back disgusted and panic-struck from the dry desert of
The opening sentence of the portrait of Wordsworth continues this attack on the Lake School, when it asserts that "Mr Wordsworth's genius is a pure emanation of the Spirit of the Age" (161). Read as an extension of Coleridge's portrait, Hazlitt's conception of Wordsworth implies that he only produces un-actualized representations, which aspire—but ultimately fail—to enact the Revolution’s principles.

The political radicalism advocated in the portraits comprising Hazlitt's *Spirit of the Age* demands a direct translation of subversive representations into radical acts, which Hazlitt supposes will instantiate the revolutionary ideal in the form of the French Republic. According to Jonathan Bate, Hazlitt was "one of the few English Romantics to remain loyal to the ideals of the French Revolution throughout his life" (para. 7). His commitment went so far as to support the French conquest of Europe: "Hazlitt always believed that Napoleon was the sword-arm, not the extinguisher, of the ideals of the French Revolution; the battle of Waterloo brought him near to distraction" (para. 25); previously, when the Emperor abdicated in 1814, Hazlitt "took it almost as a personal blow" (para. 24). In his last work, *The Life of Napoleon Bonaparte* (1828), Hazlitt argues for the legitimacy of Louis XVI’s execution, writing: "[t]he condemnation of Louis XVI. stands on the same . . . foundation as that of Charles I . . . and the object of both was . . . to remove the most dangerous enemy of the state, and also to set an example . . . that if kings presume on being placed above the law . . . there is a justice above the law" (158).

Faithful to his pursuit of the Revolution’s ideals, Hazlitt’s criticism of Wordsworth’s latter-day work derives from his sense that the poet, having abandoned his revolutionary principles for aristocratic patronage, no longer wills an equitable social order, in which the marginal subjects of his early poetry enjoy privilege. Referring to Wordsworth’s "later philosophic productions," Hazlitt laments that these poems “seem to have been composed not in a cottage at Grasmere, but among the half-inspired groves and stately recollections of Cole-Orton,” which was the country seat of one of Wordsworth’s patrons, Sir George Howland Beaumont (1992 [1825]: 7: 164, 299). *The Excursion’s* depictions of rustic characters, who speak in philosophical terms and polished language, appear to Hazlitt as "a departure from and dereliction of [Wordsworth’s] first principles" (164). In his assessment of the poem, Hazlitt reads the hypocrisy of Wordsworth’s lapsed radicalism into the poet’s choice of subjects, suggesting that *The Excursion’s* aggrandizement of common folk strikes a ridiculous juxtaposition against Wordsworth’s elevated style and attempts at philosophy:

The EXCURSION, we believe, fell stillborn from the press. There was something abortive, and clumsy, and ill-judged in the attempt. It was long and laboured. The personages, for the most part, were low, the fare rustic: the plan raised expectations which were not fulfilled, and the effect was like being ushered into a stately hall and invited to sit down to a splendid banquet in the company of clowns, and with nothing but successive courses of apple-dumplings served up. It was not even toujours perdrix! (The Spirit of the Age 1854 [1825]: 129)

The jarring, incongruous aesthetic effect Hazlitt decries in this critique is a species of the radical choice of language and subject matter he lauds in Wordsworth’s earlier work. When Wordsworth, in "Michael, A Pastoral" from *Lyrical Ballads*, presents his readers with the expectation of a lyric idyll—replacing the attic swains with rude Lake District shepherds, who, instead of singing odes to nympha, lament the insidious lure and deleterious effects of modern market society upon their idealized rural paradise—he shocks his readers by making rude subject matter the centre of his moral vision and inviting the reader to contemplate this vision’s humble pathos. Hazlitt’s acerbically ironic metaphor of country house clowns itself constitutes a parody of Wordsworth’s recurring technique, as it relies upon supplementing the traditional neo-classical centres of mimetic attention with his idiosyncratic elevation of peripheral subjects.

By deploying irony, Hazlitt intends to shame Wordsworth for having abandoned his radical denunciations of the established poetic order, which is linked to the oppression caused by the dominant social and political system. However, the vestiges of Hazlitt’s refined sensibilities regarding the appropriate matching of speaker and discourse lead him to lapse into the very error that he accuses Wordsworth of succumbing to. Hazlitt wishes to uphold a standard of literary excellence manifest in realistic consistency, but he does not wish to abide these subjects’ crude attempts to represent their own position vis-à-vis the status quo. To Hazlitt’s mind, the ethical lessons of Wordworth’s selection of rustic subjects—that the poor masses should take precedence over the wealthy and powerful few—are implicit in his decision to foreground them. The unlikely
possibility that virtually illiterate people could give an involved description of the class critique that they represent in the poem constitutes, for Hazlitt, and unbalanced composition. Hazlitt wants less philosophy and more poignant melodrama in order to highlight the abhorrent and tragic incongruity of the rustics in relation to their indifferent masters. Wistful for the initial radical impact of *Lyrical Ballads*, Hazlitt suggests that Wordsworth can no longer effectively serve to incite the type of physically active political engagement Hazlitt believes in.

When, in the struggle over political ideals, language users are inspired by rhetoric to abandon the symbolic and attempt to physically dominate the centre of the scene of representation, real violence often ensues. For example, melodramatic works—which present the audience with an oppressed subject and oppressing villain, who both resemble figures in the social world—may function to incite revolutionary action. The representational seeds of the actual violence resulting from revolutionary action appear in Peter Brooks's description of melodrama, as an aesthetic form coming "into being in a world where the traditional imperatives of truth and ethics have been violently thrown into question, yet where the promulgation of truth and ethics, their instauration as a way of life, is of immediate, daily, political concern" (15). His definition of melodrama characterizes Hazlitt and other political radicals' revolutionary rhetoric, which often depicts "an intense emotional and ethical drama based on the manichaean struggle of good and evil. . . . The polarization of good and evil works toward revealing their presence and operation as real forces in the world" (12-13). In melodrama language contains an increased potential to incite resentment up to the point where words cannot be found to express—and thereby defer—the inchoate violence exploding out from resentment. While acknowledging this possibility, Gans's originary hypothesis suggests that, more often than not, language succeeds in deferring physical conflict, claiming that so long as the language users contemplate the representation (for instance, imaginatively indulging their revolutionary sentiments instead of enacting them) conflict in the social world is deferred. In this way, Derrida's *différance*, as it operates on Gans's gradient between violent action and representation, aptly characterizes the roles Romantic rhetoric and poetry play in the revolutionary ferment of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The arc of Wordsworth's career in relation to his changing attitude regarding the necessity of revolutionary violence—in which the threat to his family, as Johnston suggests, played an important role—illuminates the internalization of revolutionary principles to the imaginary scene shared between Wordsworth and his readers. Unwilling to engage in rhetoric that could potentially inflame his readers to violent action, Wordsworth pioneers a poetics that imagines the appropriation of the centre by the periphery. As the Nambikwaran antagonist defers physical violence against her rival by betraying the rival's proper name, Wordsworth's later works, like those of his early career, perform *différance* by privileging idealized, but common, characters, whose occupation of the aesthetic scene's centre constitutes an affront to the established order's tendency to focus on conventionally noble subjects. Violating the accepted neoclassical conventions, which take idealized Attic figures as their speakers, Wordsworth's poetics undertake a double displacement, or supplementation, of the established order. First, like the young Nambikwarans using forbidden proper names to pursue their mimetic antagonism, he violates a taboo by replacing the shepherd and nymph of the conventional idyll with the gross figures of the contemporary English lake country. Second, also similar to the *Tristes tropiques* girls' substitution of word for deed, Wordsworth distances himself from the prospect of undertaking physical action in response to the social inequalities he describes. Like the children whispering their rivals' sacred and taboo proper names to the anthropologist instead of continuing to exchange blows, Wordsworth defers potentially violent action by eschewing activist rhetoric and aggrandizing those subjects who the literati of his period deemed unworthy of serious poetic attention. The violence-deferring capacity of Wordsworth's poetry is present in both *Lyrical Ballads* and *The Excursions*, but it is implicit in the *Lyrical Ballads* and explicit in the discourse of *The Excursion*’s characters.

Rejecting Wordsworth's modest efforts to reorient popular aesthetic and ethical values, Hazlitt justifies the bloodshed of the Revolution, indicating that his rhetoric gravitates to the activist extreme on the continuum uniting violent action and representation. In his declining years, writing *The Life of Napoleon Bonaparte*, Hazlitt emphasizes the symbolic, violence-deferring quality of Louis XVI’s execution—a gesture indicative of Hazlitt's enduring revolutionary radicalism. "In fine," he writes, "the end and object of this act [the execution], ‘which was not done in a corner,’ was to let the world see that there was a majesty of the people as well as of kings, which might be too long insulted and trifled with" (1: 159). Hazlitt’s account of the Revolution, while regularly condemning common acts of brutality, figures the tyranny of monarchy as the ultimate violence (158-59). Through the killing of the King, Hazlitt argues, potential tyrannical violence
against the people may be deferred. In the long term, the example of the French Republic provides an alternative model to monarchical rule, with its attendant structural violence. However, the immediate outbreak of the Terror, along with the mobilization of the Allies in response to Louis XVI’s death, brought about total war, which, according to Hazlitt, the symbolic and real violence of the execution was designed to prevent.(2) Ultimately, on the continuum between action and representation, Hazlitt’s defense of a symbolic execution stands closer to the extreme of violent action than Wordsworth’s subversive representation of marginalized subjects.

Hazlitt’s faith in the violence-deferring capacity of symbolic execution differs widely from the pacifism of Wordsworth’s rustic Wanderer, who presents the individual’s contemplative naturalism as a means to avoiding violent action. Nevertheless, Hazlitt’s reading of revolutionary themes into Wordsworth’s early poetry demonstrates how representations of society’s victims may incite violent activism. Language that defers action and language that indexes the threat of violence both protect the community from escalating conflict. As Gans points out, these two modes of language use stand relative to each other on a continuum between extremes of action and representation. The representation of a threat inspires the language using community to act by ritually and symbolically expelling the offending object. Simultaneously, the aporia of representation (or différance) delays the subject’s active engagement with the object he or she contemplates. Thus, the continuous relationship between Hazlitt’s revolutionary rhetoric and Wordsworth’s hierarchy-inverting poetics effectively illustrates the gradient of violence separating extremes of action and representation.

Works Cited


**Notes**

1. In their recent *Anthropoetics* contribution titled "‘Revolution!’—The Rhetoric of Exclamation," Chris Fleming and John O’Carroll summarize their reflection on the paradoxical statements that serve as revolutionary slogans, stating that such "paradoxes … supplied [their study with] a clue to seeking the anthropoetic paradoxes that signal the appropriative nature of revolutionary rhetoric, and enabled the tracing of whether (as we suspected) at present most revolutionary discourse operates to defer violence, but has always the potential for its incitations to take hold" (para. 42). Attempting to appropriate the centre and redistribute the central objects, users of paradoxical revolutionary rhetoric are most often pleased to exclaim—that is, represent—their revolutionary vision, but such paradoxes, when sufficiently incoherent, may give way to real, potentially violent, action. (back)

2. Enumerating the practical reasons for Louis XVI’s execution, Hazlitt suggests that leaving the King alive would only lead to more violence: "Would his banishment," Hazlitt asks, "prevent his return at the head of his hordes of foreigners and bands of emigrants?" (1: 157-58). (back)

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Reflections on the Popular/High Art Continuum

Seven small essays, ventures, somewhat in the original French sense of the word *essai*

Ian Dennis

Essay 1 — On Making Things Happen

W. H. Auden: "poetry makes nothing happen" (1)—by poetry, let us say he meant high art. High art makes nothing happen.

Making nothing happen. Surely it is harder than it sounds, even for a moment, to make *nothing* happen. To defer anything at all happening. Because things are going to happen.

But then, deferral makes the human happen—the human, that guardian, that font, that sanctuary for the nothingness of the universe. Deferral makes the human happen, the Sartrean *néant* of consciousness, call it—the human makes culture, that collective making of nothing, happen. And "Nothing will come of nothing," quoeth the soon-to-be mad king. Just ask the creditors of bankrupt Detroit, who wanted its art collection sold off and have yet to see a dime on their lost dollars. (2) And once that culture-nothing has happened, the nothing which Generative Anthropology defines as the opposite of the something of violence—once *that* nothing has happened, other things may begin to happen, but only things laced with nothingness, significant things, things only half things, half thing and half-sign, half made and half potentially made, half something and half nothing.

"Here," said the president, the maker, proximate maker anyway, of the most cataclysmic something his nation has ever experienced, the violence that will soon sweep him too away as it has so many others; "here," said he, "is the little lady who made the big war." "But I have had a vision," replied Harriet Beecher Stowe—or at any rate, should have, or would have replied (3)—"I have had a vision of what art can do."

Popular art, that is, that she and her president agreed did, does, can make something happen—that something to which we have alluded, violence—and will make it happen again. As with many visions, this was probably both right and wrong.

Maybe *Uncle Tom's Cabin* didn't start the American Civil War or even help to. Maybe novels make nothing happen, too—hard to know how one could prove it one way or another. But some people at the time and more people now seem to find it plausible, presumably on the analogy of what they themselves feel when reading the book or, more likely, what they feel other people likely feel or felt. The kinds of feelings that might make other people start wars, and so on, whether or not they actually do. So, we'll venture that novels, or popular art anyway, make at least the *feeling* of something happening happen. Whereas, then, might we say that high art makes the feeling of nothing happening happen? Certainly, many undergraduates would endorse the latter formulation. *Waiting for Godot* famously made nothing happen, twice. So it must have seemed to those first audiences who naively entered the playhouse expecting something ... else. This, the disabled undergraduates could have told them, is what high art *always* does, not just twice but over and over and over!
At any rate, let us assert this much, upon the authority of the artists and at least some of their audience:

High art makes the feeling (at least) of nothing happening happen.

Popular art makes the feeling (at least) of something happening happen.

Pregnant derivation: The high and popular art distinction, as a distinction, is located in feelings experienced.

**Essay 2 — On Askesis, Wisdom, and Plenitude**

A brief review of the concept of the aesthetic in Generative Anthropology.


Oscillation between imaginary possession and recognised inviolability is characteristic of all aesthetic experience. (118)

The aesthetic is "an effect rather than a solid state" (123) and its "minimal locus" is "the individual's own scene of representation" where it "offers an internal solution to resentment," or indeed, "permits an unresentful vision of the centre" (125).

"The opposition between the high and popular aesthetic modes, or ‘art’ and ‘entertainment,’ reflects a tension internal to the originary scene which emerges only in the Romantic era. In the context of the contemplation of the central object of the scene, the moment of art looks back to the renunciation of appetite implicit in the sign, whereas that of entertainment looks forward to the appetitive satisfaction of the communal feast that will follow" (171).

"'Popular' and 'high' are poles rather than mutually exclusive categories" (172).

Popular art "denies the askesis of the sign by anticipating the alimentary satisfaction that follows its emission in the originary event. The anticipation of my individual portion is founded on my renunciation of the whole" (173).

And, from *Chronicle* 315:

Popular culture, whether it be pre-industrial folk culture or the mass-produced culture of industrial societies, is entertainment for those who . . . adopt, whether for a moment or a lifetime, an attitude of indifference to the functioning of society as a whole.(4)

Renunciation of the whole, however, is clearly at least a degree of askesis, and indifference to social functioning often enough a form of prudence. Taken together, indeed, might not such an attitude even be wise? Healthy? One cannot have it all. To try to have it all is finally to have nothing. And even if one senses, dimly or acutely as the case may be, its contagious character, nonetheless, to live happily or well is to come to some sort of accommodation with desire. To be peaceful is to be happy with one's piece, of the collective human pie, to imagine oneself the equal of the great people in the world, to be unwilling to change one's place with kings because of the beauty of one's car or house, haircut or attitude.

Popular art models such accommodations. Much of it is suffused with a feeling not of fragments or limits but of glorious plenitude, from the endless un-spooling of Scheherazade's narratives of sex, violence, riches and mysterious transformation, to Michael Bublé's exuberant promise that "the best is yet to come."(5) If this reflects originary resentment, everyday resentment in the more familiar sense of the term is often distant.

High art conveys an aching sense of the inaccessibility, even the emptiness of the centre; pop art, the fun, the fullness, the richness of the periphery. It may be only a part, but, often enough and as long as it lasts, it feels like everything. Or enough.
Also from Chronicle 315: "The popular subject seeks imaginary satisfactions in compensation for his worldly frustrations, but since his ‘oppressor’ is real whereas the fulfilment of desire is not, the heart of popular culture is revenge on the former rather than celebration of the latter."

The private fulfilment of desires and the resultant public good together constitute, of course, the beating "heart" of the market, and much popular art joyfully reflects the productive exuberance of the market system. Are not all human satisfactions half-fantasy, the realization of mediated desires, imagined even as enjoyed? Do we not eat or play or drive our car or make love in an aesthetic mode? Is this not "real"? Such satisfactions combine, certainly, with a sceptical watchfulness, a reflexive resentment of claims to inequality which—while unpleasant enough in some of its manifestations—might in turn be considered an important safeguard of democratic market systems. Even a prerequisite thereof.

Popular art may be "parasitic" on high culture (Originary Thinking 174), but only in the sense that all market activity, economic or otherwise, is parasitic on a public centre, the askesis it demands, the peace, order, and good government it maintains.

Essay 3. On the Continuum of Attitudes and the Imbrication of Experiences

Let us muse on the phrase, "for a moment or a lifetime," from the quotations above. Consumers of popular "adopt, whether for a moment or a lifetime, an attitude of indifference to the functioning of society as a whole." One may wonder how common it is for modern denizens of the market to retain such an attitude lifelong, hegemonically, uninterruptedly. To imagine such consistency is to imagine lives into which no glimpse of the transcendent ever pierces, not even a transitory apprehension of what those around them, from varying positions and with varying degrees of naivety or sophistication, revere as "higher things" or the beauty, in any of its many forms, of self-sacrifice. It is to imagine those never stirred by represented heroism except as they imagine themselves performing it, or as they resent its purchase on their own desires. But let us concede the possibility. Still, for the purposes of the current essay, we will concern ourselves with the many others, those who experience movement from one attitude to another.

Attitudes towards "the functioning of society" we must call ethical, and if the same people move in and out of them we may as well call them ethical moods. Such moods alter, sometimes, for example, in response to the proximity or distance of objects of temptation. These distances, or the difficulties that intervene between the images provoked by art and their imagined appropriation, we may well say are under the control of the artist, and inhere as formal properties of the art-work. But this formulation does not recognise the active aspect of the human experience of art, the moods or contexts of desire which drive people to expose themselves to one or other attitude-adjusting art-experience. A person may say, today I will defer, I will have no Rachmaninoff today, I will have Stockhausen; I will shun Phillip Glass in favour of Steve Reich. I will have John Cage sitting for 4 minutes and 33 seconds in front of a piano. Of course, the artists may sometimes ambush us, all or partly unawares. Perhaps we thought John Cage was going to play that piano, that he was going to play a bagatelle, or some Chopin.

Or, on another day, I may adopt a mixed or intermediate attitude. I may tune my brow to the middle. I may tinker with, or play host to artworks which tinker with the interval of deferral. I may ask to be surprised, for suspense, as to the interval or eventual outcome—immediate gratification or endless deferral. (Even if, in another, temporarily quiescent area of my mind, I know quite well that no deferral is ever truly endless and every gratification must pass at least fleetingly through form.) I may be lazy, or alertly attentive, attend a little or a lot to the means, indeed the forms, by which my desire is awakened, deferred, gratified.

Ethical moods are a luxuriance of the market, presumably not available on the originary scene, which required everyone who was part of that scene to be in the same mood. They are thus less available in ritual cultures, or in moments of reversion thereto, as in the passions of a mob. Consumerism, for all its hailing, for all its manipulations, its relentlessness, for all its wafting of background muzak, has notably less control over our ethical moods, and the influence it does have is liable to denunciation. It insinuates, true, its effects accumulate, and while it is entirely possible to turn a cold shoulder to any one of its blandishments it is certainly difficult to snub them all—doubtless the row of pure asceticism if harder now to hoe than once it was. On some days, too, it is harder to resist than on others—the tides and gulf-streams, currents, eddies and mere dimples animating the ocean of global desire across which we tack are as changeable in force as
But considerable variations are possible in the way of responses, just as considerably different experiences along the hi-pop continuum are possible, for different people, for the same people on different days, in different moments of one day, in different epochs of individual lives, or the histories of cultures. Every single oscillation—are we not forced to concede?—in all the myriad of them since the originary scene, is, has been and will be temporally asymmetrical, to one side or the other, to a slightly different degree than any of the rest. To say the aesthetic experience is individual is in effect to concede this. The sign is collective, attention is joint, but the virtual movement back and forth from contemplated sign to imagined consummation must occur in an interior solitude whose experienced temporality need not be synchronous with the unanimous exterior movement from deferral to sparagmos which that inner movement anticipates and recapitulates.

If aesthetic experiences are temporally asymmetrical, they are obviously also affectively so. There are weightings, preserved by that great enabler of the human, memory, and not apparently or always dependent upon the relative intervals of oscillation. One instant of glorious formal significance, one piercing recognition of the beauty of the object of desire, may outweigh in memory a long saturnalia of imagined consumption, haunting the post-prandial, the post-coital vacancy with the squandered promise of lost deferrals. Maybe we also feel beat the "heart" of pop in this very experience of loss or chagrin, that tells of pop's wasteful economy of desire, the glorious potentialities too soon gone into the ever-devouring maw of consummation. Different responses to this experience are also possible, of course, by different persons or by persons at different times, from the frenzied return to the original source of stimulation, seeking an ever stronger dose of the same sparagmatic drug, to the gradual or sudden disenchantment with the pop process itself, and thus the launching into a paradoxical quest for more of less, for a longer moment of deferral and beauty, and for the art-forms that provide it. Many an experience of high art has been bounced to from the springboard of pop.

Perhaps the metaphor of the continuum even obscures an important truth, namely that all pop harbours within itself the high seeds of its own transcendence or destruction, moves through temporal phases unpredictably but inevitably intersected by vertical intimations of the timeless.

**Essay 4 - On Qualitative Judgement in the Aesthetics of Resentment**

Flattery is subject to aesthetic judgement. Flattery is to different degrees resistible, but if artful, can be glimpsed and admired in its formal beauty even as it works—even as this glimpse allows it to work—its nefarious purposes upon our desires. Flattery, in such circumstances, will get you everywhere. But, flattery may also be potent when naive, sincerest in its helpless mimeticism, beautiful in its evident absence of design. Flattery has its naive and sentimental phases.

And what is true generally of flattery is true even more of the flattery of resentment.

"And you think I didn't have my suffering—look here, when I went to give up that flat and saw that damn box of dog biscuits sitting there on that sideboard, I sat down and cried like a baby. By God, it was awful—."

I couldn't forgive him, or like him. But I saw that what he had done was, to him, entirely justified. It was all very careless and confused. They were careless people, Tom and Daisy—they smashed up things or creatures and then retreated back to their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made. . . .

I shook hands with him; it seemed silly not to, for I felt suddenly as though I were talking to a child. Then he went into the jewelry store to buy a pearl necklace—or perhaps only a pair of cuff buttons—rid of my provincial squeamishness forever.

In combination with the rest of the concluding pages of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Great Gatsby*, this celebrated passage is surely one of the more eloquent expressions of resentment in literature. It is tone-perfect, like a beautifully prepared operatic high C. It prevents us from feeling small in our resentments, it flatters us that
our resentments are big, generous even, and wearily far-seeing, of a piece with our complicated feeling of superiority and pitying awe at the martyred Gatsby himself. Those god damn careless rich people. Oh yes, we eat cake and have it too—"fending off" and wallowing in "romantic subjectivism" at the same moment(6)—a combination very much consonant with the account of aesthetic experience we are referencing in these essays.

The double perspective, the distance, established by the distinction between the narrator and protagonist in this and many another novel seems the hi-art move par excellence, complicating identification, qualifying desire, examining and evaluating its objects. But such ostensibly unresentful visions of the centre are not truly cathartic here—they are but the trappings of tragedy, dressing up our desires. When poor hopeful Gatsby stops giving parties, thinking he has Daisy back forever, instead of for a few illicit afternoons of her self-indulgence, we supposedly have our askesis, we too can feel what grotesque things roses are. But this is not really tragic knowledge. It just helps ready us, sets us free to soar with that high C.

But nor is the treatment of Gatsby's desire ironic. This is doubtless what makes this novel so successful: it was written, evidently enough, by a romantic, by a self-acknowledging and thus superior "provincial." Its resentments defend earnestness. The usurpation of centrality it decries is that perpetrated by the crass new forces of market success—a venerably Romantic posture—but the martyrdom it models is not of the man left behind by or trampled by the market. Gatsby rises in Eastern seaboard world, triumphs in its modes of desire—nearly a century later we are still agog at (cinematic stagings of) those parties—and he is only finally destroyed for failing to respect the infinite fungibility of its objects of desire, which is to say, for trying to turn it to fixed, sacral purposes. (Failing heroically to see how eminently replaceable his Daisy really is—has the man never heard of serial monogamy!) His story is thus of special comfort to those committed to similar projects, or (a somewhat larger group) able to imagine themselves being so. Appropriately themed resentments are summoned. Such projects, it is hopefully not too churlish to remind ourselves, are of course still strategies in the market, aspiring, in putative defeat as effectively as in glorious triumph, to centrality, identity, the attention and desires of others.

But does it make our something happen, The Great Gatsby? Violence? Surely it contributes class and style to our resentments, makes such resentments harder to dismiss, helps foster attitudes which do have their political expressions. That god damn one percent. Gatsby may be no Uncle Tom, no Eliza. But to such resentments, in their collective power, the political process will have to respond. Where it doesn’t, there will be ... something.

Like all beautiful things, however, even truly artful flattery finally leaves more of nothing than of something. Indeed, any awareness of the qualitative intimates the stasis of attention to form. Can this mean that the more successfully resentment is gratified, the more it is transcended? Can this mean, the more completely the consummation can be pre-figured in the art work, the more that anticipated peace can pervade the aesthetic experience itself, deferring its own completion, creating a peace before peace? Is high now just pop done better, by pop's own measure?

Essay 5 — On Irony and Doubling

High and Pop shadow, double each other.

Every "realist" narrative, for example, is shadowed by its "romantic" original: how other people want things to be is the subtext, the inverse double, the essential negative measure of how things putatively are. The resentful desire of realism is for the chastisement, the overthrow, above all the disillusionment or at least disorientation of those others. So realism, in its own terms, is not pop—it defies rather than flatters desire. But surely it can be pop, depending on how imaginable its triumphs are, and this is to some degree a function of how intelligibly the overthrow of the other/model/rival is represented within the realist work. When characters within the work are shown in such disarray, the unshocked readers triumph, are granted their desires. Fearful, anti-romantic aspects of reality which readers outside the work are shocked by, occlude, make entirely theoretical, such victories. Genuinely shocked readers endure their chastisement in the name of high art. They have been subjected, by the grimly accepting characters within the fiction, by the even more masterfully grim author. But habitually shocked readers—the concept does feel paradoxical!—one may suspect of enjoying an identity at the expense of the more timorous mainstream. By the same
measure, we might say realism is high art not so much when anyone is shocked as when the reader and author or implied author share the illusions or desires that are sacrificed, waking together on the cold hillside of indefinite deferral. This is presumably why Flaubert felt he had to say Madame Bovary was him. (Except, we must observe, in some moods, his or hers, she clearly wasn’t.)

Other people are plural. "They" notoriously say, expect, erroneously believe things about singular me. Pop pleasures are communal, collective: Gans offers the example of a youthful crowd tapping toes or stomping feet to a single, overriding beat. Except, we imagine, the ironic postmodern individualist, whose foot may also be moving, in eloquent quasi-mimicry, but whose self-consciousness causes him to float aloof.

Once—call it the golden age of realism, or the Romantic era—once, the desires of others could merely be reversed, negated, to produce a privileged, indeed originary insight. The true, the mysterious, the deep, was the nothing to "their" sparagmatic something. High art deferred broadly imitated desires in order to model more satisfactory ones, achieve more prestigious differences, an individual apprehension of the human. Individuality itself.

But, if this operation was always tributary, from the Romantic period forward, to the collective desires it defied, the clear risk now is that it will merge entirely into its erstwhile rival, that its satisfactions will feed too smoothly and inevitably back into the collective joys and resentments it sought to transcend, leaving just another foot-stomper with only the faintly detectable whiff about him of bored self-contempt. Or is that middle age?

**Essay 6 — On the High to Pop Transit**

Turning English teacher, in middle age, has landed the present author in a relationship of unexpected pathos with William Wordsworth’s "We Are Seven." This is in no direct way the fault or doing, I think, of the poet, who died in 1850, nor of his still and always exquisite poem. Some historical imagination is needed, though, to grasp why the volume in which it first appeared in 1798 was largely greeted with hostility and incomprehension, and why the angry young poet of that day sarcastically anticipated such rejection in his famous preface: "Readers accustomed to the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers, if they persist in reading this book to its conclusion, will perhaps frequently have to struggle with feelings of strangeness and awkwardness: they will look round for poetry, and will be induced to enquire by what species of courtesy these attempts can be permitted to assume that title." Such struggle, I happily imagine as I assign this essay, is also the heart of education.

But my 21st-century undergraduates are of course otherwise accustomed, and for many of them "We Are Seven" is notably "simplistic"—a term they deploy in a mode of heartfelt gratitude. "Simplistic" in the good way. They are afloat, many of them, adrift we might better say, "alone on a wide, wide sea" of literary and scholarly phraseology whose character is not even determinant enough, for them, to be gaudy or inane. If Wordsworth and I intended disorientation we have achieved quite the opposite effect for many poor young souls, who find here an island of refuge and safety—a desert island, perhaps, but at least a dry one. Might I please write my term essay on "We Are Seven"? (Not "Tintern Abbey"?) Are there more poems like "We Are Seven"? I don’t like poetry, but ... well, maybe I could do something on "We Are Seven." "I was thinking of a comparison between ‘We Are Seven’ and one of Beyoncé’s songs...?" Those who don’t draw a complete blank when asked on their exam to mention one or two principles from the "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" often suggest that Wordsworth believed in writing poetry in simple (or simplistic) language so people could understand it. They less frequently recall the poet’s denunciation of the "deluges of [the] idle and extravagant," the "sickly and stupid" popular art which has nourished a "degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation" and reduced his contemporaries’ minds to "a state of almost savage torpor." What once was high, some of it, for them, now is pop.

It is, of course, one of the more commonly accepted markers of popular art that it is "easy" while high is correspondingly "hard." A torpid mind still presumptively the product of too much of the former. Generative Anthropology allows us to make the somewhat finer distinction about deferral and the functioning of society as a whole, but the challenge, the concern, the menace even, of dumbing-down, is now a familiar bromide of the postmodern market world.
Sometimes the high to pop transit, though, can take quite different forms. I attended, for example, in the nineties in Toronto, a staging of Shakespeare's "King Lear" in which Lear was played by a woman. All the other parts were filled in their traditional genders, and the text was otherwise intact, as demanding and as tragic as ever it was. But the experience was unmistakably altered. The most unbearable of dramatizations of the convergence of violence and desire upon an uninhabitable public centre had been inflected to the resentful demonstration that in the grandeur of their central suffering, too, women have proven their detractors wrong. Admiration of the lady monarch, of the actress's performance, was obligatory. The production was, correspondingly, a considerable critical and popular success.

Or, to return again to the Romantics in post-modernity, another of my hauntingly frank undergraduates, encountering Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale," noted how, as the poet listened, a birdsong was "playing" in the woods. That is, playing, the way a Beyoncé song plays on an iPod. Unmediated avian nature, it seems, perhaps passing in transit through Yeats' Byzantine handiwork bird, had arrived in the postmodern market, one more voice, or product, among the multitude on offer. But is this something the poem has always known? "Perhaps," Keats says, "the self-same song . . . found a path / Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home, / She stood in tears amid the alien corn." Who knew how alien, one might respond, but to the discomfited if not quite tearful students I have tried to strand in such a place, the means to look homeward, to popular comforts, however small, undermine—or ultimately overwhelm—all my schemes of disorientation.

Circumspect derivation: Maybe all high art contains the seeds of its own popularization.

**Essay 7 — Cautious Conclusions**

The high art experience is not dead, or dying, even if some genres that once provoked it are. Desire in modernity, however, can also push past almost any technique of deferral, popularize or merely brush aside even the highest of the high.

In modernity, in the market world, the erstwhile peripheries proliferate. An immense number of aesthetic experiences occur simultaneously, more and more and more, every one different, vastly outnumbering the artworks that provoke them. Classifications must be exceedingly general, typologies ideal only.

Aesthetic experiences have histories, individual and collective, that individual artworks do not. Even the changing character of artworks and genres thereof is only the roughest gauge of these histories.

In order genuinely to contribute to our understanding, through Generative Anthropology, of the full range of such phenomena, the high to pop or pop to high transit must be mapped diachronically along its synchronic continuum, across whose vectors we must acknowledge the gusting and eddying of ever-changing ethical moods. But if doing so helped us recover some of the particularity of what remain profoundly variable experiences of deferral, it would be worth the effort, even constituting a new opening for literary and cultural criticism.

**Notes**

1. "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" (1939), line 36. (back)
3. http://quod.lib.umich.edu/j/jala/2629860.0030.104/--lincoln-stowe-and-the-little-womangreat-war-story-the-making?rgn=main;view=fulltext. This has not prevented its broad circulation, and even, indeed, the erection of a statue, in Hartford. (back)
5. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MlfGRVRqj4M (back)
6. "The realist’s claim of empiricism is meant to fend off the danger of romantic subjectivism, where the artistic self discovers itself rather than the world." *Originary Thinking*, 176. (back)

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Time has stopped.

Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot*

[B]ehind this veil of gentleness and peace, night is charging and will burst upon us (*snaps his fingers*) pop! like that! just when we least expect it.

Pozzo in *Waiting for Godot*

They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more.

Pozzo in *Waiting for Godot*

**Part One. Beckett**

Two hobos enter the stage at the beginning of Beckett's most famous play. Our expectations of them are high, and their expectations of themselves equally so. They have met a character named "Godot" who suggested they meet him (as one of them tells the story) on a certain day at a certain time in a certain place. They will wait for him for most of the play, and we will wait for him with them. There is little else on the stage to divert our (or their) attention.

Before the play's conclusions, both their expectations and our expectations will be met, although not necessarily in the manner we (or they) expect. Two series of things happen in the course of the first act. The characters talk, they eat, they philosophize, they joke, they struggle with their clothing (boots, hats, pants, etc.)—they pass the time, doing all the normal everyday things one would expect them to be doing while waiting for something to happen, waiting for this character, with the slightly odd name of Godot, to appear. And in the course of that passage, some other, less everyday, more accidental things occur. Two other characters, Pozzo and Lucky—ebullient with their own internal dramas—happen by, and a great deal of stage time is spent following their relationship, both with each other and with our two attendant protagonists. Finally, a fifth character appears. A boy, presumably an individual who works for Godot, arrives to say that Godot will not come this evening.

Instead of the traditional structure of meaning we expect, in other words, it seems we will observe a different structure, a more "absurdist" drama in which we will learn more about what does not occur than what does, less about the missing arrival than about the energy they (and we) have invested (and continue to expend) in attending it. Godot will turn out—whatever else the name signifies—to be the name attached to their expectations. He said we were to meet him here on this day in this place, one of them notes at some point. We will learn along with the characters in the course of this play what it means to say as much.
Act Two thus opens with a heightened sense of expectation. It begins with a kind of prelude, a poem (or song) that is built upon an internal infinite loop. A transgression leads to a retribution that outdoes the original transgression and then tells the story of that transgression and heightened retribution, and that story includes relating the transgression, the retribution, and the story—ad infinitum. The character singing the song—Vladimir—stops for a moment, befuddled, before he continues. Begun as a kind of entertainment, the song assumes in the course of its articulation a more serious weight for its singer as its infinite quality or endlessness progressively dawns on him, a movement that may presage in turn what is about to dawn on us in our experience of the play at large. (4)

And then a curious thing happens. The characters in Act Two—the same as those we saw in Act One—start repeating more or less conversation for conversation, gesture for gesture, all that happened earlier. Again the two lead characters talk, eat, joke, argue, struggle with their clothing, and philosophize. Again they find ways to pass the time. Again Pozzo and Lucky arrive. Some changes have admittedly occurred—between the acts, so to speak. Pozzo is now blind and Lucky is now mute. But by and large, the same drama ensues. Again the boy arrives, again to say that Godot will not come this evening, but surely tomorrow evening. And again Godot does not arrive. Life’s a bitch, it would appear. And then you die.

Or do you? In fact, precisely to the extent that Act One does repeat itself in Act Two, I would suggest that we begin to understand something new, an understanding that assumes in general terms the form of what Freud identified as the conclusion of an analysis: namely, that this could go on forever. So much in fact is everything that happens in Act Two like what has happened in Act One that we are led to wonder whether what happened the first time was really "the first time" after all, whether, to the contrary, what we presumed to be the "first" time (and what the characters presumed to be the first time) was already in fact a second time, a repeat occurrence of some other previous "first time" now rather mired in obscurity.

And this new insight leads us quickly to another. If Act One was never in fact really "Act One" (but "Act Two" to some previous lost Act One), what gives us confidence that that earlier Act Two was ever really Act Two to begin with? We begin to wonder whether what happened last time was in fact already the nth time, a repetition of some "first" time now lost forever in the immemorial past (if in fact there was ever anything like an original event), in a structure that moreover will repeat itself forever, and thus a structure not unlike the poem marking the interval between Act One and Act Two, cited above. Or to put it in still another way, what gives us confidence that what happened "yesterday" happened yesterday and not eons ago, that "Act One" and "Act Two" are connected in some temporal contiguity, and not simply serially lodged as two arbitrary diachronic moments in some larger drama that has been unwittingly repeating itself incessantly?

And the idea of that second repetition, that potentially nth repetition, then, in turn and as a consequence, does something unexpected. It curiously confers yet a new meaning upon all they have experienced—perhaps the very meaning they have been awaiting, the meaning of the vague sense of meaninglessness they have been experiencing (and that we have been experiencing along with them) in "Act One" while waiting for meaning to arrive. Or more precisely, what begins to dawn on them (and on us) is that that earlier meaninglessness may in fact have been entirely meaningful although in an entirely unexpected fashion: that we have been dying while waiting for meaning to arrive, when in fact all ever we needed to do is stop. Like Kafka's "man from the country" who comes before the guard to beg admittance to the Law, what they begin to suspect (and what we begin to suspect) is that all they needed to do, at some point along the way, was, precisely, something else. What has effectively passed them by, while they were waiting for Godot to appear and their lives to begin, has been their lives. (5)

You can already surmise, I suspect, in a conference on the work of Eric Gans, where this analysis regarding events in the immemorial past that turn upon a capacity to stop might be going. But let’s not get ahead of ourselves. This potential—to stop, to give up the procedures under way—is made clear within the play itself as the end of Act Two approaches. "And if we dropped him?" one of the characters muses, and the other quickly retorts, "He'd punish us" (59b). They protect themselves against exiting with a non-sequitur that may prove more symptomatic of their dilemma than a commentary upon it. Beckett’s play in that way is not unlike Sartre's No Exit, and this play is in some ways Beckett’s version of his contemporary’s drama. The characters cannot leave the theater they have created for themselves, even if the door stands wide open for them. The hell in which they are locked, in which they continue to exist even after death, is an inferno of
their own making, an inferno they constructed and now are condemned to live out.

On the other hand, by virtue of that lack of freedom, if they cannot leave, we have the capacity to do so. We can leave the theater, we who have after all also freely attended this scene. The whole thrust of Act Two in fact is, I would suggest, upon the potential for freedom, upon what we as audience can do that they cannot, or upon what they can do that the individuals they meet along the road can no longer do. As they say "Let's go" and do not move in the play's final sequence (in a gesture that repeats a series of similar gestures throughout the play), so we are capable of leaving the theater, recognizing in the process that we have had the capability of doing that all along. In some productions I have attended, the final curtain does not in fact fall upon the actors, and the audience is compelled to exit the theater (and the drama it stages) self-consciously, to "walk out" on the actors, so to speak, if only to exercise the capacity to do so.

The idea of this Godot who never arrives continues to fascinate us long after we make our exit. Is there some trick solution to this conundrum that we have missed? we sometimes wonder. If the character they have presumably met never returns, is there a way in which there are some other "secondary" Godots available on the scene for our intellectual employment? What, after all, is the significance of the name? Is it a combination of "Gogo" and "Didi"—Go(go) plus Di(di)—with the second syllable altered to match the first? Does it mean "God" or "small God" containing as it does the English word God within it? If we await Godot, and if Godot will let us know when he arrives where we stand (as one of the characters suggest at one point), then is Godot not something like a minor deity? One of the innovations of a recent production (based, it is said, upon the production Samuel Beckett himself directed) in Sudbury, Massachusetts, was the pronunciation of the word "Godot" which was made to sound like "God-oh" with the accent on the first syllable, perhaps an echo of the appellation "Daddy-oh" that was used in the 1950s in America in the Bohemian language circulating for example in NYC.(6)

Or, to take still another approach, do not each of the characters in some sense play "Godot" for each other? Vladimir for Estragon (and Estragon for Vladimir)? Pozzo for Lucky (and Lucky for Pozzo)? The name "Pozo" in Italian, which means "well," sounds very much like "pazzo," meaning "crazy." "Lucky" was a name in the fifties in America assigned to a carefree happy-go-lucky guy—an ironic appellation used, for example, in the naming of a figure of the American Mafioso mythology—Lucky Luciano. Is not "playing Godot" for each other in fact precisely what defines relationship in this play? Does not "Godot" mean in the simplest sense that which will save us? Is that not what René Girard has been writing about with regard to mimetic desire in the nineteenth century novel—namely, the way in which the romantic heroes of our most famous novels enchain themselves to others in a manner that a reader of Hegel's Phenomenology would recognize as slave to master, a relation signaled in the quote from Max Scheler that Girard places as a head note to his essay?(7) And so in that sense, Godot has never stopped appearing. What is missing is only something like a transcendent signifier.

None of these characters, of course, are "the" Godot. The vague sense that someone may have said he would meet us here at this place at this time on this day, plus the boy's daily characterizations, are presented credibly enough. But they are about all we learn regarding the arrangement with Vladimir and Estragon. Perhaps there was a Godot and we (or they) missed him entirely. "Godot," we gradually begin to realize, may constitute somewhat metaphorically an enigmatic reference to whatever reality gives meaning to their lives and lets them know where they stand. The arrival of Pozzo and Lucky is insufficient to accomplish that task for Vladimir and Estragon, although Pozzo and Lucky have their own sources of meaning—derived from their relationship with each other. The name "Godot" that Vladimir and Estragon recite means little to Pozzo and Lucky. And the boy retains his own Godot—presumably, the same one they await—but by the end of Act One, he has still failed to appear. Godot in short will turn out to be the name attached to an imagined (if not imaginary) individual, a force, an idea—serving as an interlocutor, or conversation partner—from whom in their view they have derived the structure that governs their current predicament.

Our expectations about what constitutes reality in the Platonic-Aristotelian West are based upon a notion of time conceived in a very specific way, and in particular based upon two sets of immutable assumptions: that what has occurred in the past really has already occurred; that what will occur in the future really has not yet occurred (and that once it does occur it will look in retrospect reasonably like the past); and that what occurs in the present really is occurring now somewhere, if not immediately before us, then within a
reasonable proximity, and that it is fundamentally distinguishable from past and future. Moreover, that this
time or temporality is linked in an important way to death. Time, in the English poet William Wordsworth’s
conception of things is often said to be death minus now—and “Intimations of Immortality” is often cited as
a primary example. Time in this conception is something like the filler between the two certain realities
available to us, our death and the present moment. Time describes the interval between the two, the
distance between death and now. “Time equals death minus now” is how I like to say it.

What if time has stopped for these characters?(8) Then what we imagine to have occurred may or may not
have occurred. And what we imagine as yet to happen may or may not happen (what is past may for
example not yet have happened, and what is yet to occur may already have occurred). And what if it has
stopped because for all intents and purposes they are dead? They imagine a future with a Godot (or God-
oh) who will arrive based upon their imagination of a past with a Godot who did arrive and has spoken with
them. But what if that formulation only obtains when time is intact, when death remains a “viable” future
potential so to speak? The possibility of death ironically offers the possibility of a future.(9) But if that
possibility has been abrogated, then the future in which Godot will arrive may never occur, not because
there is a future and Godot will not arrive in it (for whatever reason) but because there simply is no future
(and is no past). All that remains is the present. Godot has said to them he would arrive. And all things
being equal, we have no reason to think he would not have done so, no reason to challenge their account of
him or his account to them. But if time itself has stopped, then whatever future drama might have played
out has stopped as well. All that remains is the elemental. Cultural constructions of time and space have in
effect evaporated.

"Everything’s dead but the tree," one of the characters observes at some point, and Beckett’s play seems to
have worked out in full the literal consequences of that insight.(10) Like Sartre, what Beckett understands,
in other words, is that in the shadow of the devastations of the early twentieth century, something else is
lost beyond the possibility of a reliance upon liberal humanism. It is death itself that is no longer
meaningful, death which is the very foundation of our conception of time, that has gone missing from its
customary place in the future. We often identify this period in literary study, after Martin Esslin’s enigmatic
phrase, as “Theater of the Absurd.” Sartre, Camus, Anouilh, Genet, Beckett, Artaud, Ionesco—all the writers
of the early post-war period in France—share in this one idea, that what is absurd is not death but its
absence. As long as we have a way out, as long as we feel there is a future, we may engender meaning—
even if it is the anticipation of death.

But what if we take away that anticipation? What if death is no longer an obstacle because it has already
occurred? What if time, as we have constituted it in the Aristotelian West, has been an elaborate ruse? Then
the only possible recourse is to face what we have been avoiding by means of that excuse, a predicament
that at least one postwar French thinker identifies as full responsibility for the other individual, for the
neighbor, and by extension for human relations at large.(11)

In other words, what if Vladimir and Estragon are locked in here (wherever "here" is) forever? We do have
the sense that for them it is already too late, that this play has begun after the capacity to get out has
expired, that we have understood their freedom relative to Pozzo and Lucky even if they have not. What if
we eliminate the object of desire, not because it is no longer desirable, or because it is no longer available,
but simply because it is just out of reach forever? What if we find ourselves like the lover on Keats’ Grecian
urn? What if art has eliminated death from the equation, if it begins with the premise that death has already
occurred, and what remains is simply our dying? The world imagined by Kafka in The Trial is not far off the
mark.

* * * * *

No doubt you have realized by now what I have been avoiding in this presentation, the screen that I have
put up by which I have put off or deferred talking about what I announced as the topic of my inquiry,
namely, deferral in the work of Jacques Derrida and Eric Gans. And Waiting for Godot is certainly the ideal
play for me to hide behind (perhaps not unlike Estragon hiding at one moment behind the tree within it)
since what more clearly focused play could we imagine on the topic of deferral? The play is about deferral
par excellence. Two characters are instructed to meet a third on a certain day at a certain place and
someone arrives to defer that projected meeting endlessly, not to cancel it or render it unnecessary, mind
you, but simply to reschedule it, and to do so repeatedly, infinitely, for the foreseeable future, if we are to trust certain intuitions about that deferral. And if we follow the thesis that we put forward about that particular deferral that Beckett has staged for us, we may gain from his analysis insights that can assist us in thinking about our larger and more immediate subject matter.

So let me, for the moment, put aside the deferral that Beckett has described for us—let us defer his deferral so to speak (I promise we will return to it)—and let me return more immediately to the work of these two thinkers of the concept of deferral who are undoubtedly the center of the interest of this conference on the theme of deferral: Jacques Derrida and Eric Gans.

Part Two. Derrida, Gans, and Deferral

You certainly do not need me in this context to point out how similar conceptually are the writings of Derrida and Gans on the topic of language and in particular its function as deferral. Their conjunction has long been noted by numerous commentators (and here I am thinking of the work of Andrew McKenna and more recently Peter Goldman), and of course by Eric Gans himself on numerous occasions. You do not need me to point out that Derrida's work needs little introduction. Derrida begins his work in the nineteen fifties with the work of Husserl and Heidegger. From Heidegger in particular—and especially from the notion of Destruktion—Derrida borrows the method of thinking that has become known in France and North America by the household name of deconstruction. Deconstruction in effect, we may say, is an analysis of presuppositions. Any project you may conceive in thought involves presuppositions, which is to say, a set of conceptual categories on which it is based and upon which the very possibility of thinking those ideas is based. But those ideas in turn are founded upon presuppositions, and those secondary presuppositions in turn founded upon presupposed categories, and so forth, until, sooner or later, you stumble upon the very conceptual categories or ideas you have undertaken this project initially to investigate, conceptual categories or presuppositions moreover whose meaning is in fact already entirely determined.

The very possibility of a philosophic project, in other words, is based upon a prior impossibility, and all such projects are foreclosed in advance by this metaphysical circularity of its conceptualization. But such circularity, Derrida is quick to point out (and here he is very much a student of Hedeigger), is not a mistake or error of the system. It is not some kind of flaw that we introduce when we use the system badly or improperly. But rather it is the system. It is an example of the system working in its very capacity to do its job. It is a feature of the system that is "built-in," so to speak, endemic to its very construction, to the very possibility of thinking at all, the very possibility, that is to say, of a philosophic project.

Thus, for example, Derrida comes to analyze the speech-centeredness of philosophic discourse, an onto-theology (using Heidegger's word) which derives from Platonism and Platonic reasoning or decision-making and which involves the determination of being as presence, a speech-centeredness or "logocentrism" which Derrida tells us is also a "phallo-centrism" and which has characterized the history of Platonism since its inception. And this logo-centric and onto-theological discourse constructs a hierarchical relationship to other conceptual possibilities in which it is embedded, to writing, for example, which it conceptualizes as secondary or supplementary to speech. But it turns out that this gesture of rendering secondary or supplementary or marginal the act of writing in relation to the act of speaking may be misleading, and that the formulation which views speech as primary and writing as secondary may suppress a more fundamental relation of writing to speech in which such writing (or écriture) is in fact constitutive of speech. Borrowing our language from Nietzsche (who famously says that truth is the fiction which governs), or from Plato (who shows that truth is the mimesis that wins, that gets to call itself truth and everything else mimesis), we may say speech is the writing that wins, that gets to call itself speech and everything else writing. Writing is not secondary or auxiliary to speech, according to Derrida. Writing is speech. Speech is simply the name that such writing takes on when it assumes a dominant position and identifies itself as primary and everything else as secondary. Writing veritably precedes speech for Derrida. "Writing precedes speech" might seem at first glance an odd and unlikely slogan for this deconstructive insight (echoing somewhat
obliquely, as it does, the existentialist credo that "existence precedes essence"). But that insight turns out in fact in Derrida's view to contain in germ form the very foundation of the philosophic project, a foundation in which l'écriture (whether conceived as "handwriting", or "text", or "scripture") enables or conditions its very possibility, not of course in the sense of the material manifestations of such writing, but nonetheless as its signature, its script, its holy writ. Writing, to use Saussure's language, may be said to function as langue or the differential system in the way that logo-centric philosophic discourse functions as parole, which is to say as its execution and manifestation.

The reference to Saussure of course is not accidental, and Derrida has also long been critical of what he takes to be Saussure's own unthinking subordination of writing to speech. Even if Derrida utilizes Saussure's ideas at every turn—and Derrida's conception of language as a system of differences, or language as a system of signs that are a system of differences remains foundational for him—he is still willing to criticize this inventor of "semiology" for failing to assess his own participation in the traditional logo-centric subordination of writing to speech. And such formulations, Derrida argues, formulations that are profoundly useful and enlightening in one context (language as a system of pure differences) and just as profoundly conventional and limiting in another (writing as secondary to speech) are not able to be assessed finally as either positive or negative. The issue of whether one is really dominant and the other really secondary is simply undecidable. No trans-contextual determination can be made about it, since in one instance we are dealing with one perspective (the way a formulation is innovative for example and opens new possibilities) and in another instance with a different perspective (another way in which that same perspective shuts down or forecloses those very possibilities).

And no activity of Derrida's is more common. Derrida moves from system to system, from philosophic project to philosophic project, bringing his deconstructive analysis to bear, not unlike a kind of intellectual handyman or bricoleur (in contrast to an engineer who always proceeds with a defined plan or script or blueprint in mind), and just as Claude Lévi-Strauss has defined such bricolage as the very mindset of cultural thinking as such, adapting itself to whatever empirical circumstances in which it finds itself by discovering its intellectual categories to be prior to those empirical determinations, even though Derrida by the same turn takes Lévi-Strauss to task for precisely his deployment of such methodology elsewhere.

Philosophic discourse proceeds by way of decision-making. Decision-making proceeds by way of language. Language can be conceptualized as a system of differences. But how do those differences themselves get produced? we may wonder. What produces the system of differences upon which for Derrida so much in culture and language depend?

Here, for example, is Derrida on the notion of différance. Although it is customary to pronounce this word, this Derridean neo-logism, as "difference with an a," I will pronounce it for our purposes as if it were the made-up word "deferrance."

First, différance [difference with an a] refers to the (active and passive) movement that consists in deferring by means of delay, delegation, reprieve, referral, detour, postponement, reserving. . . . Second, the movement of différance, as that which produces different things, that which differentiates, is the common root of all oppositional concepts that mark our language, such as, to take only a few examples, sensible/intelligent, intuition/signification, nature/culture, etc. . . . Third, différance is also the production, if it can still be put this way, of these differences, of the "diacriticity" that the linguistics generated by Saussure, and all the structural sciences modeled upon it, have recalled is the condition for any signification and any structure.(14)

And then Derrida concludes:

From this point of view, the concept of différance is neither simply structuralist, nor simply geneticist, such an alternative itself being an 'effect' of différance. (15)

In other words, "différance" for Derrida, difference with an a, is "the production of differences," the production of the system of differences, the spacing in time and in space, the postponement, or deferral, of
the object. Difference, Benveniste tells us, in his study of Indo-European words, which comes from the word differ (from the Latin fero "to carry" and dis- "away from") means "to carry or bear away from the sacrificial altar," to generate a separation or boundary between two otherwise continuous entities.

Derrida notes that that difference is primary.

Nothing, no present and in-different being thus precedes différance and spacing. There is no subject who is agent, author, and master of différance, who eventually and empirically would be overtaken by différance. Subjectivity—like objectivity—is an effect of différance, an effect inscribed in a system of différance. This is why the a of différance also recalls that spacing is temporization, the detour and postponement by means of which intuition, perception, consummation—in a word, the relationship to the present, the reference to a present reality, to a being—are always deferred. Deferred by virtue of the very principle of difference which holds that an element functions and signifies, takes on or conveys meaning, only by referring to another past or future element in an economy of traces.(16)

All of which is to say that deferral clearly plays for Derrida a critical role in his thinking and in that regard Derrida departs from Saussure, for whom no such role in indicated.

* * * * *

Consider, now, the writing of Eric Gans on the same topic, the topic of deferral. The "originary hypothesis" that Eric Gans has put forth in so many books, journal articles, and internet columns (starting with The Origin of Language in 1981), is that at the origin of culture, "the deferral of violence takes place through representation," which is to say, in his view, through language or sign use. Gans's goal is to provide an account of the origin of culture in the origin of language. He sees language-use rather than victimization as the origin, and in this way distinguishes his view from that of his teacher, René Girard. "If generative anthropology has a role to play," Gans writes, "in allowing us to transcend self-righteousness toward the ultimate horizon of mutual understanding, it is in showing us that society is not founded on victimization but on language and the deferral of violence."(17) "The originary hypothesis explains language and culture in general as primarily motivated by the need to defer the violent consequences of mimetic desire."(18)

The origin, in other words, for Gans, is also a scene of deferral. Gans shares with René Girard the idea that the context in which all of this takes place is one of mimetic desire. We desire imitatively and learn to appropriate the desires of others at a very early age, and this learning for Gans takes place at the proto-hominid level. But unlike Girard, who regards the sacrificial mechanism as the management system of runaway appropriation, Gans sees the decisive event in human history at the level of desire itself, as the attempted appropriation of the attractive object of desire that "gets stuck" in the middle, so to speak, and the genesis (in that gesture of the aborted reaching for the object of desire) of the linguistic sign, of designation, of representation. Violence is thus averted, in Gans' schema, deflected, deferred, by the process in which individuals in a community give up or abort their claim on the general object of desire, and their reach for it and its cessation becomes in effect the first sign. Rather than imitate their models, these proto-humans, Gans makes clear in later essays, imitate in effect their object.

Now, let us put aside for the moment the complications of comparing two such intricate theoretical models, let alone whether the claims that they make are accurate historically, and what it means to make that assertion. In fact, let us proceed, for the sake of the present argument, and on the present occasion, as if they are entirely accurate, as if they are completely true, and as if such truth-claims are not problematic. Both theorists make their arguments on the basis of a notion or set of notions that I would like to argue is itself supremely questionable, a theoretical foundation that may be incapable in short of sustaining the weight they place upon it, and one that may indeed challenge the very purpose to which it is put.

In a nutshell, the question I want to raise concerns time or temporality. Does not the idea of "deferral" presuppose Aristotelian time as we know it and have defined it above? Does it not presuppose a past, a present, and a future defined differentially and understood conceptually as we have discussed it in context of Samuel Beckett's play, namely, in a certain meaningful relation to death? And does it not do so in either
case—whether we are talking about the first primates to have emerged successfully from the difficulties of food gathering in the savannahs of Tanzania in the obscure history of hominization, or the structures of difference production at work in the thinking that has come down to us from Greek, Roman, and Germanic cultural practices of two thousand years ago, and whether we are talking specifically about the work of Eric Gans or the work of Jacques Derrida? Does it not rely already upon a certain understanding of spacing and of temporalization which it is, in part at least, the very purpose of both the work of Gans and the work of Derrida to examine?

And does not Beckett’s play, Waiting for Godot, raise such a question at its core? Beckett’s Waiting for Godot, it seems to me, has a great deal to tell us about such ideas. Does it not imagine a world in which time has stopped, and in which continuing to think that it has not stopped, that Godot will arrive at some point in the future, is itself the lynchpin that locks them into their current predicament, which is to say, within a prison house or “lock down” in which they find themselves and to which the audience alone is not subject since they are not “tied” and can get up and leave the theater?

What’s wrong with clock time? we may be tempted to ask. And the short answer is: nothing. Clock time provided a theoretical support for the rationalistic perspective that emerged in Miletus and other city-states in Greece in the ancient sixth century and that in the fourth and third century with the appeal of Aristotelian formalism and Platonic idealism in effect took over what was to become Western thinking. It is the model for our very Western conceptions of science and knowledge insofar as that knowledge derives from Plato and Aristotle.

But it is not universal. There are cultures in the world in which it is not dominant—in some Asian cultures, for example, or some cultures anthropologists identify as archaic. And even within our own culture there are moments in which it fails us: moments of trauma, for example, in which all of our perceptions of both time and space are conditioned by the black box event that has inaugurated such repetitions; or moments of religious fervor, in which the shattering supernatural event that breaks the hard core of our world leaves us similarly in a time and space of witness.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves again, So let us turn—or return—in the final section of our paper, to Beckett’s play in order to take up this question.

Part Three. Death, Time, and Disaster.

Here is the opening paragraph of Maurice Blanchot’s book, The Writing of the Disaster.

The disaster ruins everything, all the while leaving everything intact. It does not touch anyone in particular; "I" am not threatened by it, but spared, left aside. It is in this way that I am threatened; it is in this way that the disaster threatens in me that which is exterior to me—an other than I who passively become other. There is no reaching the disaster. Out of reach is he whom it threatens, whether from afar or close up, it is impossible to say: the infiniteness of the threat has in some way broken every limit. We are on the edge of disaster without being able to situate it in the future: it is rather always already past, and yet we are on the edge or under the threat, all formulations which would imply the future—that which is yet to come—if the disaster were not that which does not come, that which has put a stop to every arrival. To think the disaster (if this is possible, and it is not possible inasmuch as we suspect that the disaster is thought) is to have no longer any future in which to think it.(19)

"To have no longer any future in which to think it." Is that not the heart of Beckett’s play? Why has Beckett done what he has done? Why has Beckett written a play like Waiting for Godot? Putting aside personal motivations (whether his or ours), can we not ask whether his play is not a reflection upon disaster (even, in a minimalist way, an enacting of that disaster) from which Europe (and especially French culture) has only recently emerged? Blanchot’s essay on “Literature and the Right to Death” in 1949 and his essay on "The Writing of the Disaster" in 1980 (from which the above quotation comes) would seem in many ways the theory of which Beckett’s play is the dramatization. What would it look like to act differently from the
way in which Beckett’s characters act? And what are we to do in its wake?

Beckett does not offer us an answer. His goal as he perceives it is only to pose the relevant questions, a little more forcefully perhaps than others have done, and in ways that implicate us a bit more. On the other hand, there is in fact, on the horizon, a philosophic thinker who articulates some alternative conceptualizations. When asked about the subject of his current projects, in one of his last published interviews, Emmanuel Levinas is said to have described his project as "The deformalization of the notion of time."(20) A time, that is to say, he further elaborated, in which past is modeled on creation, the present on revelation, and the future on redemption (and not the reverse). A time thus imagined in the manner of Franz Rosenzweig in The Star of Redemption (233). A time that gives up the notion of language as representation for a more radical understanding of language as diachrony, and of speaking in general as the said (or le dit) for a notion of speaking in general as the "to say" (or le dire).(21)

He might also have spoken—and others have certainly done so—of the time of trauma, of the black box which bequeaths to us, in defiance of all reason, an endless repetition of circumstances we experienced and yet to which in a very real way we were not witness. The religious or biblical dimensions of the shattering of the world that occurs in discussions of revelation about which Biblical studies scholar speak, the traumatic understandings of time of which psychoanalytic practitioners speak—these are alternative ways of thinking about time and temporality to our traditional Western modes of understanding. And they are not the only ones. And their very existence affirms that our customary temporal formulations are not universal or free of historicity and may one day seem to us in their claims for universality as quaint as yesterday’s news.

Beckett, in other words, may be doing what he is doing, among other reasons, in concert with the postwar context in which he writes. And if that is the case, then, for us to continue to utilize our conventional ideas, to deny their reliance upon pre-disastrous conditions, in short, to defer the disaster, is, ironically, to enact and reflect it. On the other hand, what if we began to think differently? To give up not just (or not even) the idea of deferral but the entire schema on which it is based?

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Eric Gans understands fully that in the world in which we live—in the shadow of the Shoah and the victimology discourse it inaugurated—our view of deferral must change. "That the Holocaust was carried out without deferral," Eric Gans writes, "with no weapon or force held in reserve, and at the same time gratuitously, even to the detriment of the German war effort, defines it as the extreme point of human violence independently of any ‘objective’ measure of the violence that occurred before or since."(22) Gans’s reflections on Judaism and anti-Semitism offer us, I would argue, a way of re-conceiving of his own project, of generative anthropology, in terms that address the questions that Beckett’s play raises.(23)

What Eric Gans has done, in other words, I suggest, is conceive of a specifically Jewish theory of cultural and linguistic origins, a theory of creation based upon the Sabbath, upon shabbat, upon stopping or resting or ceasing, upon the gesture, that in Judaism creates the world.

Thus were finished the heavens and the earth, with all of their array.

God had finished, on the seventh day, his work that he had made, and then he ceased, on the seventh day, from all his work that he had made.

God gave the seventh day his blessing, and he hallowed it, for on it he ceased from all his work, that by creating, God had made.

These are the begettings of the heavens and the earth: their being created (2:1-2:4).(24)

Stopping creates the world in Genesis. Stopping, ceasing, resting, is imagined by the Rabbis as the condition of possibility of creation (and it is for that reason that the Rabbis customarily celebrate the Sabbath as "the birthday of the world"). The world, the Rabbis say, is not created on the first day but on the seventh, on the day of rest, the day of not-doing or of withdrawing, on the day of the gesture by means of which the
possibility of contemplating what has taken place is opened and made viable.

What Eric Gans has done in a sense is elaborate that insight anthropologically. He has built an extensive and detailed midrash that allows us to translate Biblical language into the language of anthropology. What would it look like to imagine the genesis of the world, the genesis of culture or of language, on the basis of stopping? he asks in effect. And since the gesture of creation as conceived by the Rabbis is only an opening gesture—the process of creation is an ongoing one and we are partners with God, the Rabbis say, in that creative process—so the language of deferral is built into it. The process of creation has begun. The revelation of that process of creation is underway. And the completion of that process of the revelation of creation, which is to say, the moment of redemption, will take place strictly in the world to come.

Deferral in the work of Eric Gans, I would suggest, needs to be reconceived, not as a matter of conventional Aristotelian time, but as a matter Rosenzweigian time, as a matter of the time of creation, revelation, and redemption. Or as a matter of Beckettian time. There is no future in which Godot will arrive and we will be saved, Beckett’s play teaches us, and so long as we continue to believe that there is, we will remain like Vladimir and Estragon, speaking of going but never going, imagining the possibility of not being "tied" and of dropping Godot, but never enacting that possibility. Or, in the worst-case scenario, we will render ourselves (and as a consequence of the violence we will commit against ourselves and others) like Pozzo and Lucky, "Crazy" and "Lucky" by name, and dramatic and exotic and interesting in the first instance, but in reality finally blind, deaf, and mute.

Two different perspectives, difference and deference. On the one side, decision-making, distinctions, the general inheritance of Plato and Platonism, de-sacralization, demystification, iconoclasm, but also bickering, "differences" in the pugnacious sense, fighting, even violence. And on the other side, a less iconoclastic view, a respect for the sacred, for sacrificial thinking, for deferential behavior to authority, for commitment to not changing. Two distinct attitudes, two distinct approaches, both participating in the deferral that presumes traditional temporality—endorsement of the sacred as deference, and rebellion against the sacred as difference—these two remain our condition. Two attitudes regarding modernity, two attitudes reflecting modernity. Both deferrals of, rather than a deferring to, I would argue, finally, an ethical conceived as the foundation of responsibility rather than its consequence.

What Samuel Beckett’s work stages for us finally, I would submit, is our failure, our inability to free ourselves from the endless repetitions in which we find ourselves, repetitions which have no doubt acted effectively as a smoke screen, as a protection (to put it in the most kindly fashion) against the violence in which we repeatedly find ourselves caught and by which we find ourselves condemned, as a screen against the smoke of the fires of the Holocaust in Europe or the bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki (and not to mention other disasters of the recent past or an incipient future), but also as screens on which we readily construct our own egoistic images, images in which we obscure our utter vulnerability behind imagined scenes of virility and strength. What Beckett asks us to consider, is whether in repeating ourselves in this fashion we blind ourselves and make ourselves deaf and mute (not unlike like Pozzo and Lucky in Act Two of his play) to the consequences of such behavior, to the no-man’s land in which we continue to live, to the state of post disaster in which no deferrals of any kind will serve us, and in which the only cogito worthy of consideration, the only creed capable of assuring us that we exist, is not "I think; therefore, I am" or even "I suffer; therefore, I am" (as Vladimir and Estragon seem respectively to maintain) but "I died; therefore, I am" ("Je suis mort; donc, je suis"). "Everything’s dead but the tree," one of the two remarks, and Vladimir’s observation appears to be Beckett’s pronouncement upon this scene. The tree alone appears capable of new life.

And the means of doing so, of keeping ourselves trapped, would appear to be the notion of time itself, a notion that seems to have little relation to time of trauma or the time of religious fervor and revelatory sensibilities that might in fact free us, that might enable us to leave the theater in which we seem content (if not compelled) to remain. If the work of René Girard on the danger of the sacrificial structures in which we continue to live, or the work of Maurice Blanchot on our posthumous (as opposed to our postmodern) condition, or the work of Emmanuel Levinas on our infinite responsibilities for the other individual, or the work of Eric Gans on the importance of Judaism as a thought of stopping, or cessation, or the taking of a
shabbat in the face of violence as a means of creating the world speak to us today more powerfully than ever, it is perhaps an available witness that the structures of compulsive repetition are capable of failure themselves, and that hopefulness, even the hopefulness that obtains in the face of utter devastation and destruction, remains a distinct possibility, one to which we might really effectively defer.

**Works Cited**


**Notes**

2. Page 10a. In the Grove Press edition, pages on which the play is printed are numbered at the bottom of the left hand page only. Accordingly, I have numbered references on the left side of the page 10a and those on the right 10b. (back)

3. Cf. "Vladimir: We're waiting for Godot. Estragon: (despairingly). Ah! (Pause.) You're sure it was here? Vladimir: What? Estragon: That we were to wait. Vladimir: He said by the tree. (They look at the tree.) Do you see any others?" (10a). And then later: "Estragon: You're sure it was this evening? Vladimir: What? Estragon: That we were to wait. Vladimir: He said Saturday." (back)

4. Here is the song that open Act Two. "Vladimir: A dog came in the kitchen / And stole a crust of bread. / Then cook up with a ladle / And beat him till he was dead. / Then all the dogs came running / And dug the dog a tomb– / He stops, broods, resumes: / Then all the dogs came running / And dug the dog a tomb / And wrote upon the tombstone / For the eyes of dogs to come: / A dog came in the kitchen / And stole a crust of bread. / Then cook up with a ladle / And beat him till he was dead. / Then all the dogs came running / And dug the dog a tomb– / He stops, broods, resumes: / Then all the dogs came running / And dug the dog a tomb– / He stops, broods. Softly. And dug the dog a tomb . . ." [37a-b]. (back)


6. The Sudbury production is cited on the internet. (back)


8. "Pozzo: But I must really be getting along, if I am to observe my schedule. Vladimir: Time has stopped [24b]." (back)

9. What is absurd for Blanchot is not the appearance of death in the face of life (which is in fact the guarantor of meaning) but its absence. "Death alone allows me to grasp what I want to attain", Blanchot writes. "[I]t exists in words as the only way they can have meaning. Without death, everything would sink into absurdity and nothingness." See "Literature and the Right to Death," 324. Cf. also Adorno’s remark on "the annihilation of death": "In the camps, death has a novel horror; since Auschwitz, fearing death means fearing worse than death." See Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (1987), 371. Adorno’s remark is cited by Fackenheim and others as the very foundation for “planet Auschwitz.” (back)


11. The thinker is Emmanuel Levinas. And in fact, in Levinas’ terms even “full” is a misnomer. Our responsibility for the other individual for Levinas is unlimited or infinite, full being a reference to totality or the all, whose dangers it is one of the purposes of his thinking to expose. (back)


13. I have alluded to these movements elsewhere. See my *Sacrificing Commentary* (1996). (back)


21. Levinas, "Diachrony and Representation," in *Entre Nous*, 159-177. (back)

22. Eric Gans, "GA in the Public Sphere," *Chronicles of Love and Resentment* #335, Saturday May 20, 2006. (back)

23. It is interesting to me that in his book project with Adam Katz (*The First Shall Be the Last: Rethinking Antisemitism*), Gans may be doing just that, reassessing his theory along specifically Jewish lines. (back)

Epiphany and Closure in Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*

Marina Ludwigs

Virginia Woolf’s 1927 *To the Lighthouse* ends on a strange note. Its moment of narrative closure is both satisfactory and unsatisfactory. On the one hand, it is perfect, almost too perfect in the way two narrative strands come together and reinforce each other in their mutual culmination. There is the story of going to the lighthouse: James Ramsay expresses his wish to go to the lighthouse in Part One; his wish is finally fulfilled at the end of Part Three, ten years later. What heightens the ending of this quest-like plot is the ending of another subplot: Lily Briscoe’s search for the artistic means of finishing her painting (and, in a larger sense, her role as a female artist). As Lily watches the boat touch land, she experiences an epiphanic moment—a sudden inspiration about how to complete her painting (with "a line . . . in the centre" (TTL 226)). Thus the boat is arriving and Lily is putting the finishing touches on her painting at the same time: both subplots have been resolved. On the other hand, there is something about this congruity that feels artificial, contrived, empty even. It is presented as the moment of closure, but it does not feel like closure because the natural rhythm of the rising and falling action is compromised. Due to the unusually long deferral of the ending, the emotional charge that is supposed to fuel the coda has already dissipated by the time the event finally occurs, making the ending sound a hollow, anticlimactic note. Is this done deliberately? Is the artificial resolution without a sense of closure a piece with other formal experiments of modernist fiction or is there more to it? I think, that the answers are: “yes,” “yes,” and “yes.” Something other than/in addition to a familiar unraveling of literary form is taking place here. The novel’s peremptory, self-consciously imposed performance of narrative closure does more than deconstruct the novelistic structure by undermining the idea of closure. It creates, as I will show, a metanarrative awareness of the originary structure of narrative, organized around the aesthetic moment of literary epiphany, which itself lays bare what Eric Gans calls "the becoming-portable of the sign" (SI 84).

In addition to being emotionally unsatisfactory, the plot of Virginia Woolf’s novel is almost parodic in the way it implements the narrative pattern of the quest. The story, which is loosely based on the lives of Virginia Woolf’s parents, features the Ramsays (Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay and their eight children), who host several guests in their summer house on the Isle of Skye. The first part, "The Window," spans one summer day, which happens some time before World War I. It starts with little James’s request to go to the Lighthouse and ends late in the evening, after a dinner party, with the trip postponed. The second, impressionistically-written, part, "Time Passes," spans ten years, which include the war. Unusually enough, it centers on the setting of the summer house itself, which is abandoned by the family, and follows the changes and decay that are taking place. In the third part, "The Lighthouse," Mr. Ramsay and two of the children, including James, return (sans Mrs. Ramsay, who is now dead) but together with some of the previous guests. At the end of the novel, Mr. Ramsay and the two grown children go to the lighthouse, observed by two guests: Augustus Carmichael, a poet, and Lily Briscoe, an amateur painter and one of the novel’s main focalizers.

On the face of it, the novel has the shape of a quest (in, at least, two or three senses, depending on how loosely we define "the quest"). On the plot-driven level, it tells a story of a wish fulfillment or the story of a boy who wants to go to the lighthouse and does, eventually, go to the lighthouse, albeit ten years later. But
the novel can also be interpreted as a quest in a metaphorical sense, as we focus on the character-driven aspect of the story. Read as a family drama, the plot of *To the Lighthouse* develops along the narrative arc of redemption in a story of a distant father who eventually reconciles with his son. The narrative opens with Mr. Ramsay's contradicting his wife's promise to go to the lighthouse by saying that the weather will certainly be bad. At this, young James, disappointed by Mr. Ramsay's habitual lack of empathy, "would have gashed a hole in his father's breast and killed him": "Such were the extremes of emotion that Mr. Ramsay excited in his children's breasts by his mere presence" (TTL 8). As for Mrs. Ramsay, she is not oblivious to James's reaction, thinking that this disappointment will imprint itself permanently on her son's memory: "he will remember that all his life," for "children never forget" (TTL 68-69). James's resentment is finally addressed (and redressed) at the very end, when James, Cam, and the father go to the lighthouse. We view this moment from the point of view of each of the three participants. First, the father is oblivious to the two teenage children as they are watching their father and brooding over their childhood grudges. As James tries his hand at steering the boat, he is praised for his effort by Macalister, a fisherman who is accompanying the family to the lighthouse. "But his father never praised him, James thought grimly" (TTL 221). However, just before they arrive, the normally overcritical father says "Well done," at which, the sister, Cam, thinks to herself: "You've got it at last. For she knew that this was what James had been wanting, and she knew that now he had got it he was so pleased . . . that he was not going to let anybody take away a grain of his pleasure. His father had praised him" (TTL 223). This marks the point of the fulfilment of James's psychological quest, the moment of reconciliation with his father.

Lastly, the ending resolves another narrative thread, the story of a painting, or rather the story of Lily Briscoe's process of creating and completing a painting. As an amateur woman painter ("one could not take her painting very seriously" (TTL 21)), Lily struggles with self-doubt throughout the novel. As she tries to paint, knowing that, in the end, her paintings "would be hung in the attics" or "rolled up and flung under a sofa" (TTL 193), she is distracted by Charles Tansley's, Mr. Ramsay's assistant's, voice in her head: "women can't paint, women can't write" (TTL 54). Despite this, Lily, who is quite ambitious and *au courtant* with the formal experiments of her time, has her own compelling artistic "vision" (TTL 60), which she finds difficult to explain to the uninitiated, such as William Bankes, Mr. Ramsay's colleague. Mr. Bankes's dated ideas about art cannot, for example, accommodate the motivation behind abstracting a mother-and-child image (Mrs. Ramsay's reading to James) into a purple triangle. Such hollowing out of referential content clashes with his understanding that "mother and child" are "objects of universal veneration, and in this case the mother [is] famous for her beauty" (TTL 59). When Lily tries to explain to him that she is interested in "relations of masses, of light and shadows," he finds this thought novel and plans to subject it to "scientific examination" (TTL 59). We follow Lily as she tries to solve the problem of her painting by figuring out "how to connect this mass on the right hand with that on the left" without breaking the unity of the painting (TTL 60). During the protracted dinner scene, central to "The Window," Lily tunes out the surrounding conversation to return to her painting and rethink the composition: "She took up the salt cellar and put it down again on a flower in the pattern in the table-cloth, so as to remind herself to move the tree" (TTL 92-3).

Even though the painting remains unfinished during the visit described in part one, its idea is taken up again in part three, when Lily returns. She remembers that "there had been a problem about a foreground of a picture. . . . It had been knocking about in her mind all these years" (TTL 161). But now "it seemed as if the solution had come to her: she knew now what she wanted to do" (TTL 161). Prompted by inspiration, she is able to overcome doubt and start painting, settling into a rhythm where everything falls into place, only to be later arrested and distressed by a thought that "she could not achieve that razor edge of balance between two opposite forces; Mr. Ramsay [on the boat, approaching the lighthouse] and the picture" (TTL 209). It seems that her solution has deceived her, and for a moment, Lily feels despondent, frustrated with "the human apparatus for painting or for feeling; it always broke down at the critical moment" (TTL 209-10). She resolves to wait for the return of her inspiration, and, in the end, it is there for her. As the boat touches the shore, she is struck by a revelation, a sudden knowledge of what is missing and how she should complete her painting:

There it was—her picture. Yes, with all its greens and blues, its lines running up and across, its attempt at something. It would be hung in the attics, she thought; it would be destroyed. But what did that matter? she asked herself, taking up her brush again. She looked at the steps; they were empty; she looked at her canvas; it was blurred. With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in
the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision (TTL 226).

Of the two subplots, the surface one, about Mr. Ramsay and James (both as a story of arrival and father-son reconciliation), lacks satisfactory closure, in my opinion. Such things are subjective, to some degree, but I would suggest that many other readers would share my impression that the sense of narrative anticipation and release is violated due to "improper" narrative dynamics. The resolving incident is too far removed from the inciting incident, both in terms of the fabula and of sujet (story and plot), compromising the emotional logic of the story.

By speaking of "emotional logic," I am alluding to various reader-response friendly narratological accounts that pay attention to the temporal unfolding of the plot. According to Meir Sternberg, for example, the reading experience is structured by navigating "a dynamic system of gaps" (EM 50). The reader is compelled to revise his understanding of the plot in response to a surprising event that sheds new light on his previous construction of the fictional world. This revision is an ongoing process, being continually stimulated by the narrative interests of curiosity and suspense. The former aims to close the gaps of knowledge, addressing itself to the questions of "what happened?" and "why?" The latter is oriented toward the future, as a clash of hope and fear. Curiosity and suspense are dynamic and temporal properties that are balanced with each other via the structure of retardation (such as reversals, digressions, etc.) in order to heighten tension and increase the impact of the ending. As Sternberg puts it: "retardatory structure relates directly to the temporal nature of narrative . . . The fact that the text is communicated and apprehended along a continuum makes possible (and to some extent entails) a gradual and controlled unfurling of information, and hence a lively play of expectations throughout" (EM 161-163). Heta Pyrhönen, in his entry on retardatory devices in the Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative theory, also stresses the affective temporality of perception by saying that these devices "contribute to our sense of narrative dynamics" and, "by suggesting that there is a goal to reach, but one that will not be attained through the fastest route, they retard our perception of the narrated whole" (NT 499).

Similarly, David Velleman, who argues for the emotional logic of narratives, says that emotions are "essentially diachronic— . . . their nature consists in how they unfold over time" (NE 13). In his view, our understanding of plots is indissoluble from our emotional understanding: "a description of events qualifies as a story in virtue of its power to initiate and resolve an emotional cadence in the audience. . . . A story . . . enables its audience to assimilate events, not to familiar patterns of how things happen, but rather to familiar patterns of how things feel. . . . Thus, the audience of a story understands the narrated events, first, because it knows how they feel, in the sense that it experiences them as leading it through a natural emotional sequence; and second, because it knows how it feels about them" (NE 18-19). Borrowing Frank Kermode's analogy of a ticking clock, Velleman suggests that stories are made sense of "by deploying some episodes to set off an emotional tick to which subsequent episodes can provide the answering tock" (NE 20). But it is important to realize that the tick and the tock are not just to points on a graph, that is to say they should not be understood in structural terms; on the contrary, they are dynamic variables in the way they are embedded in the experiential temporality of emotion. Emotions have to run their course for the story to feel complete: "the story begins with the circumstances that initiate some affect, or sequence of affects, and it ends when that emotional sequence is in some way brought to a close" (NE 14). Thus, "having passed through the emotional ups and downs of the story, as one event succeeded another, the audience comes to rest in a stable attitude about the series of events in their entirety" (NE 19).

Patrik Colm Hogan offers a somewhat more complex framework of the affective logic of narratives, but the idea at its core is compatible with the insights of both Velleman and Sternberg. It shares with Velleman the belief that narrative shapes are affected by emotions, and emotions unfold and play out dynamically, and with Sternberg the interest in the continual sampling and reevaluation of emotional states and situations. Hogan presents two theories of emotions, one based on appraisal, another on perception. This appraisal theory attempts to chart the dynamics of human emotions in connection to desire and goal-oriented thinking. "Appraisal is [the] process of evaluating the ways in which a particular, interpreted situation affects one's ability to achieve one's goals. Broadly speaking, we may say that positive emotions reflect situations that make goal achievement more likely while negative emotions reflect situations that make goal achievement less likely. Particular positive and negative emotions reflect particular configurations of goals and facilitations or inhibitions of the achievement of those goals. For example, jealousy arises when
attachment goals are threatened by a rival." (AN 44). This model of emotions presupposes our utter sensitivity to the passage of time. We subdivide time into chunks, which form hierarchically ordered units (from smaller to larger) of incidents, events, episodes, and stories. Each occurrence marks a deviation from normalcy, thus prompting the reader to yearn for a return to normalcy, the fulfilment of which would complete an emotional cadence. Again, as in Velleman, the emotional profile of deviating from and returning to normalcy is not static but dynamic and experiential. He writes that "One important aspect of emotional response is that our experience of emotion does not operate on an absolute scale. It is part of a function of the gradient of change from one moment to the next. To some extent, this is a matter of our prior mood" (AN 33).

In contrast to the appraisal theory, the perceptual theory is based on the observation that "we respond to certain perceptual experiences very quickly," (AN 45) such as noticing that something is scary, unexpected, or arousing, before we would have had time to appraise its effects on our long-term goals. It is a theory based on reaction and it is not, as Hogan writes, immediately obvious how the two dovetail. Perhaps both of them are right, and both types of emotional response are evoked under different circumstances. What I find interesting is that there seem to be correspondences between the appraisal and perception theory of human emotions and Meir Sternberg's identification of several narrative interests. Thus, the element of surprise correlates with the perceptual view, and the act of balancing between curiosity and suspense with the appraisal model of emotions. First, we react to an event, which is then followed by our trying to incorporate it into our picture of reality and adjust our expectations.

By giving this brief overview of theories of narrative emotions, I have been preparing to justify my contention that the ending of the story of James and Mr. Ramsay does not work properly. Even though the story does contain the tick and tock of the initiating and resolving incidents, James’s desire to go to the lighthouse and James’s resentment of his father, coupled with the scene of arrival at the lighthouse and the moment of reconciliation with the father, the emotional landscape that would allow the reader to get from point A to point B is missing. There are no reversals, no ups and downs that connect these events, no detectable retardatory structure. The tick and the tock are nothing but formal markers without any meaningful phenomenological content. This feature does not easily fit in with the character of the rest of the writing. On the contrary, Woolf's novel is everywhere else extremely finely attuned to the ebb and flow of human emotion. In fact, the masterful way in which the writing captures the recurrent rhythms of emotions and perceptions is one of its stylistic innovations, together with the technique of the floating focus, whereby one focalizing consciousness seamlessly shifts into another. Both of these contribute to making this book a heady and sometimes disorienting reading experience.

The two important psychological observations that the narrative makes is, firstly, that our feelings about things constantly change: a momentary snapshot of our feelings does not reflect our overall attitude about a subject, and, secondly, that timing is crucial to making a meaningful connection with another human being. We can see this, for example, in the dinner scene in the first part of the novel. William Bankes, who has an old crush on Mrs. Ramsay, is turned off by her trivial conversation during dinner and feels a sudden distaste for her. "Yes, he thought, it is terrible waste of time... Yet, he thought, she is one of my oldest friends... Yet now at this moment her presence meant absolutely nothing to him" (TTL 97). However, a little bit later, when a perfectly cooked boeuf en daube is served, Mr. Bankes declares it a triumph. "How did she manage these things in the depth of the country? He asked her. She was a wonderful woman. All his love, all his reverence had returned" (TTL 109). In another scene in part three, Mr. Ramsay approaches Lily Briscoe as she is trying to paint. "Look at him, he seemed to be saying, look at me; and indeed, all the time he was feeling, Think of me, think of me" (TTL 166). Lily understands that he wants sympathy but bristles at the thought that it is expected of her, as a woman, to provide men with a shoulder to cry on. "His immense self-pity, his demand for sympathy poured and spread itself in pools at her feet, and all she did, miserable sinner that she was, was to draw her skirts a little closer round her ankles, lest she should get wet" (TTL 167). When the feeling of sympathy does spontaneously come unbidden, it does so at a "completely inappropriate moment... her feeling had come too late; there it was ready; but he no longer needed it" (TTL 168-9).

These episodes, together with others, reflect a recurring conflict that the novel explores—one between sensitivity to feeling and responsiveness, on the one hand, and a somewhat insensitive (or “barren,” as it is labeled in the novel) tendency toward scientific, rational thinking, on the other. The scientific mind is often
associated with the male characters, such as Mr. Ramsay and Charles Tansley, his student, especially the latter's "acid way of peeling the flesh and blood off everything" (TTL 12). They both say disagreeable things in the name of truth, such as the wind "blowing from the worst possible direction for landing at the Lighthouse" (TTL 9). James, who wants to go to the lighthouse, hates his father not only for saying that the weather will not be fine in response to Mrs. Ramsay's assurance that it will be fine, but for the way he says it, "grinning sarcastically, not only with the pleasure of disillusioning his son and casting ridicule upon his wife . . . but also with some secret conceit at his own accuracy of judgment" (TTL 8). In his turn, Mr. Ramsay hates his wife for saying that it might be fine tomorrow. "The extraordinary irrationality of her remark, the folly of women's minds enraged him. . . . Not with the barometer falling and the wind due west" (TTL 37).

Scientific thinking with its long-term goal-making thematizes explicitly the foregrounded contrast between the linear temporality of the male, quest-like and abstract, and the convoluted temporality of the woman, attuned to the natural rhythms and flow of human emotion and grounded in concrete situations. Mr. Ramsay has his own metaphoric lighthouse that shines ahead but cannot be reached. Excusing himself, because he has to feed eight children, he is nonetheless dissatisfied with his life's achievement because "he had not done the thing he might have done" (TTL 51). Even though he had a "splendid mind," yet "if thought" was "like alphabet . . . arranged in twenty-six letters all in order . . . he reached Q . . . Z is only reached once by one man in a generation. Still if he could reach R it would be something" (TTL 39). His friend and colleague, William Bankes, says that "Ramsay is one of those men who do their best work before they are forty" (TTL 28), while Mr. Ramsay himself imagines that people consider him a failure and "that R was beyond him" (TTL 39). His wife, in her turn, wonders what she has done with her life. But her achievements cannot be arranged in an alphabet: they lie in the sphere of human interactions. She has a special talent of making people feel special and has mastered the art of bringing them together in a harmonious way on social occasions. Thus as she enters the dining room, she sees that "nothing seemed to have merged. They all sat separate. And the whole of the effort of merging and creating rested on her" (TTL 91). Similarly, in an earlier scene, she builds up her husband's ego by her carefully-chosen, soothing words, and while he, "filled with her words, like a child who drops off satisfied" feels "restored" and "renewed," she is sucked dry of energy and is described as "fold[ing] herself together [in exhaustion], one petal closed in another" (TTL 44).

Yet there is the story of Lily, pursuing her own quest, which is fulfilled, I would like to argue, in an act of real, not sham closure. Lily's subplot has "content," as it were: there is continuity, gradual development, and retardation, which together amount to a sense of fullness, as opposed to the emptiness of the father-and-son plot. Her moments of doubt and dejection are interspersed with her moments of inspiration; thinking and planning are succeeded by the episodes of painting and experimentation. There is an inexorable progression in her feeling her way toward a perfect composition, from a lilac triangle, containing James and Mrs. Ramsay, which would balance light, shadows, and masses, to her doubts about foreground and background, to her decision where to put the trees, and, finally, to her epiphany about drawing the finishing line. Emotionally, Lily's journey has high and low points, building up to the climactic and moving scene of her being swept up by the compelling force of painting, "this formidable ancient enemy of hers—this other thing, this truth, this reality, which suddenly laid hands on her, emerged stark at the back of appearances and commanded her attention" (TTL 172-173). But she has not won yet: her pursuit of completing the painting encounters a major reversal, when she loses her earlier feeling of certainty about her compositional arrangement and begins to feel desperation instead. It is only when she makes herself calm down and allows herself to inhabit the mood of quiet expectancy that the moment of inspiration and fulfillment comes to her.

The novel's sensitivity and adherence to the affective rhythms of emplotment, which the story of Lily's painting convincingly demonstrates, lead me to believe that the narrative of the lighthouse subplot is not meant to elicit an empathetic response. What then? I suggest that instead of subverting or questioning the very possibility of closure, as is common in modern and postmodern literature, the text makes the closure conspicuously unnatural by imposing it externally and by fiat. I propose to read the deferral of closure through Raoul Eshelman's theory of performatism. Eshelman bases his concept of performatism on GA's theory of the sign. He uses his analysis to explain new and salient characteristics of post-postmodern literature and art. But I believe it is applicable to works created in other periods as well, especially those that feature central moments of epiphany that shape meaning. What makes a work performatist is, among
other things, a forced closure, which is imposed by the device of the double frame. "Performatist works are set up in such a way that the reader or viewer at first has no choice but to opt for a single, compulsory solution raised within the work at hand" (P 2). "On the one hand, you’re practically forced to identify with something implausible within the frame—to believe in spite of yourself—but on the other, you still feel the coercive force causing this identification to take place" (P 3). Coercion, which we nonetheless recognize, is created when the outer frame locks the inner frame. The inner frame could, for example, be at the level of the story, and the outer frame at the level of the narrator, but they could also be at different story levels.

In this case, the inner frame is drawn around Mr. Ramsay and his children, who are arriving at the lighthouse. The outer frame is that of Lily Briscoe and her story of struggling to finish her painting. Precisely at the moment the Ramsays reach the other side of the bay, Lily Briscoe experiences a flash of intuition, which tells her how to complete her painting. Her epiphanic vision is what imposes the closure on the story, with the frame around her painting becoming the literal outer frame of the journey to the lighthouse. Lily's realization that the painting is finished completes, in a peremptory fashion, the story within the inner frame. Eshelman's model validates our intuition about the artificiality of this narrative closure but it also illuminates the meaning and function of epiphany from the perspective of GA's originary scene, as I will proceed to demonstrate.

The term epiphany in its secular, aesthetic sense was introduced into the critical discourse by Joyce in his earlier version of A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, Stephen Hero. Joyce carries over the discussion of epiphany from Stephen Hero to his Portrait, but does not use the term itself in the later novel. The idea, however, does not undergo significant transformations. I will therefore use both texts interchangeably. The protagonist of Stephen Hero says that "by epiphany he meant a sudden spiritual manifestation" of a certain truth (DOE). While in the original religious epiphany, the wise men perceive the truth of Jesus's divinity, Joyce is, instead, interested in the truth of beauty, which, when perceived and appreciated, has a special effect, according to him: it arrests the mind, producing the experience of stasis. Unlike "desire [, which] urges us to possess," inciting in the audience "kinesthetic" emotions, the aesthetic moment, in agreement with Kant's postulate, is disinterested, and the emotions it arouses are static (PA 204-205). The moment of beauty, as the moment of the revelation of truth, is punctual. It arrests movement and condenses fleeting reality into a freeze-frame.

It seems to me that Woolf understands moments of revelation very similarly to the way Joyce conceptualizes epiphanies. As Lily resumes her painting, she experiences the stasis of beauty through having "exchanged the fluidity of life for the concentration of painting" (TTL 173). Significantly, Lily's moment of clarity about her painting echoes another, earlier moment of epiphany, which she recalls as an episode that happened ten years ago to herself, Mrs. Ramsay, and Charles Tansley. The trio was spending time on the beach, with Mrs. Ramsay's writing letters and, at the same time, observing Lily and Charles throwing stones into the water. Suddenly, this recollected scene finds resonance in Lily's thoughts as she reflects on the way a single moment can arrest the flow of time, stabilizing the experience of life, which is otherwise ineffable and impossible to capture. "What is the meaning of life? . . . The great revelation had never come. . . . Instead, there were little daily miracles, illuminations. . . . Herself and Charles Tansley and the breaking wave; Mrs. Ramsay bringing them together; Mrs. Ramsay saying 'Life stand still here'; Mrs. Ramsay making of the moment something permanent" (TTL 175-6). Lily clearly sees that this memory owes its existence to Mrs. Ramsay. After all these years, Lily is now in the position to appreciate the latter's special talent and mission in life: bringing people together, "merging and flowing and creating," (TTL 91) and finally making something permanent, palpable, and meaningful of the fleeting moments in time. This seizing of the ephemeral instances of now and bringing out their essence is what is at the heart of the painterly nature of epiphanies. This is what the painter experiences in her moment of vision—the feeling that she can see time standing still. In a similarly charged episode, Lily and William Bankes are observing Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay observing their children. "So that is marriage, Lily thought, a man and a woman looking at a girl throwing a ball. . . . And suddenly the meaning which, for no reason at all . . . descends on people, making them symbolic, making them representative, came upon them, and made them . . . the symbols of marriage, husband and wife. Then, after an instant, the symbolic outline . . . sank down again, and they became . . . Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay watching the children throwing catches" (TTL 80).

Whenever these significant, time-arresting episodes happen in the novel, they are shared by several participants in various configurations of joint attention. Vera Tobin in her article on To the Lighthouse...
considers moments of joint attention to be a central feature of the novel. In continuing the modernist project, according to Tobin, Virginia Woolf questions the nature of consciousness and representation. "What happens when authors are no longer certain that perceptions can truly be communicated or shared" (JA 45)? The answer that the novel provides is ambiguous. On the one hand, joint attention can engineer moments of connection between characters who do not always see eye to eye. Thus Mrs. Ramsay, who is convinced that Mr. Carmichael dislikes and avoids her, shares an aesthetic moment with him inadvertently when they both glance at the same fruit dish: "she saw that Augustus too feasted his eyes on the same plate of fruit, plunged in, broke off a bloom there, a tassel here, and returned, after feasting, to his hive. That was his way of looking, different from hers. But looking together united them" (TTL 105-106).

Similarly, in the last scene with Mrs. Ramsay, we see her and Mr. Ramsay sharing a joint look at the lighthouse.

Getting up, she stood at the window with the reddish-brown stocking in her hands, partly to turn away from him, partly because she remembered how beautiful it often is—the sea at night. But she knew that he had turned his head as she turned; he was watching her. She knew that he was thinking, You are more beautiful than ever. And she felt herself very beautiful. . . . Then, knowing that he was watching her, instead of saying anything she turned, holding her stocking, and looked at him. And as she looked at him she began to smile, for though she had not said a word, he knew, of course he knew, that she loved him. He could not deny it. And smiling she looked out of the window and said (thinking to herself, Nothing on earth can equal this happiness) (TTL 134).

On the other hand, Tobin's point that these moments of connection are fleeting, inconclusive, and deceptive is well-taken. After all, Mr. Carmichael's "way of looking [at the bowl] is different from [Mrs. Ramsay's]," and even intense momentary feelings of rapport and love are powerless to bridge misunderstandings and accumulated resentments between the spouses. Woolf’s depiction of such scenes of misfired connections is of a piece with her general interest in "the desperate and mostly doomed attempt to understand and connect to the mind of others" as part of literary modernism's suspicion that "true mutual understanding can never be achieved" (JA 52). Even though I agree with Tobin’s analysis, I believe that, in addition to exploring the modernist skepticism about representation of consciousness and intersubjective understanding, aesthetic (and often epiphanic) scenes of joint attention are instances of the reenactment of the originary scene.

What distinguishes the aesthetic moment from other circumstances of the emission of the sign is the subject’s awareness of the paradoxical oscillatory experience between the contemplation of the sign and its imaginary referent. The originary pleasure derives from the relief the participants on the imaginary scene experience when they realize that the impending violence of competing for the possession for a real object is successfully deferred. The contemplation of the aesthetic form captures the doubleness of the moment of formal closure, when the sign is both conventional and motivated or "no longer an act of ethical solidarity and not yet a mere instrument, but independently evokes its referent in the imagination, no longer as material object but as sacred being on the spectator's scene of representation," as Eric Gans writes in The Scenic Imagination (SI 84). The main difference between a regular and aesthetic use of the sign lies in the retention of the memory of the originary event in the latter case, when the sign still feels freshly emitted, still reminiscent of deferred violence. "What assures the affective link between the arbitrary sign and the experience of sacred interdiction," Gans continues, "is the possibility of imaginarily, that is esthetically, evoking the scene by means of the sign. The originary moment is, so to speak, the becoming-portable of the sign" (SI 84). In A New Way of Thinking, Gans continues this line of argument, pointing out that in art, "signs or representations cannot be divorced from the imaginary beings they generate in us" (NWT 201). An aesthetic emission of the sign is fascinated by the very act of the production of transcendence from immanence, verticality from horizontality, and focuses therefore on the newly emerged formal properties of the sign that bespeak its absolute arbitrariness, keeping apart and together within its attention span sign-as-the-form and sign-as-the-sacred. "What we call art," Gans writes, "is the deliberate cultivation of [the] generative act. The artwork obliges us to experience over time an oscillation between perception of the representation and its meaningful interpretation that models the genesis of the originary sign" (NWT 205).

In light of this analysis of art, the choice of Lily Briscoe’s final epiphany as a representative model of the
aesthetic moment feels especially appropriate. In her artistic process, Lily has been searching for balances and correspondences between her internal impressions of the external world and the representational means with which they could be captured. In her moment of distress over the progress of her painting, Lily despairs that "For whatever reason she could not achieve that razor edge of balance between two opposite forces; Mr. Ramsay and the picture; which was necessary" (TTL 209). This is a fitting illustration of the generative act on, at least, two levels: firstly, the fact that Lily is an abstract painter, and so the painting that will be produced would be arbitrary on a literal level, as it were, constituting certainly a more arbitrary sign of what she wants to express than a figurative painting would have been; secondly, the fact that she is not even painting Mr. Ramsay on a boat—she is painting Mrs. Ramsay reading a book to James as this scene imprinted itself on her memory ten years ago. Yet the event of Mrs. Ramsay's boat touching land generates the mysteriously elusive moment of formal closure, the closure of her painting and the closure of the narrative. The reader is none the wiser as to what clicked in Lily's mind and allowed her to make sense of the connection between the arrival at the lighthouse and knowing where to put the finishing line in her painting of Mrs. Ramsay or what, in Eshelman's terms, produced the lock or a fit between the outer frame of Lily's story and the inner frame of Mr. Ramsay's story, yet the narrative of Lily's creation of an art work does feel complete on an emotional level. In other words, the outer layer of the story still follows the conventional laws of narrative closure, but, by acting performatively, it reveals the inner workings of the sign, which receives its formal closure by the fiat of the originary community's consensus.

As Gans points out, Kant was one of the first thinkers who attempted to analyze the obscure and arbitrary nature of aesthetics in his Critique of Judgment. Judgment in Kant is precisely the faculty that is responsible for adjudicating correspondences. Aesthetic judgment or the judgment of taste is grounded in the intuition of a "subjective harmony of the imagination with the understanding without an objective harmony—where the presentation is referred to a determinate concept of an object" (CJ 92). Judgment without an underlying concept means that we do not (strangely enough, perhaps) judge objects based on symmetries or proportions, such as the golden mean, etc., but judge them directly: "a judgment of taste... is pure, it connects liking or disliking directly with the mere contemplation of the object" (CJ 92). This is why aesthetic judgment of taste is both universal (shared by all, universally communicable) and subjective (not based on objectively defined concepts). This claim of universal subjectivity makes Kant's analysis of the beautiful deeply insightful from the anthropological perspective because, as Gans rightly points out, the only way to bring together the notions of subjectivity and universality is through their origin in the consensus of the emergent human community.

By glossing Kant's analysis of taste, Gans brings up the interesting idea of thisness. Indeed, what does it mean to "grasp an object [by intuiting] unity and purpose 'without a concept'" (NWT 202)? Regular judgment uses concepts to interpret sense data. On seeing a horse, we identify it as a horse using the concept of "horseness" that we have formed. "The esthetic object... is one that shares with the members of 'natural kinds' the wholeness that we associate with living species, yet unlike these, it cannot simply be named by a species concept. In experiencing the particular living unity of this horse I do more than judge it a good example of horseness; I intuit it as a purposeful individual being, existing for itself and not merely in order to exemplify its species" (NWT 202). In other words, non-aesthetic judgment sees categories, while aesthetic judgment sees individualities.

This analysis dovetails nicely with the rest of the discussion about beauty and epiphanic vision in Joyce's Portrait of the Artist and Stephen Hero. The protagonist of both novels invokes Aquinas' idea of beauty, according to which the mind grasps beauty in three stages: as wholeness (or integrity), symmetry (or harmony), and finally, radiance (or clarity). This observation captures something that is central to epiphany. As we perceive a beautiful object, we experience a subtle shift of perspective, whereby ordinary vision becomes special, extraordinary vision: it makes the thing on which it focuses appear symbolic, significant, or larger than life in our imagination. Under its searching light, the object becomes epiphanized, according to Stephen Hero's protagonist. But the next moment, the privileged kind of vision changes back to ordinary vision and the object, once again, becomes ordinary. Stephen says that claritas comes from the Aquinian notion of quidditas, the whatness of an object. It has been remarked, however, that the notion Joyce really needs is that of haecceity or thisness, which comes from Duns Scotus (see, for example, Kearney (EJ)). It is our recognition of the haecceity of the thing that makes it radiant. As Stephen explains to his friend Lynch in the Portrait: "The instance wherein the supreme quality of beauty, the clear radiance of the esthetic image, is apprehended luminously by the mind which has been arrested by its wholeness and fascinated by its
harmony is the luminous silent stasis of esthetic pleasure" (PA 213). To a reader not coming from the perspective of Generative Anthropology, the idea of some special, arresting vision that can produce an exalted experience of radiant thisness may appear baffling, metaphoric, or even mystical. How can thisness be experienced? How can it create a spiritual manifestation of recognition? What can be recognizable about this particular object, the object that I have not encountered before? To answer this question, I will look closer at the three steps of aesthetic apprehension and compare them to Charles Peirce’s fundamental categories of firstness, secondness, and thirdness.

This is how Stephen in *Stephen Hero* explains these three steps to his friend Cranly.

-You know what Aquinas says: The three things requisite for beauty are, integrity, a wholeness, symmetry and radiance. . . . Consider the performance of your own mind when confronted with any object, hypothetically beautiful. Your mind to apprehend that object divides the entire universe into two parts, the object, and the void which is not the object. To apprehend it you must lift it away from everything else: and then you perceive that it is one integral thing, that is a thing. You recognise its integrity. . . . That is the first quality of beauty: it is declared in a simple sudden synthesis of the faculty which apprehends.

-What then? Analysis then. The mind considers the object in whole and in part, in relation to itself and to other objects, examines the balance of its parts, contemplates the form of the object, traverses every cranny of the structure. So the mind receives the impression of the symmetry of the object. The mind recognises that the object is in the strict sense of the word, a thing, a definitely constituted entity.

Now for the third quality. For a long time I couldn't make out what Aquinas meant. He uses a figurative word (a very unusual thing for him) but I have solved it. Claritas is quidditas. After the analysis which discovers the second quality the mind makes the only logically possible synthesis and discovers the third quality. This is the moment which I call epiphany. First we recognise that the object is one integral thing, then we recognise that it is an organised composite structure, a thing in fact: finally, when the relation of the parts is exquisite, when the parts are adjusted to the special point, we recognise that it is that thing which it is. Its soul, its whatness, leaps to us from the vestment of its appearance. The soul of the commonest object, the structure of which is so adjusted, seems to us radiant. The object achieves its epiphany (DOE).

Whenever three ways of cognizing an object are brought up, they trigger an association with the Peircean phenomenological categories of firstness, secondness, and thirdness. Peirce sees these categories as the three fundamental components of thought that apply to our perceptual apparatus, that is to say, we perceive the world in terms of either firstness, or secondness, or thirdness. There is nothing above thirdness, only recursive agglomerations of further thirdnesses.

Firstness is a "positive internal character of the subject itself" or the "mode of being of that which is such as it is, positively and without reference to anything else." It is also a "quality of feeling." Examples of firstness could be the quality of redness or hardness in themselves, unrelated to any object to which they could be attached (PF).

Secondness is a "brute action of one subject or substance on another" or a "mode of being of that which is such as it is, with respect to a second." It is the idea of effort prescinded from the idea of purpose . . . the experience of effort cannot exist without the experience of resistance. Effort is only effort by virtue of its being opposed; and no third element enters" (PS).

Finally, there is thirdness, which is an "influence of one subject on another relatively to a third" or a "mode
of being of that which is such as it is, in bringing a second and third into relation to each other." While
firstness has to do with feelings, secondness with experience, thirdness relates to thinking. Whenever we
speak of thridness or a triadic relationship, Peirce explains, "you will always find a mental element in it." 
This is another way of saying, of course, that thirdness is the category of representation. Linguistic signs,
symbolic systems, mathematical relations, and lawful regularities in sciences are all manifestations of
thridness (PT).

In linguistics, the three categories have been connected to the three kinds of sign—iconic (standing for the
thing itself), indexical (standing for something else), and symbolic (mediating between two things). It is only
with the emergence of the symbolic that language begins, although symbols may be used to represent icons
and indices. While animals understand indexical connections, according to the received view, they cannot
use signs as conventions—for this you need the symbol. And indeed, you need a third term to create an
arbitrary connection between two others. However, when we put the three stages of apprehension side-by-
side with the three phenomenological categories, we discover that they do not match up. The first step, one
of apprehending integrity, which divides the universe into two parts, the object and its background, takes us
directly into secondness, which is not surprising since pure firstness must be pre-cognitive. Consequently,
the synthesing second step is only possible on the level of thirdness since in order to evaluate symmetry
(or harmony), we need to consider the object's relational aspects. But what then do we do with the third
step of radiance? After all, according to Peirce, there is nothing above thirdness. Are Aquinas and Joyce
mistaken about this division or is there something like fourthness? On the contrary, I would like to suggest
that they display a sound anthropologial intuition.

Significantly also, Eric Gans expressed doubt about the Peircean schema, writing "what I find lacking in the
Peircean . . . notion of the sign is precisely the absence of a passage through the absolute difference of the
sacred/significant" (NWT 205). We need another category to explain "the frisson that accompanies our
encounter with a successful artwork" (NWT 205)—the state of oscillation. I propose that we call the
"fourthness" of the epiphanic seeing by the name of "mediated firstness." What we recognize as an
epiphany is the prelinguistic and pre-cognitive moment of the object's still being an appetitive object of
mimetic contention before the origin of language. What is radiantly flickering at the heart of the ecstatic
experience of epiphany is the oscillation between two images: those of the object as firstness, to which we
no longer have access, and the object as sign representing or mediating this original lost firstness.
Epiphanies are thus paradigmatic aesthetic moments, which produce a re-enactment of the originary scene.
But they also focus our attention on the belatedness of the sign, and, at the same time, promise that its lost
essence can be recovered through their performance of mediated firstness. Once we understand something
in its symbolic, epiphanic, larger-than-life sense, for example, this group of people not just as two parents
watching their children play, but as the symbolic incarnation of family itself, we have produced an alignment
of the double frame, which locks meaning into place. What is interesting about performatist mechanisms,
described by Eshelman, is that they make these reenactments self-consciously explicit. The reason we
accept a lock or fit between the inner and outer frame is because the minimal inner frame "[consists] of an
intuitively perceived unity of sign and thing," which we take for granted (P 5). This is only possible, as
Eshelman writes, because the minimally possible inner frame is grounded in the originary scene, which
creates an illusion of a natural link between the thing and the sign. Even as meaning in a performatist work
(and I consider epiphanies performatist) seems to be imposed from above by the "arbitrary or dogmatic quality" 
of the outer frame, it is made possible from below by the inner frame, which secures the connection
between the sign and the referent: the inner frame of the sign," he writes, "makes possible the outer frame
of the human" (P 5). Thus to return to Lily's epiphany, the firstness that it makes visible is Mrs. Ramsay's
luminous quality of turning life into art, but it can only be appreciated retrospectively, ten years after Mrs.
Ramsay's death.

Mediated firstness goes hand-in-hand with the experience of belatedness and retrospective nature of
narratives because the originary scene incorporates the originary belatedness and retrospection. In order to
avoid violence threatened by the contesting desires and abandon their appropriative gestures, the
participants must somehow pre-understand the danger of the center in its constraining power to defer
appetites (NWT 32). While the participants are still drawn to the center by the memory of the sacred's
appetitive attractiveness, the sacred center, in an opposing motion, pushes back. Elsewhere I have analyzed
these counter forces as the originary doubleness of narrative (NJ). I suggest that the figures of Mr. and Mrs.
Ramsay can be seen as metaphors of this doubleness. While Mr. Ramsay's quest to "reach R" represents the
forward movement of desire, Mrs. Ramsay, in her defensive stance, is backward-oriented, her cautionary wisdom a repository of scary scenarios. Despite Mr. Ramsay's lack of emotional self-sufficiency and his dependence on Mrs. Ramsay for support and encouragement, he is the optimistic partner in this union, while Mrs. Ramsay, despite her nurturing strength, is the one who sees life as "terrible and hostile, and quick to pounce on you if you gave it a chance" (TTL 66). In connecting real Mr. Ramsay and imaginary Mrs. Ramsay with a line in the center, Lily's moment of epiphany seems to me to function as a meta-narrative performatist commentary on the emergence of language and the origin of narrative.

There is something exemplary in the epiphanic moments in To the Lighthouse in their self-conscious scenicity of being aesthetic experiences par excellence, re-enacting the originary event as event, not as a memory, on the scene of representation, which engages the joint attention of the participants. Joint attention is the phenomenon made possible by the originary moment and making possible, in its turn, the originary scene's later re-enactments. In addition to the examples already given, here are two more important examples. The scene when Lily is struck by the Ramsays appearing as a paradigmatic model of the family has a double configuration of joint attention: as Lily and William are observing the Ramsays, the couple is jointly observing their children. Similarly, in the last scene, Lily is observing the boat together with normally aloof Mr. Carmichael. But in this instance, they are sharing a moment of intimacy. "Old Mr. Carmichael stood beside her, looking like an old pagan god, shaggy, with weeds in his hair and the trident (it was only a French novel) in his hand... They had not needed to speak. They had been thinking the same things and he had answered her without her asking him anything. He stood there spreading his hands over all the weakness and suffering of mankind; she thought he was surveying, tolerantly, compassionately, their final destiny" (TTL 225).

One could object that the scene of Lily's epiphany when she understands that Mrs. Ramsay made life stand still takes place entirely in Lily's imagination and is thus not an actual reenactment of the originary scene, but I would suggest that this scene is, in some sense, the most interesting example. By seeing in front of her inner eye Mrs. Ramsay observing herself and Charles Tansley throwing stones in the water, she is watching her earlier self jointly with Mrs. Ramsay, seeing herself through Mrs. Ramsay's eyes. This moment is vertiginous, circular, evocative, and recognizable. My final suggestion is that a moment like this compresses the paradigm of narrative self-consciousness. It is vertiginous because it makes visible the operation of the mimetic paradox. It is circular because it encodes the prospective and retrospective orientation of narratives. It is evocative because it stresses the belatedness of representation. And it is recognizable because it expresses what Barthes calls the deja-lu (already read) quality of intertextuality. Lily seeing herself inside the inner frame is not just a metaphor but an actual performance of narrative closure, suggesting that closure involves both transcendence and self-referentiality.

Works Cited


**Abbreviations**

*Affective Narratology*—AN

*A New Way of Thinking*—NWT

*Critique of Judgment*—CJ

Epiphanies in Joyce—EJ

Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction—EM

James Joyce: Definition of Epiphany—DOE

Joint Attention, To the Lighthouse, and Modernist Representations of Intersubjectivity—JA

Narrative Explanation—NE

Peirce: Firstness—PF

Peirce: Secondness—PS

Peirce: Thirdness—PT

Performatism or the End of Postmodernism—P

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man—PA

Retardatory Devices—RD
The Scenic Imagination—SI

To the Lighthouse—TTL

What propels narratives forward? Narrative as Janus—Nj

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Deferral, Discipline, and the Esthetics of Failure: Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*

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The most profound irony of postmodernity is the paradox inherent in the historical movement beyond the new. But the experiential realization of such paradoxes is precisely what we have called the esthetic. The postmodern transcendence of modern panestheticism is the estheticization of our very experience of time.


I would like to consider Samuel Beckett's play, *Waiting for Godot*, in light of the 2014 GASC's themes of deferral, discipline, and knowledge. I think it will be interesting to explore waiting as a mode of deferral which involves particular forms of discipline. As a guiding framework for this discussion, I am going to revisit Eric Gans' paper, "Beckett and the Problem of Modern Culture." There, Gans considers (among many other things) Beckett's "esthetics of failure." He makes it clear in the paper that Beckett's esthetics was not only pertinent to the post-war epoch, but also continued to be so in 1981. In revisiting Gans's analysis, I would like to re-examine the play and its esthetics (considered as a form of knowledge) in order to begin to re-situate the discussion within a contemporary cultural, historical, and of course theoretical context.

The classic point of departure for discussions of the play is the title, "En attendant Godot," or Waiting for Godot. Like most attentive and literate hermeneuts, Gans brings us back to the French title, emphasizing that "En attendant Godot" is "not so much ‘waiting for Godot’ as ‘while waiting for Godot.’ The ‘action’, such as it is, [Gans points out here], takes place in an interval of waiting for something else. The primary dramatic action is thus the waiting itself." (1982, 4).

I would like to pause here and consider a few things. Gans has begun to lay out the unusual situation presented by the play. There are a few more elements for us to attend to, but I would first like to note that either one of the twin titles constitutes a remarkable announcement that, already, before the play, sets up a particular form of dramatic irony that we might call postmodern. There is a hint of this in the fact that the audience can know, before the play begins, that its primary action will be the waiting itself. This dramatic irony is something for us to get back to.

I also think that the twin titles themselves bear a little further reflection. Furthermore, I would say that reading this play seriously, especially in the context of this discussion, will require us to take both the French and the English texts carefully into account. That said, I do agree with Gans that the French text has a certain priority, and this is not just chronological. The intercultural and intertextual dynamics of the two plays, with their slight permutations and subtle nuances of tone, are especially interesting given the post-nationalist angle of Beckett's early form of postmodern drama.

Gans takes his initial framework for approaching the play from a theoretical justification for Beckett’s "lucidly paradoxical refusal of greatness." (1982, 3) I say "a theoretical justification" because the conclusion of Gans’ article makes it clear that Beckett’s play represents a step further beyond the paradox; this implies that the esthetics of the play cannot be fully accounted for by the conceptualization that may have guided Beckett as
Gans argues that "we should avoid approaching this play in the first place as a success in doing what it does . . . what should interest us is what does not happen, what fails to happen . . . because the author . . . fails to make it happen" (1982, 4). This is the level on which Beckett "fails to express." This is the problem that the artist cannot solve, in part because he must also take on the "meta-problem" that he solves as a result of failing on the first level—the meta-problem, that is, of expressing his failure to express" (1982, 4).

In the play, the first level is the primary action of the waiting itself. Gans argues that this waiting "fails to express itself in the concrete action of the play." In other words, what the characters actually do is "not waiting but something else" (1982, 4). Gans sums up this situation: "the very choice of 'waiting' as dramatic action condemns the author to failure" at the first level. However, it also sets up the solution to the meta-problem: "this is a failure that can be perfectly well expressed in its own right, since everything that happens, or can possibly happen, expresses it" (1982, 4).

Gans will already have indicated at this point in the paper that, if level one is announced in the title by its present participle of "waiting," level two is also already opened up by the name of Godot. The dramatic irony, in other words, also involves the level of the meta-problem. Before the play, the audience knows that Godot will not arrive since, as Gans puts it: "his absence is the sine qua non of successful waiting" (1982, 4). As Gans unpacks the structure that will enable this success, he also makes it clear that the audience can not only be aware of the waiting and of Godot's role before the play, but they can also anticipate this particular form of success (the author's expressing his failure to express)—unlike the characters in the play, but like the author (and the actors). This postmodern dramatic irony plays out in contrast to models of popular culture, which succeed at a different, and less significant level. As Gans puts it: "in these works, of course, Godot always arrives" (1982, 4).

Instead, in this play, the absent Godot "plays a transcendent role with respect to the scene" (1982, 6). Gans asserts that "this is precisely the role of the sacred in Judaeo-Christian society: God never makes himself present, but belief in his presence offstage allows for worldly activity to go on while waiting for his return" (1982, 6). I do not agree that the roles are precisely the same, but before explaining why, I would first like to lay out Gans's analysis of Godot's place within the dramatic structure of the play.

Gans compares this structure to the structure found in tragedies or comedies where the author presents us with characters on stage who effectively imitate actions. These characters are the presumed or potential masters of their situation: "whether kings or commoners," Gans writes, "they seek to dominate their universe"—and, I would add, they seek to do this by acting. Their failure, in the case of tragedy, Gans explains, "is the sign of a higher mastery of their world from without, a mastery with which the hidden author is identified" (1982, 5). Gans makes the interesting observation that the spectators' primary identification is with the author (and not the hero), and it is the dual identification with both the hero and the author that actually enables catharsis in the Aristotelian sense. He spells this out in the paper: "The spectators are said to identify with the hero in his tragic or comic fall, but their primary identification is with the author, who, like them, witnesses and judges the hero's actions from offstage. The identification with the hero is what is, in Aristotle's term, 'purged'; but this is only possible because the spectators identify not only with the hero but with the author as agent of purgation. It is in Sophocles', not Oedipus', hands that we place ourselves in our search for esthetic catharsis" (1982, 5).

Here I would like to point out the importance of dramatic irony, both in the tragic situation described by Gans, as well as in the very different, if somewhat analogous situation we find in Waiting for Godot. On the one hand, as Gans points out, "The end . . . is only a matter of time." In both cases, this is something "the spectator well knows, whose evening in the theater is sandwiched between other worldly activities like
eating dinner and undressing for bed. Whatever the nature of the action on stage, its ultimate effect is to take up the time required to bring about a conclusion determined in advance by the dramatist" (1982, 5). The situation in Beckett’s play shows, Gans writes, that "this extra-dramatic conclusion is in effect always of a higher level of necessity than any dramatic activity," that "the dramatist’s apparently superior understanding . . . really only reflects an a priori structural necessity" (1982, 5).

Gans further emphasizes the contrast between the dramatic action in a tragedy or a comedy and Waiting for Godot: "even if the dramatic hero may be said to ‘await’ his fate, surely there is a difference between his awaiting something that will of necessity take place and Beckett’s heroes’ awaiting a character who never arrives. Precisely. The ‘fate’ of the hero within the play is in reality decided outside the play by the dramatist. . . . Godot personifies this process" (1982, 6).

This phrase, "Godot personifies this process" merits some unpacking. Unlike, for example, the god Apollo, the presumption of whose presence offstage would effectively guarantee and determine the action onstage, and provide a transcendental grounding for the author’s mastery of the significance of the drama, Godot personifies a process in which Beckett’s more humble yet realistic characters cannot act, but must be content to wait—and, as Gans puts it, "they ensure in effect that Godot will never come." From this perspective there is a certain felicity built into the English title, "Waiting for Godot." In a manner somewhat analogous to the ambiguity of subjective and objective genitives, the preposition "for" articulates two slightly different situations. Primarily, one understands "Waiting for Godot" to be a matter of remaining in the place designated by Godot until such time as he arrives. However, there is also a slight hint, as Gans has just indicated, that this can also be understood to mean waiting in Godot’s place, to do his waiting for him. Unlike a transcendental signifier that enables a structure of presence, intentionality, and action, Godot is a spectral signifier personifying a process where he not only does not fully serve as a transcendental ground for presence, but whose very absence is not a simply independent function. Furthermore, all of this is already implied for the spectators in the dramatic irony announced by the title before the play.

Gans follows Beckett’s cue in establishing the literary context for the play in terms of an anti-modernist response to high modernism as exemplified by the works of Joyce, Proust, and Mallarmé. "Beckett has qualified [the] enterprise of [high culture], with especial reference to James Joyce, as that of ‘mastery.’ Joyce was a master, he has said; I no longer claim to be one" (1982, 5). Later in the paper, Gans identifies some historical justifications for criticizing a modernist culture of mastery. Looking at the recent past, Gans writes: "modernity exhibits the most arrogantly determined efforts at mastery of man’s material and social, not to say psychological limitations" (1982, 9). Turning to an apocalyptic perspective on the future, Gans adds: "Only in a ‘hyper-modern’ era—defined by the possibility of human self-annihilation that seems to be figured in the later plays "Endgame" and "Happy Days"—is a resolutely anti-modern culture possible" (1982, 10). In between these two glimpses of the historical context, Gans will have concluded: "What Beckett’s esthetic denounces in the past is in fact nothing but its ‘modernity,’ its faith in historical solutions" (1982, 10).

This is an important distinction. Where, as someone like Hannah Arendt might point out, the movement of modern art is generally motivated by the rebellion of the artist against society (and its philistine culture), Beckett is taking this a step further, contesting the culture of mastery itself at a more fundamental level. In other words, Beckett’s artistic revolt is more along the lines of what Camus would call a "metaphysical revolt." It will be important to bear in mind that there may be distinctions to be made between Beckett’s dogmatic formulation of an esthetics of failure and the esthetics we actually find operating in Waiting for Godot. Nevertheless, since artistic mastery or literary mastery is, at least according to Gans, "the supreme value of ‘culture,’ we have now come face to face with the central problem of modern culture" (1982, 10). This problem, and its wider context, is developed to a remarkable extent by the interactions of the characters on stage in Waiting for Godot. Before turning to Gans’ analysis of what occurs in the play, however, I would like, for a moment, to re-consider the literary context from a theatrical perspective.

In other words, rather than contrast Beckett’s projects with those of a novelist like Joyce, let us situate the play with respect to the more or less contemporary dramatic works of authors like Anouilh, Sartre, and Ionesco. Here, too, we have artists staging critical perspectives on their society. Considering these works in an admittedly cursory fashion, they appear to fall into two groups. On the one hand, plays like “No Exit” by Sartre or "Antigone" by Anouilh appear to be modernist works characterized by an esthetics of artistic
mastery, albeit ironic. Anouilh's "Antigone," although it is reshaped by the author's adaptation of the play, as well as the social context of its original performance, nevertheless offers clear parallels to Greek tragedies and strong contrasts to the structure which would preclude tragic action in Waiting for Godot as we have analyzed it. The action in "No Exit" may be relatively trivial and perhaps inconclusive; it nevertheless proceeds according to a structure which is still determined, again even if ironically, by the mechanisms of the author's culture of dramatic mastery.

On the other hand, if the structure of Ionesco's "Rhinoceros" could also be described in similar terms, "The Bald Soprano" seems to follow, rather neatly, Beckett's esthetics of failure, and at both levels. The absurd circularity of insignificant dialogue and inconsequential activities corresponds to a failure to express. The author's expression of failure in this play operates less at the level of the framework for the impossibility of action and more at the level of the framework for the language itself. One might argue, in fact, that "The Bald Soprano" could be taken as a purer manifestation of Beckett's esthetics of failure, if more ironic, less paradoxical, and also without the touch of pathos to be found in Waiting for Godot. Unlike the spectral signifier, Godot, the transcendental signifier that would enable Ionesco to generate the dialogue of the play and motivate the minimal significations of its absurdity seems utterly indifferent. Ionesco's purer implementation of an aesthetics of failure involves a more radical failure to communicate, and a more ironic expression of this failure.

This contrast not only helps, I think, to highlight Beckett's distinctive aesthetics of failure, but also points beyond the perhaps sterile dialectic of this esthetics to something we might call a distinctive theatre of resistance.

Gans contrasts the social models represented by the two couples in the play, Vladimir and Estragon, who are waiting, and Pozzo and Lucky, who are effectively non-participants. Vladimir and Estragon rarely leave the stage during the play; Pozzo and Lucky are also often on stage (over 47% of the total play, and a full 58% of the first act, based on Gans' page count). Where Vladimir and Estragon represent an "essentially egalitarian society united in their orientation to other-worldly values" (e.g., waiting for Godot), Pozzo and Lucky represent—"rather pointedly, [Gans notes, and I think we can agree]—Hegel's master and slave" (1982, 8). Gans adds that Pozzo and Lucky's Hegelian master-slave relationship "incarnates a trivialized model of society as history." They thus comprise interesting characters, both for Vladimir and Estragon as well as the audience, because they "express" the fundamental worldly desire of domination," (1982, 8) and the postures and interactions that go along with that desire. Pozzo claims to be the proprietor of the land, and he waits for no one; "his movement across the stage is self-initiated and his sojourn there is only an interlude" (1982, 8). The episodes of Pozzo and Lucky are, Gans shows us, "a play within a play" which represents the society which "created the theatre of mastery as a mirror of itself" (1982, 9). Pozzo and Lucky arouse 'pity and terror' (both in Vladimir and Estragon as well as the audience) "because we all desire to be like Pozzo and fear to be like Lucky" (1982, 11).

In contrast, Vladimir and Estragon, in their essentially egalitarian relationship, comprise what Gans calls an anthropological culture, as opposed to an historical one. He also characterizes this anthropological culture as a modern culture, as opposed to a traditional one. Here, I would make a distinction between what one might call "modern anthropology" and "postmodern anthropology." The development of anthropology, following the development of the science of biology with Darwin's theory of evolution, is clearly a modern phenomenon, and is based on premises which are fundamentally different from traditional views with respect to many elements of culture, and in particular with respect to traditional conceptions of language. However, anthropologists such as Claude Lévi-Strauss and critics of orientalism and colonialism such as Edward Said have shown that the science of anthropology has long been denatured, and sometimes manipulated, co-opted, and corrupted by the modern culture of mastery within which it emerged. The critics' case has often been overstated; I think it is important to recognize that the tension between the science of anthropology and the modern culture of mastery was there from its inception and that this was felt to some extent (and resisted) even by some of its earliest pioneers. Nevertheless, especially since World War II, in a post-colonial context, a more intercultural approach to anthropology has since worked to transform the science and further detach it from the culture of mastery. I think, within the context of Beckett's play, that this perspective would be more accurately termed "postmodern anthropology."

Getting back to Gans and the play within the play, if we consider the society represented by Pozzo and
Lucky, and we also keep in mind that this society "created the theatre of mastery as a mirror of itself," (1982, 9), then it is interesting to observe with Gans that "inserted into the broader ‘anthropological’ context of Beckett’s play, this theatre appears as inauthentic posturing, a self-contradictory effort to demonstrate to the spectator that it exists independently of his presence" (1982, 9).

Vladimir and Estragon establish a (postmodern) "anthropological" context by forming a model of a minimal human society. Gans suggests that the audience relates to them differently, without identifying with them as heroes. "We are neither to imitate them nor to avoid imitating them" (1982, 7). They do not represent anyone, but "they have solved . . . the problem of living in society" (1982, 7). Their dialogues maintain an ongoing and "delicate equilibrium . . . [they] are just different enough from each other not to be mirror images, but not different enough to allow for the development of asymmetric relations of any kind. Vladimir knows Godot, and Estragon doesn't, but Estragon trusts his friend enough to make leaving unthinkable" (1982, 8). (1)

Although Gans contrasts the anthropological boredom of Vladimir and Estragon (where nothing really happens) with the historical fascination of Pozzo and Lucky, he also reminds us that the anthropological perspective is fundamental, and asserts that the "theatrical test of these propositions comes in the second act" (1982, 9). Gans reminds us that when Pozzo and Lucky again cross the stage, Pozzo is blind and Lucky is mute. Gans notes that "Pozzo’s blindness is a caricature of Oedipus’; he is the master humbled, the victim of hubris" (1982, 9). Unlike Oedipus, we might add, Pozzo is childless. Gans argues that the "dramatic function of the division of the play into two acts" (otherwise a somewhat enigmatic structure, given the lack of action) "is to mark the different effect of time on the two couples." (1982, 9) Gans calls our attention to the fact that, although Vladimir and Estragon recall their previous meeting, Pozzo has lost all memory of the past; "the blind as he says, have no notion of time" (1982, 9). Gans notes the difference here between Pozzo and Oedipus, and explains that Pozzo’s amnesia stems from the fact that "the world of the stage is no longer a locus of significant experience" (1982, 9). Gans further explains that, although "Pozzo has been humbled by fate, [he] cannot understand the past because his fate has not been determined in time but by time" (1982, 9). Gans takes this a step further when he asserts that Pozzo’s illusion of mastery "has not been shattered by the ironies of experience, but by the essential disequilibrium of historical existence" (1982, 9). Here I think Gans may have gone just a bit too far. I would have to agree with him, if we were talking about characters in "The Bald Soprano." In this play, however, Vladimir and Estragon remember, and I think that fact is very important.

It would appear, if we follow Gans’ analysis all the way here, that Beckett’s rejection of the modern culture of mastery is also a complete rejection of all history. I think that Beckett’s stance is more nuanced. Earlier, I noted that Beckett approached this early form of postmodern drama from a post-nationalist perspective. As Gans reminds us in his analysis, the modern culture of mastery is based on a conception of history. In the modern context, then, this is a history based on nationalist narratives. In rejecting the modern culture of mastery, in particular as he does this from a post-nationalist perspective, Beckett is, indeed, also rejecting the nationalist conceptions of history. That does not necessarily imply that his postmodern perspective is completely ahistorical. In any confrontation with a different culture, there are three possible outcomes: rejection, assimilation, or a cosmopolitan acceptance. As an Irish writer choosing to write this masterpiece first in French, and, furthermore, choosing to translate it brilliantly into an English masterpiece, Beckett has succeeded in adapting a cosmopolitan perspective. We will return to these choices, and to the historical significance of Beckett’s stance, a little later.

Meanwhile, let us consider the significance of Vladimir and Estragon’s memory. This brings us back to Godot. We noted earlier, following Gans, that there is no waiting for Godot unless he remains absent. There is also no waiting for Godot if Vladimir and Estragon completely forget about him! At the same time, given Godot’s role as a spectral signifier, he cannot guarantee memory the way a transcendental signifier presumably would. With this in mind, let us consider the odd role of the messengers in the play.

Although they do serve as a reminder that Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for Godot, the messenger(s) in this play barely seem capable of remembering their messages, much less the past. This stands in stark contrast to the messengers in Oedipus the King, for example, who connect the action on stage to its grounding in the past (and future) as determined by gods like Apollo. In short, history is not grounded in this play the way it would be in a play produced by a culture of mastery, yet Vladimir and Estragon
nevertheless remember most things faithfully.

Some of their memories may also connect the play to what, at the time of its early performances, was then recent history, at least for the French spectators. Hugh Kenner was one of the first to point out that the play "resembles France occupied by the Germans" and that Vladimir and Estragon’s situation resembles situations faced by members of the resistance like Beckett himself. Kenner suggested that presenting the structure of this situation may even have been "the playwright’s most remarkable feat." Kenner explains: "There existed, throughout a whole country for five years, a literal situation that corresponded point by point with the situation in the play . . . that millions of lives were saturated in its desperate reagents" (2005, 10).

Marjorie Perloff notes that, in the French version of the play, Estragon alludes specifically to l’Ariège in the Pyrenees, a point along what was known as the "Chemin de la Liberté"—the chief World War II escape route from France to Spain" (2005, 2). She recounts Beckett’s clandestine stay in Roussillon, a village about 40 kilometers from Avignon, where he worked for a farmer named Aude and picked grapes for another farmer named Bonnelly, "who is mentioned by name in ‘En attendant Godot’:


Beckett’s experience of World War II was different from that of many of his contemporaries, including Anouilh, Ionesco, and Sartre. He and his wife both played active roles in the French resistance, even risking their lives. Given his Irish identity (he apparently spoke French with a recognizable accent), his experiences of risk and solidarity were inevitably infused with cosmopolitan nuances. Our perspective on the significance of this experience can be further informed by comparing the English version with the French version. Instead of what might be an obscure reference to l’Ariège for an English-speaking audience, Estragon instead suggests that "we’ll go to the Pyrenees" (2005, 1). Perloff also notes that "the specific references to the Vaucluse and Bonnelly have been excised [by Beckett from the English version], Vladimir’s lines reading":

VLADIMIR : But we were there, together, I could swear to it! Picking grapes for a man called... (he snaps his fingers)... can’t think of the name of the man, at a place called...(snaps his fingers)... can’t think of the place, do you not remember (2005, 7)?

In the English version, Vladimir’s memories are becoming as uncertain as some of Estragon’s, making it more difficult for him to remind his partner of the event. This is not total amnesia, however; although it is a function of a different kind of history, it is not a sign of the absence or utter insignificance of history. Perloff cites the narrator of one of Beckett’s short stories, who says: "Memories are killing. So you must not think of certain things, of those that are dear to you, or rather you must think of them, for if you don’t there is the danger of finding them, in your mind, little by little" (2005, 2). If we consider both versions of the play and the scenes which they set up for the audiences, there are clearly a number of challenges for the playwright. Foremost among them, I think, if we consider this particular scene of trying to remember together things which combine trivial, everyday matters of a personal relationship and a broad, even global context, there is the challenge of both remembering and resisting the culture of mastery.

Perloff makes it clear that Beckett’s experience of the resistance profoundly informed his postwar outlook, and I would argue that it played a key role in the formation of his distinctive postmodern stance. This is hinted at in the combination of esthetics and ethics in his formulation of the esthetics of failure. This positive thrust of his cosmopolitan experience of resistance is more fully articulated in the play, in both the French and the English versions. In short, I think that the waiting in Godot, shared by the audience of the play just as it was by so many people, and not just French people, in occupied France (and elsewhere during the war), is less an expression of failure than it is of resistance. Beckett takes a firm anti-modernist position in creating Waiting for Godot, but there is a humanist impulse that needs to be further attended to.

With this in mind, let us now turn to Gans’ wider analysis of the problem of culture in the article. Gans opens this wider analysis by re-examining the notion of mastery: "the very word ‘culture’ suggests a more culturally relevant definition of mastery. Agriculture, from which this originally metaphoric term derives,
exemplifies man's domination of nature" (1982, 11). When the word culture is applied to people (originally to children), it involves "the conquest of the natural—and socially unacceptable—'disorder' within man himself" (1982, 11). The real meaning of this cultural mastery "is thus mastery over human emotions" (1982, 11). From this perspective, in the context of a culture of mastery, "literature may be seen to consist of subject-matter related to domination or 'mastery' and capable of arousing our desire and fear of same" (1982, 11). Gans has already called our attention to this in the case of Pozzo and Lucky. He explains that "this desire and fear . . . may be identified with the desire that Nietzsche called ressentiment" (1982, 11).

Gans contrasts this situation with one found in primitive egalitarian societies, where significant ressentiment is not generated because they do not involve significant social differences. He cites Vladimir and Estragon as a model of such a society. He notes, however, that "this lack of social difference does not mean automatic harmony; on the contrary, it is in such societies that the force of the sacred is greatest. The harmony of these societies is founded on the incarnation of social values in external gods or 'ancestors' like Godot" (1982, 12). I have already mentioned that I would not quite agree with this characterization of Godot. Let us continue with Gans's analysis for a moment, however.

Gans turns at this point to the Greeks as an early example of a society in which secular culture has reached a high level. Comparing Sophocles' Athens to Racine's Paris, he explains that "both are characterized by a strong degree of hierarchization limited by certain 'countervailing powers' expressed in law and custom, and above all, permitting considerable room for personal initiative in the upper-middle strata. These are the strata that support 'culture' and whose ressentiment culture both expresses and subjects to the control of catharsis" (1982, 12). I think Gans' comparison may be generally valid; however, there is something else going on in Greek culture that is also pertinent to our discussion. Greek culture cannot be fully comprehended, in my opinion, in terms of an agricultural civilization. Instead, I think it is important to consider its relatively unique status as a commercial civilization. There have been other commercial civilizations, of course, and the Greeks were aware of examples such as the Phoenicians. The Greeks were fortunate not only to be able to trade and learn from the Egyptians and the Persians but also to enjoy a geographical position which enabled both trade and relatively long-standing independence. Hence the elaborate development of their civilization and its culture. In contrast to those whose experience was shaped only by a single agricultural civilization, the Greeks could be both familiar with and able to view other cultures from a unique critical perspective.

Gans characterizes modern society as one in which well-defined social hierarchies are broken down and opportunities for social advancement are expanded. In such a context, ressentiment operates quite differently. "Ressentiment against necessary and insuperable domination—mastery—is one thing; ressentiment against the contingent, and often temporary, superiority of others is another" (1982, 12). I would argue that the social context of "necessary and insuperable domination" corresponds much better to an agricultural civilization than it does to a commercial one. More important for the context of this discussion, I think, would be the modern examples of totalitarian societies that were such a prominent feature of the mid-20th century. Fortunately, the figures of Vladimir and Estragon may point, not so much to a golden age of primitive egalitarianism, but, perhaps too modestly, to a situation where ressentiment continues to operate, but in a context of contingent, and often temporary, superiority of others—and in a context of resistance to the threats posed by cultures of mastery. Vladimir and Estragon's situation, in other words, is not one in which ressentiment is absent; instead it may be transformative.

Madelaine Hron has described the transformative possibilities of ressentiment:

"As Gans cautions, however, the value of ressentiment does not merely lie in its consciousness-raising potential, but, rather, it rests in its transformative possibilities—in its creative attempts to transcend the victim status. To be a 'real instrument of culture,' a creative act of ressentiment entails a continuous process of transformation, and of overcoming, those elements within the social order that are deemed non-significant. Such transformation can only be achieved if the subject is no longer dependent on the Other for definition, or operating in response to the Other, to take up Nietzsche's main criticism of ressentiment as a reaction" (2009, 56).

The relationship of Vladimir and Estragon to the figure of Godot differs in subtle, but important ways from the situation captured by Nietzsche's criticism of ressentiment as a reaction. They depend on Godot, but not
precisely for definition, and he can also be said to depend on them. They wait in response to Godot, but their response is based on an obligation that depends on some sort of reciprocity and maintains an open quality. It maintains an open relationship, both with each other and with respect to the figure of Godot.

In her essay on the crisis of culture, Hannah Arendt mentions that "it is of some importance that the last individual left in mass society seems to be the artist" (2006, 161). This individuality enables the artist to continue to be the authentic producer of cultural objects. Arendt defined these objects as things that have "the faculty of arresting our attention and moving us" (2006, 163). Like Arendt, Beckett also considered the role of the artist to be important and was particularly concerned about its authenticity. Thanks to Eric Gans’ analysis of Beckett’s aesthetics, I think we can better understand the role of the artist in shaping postmodern culture.

When I first read this article back in the early 1980s, I was struck by the remarkable complicity that occurs in the play between the spectators, the actors, and at least two of the characters. When Waiting for Godot is performed, thanks to the masterpiece constructed by the author, they all participate in this waiting. I have now come to recognize the element of transformative solidarity implicit in this shared experience.

To wrap things up, I would like to recall Gans’ explication of culture in the context of agriculture, and its relevance to raising and educating children. Perhaps I have spent too much time in high school French classrooms, but this also reminds me of the scene in The Little Prince where the fox teaches the little prince in a playful and imaginative way about deferral and discipline, about culture and waiting. Saint-Exupéry, writing during World War II, frames this discussion in terms of apprivoisement or domestication, and explains that it is fundamentally a process of building relationships (créer des liens).

Although Beckett took a stance against modernism, there is a humanist impulse at work in Waiting for Godot. As they wait, Vladimir and Estragon also show us how to finesse ressentiment in the play of relationships, something, I think, that is at the heart of growing as an individual in society and yet continuing to resist mastery.

* * *

1. The differences between the social dynamics of the two couples are also indicated by the pronouns they use to address each other. As one would expect, both Vladimir and Estragon use "tu," the pronoun of solidarity according to Brown and Gilman (1960, 265-266). In contrast, the asymmetric power relations between Pozzo and Lucky are signaled by Pozzo’s commands and his use of "tu" to address Lucky. Although Lucky makes a speech in the first act (before becoming apparently mute in the second act), he does not address anyone directly; his attitude toward others, by turns aggressive, submissive, and detached, is never clearly formalized by his speaking parts. Vladimir and Estragon consistently address both Pozzo and Lucky with "vous," and Pozzo reciprocates. As Gans points out, Pozzo is thankful for his interlude with Vladimir and Estragon because "like Hegel’s master, he needs contact with persons other than his slave, whose status precludes ‘free’ recognition" (1982, 8). The need for this contact seems to be further illustrated by this reciprocal use of "vous" in the play, although one might say that the status of the recognition is undercut to some extent by Vladimir and Estragon’s use of "vous" to also address Lucky. I bring this up because I think the social dynamics of dialogues merits further research from a generative anthropological perspective, and the historical development of various pronouns of power and solidarity (as outlined in Brown and Gilman’s pioneering article) might be a productive point of departure. (back)

References


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At the beginning of chapter XIX of Voltaire's "conte philosophique," we find Candide and Cacambo, his faithful companion and sounding board, en route from El Dorado and laden with some of its untold wealth, which they see as the unshakable foundation of their imminent happiness: "Nous sommes" says Cacambo, "au bout de nos peines et au commencement de notre félicité" [We are at the end of our travails and at the beginning of our happiness]. This last word has a cruelly ironic resonance, as we are immediately confronted by the exhibition of human ignominy, or "infamy" in Voltaire's terms, that is recounted in the next two paragraphs:

En approchant de la ville, ils rencontrèrent un nègre étendu par terre, n'ayant plus que la moitié de son habit, c'est-à-dire d'un caleçon de toile bleue; il manquait à ce pauvre homme la jambe gauche et la main droite. "Eh, mon Dieu, lui dit Candide en hollandais, que fais-tu là, mon ami, dans l'état horrible où je te vois? J'attends mon maître, M. Vanderdendur, le fameux négociant, répondit le nègre. C'est ce M. Vanderdendur, dit Candide, qui t'a traité ainsi? Oui, monsieur, dit le nègre, c'est l'usage. On nous donne un caleçon de toile pour tout vêtement deux fois l'année. Quand nous travaillons aux sucreries, et que la meule nous attrape le doigt, on nous coupe la main; quand nous voulons nous enfuir, on nous coupe la jambe: je me suis trouvé dans les deux cas. C'est à ce prix que vous mangez du sucre en Europe. Cependant, lorsque ma mère me vendit dix écus patagons sur la côte de Guinée, elle me disait: "mon cher enfant, bénis nos fétiches, adore-les toujours, il te feront vivre heureux, tu as l'honneur d'être esclave de nos seigneurs les blancs, et tu fais par là la fortune de ton père et de ta mère." Hélas! je ne sais pas si j'ai fait leur fortune, mais ils n'ont pas fait la mienne. Les chiens, les singes et les perroquets sont mille fois moins malheureux que nous. Les fétiches hollandais qui m'ont converti me disent tous les dimanches que nous sommes tous enfants d'Adam, blancs et noirs. Or vous m'avouerez qu'on ne peut pas en user avec ses parents d'une manière plus horrible.

—O Pangloss! s'écria Candide, tu n'avais pas deviné cette abomination; c'en est fait, il faudra qu'à la fin je renonce à ton optimisme. —Qu'est-ce que l'optimisme? disait Cacambo. —Hélas! dit Candide, c'est la rage de soutenir que tout est bien quand on est mal." Et il versait des larmes en regardant son nègre, et en pleurant il entra dans Surinam.

[As they were approaching the town, they noticed a negro lying full length at the side of the road and wearing nothing but a pair of blue drawers. The poor fellow had no left leg and no right hand. Candide addressed him in Dutch: "What are you doing here, my friend?" he asked. "And what a dreadful state you are in!" "I am waiting for my master, Mr. Vanderdendur, who owns the famous sugar-works," replied the negro. "Did Mr. Vanderdendur treat you like this?" asked Candide. "Yes, Sir," said the negro, "it's the custom. For clothing we are given a pair of canvas drawers twice a year. Those of us who work in the factories and happen to catch a finger in the grindstone have a hand chopped off; if we try to escape they cut off a leg. Both accidents happened to me. That's the price of your eating sugar in Europe. My mother sold me on the coast of Guinea for fifty Spanish shillings. When she parted with me, she said: 'Always honor and
adore your fetishes, my dear boy, and they will make you happy; you have the honor of being a
slave for milords the white men, and that is how you will make your parents' fortune.' I don't
know whether I made their fortune," he continued, with a shake of his head, "but they certainly
did not make mine. Dogs, monkeys, and parrots are much less miserable than we are. The
Dutch fetishes, who converted me, tell me every Sunday that we are all children of Adam, black
and white alike. I am no genealogist; but if these preachers speak the truth, we must all be
cousins. Now, you will surely agree that relations could not be treated more horribly."

"Oh, Pangloss!" cried Candide. "A scandal like this never occurred to you. But it's the truth, and I
shall have to renounce that optimism of yours in the end." "What is optimism?" asked Cacambo.
"It's the passion for maintaining that all is right when all goes wrong with us," replied Candide,
weeping as he looked at the negro. And with tears in his eyes, he pursued his way to Surinam.
(Penguin trans.)

We do not need an elaborate conceptual or theoretical apparatus to get Voltaire's point: human oppression
and cruelty are clearly exposed to censure, along with systemic self-deception about it, which may very well
be Voltaire's strongest point. I shall nonetheless engage some basic insights of René Girard's Mimetic
Theory and of Eric Gans's Generative Anthropology which builds on it in order to highlight salient features of
this episode that have poignant relevance for us today. Girard focuses on sacrificial violence as the origin of
human culture, Gans on the deferral of violence through representation: Girard draws our attention to
victims, who clearly concern us here; Gans's linguistic approach enables us to grasp more precisely just how
our sympathy with the victim is achieved.

Gans has hypothesized that the origin of language, and therefore of the human species as uniquely symbol-
using animals, arises from the deferral of violence through representation. To be human, he writes, is to be
"too mimetic to remain an animal" (Originary Thinking 8) because imitative behavior among us higher
mammals has evolved in inverse proportion to instinctual brakes to our mimetic violence, with a consequent
breakdown of dominance patterns and pecking orders that stabilize other animal groups. A protohuman or
hominid group could only have convened around a desirable prey it had killed long enough to share it
peacefully if the act of seizing it provoked a sense of danger from rival contenders that was strong enough
to oblige the participants to hesitate and only gesture to its appetitive object. He posits the first sign as an
aborted gesture of appropriation designating the object as attractive and inaccessible, as sacred, as having
the power of convening predators in a moment of "non-instinctual attention" (Girard's expression in Things
Hidden 99-100) to a center holding the group together. Ritual repetition of this ostensive sign, of this
convention, resulted in more elaborate forms of collaboration and of linguistic expression, ultimately leading
to the declarative sentence. Thus there obtains a key distinction in Gans's formal theory of representation
between ostensive, performative language ("Ecce homo," "Crucify him") and declarative utterance, a
latecomer to our linguistic facility, which states a fact or a truth in the absence of its referent ("Jesus died
and was raised from the dead"), and from which metaphysics no less than fiction draw their formidable and,
to some, equally fabulous careers.

A notorious feature of Voltaire's Candide is its radical empiricism, its massive attack on metaphysical
speculation in the name of indisputably brutal facts. Pangloss' optimistic lucubrations on the law of sufficient
reason (loosely drawn from Leibniz) that argues that what is must be, and therefore must be for a reason,
which must be the best possible reason in the best of possible worlds, is systematically trumped by
Candide's horrendous experience of "le mal moral et le mal physique" (chs. XX, XXI) as he wanders all
over the world in a mock love quest for his beloved Cunegonde. My focus will be on irony, for which Voltaire
is best known, and which Gans shows to be an essential property of all language.

The value of Gans's "originary analysis" for stylistic commentary is to center our attention on the
fundamental ambiguity of signs, the fact that they relate at once vertically, transcendentally, formally to
objects in the world and count as well among the objects in the world. This paradoxical, or shall we say
ironic, structure can help us to understand more precisely just how we get Voltaire's point. In so doing we
can illustrate very concretely Gans's conception of literature as a "discovery procedure" (Originary Thinking
132) and demonstrate further how that procedure is linked to biblical anthropology, to which Girard assigns
the core inspiration of his Mimetic Theory (Things Hidden II; Evolution and Conversion ch. 6). Girard's
insights were first inspired by his study of the novel, where patterns of conscious and non-conscious
imitation emerge in works from Cervantes through Proust (Deceit, Desire, and the Novel). It is not, however, necessary to believe in biblical revelation, as Girard emphatically does, to acknowledge its foundational role for Voltaire's irony.

Of all the rhetorical ploys worthy of comment here, I shall emphasize those which exhibit this essential feature of Enlightenment reasoning, namely its religious and specifically Christian inspiration, whereby the text performs a critique of Western religion from within its own scriptural tradition.

The mention of the "toile bleue," of the left leg and right hand, is not gratuitous. The narrative zooms in to provide just enough visual and realist-seeming detail to place readers in the presence of this lamentable figure and to warrant the judgment "horrible" for the man's "état." On the other hand, the speaking "en hollandais" lightens the tone by its very irrelevance, an effect that is maintained by the fast-pacing attributives—"dit Candide," "répondit le nègre," "dit Candide," "dit le nègre"—which naturalize, socialize ("mon ami"), civilize a dialogue about horror.

The incongruity of style, or form, and content is a key artifice of satire—think of Swift's "Modest Proposal"—and it is deployed amply here. To describe such treatment of the slave as "l'usage," the custom, is in every sense a strategic understatement, for it only magnifies the atrocity by suggesting its commonplace, prosaic ubiquity. Understatement is employed again when the slave summarizes his double mutilation, indicating in effect the brutal economy of slave labor, with the relatively neutral, synoptic formulation: "Je me sui trouvé dans le deux cas." Then Voltaire lowers the boom on his readers, placing us in direct, causal relation to the victim's suffering: "C'est à ce prix que vous mangez du sucre en Europe." The notion of economy, whose worldwide spread today is known as globalization, is thematized by the word "prix," and it is understood in this context as sacrificial: mutilation here functions as a kind of slow-motion dismemberment and European consumers are drawn into the role of participant-beneficiaries. The force of the statement lies in the disproportion between the huge cost in human suffering borne by others and the trivial benefit to our appetites, between the atrocity and the amenity.

The denunciation of slavery, which downgrades humans from persons to possessions, is clinched by reference to the biblical story of originary Adamic consanguinity. The creation narrative establishes absolute human equality, "blancs et noirs," as preached insistently —"tous les dimanches"—by the missionary catechesis, to whose truth—"si ces prêcheurs disent vrai"—Voltaire's European readers are doctrinally pledged and bound, to which they are in principle compelled to assent. Irony works here not to pit the slaves against the masters but the masters against themselves. Its intention is not to urge revolt but cognitive and spiritual revolution; a conversion, in sum, which is in fact thematized at the end of the dialogue. Something held up as Biblical truth is juxtaposed teasingly, via circumlocutionary understatement, to its flagrantly violent repudiation. The structure of the sentence unfolds like a slow-motion artillery barrage; it simulates the serenity of cool syllogistic reasoning ("Or vous m'avouerez"), establishing a conversational tone that is in outrageous contradiction with its "horrible" referent. The sentence defers, postpones the shock of recognition in order to deepen its impression, whereby its readers are slowly but surely branded not as soul savers but as persecutors. I will return to this latter point further on.

For all the transparency of Voltaire's irony, and just because of its simplicity, it is worthwhile to analyze its properly deconstructive operations, consisting in a leveling critique of difference among humans of the kind that Scripture advertises when it proclaims mountains shall be lowered and valleys filled to "make straight the way of the Lord."

Irony is ostensibly a simple trope. It consists in saying the opposite of what is meant, it proceeds typically by antiphrasis, as is the case when, regarding the Inquisition, we read of "un bel auto-da-fè" (ch. VI), or of war as "boucherie héroïque (ch. III), or, as here, "l'honneur d'être esclave." Like all rhetorical tropes, irony triggers an esthetic experience of language, which Generative Anthropology defines as an oscillation of our attention between signs and their referent, such that the artful manipulation of signs both draws from and lends to the prestige or sacrality of what they represent (Signs of Paradox 25, 27, 29, 136-39). This conception offers a more palpable sense to the widely held conviction about the religious origin of art (McKenna, "Art and Incarnation").

How does that work in this episode, where the function of irony is to withdraw respect for the colonizing
Irony says one thing and means another, but unlike lying, its declarative or constative falsehood means to be perceived as intending the opposite of what it says (Candide: Textes et contextes 283). Gans writes that truth is predicated "as the 'value' of the declarative proposition" (the cat is on the mat; the cat is not a mat) (Signs 60); in ironic utterance, untruth is more than implied. Irony ostentatiously negates what it affirms, and in so doing exploits to the utmost the ambiguity, the double dealing of language that Gans describes as the mimetic paradox, namely, the fact that "the sign that is in the world represents the world it is in; the sign that stands above the world remains within the world of the sign" (Signs 35). Both transcendent and immanent to the world, the use of signs generates what the anthropologist Louis Dumont (Homo hierarchicus), and Jean-Pierre Dupuy after him (Le Sacrifice et l'envie 196-97, 204), has identified as a tangled hierarchy, where the sign names a class of objects of which it is a member; the sign is both inside and outside the world, of the world and beyond it, transcendentally.

The fact that signs can refer to signs among other objects in the world is evidence for the self-referential potential in every use of the sign. Irony exploits this potential to the fullest because of its self-negating, literally para-doXical, double-talking structure. "Paradox, writes Gans, "is the privileged road to understanding the human, because paradox reveals the seam—the umbilical hole—in the hierarchy of sign and referent that is the essence of human language" (Signs 13). Irony consists in an active performance, a dramatic deployment of this paradox; it inhabits that seam, re-marks that hole and makes its home in it; makes it a scene, makes a scene about it, to recall a core notion of Generative Anthropology, namely, that human interaction in space and time is experienced as essentially scenic. Opposing the sign to itself, irony is the mise-en-scène of language as event, of utterance as performance.(1) Irony is deconstructive in its every instance, its every agency: the dichotomous relation of constative and performative utterance is exposed as a tangled hierarchy: by ostentatiously negating what it affirms, irony performs the difference between declarative or constative utterance and performative, ostensive utterance, and collapses the former into the latter, inscribing both under the heading of the performative. Furthermore, irony instantiates, activates epistemics as ethics: if we say butchery among humans is horrible we are confirming a moral consensus about what it refers to, while implicitly assenting to the ethical telos of language; if we say it is heroic, we are apparently negating that consensus, but just as apparently redoubling it, reiterating it, as it were, upside down or inside out.

Irony plays a double game, a game of double meanings; it trips a mechanism that in comic theater parlance is called a double take ("say, what?!!). It engages language in a mechanism of self-referential contradiction or self-contradictory reference, whereby our attention oscillates—but only fleetingly—between what is said and what is meant as between the constative and the performative. Where the originary ostensive at the origin of language named the central referent as sacred, whereby those on the periphery refrain from a mêlée of acquisitive violence that would dissolve the group, just the opposite occurs with irony: a hitherto hallowed reference (heroics, autodafè) is hollowed out, desacralized; the aura of sanctity or respect enshrouding certain practices is dispelled, definitively profaned. Voltairean irony typically snaps the links of the sacrificial circle that divinizes human violence,(2) creating space for a rational, "enlightened" consensus that renounces it. After Homer, Archilochus (Gans, The End of Culture, ch. 10).

In Signs of Paradox, Gans devotes a chapter (5) to the structures of irony, though limiting its discussion to classical tragedy and romantic melodrama. This is strange, since it is in Europe's neoclassical era, from Molière and Pascal ("le plaisant dieu que voilà!" he says of us) to Chamfort, and with Dryden, Pope, Swift and Fielding, that irony has its luminously golden age. The chapter ends with this observation, decisive for my purposes: "regardless of wisdom or cynicism, in order for the esthetic to function, we must experience irony through our own lived illusion and disillusion" (74)—to which I would emphasize: in that order. We smile as the scales fall from our eyes because disillusion is lived, performed, consented, with pleasure.

To sum up, first we have the well-known ploys of satire, with its put-down, punishing laughter, what Baudelaire called "le comique significatif" ("De l'essence du rire" V), which puts the reader on Voltaire's side, which is the victim's side, and which scriptural testimony is invoked to endorse, to ratify, against practices that can no longer be taken seriously on their own terms, that can only be acknowledged henceforth as abuses to be repudiated and abolished. This is the irony of Voltairean irony: he mocks religious practice
McKenna - Voltaire's Victims and Us

Voltaire's constant recourse to ironic understatement guarantees that his readers will share in the knowing elation of his notoriously mocking smile before he openly solicits, indeed dramatizes their sympathy with Candide's relentless sobbing. We cannot fail to infer that he means for his readers to share in this grief. In this regard, the narrative sequence in these two paragraphs is crucial, momentous. First the satire, with its cognitive effects, then the affective response. The deluge of tears are not those of outrage only, of indignation against what is forthrightly named and definitively classed as an "abomination," a term, we note, of distinctly biblical provenance. The tears in their excess—all the way to Surinam—are more essentially those of compassion, of identification with the victim—"il versait des larmes en regardant son nègre"—and as readers we inevitably identify with Candide's prolonged grieving. But here's the catch: if we profess the equality of all humans, then we are condemned out of our own tea cups and candy bars. Use of the possessive adjective is decisive, probatory here: We broke it, we own it, this slave is our "nègre" now.

We need to stay with Candide's tears yet a while more, as the text clearly, emphatically intends that we should, in order to define our own relation to it. Roland Barthes has described Voltaire as "the last of happy writers" in that he could write with a clear conscience, with certitude that he was struggling for justice and against prejudice and cruelty. For him, institutions of violent power seemed concentrated, compact enough to be effectively skewered; his enemies could be named, classified (99). In its moral dualism, Voltaire's vision was simple, static; his histories are mere chronicles (97) with no connecting tissue defining an era, giving it significant form. Barthes credits Voltaire's humorless, mostly unironic foil, the implacably sincere and serious Rousseau, with getting history on the move by injecting the idea of human perfectibility into literature (100). That history, from 1789 to the present, is most remarkable for the revolutionary utopias whose harvest of victims is so colossal as to render ironic mockery inapposite, unseemly in their company (94).(3) It is the world in which Nietzsche said that truth could only be uttered with sarcasm, a word rooted in the image of tearing at flesh; irony with its teeth bared, gnashing, and bloody. Of course, this is already Hamlet's truth ("Use every man after his desert, and who should 'scape whipping" 2.2) no less than Lear's ("Plate sin with gold/ And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks:/ Arm it in rags, a pigmy's straw does pierce it/ None does offend, none..." 4.6). The devastating disillusion and disenchantment they enunciate is for all time: it just may be that our world "out-herods Herod" better than ever before because it is the world of Baudelaire's "hypocrite lecteur," whose destructive barbarity is the more thorough for its being denied, blasé, banal, as we say after Hannah Arendt. The discovery procedure into which Voltaire's little apologue induces us, or that it induces in us, is one that unveils "things hidden since the foundation of the world," namely, our violent, sacrificial origins that are now revealed—with us as part and party of the "dramatis personae." That's not new to wisdom, but it is news to us every time we take pleasure in (re)reading Candide. Not least of Voltaire's accomplishments is to bring our biblical knowledge back home and tellingly present to us. We rate this work as a masterpiece because it subordinates our moral groping to its persuasive clarity.

First, then, the wry, knowing smile, then the tears; the smile is for the 18th century, the tears are for ours. For I think Candide's extended grieving pulls Voltaire's text into our modern world as nothing else we find in...
his writings: they last long enough to express diverse emotions: sympathy, and sorrow too, for the many who suffer our "nègre"'s fate; indignation, certainly, at the system which produces it. But the full truth of these tears must include shame for being complicit with that system, which is now our system, known as globalization. We don't get to condemn it except out of the rankest self-deception. Panglossian optimism is not the sole target of Voltaire's "philosophical" critique; it embraces the sacrificial character of all institutions because it assails the sacrificial rationality from which all institutions draw their violent energies since the foundation of the world. It is the rationality for the crucifixion expressed by Caiphas: "it is better that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish" (Jn 11.48) and, as Jeremiah Alberg has observed, without Christianity its logic is unassailable (182). (4)

It is not only the law of sufficient reason or philosophical rationality as such that is sacrificial: this logic extends to the market, with its cost/benefit analyses, and especially to modern markets, where money serves to mediate and neutralize exchanges and thereby detach them from the scene of human, social costs. As Paul Dumouchel maintains in Le Sacrifice inutile (ch. 1), relations of reciprocal obligations that define a community, bonds of dependency and deference, of help or hatred, are erased or suspended. All such relations define the "moral distance" among subjects, and in market situations that distance is maximal (83); human interaction is atomized and depersonalized. A lot of good and bad things can occupy the space opened up by this moral distance. The absence of internal structuration favors a climate of indifference: subjects are free to indulge in a great variety of exertions and exemptions.

It is because markets are value-free that they are so efficient. Market exchanges are people-neutral, which has incalculable advantages for the expansion of trade, while defusing in advance potential dangers humans represent to one another, whence the widespread Enlightenment belief in the pacific benefits of commerce. The downside is the potential for damage to humans that by definition does not enter into calculations that subordinate everything to debit/creditor and profit/loss valuations. Candide's tears are evidence of an anthropological truth, that of our ineluctable, structural, complicity in malfeasance, wrongdoing, for which our religious tradition supplies the word "evil," on a global scale. Over against Ivan Boesky's notorious encomium of greed to his Wall Street audience, and then Gordon Gekko's more famous iteration of it in the film by that name, the anthropological truth borne by Candide's tears is the one emphatically and repeatedly opened up by this moral distance. The absence of internal structuration favors a climate of indifference: subjects are free to indulge in a great variety of exertions and exemptions.

How, then, are we today to understand Candide's retort to Pangloss's prattle on the benefits of munching marzipan and pistachios at the cost of the serial thrashings, expulsions, and thefts he has endured: "Il faut cultiver notre jardin." [We must cultivate our garden]? We need to look how this statement responds to his preceptor's lucubrations. A Rabelaisian carnival of syllabic resonance precedes Candide's earlier enunciation of "car enfin Églon, roi des Moabites, fut assassiné par Aod; Ab-salon fut pendu par les cheveux et percé de trois dards; le roi Nadab, fils de Jéroboam, fut tué par Baaza; le roi Elia, par Zambri; Ochosias, par Jéhu; Athalia, par Joiada; les rois Joachim, Jéchonias, Sédéclias, furent esclaves. Vous savez comment périrent Créus, Astyage, Darius, Denys de Syracus, Pyrrhus, Persée, Annibal, Jugartha, Arioviste, Cesar, Pompée, Néron, Othon, Vitellius, Domitien, Richard II, d'Angleterre, Edouard II, Henri VI, Richard III, Marie Stuart, Charles Ier, les trois Henri de France, l'empereur Henri IV ? Vous savez... — Je sais aussi, dit Candide, qu'il faut cultiver notre jardin."

There is no need to translate here, since it is sounds rather than sense that are driving Pangloss' "reasoning," then numbers take over, because they are in themselves meaningless. The ellipses, too, are significant here: for the first time Candide cuts his mentor's burble short by repeating: "Cela est bien DIT réponDIT, CanDI de mais il faut cultiver notre jardin" (ch. XXX). Syllabic resonance here places emphasis on
language. We can only regard these words as an expression of hopeless resignation if we ignore the context of this retort, which phonemically mocks our endless reason-seeming prattle. Clearly, one of the things meant by this rejoinder is that there is no verbal solution to the question of evil (Weightman 155); that for those who have ears to hear and eyes to see, it calls for performance, not utterance.

Works Cited


Notes

1. "The most important feature of the biblical account [of creation] is not its naïve anthropomorphism, but
its dramatic form; the creation of humanity takes place as an event. An event is not simply an occurrence; it is an occurrence significant for a mind." (Originary Thinking 4-5) (back)

2. Girard has credited Voltaire with introducing violence into Western literature, of thematizing violence as such, as opposed to its particular forms as war, murder, etc.: "To ask ‘why is there so much violence around us?’ may feel like an eternal question, but in fact it is really a very modern one. As a Frenchman, I feel that the question really goes back to Voltaire. In Candide, the question is ‘why is there so much violence in our world?’, and the question has been with us ever since. Voltaire's pessimistic cynicism in Candide makes him seem more like a twentieth-century man than an eighteenth century philosophe." ("Victims, Violence, and Christianity" 129) (back)

3. Barthes astutely remarks that Voltaire would have hated the Marxists with all the vehemence he exercised against the Jesuits. (back)

4. Those critical of the US war on terror are often scandalized by the alliance of its collaterally damaging implementation with Christianity. (back)

5. My thanks to Suzanne Ross of the Raven Foundation (ravenfoundation.org) for help in clarifying this issue with the admonition that "one can run from guilt, attempt to assuage it on the cheap through justifying the making of new victims, scapegoats for one's unease." (back)
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