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Loss Unlimited:

Sadness and Originality in Wordsworth, Pater, and Ashbery

by

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Abstract

Sadness in literature has often been thematically interpreted as an indication of literary originality. Notions of solitude, silence, and alienation contribute to the idea that melancholy benefits the introspective work of the artist. But it is also possible to explore sadness as a more complex literary phenomenon, one that expands the dimensions of affect and influences possibilities of aesthetic and ethical renovation that gesture beyond the usual themes of melancholy and solitude. Sadness thus does not come to be conceived as merely an aspect of mourning, but as a structure of loss that is intrinsic to our concept of the world's composition and insufficiencies. The energies that surround the experience of sadness measure the degree to which many writers have been able to develop their sense of unhappiness into a way of charting the difficulties and transformative power of their own labours. As well, sadness in literature can be seen as illuminating a loss that writers generate in order to achieve through their art the possibility of aesthetic and even social reparation.

Résumé

En littérature, la tristesse a souvent été interprétée, au niveau thématique, comme un signe d'originalité; les notions de solitude, de silence et d'alienation contribuent a l'idée que le travail introspectif de l'artiste est enrichi par la mélancolie. Mais il est aussi possible de voir la tristesse comme un phénomène littéraire plus complexe, qui élargit les dimensions de l'affect et qui permet de possibles renouvellements esthétiques et éthiques, et ce au-delà des thèmes usuels de mélancolie et de solitude. Ainsi, la tristesse ne doit pas être conçue comme une forme de deuil mais plutôt comme une perte qui est intrinsèque à notre conception du monde et de ses insuffisances. Les efforts qui entourent l'expérience de la tristesse indiquent à quel point plusieurs auteurs ont été capables de développer leur propre sentiment de tristesse de façon à mesurer les difficultés et les pouvoirs de transformation de leur travail. Aussi, la tristesse peut être vue comme signe d'une perte que les auteurs génèrent de façon à suggérer, à travers leur art, la possibilité d'un renouvellement esthétique et même social.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Kerry McSweeney for his encouragement and good will at McGill and elsewhere, as well as the Fondation FCAR for their financial support of this project.

My work is dedicated to the memory of my grandparents--enduring now more than ever, they would understand what it means to convene with the company of the long gone or long silenced.

Contents

Chapter One

Introduction: Original Sadness

> Loss is legion...Let me then be destroyed. For that is the only way I may have a chance of surviving.
>
> Gillian Rose, Love's Work

This thesis takes as its subject the literary representation of sadness in the work of three writers from different historical periods: Wordsworth, Walter Pater, and John Ashbery. It is not unusual to study sadness as fundamental to the traditions of Romantic and post-Romantic literature, although it is not a thematic that is exclusive to these periods. Historically, the cult of melancholy perhaps gained its most identifiable characteristics in the nineteenth century with writers like Goethe (despite his rejection of the theme itself), notably in Faust and Werther, as well as Novalis ("Hymn to Night"). French Romanticism fruitfully explored the subject within its own traditions, as evidenced in the diverse achievements of Victor Hugo, Alfred de Vigny, Baudelaire, Nerval, and Lautréamont. And critics of English literature such as Northrop Frye, Mary Jacobus, and James Averill have shown that the poetry of the ages of Sensibility and Romanticism dealt with the melancholy of the poet as a theme peculiar to both the literature and society of the time. What emerges is a distinct preoccupation with the power of sadness as a competing force of revelation that does not, in its austerity, paralyse contemplation, but rather elucidates a notion of intellectual prestige intertwined within the experience of sadness itself.

What these different cultures of literary sadness share is a movement to redirect literature away from the mere objectification of the external world, and align poetical achievement with a writer's subjective experience of its limits. This observation,

however, merely reformulates a generic psychological explanation that has come to influence our appreciation of post-Enlightenment literature. In other words, interiority enlarges as exterior spaces become progressively more vague and alien. What is especially interesting about the unremarkable nature of such a statement is the way in which we have taken it for granted, associating literary maturity and progress with an underlying menace and tragic impulse conveyed from one generation to the next. One feature of such a concept of sadness and literature, one which is apparent in the broader themes of the Romantic and post-Romantic traditions, is the culture of the melancholy poet, who finds his literary art coming into conflict with social investments as his own needs are antagonistically juxtaposed with the mundanity and habitualness of daily life. The attempt to harvest the greatest of the passions through poetry creates a space of withdrawal and isolation that contrasts with the richness of the writer's sheltered voice.

What this study attempts is not a conceptualisation of literary melancholy as either a pure function of tradition and authority (which is an aspect of Harold Bloom's sorrowful theory of influence), or a generic preoccupation that owes much of its force to the colours and topoi of elegy. I shall examine sadness as an affect that is peculiar to the work of each of the writers I have chosen, and specifically how it comes to influence their different enterprises. I would like to use sadness as a focus for an examination of imagery, motifs, and themes that gesture beyond their immediate forms to suggest possibilities of aesthetic and ethical attentiveness woven into the fabric of what Jay Fellows has referred to as the 'linguistic consciousness" of literature. Each of these writers displays differing experiences of and uses for sadness in his work, but there is a certain shared belief that reveals itself in their individual efforts. Sadness comes to be thought of in two possible ways: it is essential as a human feeling, and appears to constitute a type of wisdom about the world accessible only through perceptual solitude and enclosure. It is associated with the domain of the self, and in turn with the private and solitary spaces found in literature (Milton's invocations in Paradise Lost,

Wordsworth's recollections amid the vastness of nature) where a writer's subjective, and hence authoritative, knowledge of interiority is most eloquently exposed. At the same time, sadness is also a temporary fatigue in the face of hope, and its very ephemerality as an emotion suggests that it inherently contradicts the more considerable progress of literary effort. It is thus through a writer's ability to find in unhappiness both his greatest obstacle and his richest satisfaction that its value for the aesthetic project comes to be subtly defined.

It is a truism to insist that themes of disconsolation bring with them certain social, philosophical, and aesthetic gains: the task of writing figures as a therapy that returns the writer into participation with a world that has become meaningful through those same emotions that initially withdrew him from it in the first place. In Literary Power and the Criteria of Truth Laura Quinney has charted the affection of Aeschylus, Johnson, Shelley, Weil, and Wittgenstein for what she has called the "tragic paradigm," suggesting that such an attraction is ambivalently associated with the belief that tragedy is interchangeable with the "grimness of the truth." My methodological premise is indebted to Quinney's, but whereas she draws out a certain alliance between literary and philosophic paradigms, my approach will be aesthetic and developmental. I shall broaden what often appears as either a theme, tone, or an explicit subject of sadness in literature, and relate it to how a writer will interpret it within the project of his own aestheticisation of the world. What this suggests is that sadness is part of a more complex emotional desire to rediscover the world through art: unhappiness in the present helps to mobilise a creative project that would seek to reshape and re-characterise the environment as more than simply a social space, but as one which is a direct expression of the writer's own wishes and beliefs. However, the fact that sadness is not overcome through literature, but rather comes to reinforce and refine the writer's emotional capacity to understand the world as if its tenuousness lay within his own field of response, provokes interest in the sustained privilege ascribed to sadness by Wordsworth, Pater, and Ashbery. What sort of a reality

is it that needfully absorbs the expressions of sadness, and how does it reflect a writer's own inner struggles?

Many of the questions I have raised so far appear to beg a psychoanalytic examination, and certainly the manner in which I have framed these questions derives from Freud's classic study of mourning and melancholia. Although I shall refer to the Freudian account and make use of it in some of my arguments, I shall not ground my study in psychoanalysis because the primary concern of my work is aesthetic. A more recent book by Julia Kristeva, Soleil Noir: Dépression et Mélancolie, seems to reconcile art with psychoanalysis by appealing to a type of methodology heavily informed by post-structuralist theory. Although Kristeva is in many ways a valuable critic for the subject of literary and psychological themes, I find that she clinically overdetermines the dimensions of the relationship between artist and work. I would like to suggest that literary sadness can be understood as a feature of a broader argument for art's redescription of the world. Such a world would be eloquently visualised as aesthetic phenomena, and would challenge the view that sadness can only obliterate reality by encouraging a complete identification with melancholy in the absence of any reparation.

Another critical influence on this study is the work of William Flesch, who in his essay "Anonymity and Unhappiness in Proust and Wittgenstein" and his study The Limits of Generosity, has fruitfully approached questions of sadness and loss in their cultural and literary contexts. What I take from him is a concern for the extreme regions of language where expression appears to be compromised, if not entirely eradicated, by the sorrow of literature. Flesch attempts to elucidate the ways in which these evasions of meaning suggestively reveal ethical and aesthetic preoccupations that force us as readers to work through the difficulties posed by the writers, to exceed superficial judgements that would ascribe these difficulties to matters of technique, personality, or forgetfulness. My study attempts to complement some of Flesch's ideas, and suggest that sadness is interwoven with a consideration of literary anonymity, or what I perceive as the desire

to ensure one's authority by relegating it to the sphere of discretion and namelessness. Loss constituted as an essential attribute rather than a measure of despair.

There are several reasons for my choice of literary subjects. I would like to critically examine the line of Romantic inheritance between Wordsworth, Pater, and Ashbery, a tradition that exploits sadness as one of its most identifiable literary tropes. More specifically, I would like to evaluate different responses to the notion of unhappiness in literature, and to suggest that although there is a cultural emphasis placed on these differences, the concerns generated for and by the experience of sadness are considered primarily as literary. Each of these writers depends upon melancholy in order to sustain his own artistic efforts, and one aspect of their collective achievement lies in their identification of writing as a labour that is aesthetically transformative. That the Greek root of the term "aesthetics" means "to perceive" suggests that art is a means of seeing the world in a way that will reconceive it as a work in progress. The universalising tendency of unhappiness, which suggests that we are by no means alone in our dejection, competes with the inner desire to proclaim unhappiness as being singular and inexpressible, and it is the complexity of such a relationship that I would like to trace in my study. As Gillian Rose observes in her memoir Love's Work, loss is as needful and important as the possibility of its imminent alleviation: " 'Loss' means that the original gift and salvation of love have been degraded: love's arrow poisoned and sent swiftly back into the heart. My time-worn remedy has been to pluck the arrow and to prove the wound, testing its resources with protestant concentration" (68).

The thesis will begin with a study of Wordsworth, and through readings of the 1802 Preface to the Lyrical Ballads and "The Discharged Soldier," I shall examine how the didactic and formal style of the Preface evokes a type of emotional solitude that is more richly dramatised in the context of his poetry. Whereas the Preface highlights certain theoretic preoccupations that are dependent upon a concept of loss as intrinsic to the success of the Lyrical Ballads themselves, the poem serves as an elucidation of

the degree to which the sympathetic eloquence and morality of Wordsworth's poetic achievement can evolve into more complex understandings of the relationship between the poet, his subjects, and the natural world that serves as the context for their literary encounters. The following chapter will be devoted to Walter Pater's poetics of sadness, and will more explicitly pursue some of the cultural implications of what I see as the anonymous, almost ghostly allusiveness of his writings. Pater is famously regarded as the nostalgic critic of The Renaissance who, quoting Hugo, said that "we have an interval, and then our place knows us no more. Some spend this interval in listlessness, some in high passions, the wisest, at least among the 'children of this world,' in art and song." (190). Much of the structure of his thoughts and writings depends upon an examination of sadness as an experience that is inextricable from a proper attention to art and life. Even more interestingly, Pater offers an example of how sadness can be indeed vital to aestheticism, despite the apparent conflict between his own view of artistic appreciation, and the lingering shadow of disconsolation. Finally, I shall conclude with a consideration of John Ashbery's contemporary mode of dejection. Although this chapter will complement some of the conventional wisdom regarding Ashbery as a splintered, solipsistic voice, I shall suggest that the detachment and groundlessness that are notable characteristics of his poetry, felicitously broaden the sense of an essential isolation usually ascribed to him. I believe that Ashbery offers us a normalised perspective of sadness, one that assimilates the experience by almost excluding its very pathos in the effort of treating loss as a fruitful attribute of life. Such an attribute also performs a stunning effect on the aesthetic sheen of his poetry, and I intend to examine how his work necessarily depends on motifs and themes of loss in order to strengthen its own peculiar eminence.

Chapter Two

Transport and Regret: Wordsworth Alone

> What is a Poet? To whom does he address himself? And what language is to be expected from him? He is a man speaking to men...
>
> Wordsworth

> What is a Poet? An unhappy man who in his heart harbours a deep anguish...I tell you, I would rather be a swineherd, understood by the swine, than a poet misunderstood by men.
>
> Kierkegaard

1.

In his essay "Silence and the Voice of Thought," Angus Fletcher identifies the aesthetic benefits of introspection in pre-Romantic literature as already anticipating many of the anxieties that have come to define the peculiar psychology of solitude in Romantic poetry: "The ground of beauty...is that vacuous 'waste of air,' that into which all beauty disappears" (198). As Fletcher goes on to say, the theme of abandonment is all the more remarkable as a poetic imperative because it simultaneously develops and attempts to resolve the desertion that is its underlying force. These preoccupations can be traced to their richest intensity in a figure like Wordsworth, for whom the attraction to silence and its evocative topographies is closely associated with a notable sadness for the elements of both his inspiration and heightened alienation. Wordsworth shared an assumption with many writers of the period that the sort of poetry that could prevail over the monotony of Enlightenment versification had to be attuned to the fascinations of feeling and thought rather than artificial stylisation. But this belief was also aligned with an awareness of how such a poetry would inevitably come to express the degree to which the tradition

and history of English poetry had become a lingering sorrow for the contemporary writer, a sorrow colouring the world of literature as both a limit and a curious premium.

Wordsworth is one of the few writers who has been able to sustain a profound concern for the experience of sadness as a constitutive part of literary power, especially the consequences of such a power when it reinterprets the world as the disillusioned summary of our feelings. Laura Quinney has noted that the prevalence of hope in his work in fact encourages a very different, shadowy interest: "for it allowed Wordsworth to create a more extended and persuasive representation of the psychology, not of hope and 'self-renewal,' but of what is in a sense their opposite--the longing for them--and of all the complexities arising from the restiveness of longing" (" 'Tintern Abbey' " 141). For Wordsworth, the theme of literary alienation had a critical effect upon the circuit of his ambitions, and became his favoured trope for the melancholic depth and intelligence of his insights. Wordsworth's awareness that solitude had a complicated influence on both the substance and the conception of his poetic labours is the basis for Quinney's insistence that he developed a psychology of the self far more advanced than what had been possible in the work of his contemporaries.

Wordsworth's mourning for a past he has outgrown, willingly or not, provokes his attitudes towards change and preservation, especially his complicated apprehension of temporality. While developing a form of poetry itself progressively determined by temporal movement rather than bland, static descriptiveness, Wordsworth is also content with the belief that his work aspires towards a type of renewal that comes as a result of careful discursive elaboration. Struggling with this awareness of time's responsibility for his estrangements, Wordsworth's thoughts can be read as expressing a dissatisfaction with the world. Even more than Pater, who similarly mistrusted the dull habitualness of everyday life, Wordsworth was captivated by the stimulation of disillusioned emotions and thoughts that literature inspired as well as consolidated. In what follows I would like to examine some of these emotions and thoughts regarding solitude and sadness by

exploring two texts that are both typical and strange in their elaboration of these subjects. I shall suggest that Wordsworth's theoretical allusions to these subjects in the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads (1802) already begin to develop the profound thematics that emerge in his strongest poetry. As an example of the latter genre, I shall discuss the long poem "The Discharged Soldier" in the context of its intensification of those feelings already theorised in the Preface, feelings surrounding the belief in solitude and sadness as central rather than marginal aspects of literary experience.

2.

Throughout the 1802 Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth engages in a persuasive relationship with his readers over the theory and reception of poetry.[1] On the surface, such an affinity is perhaps only an elegant aspect of form and style (characteristic of Wordsworth's rhetorical favouring of *humilitas* in his writings), but it also serves to fulfill a promise of inclusion and capaciousness. What is significant here is the invention of his reading audience: it allows Wordsworth to establish a sense of reciprocity on his own terms and to personalise his task by grounding its moral imperative in a conscious relationship with a receptive community. By extending his argument in firm recognition of a participatory audience for his ideas, Wordsworth already begins to complicate such a relationship by dwelling on the differences between the poet and his readership, differences that will influence his concept of poetic genius, as well as his desire to seek a type of knowledge accessible only through deprivation and loss:

> I will not take it upon me to determine the exact import of the promise which by the act of writing in verse an Author, in the present day, makes to his Reader; but I am certain, it will appear to many persons that I have not fulfilled the terms of an engagement thus voluntarily

[1]For a discussion of this relational aspect of Wordsworth and Coleridge's work in the Lyrical Ballads, see Tilotamma Rajan's The Supplement of Reading.

> contracted. They who have been accustomed to the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers, if they persist in reading this book to its conclusion, will, no doubt, frequently have to struggle with feelings of strangeness and aukwardness [*sic*]: they will look round for poetry, and will be induced to inquire by what species of courtesy these attempts can be permitted to assume that title. (596)[2]

This passage is characteristic of the prescriptive aspect of the Preface: it is prudently anticipatory and formalised, and appears overdetermined by a sort of critical reflectiveness typical of Wordsworth's thought. But this reflectiveness is also touched by an element of intimacy that makes its pronouncements appear temporary and cautious, although that familiarity is carefully guarded by a more than deliberate literary restraint. As if in fulfillment of his own style of writing, Wordsworth's ideal readers are possessed by a self-consciousness that obscures them to the gaudiness of false traditions: they who look round for poetry but are surprised by a volume that has little resemblance to what they have grown accustomed to perusing, exemplify the success of his project's desire to raze all trace of literary precedence. The community is left idle in judging him because of the surprise mixed with implicit fascination provoked by the Lyrical Ballads. Like many of the characters in Wordsworth's poetry, the rural people figured in the Preface describe a type of reflection that is in fact proper to the poet's own understanding of himself, rather than the outer world. They establish the parametres of a field of perception that appears as a function of the poet's imagination.

To dismiss, however, external influences as mere foils, or as exiguous to Wordsworth's procedures, insufficiently appreciates the validity of such movements of estragement in his psychology, and their effect on his creativity. Take, for example, the fascination held by estranged objects, which is an element of Wordsworth's description of the poet: "a disposition to be affected more than other men by absent

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[2] All citations from Wordsworth, both poetry and prose, are taken from the Gill edition in the Oxford Authors series, to which all page numbers quoted in the text refer.

things as if they were present; an ability of conjuring up in himself passions, which are indeed far from being the same as those produced by real events" (603). The unforced shift from knowing to the lack of knowledge in the Preface will come to colour the representation of the sort of invented readership Wordsworth solicits--free of arguments, thoughts, splendidly mute but intensified in feeling. This specific interest in affect also reflects the poet's image of himself before his audience, an image as intent on being stripped of knowing as it is on stirring its emotional capacities by virtue of a process of self-alienation.

> But Poets do not write for Poets alone, but for men. Unless therefore we are advocates for that admiration which depends upon ignorance, and that pleasure which arises from hearing what we do not understand, the Poet must descend from this supposed height, and, in order to excite rational sympathy, he must express himself as other men express themselves. (608)

Jerome Christensen has analysed Wordsworth's vertical tropes in the light of Coleridge's critique of the Preface in the Biographia Literaria. Where Coleridge associates poetic height with a distinct sense of property and class, Wordsworth intuits a false elevation that lends itself to poetic caprice. Even more than this, the descent from a "supposed height," as Christensen reflects, suggests a desire to efface and subsequently refurbish the authenticity of an image that captivates Wordsworth's imagination: "That emphasis suggests that Wordsworth introduces and disposes of the metaphor of height as part of a strategy to refresh by dislocation the sense of *beyond* which has been trivialized by indefinite repetitions of the spatial metaphor...poetic height is *really* a visionary actual about which nothing can be supposed and about which only Wordsworth knows" (146). The passage is a clear directive on Wordsworth's part to bring poetry back to the social realm and re-establish its relationship with an external audience; but as Christensen suggests, the polemic does not textually depart from the themes of solitude and retreat that haunt the aesthetic texture of Wordsworth's poetry. If the visionary is assumed to be indeed a place that the poet preserves as a wish left unattainable,

then the failure of ever representing that visionary location will become at once the failure and mark of an authentic self that is actively involved in the dynamics of the poetic enterprise.

A passage from Kierkegaard's Either/Or helpfully illuminates this point: "The isolationist idea is always in evidence where men assert themselves numerically. When one man will assert himself as one, then this is isolationism" (139). The pastoral impulse in Wordsworth has a conflicting effect: on the one hand, it imbues his notion of a com-munity, encouraging the calming aspect over his sense of self, a condition diffuse and receptive--ripe for "emotions recollected in tranquillity." But under magnification, the grace of such eloquence also has the effect of reducing all experience to pure revery, to a pool of dispersed feeling that threatens Wordsworth's individuality, thereby putting him at odds with his pastoral theme. In another formulation, such a dissonance seems to express itself as one of the liabilities of the form of pastoral, which underwent a generic transformation by being influenced by the desirability of other forms that were more agreeable to the elevated theme of poetic genius. "Romance," says Stuart Curran, "is the natural outgrowth of the imagination's desire for something beyond mere sufficiency...[A]nd it is thus inherently in conflict with pastoral fixities. And yet...nature itself fosters the imagination's urge to break its confines; in generic terms, pastoral opens naturally into romance. The result, however, is not to effect a break with pastoral, but to force its enlargement so as to encompass the imaginative pressure exerted upon it" (187).

The conflation of romance and pastoral thus does not simply cancel the differences between the two forms, but rather organises them to provide the topos and pathos of a type of self-reflectiveness we perceive as unique to the aesthetics of the Romantic poets. The traces of both forms are reconstituted because their assimilation to one another also scrupulously preserves the imagination's power as both the source and theme of the two genres. Wordsworth recognises the Poet's distinction in his ability to

select from the language of men that which is most appropriate to poetic expression. That expression is superficially gathered from external stimulants, but subsequently takes on a buoyancy of its own that refigures the apparent tranquillity of the world as an indication of the self's abiding strength to support such a movement. Thus Wordsworth's pastoral theme reflects and acts as a point of reference for the process of interiorisation that he is to describe in specifically psychological terms. The interest in the pure sensations of rurality, an interest for an "otherness," depends upon a sense of how that rurality is peculiar unto itself, why it elicits a fascination in the first place. That specificity is determined perhaps by Wordsworth's belief that the rural world is somehow redeemed by its alienation from "the din/Of towns and cities" as he refers to it in "Tintern Abbey," an environment that ignores, yet would probably breach, the harmonised solitude of such a marginal lifestyle. Similarly, Wordsworth's imaginative psychology has an alienating purchase on the "continued influxes of feeling [which] are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representative of all our past feelings" (598). The solitary labours of the mental faculty are the source for the potency of a language that is exalted for its visionary potential and ineluctable elitism. As nature and rurality are essentially in conflict, so the poet's mind undergoes a revision of terms. The obscurity of the relationship between mind and nature repeats the differences inherent in each one of the terms themselves, as well as emphasises the type of self-effacement Wordsworth textually cultivates, a type of faceless but *naturalised* and omniscient presence throughout the poetry.

In his book The Renewal of Literature, Richard Poirier identifies two features of twentieth-century modernist writing that are also implicitly intrinsic to the ideal literary definition of the term "modernity" itself--difficulty and density.[3] Whereas the

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[3]Poirier 130-44.

former deals with a type of technical polish, a mystification of the literary surface that manifests allusiveness and high-powered erudition, the latter has to do with a discreet tropological originality unique to the work--its aesthetic achievement. Poirier goes on to provocatively state that "Troping gives evidence of the human involvement in the shaping of language, and it prevents language from imposing itself upon us with the force and indifference of technology" (131). The originality latent in tropes is separate from the modes of copy and imitation although it is subject to the loss these modes incur, as Benjamin similarly states in one of his famous discussions of the aura, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," where the waning auratic image evidences the human presence in art at its moment of obliteration. Poirier's discussion of literary density seeks to humanise literature as the source and expression of a self separate from the social pressures that seek a claim upon its identity. His view is particularly suited to Benjamin's observation that "To perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return" (184). Both writers identify a common lustral emanation as evocative of human indestructibility--for Poirier the moment is literary whereas for Benjamin it ranges to encompass a variety of similarly epiphanic moments. Whether it be density or aura, each manifestation is rendered as a pleasure notably hard to assimilate--a source of discomfort because its persuasiveness depends upon the obscurity of its eloquence. Wordsworth identifies such a discomfort in his own readers, and it serves to measure the quality of his own work. What all these writers suggest is that literature does not define its humanity at the moment when it extends itself to a receptive audience, but rather that humanity endures as a mysterious splendour intrinsic to the writing itself. The representation of our lives in literature has more to do with ineffability, density, and solitary reflection than swift readerly perusal. The experience of reading thus dramatises the sort of attention that deep thought seeks as fundamentally necessary, as the book comes to be apprenticed to the mind's withdrawn self-examination.

The mind's estrangement from the physical and social body charts the fine boundary between contemplation and solipsism that many critics have identified as a debilitating characteristic of Wordsworth's work.[4] Although thought inspires sympathy and relations, its processes stimulate a form of attention for its own capacities, which promote the mind as the sole guarantor of the poet's existence and originality. Thought can be seen as one source of human suffering--to continuously be involved in a process of reconceiving the world according to one's genius risks having such a process define itself as more vital than the actual practices that would inevitably palliate the suffering one contemplates. This is perhaps one feature of the legacy of Wordsworth on writers like Walter Pater, whose elaborate aestheticism at times seems utterly unimpeachable by the external world. The mind, then, develops the conditions for its own sadness. Like Margaret in "The Ruined Cottage" who is committed to immobility, hopeful thought is tragically exemplified in a solitude that is as painful as it is also conducive and pleasurable.

> What then does the Poet? He considers man and the objects that surround him as acting and re-acting upon each other, so as to produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure...he considers [man] as looking upon this complex scene of ideas and sensations, and finding every where objects that immediately excite in him sympathies which, from the necessities of his nature, are accompanied by an overbalance of enjoyment. (606)

Though ideas and sensations remain to sponsor the mind as their seat of origination, it is the joyful overbalance that they induce by virtue of their significations that marks

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[4]In a provocative and eccentric discussion of "Tintern Abbey" in his book The Limits of Mortality, David Ferry states that the poem moves "in what it cannot quite successfully contain, nor contemplate with perfect equanimity," which is that despite the closing blessing passed upon his sister Dorothy, Wordsworth himself is "living proof that this is not true...what he has learned is not only that love of man which is another form of the love of nature, but a corresponding hatred and fear of the ordinary experience of men" (111). I do not agree with Ferry's observation, although it essentially illustrates the extent to which Wordsworth can provoke reflections that imbibe the darker sources of his poetic sadness.

the poet's considerable sensitivity--what Pater would call the sinking of the intellect into sensuous form. These excitations animate the excited obscurities of sense, which indicate a mind as much smoothed and finely receptive as it also undergoes a sensual renewal. What stays, however, is the feeling of discomfort as a "knowledge which all men carry about with them" (606). By the same logic that draws him to images of suffering and despair, these emotions common to all men are founded in Wordsworth upon a sense of emptiness he has learned from rural life. He knows the distance between poetry and feeling, knows (as Coleridge continually pointed out) that the language of rural men is incommensurable with the poet's own style, knows that nature is subjective and draws the poet into its solitude, as well as signals the obvious priority of time over the mind's perception of the world. It is this mixed blessing which describe the poetics of sadness in Wordsworth: a view of literature as both a representation of reality, and as a source of beauty unto itself that sees the world in excess of its immediate limitations.

For Wordsworth, the world of books preserves a special dignity: it can serve to bring happiness. Thus the success of reading would lie in its ability to assimilate the work of literature so responsibly that it would elude the errors that books can invariably come to provoke and project onto the world. Towards the end of the Preface where he dismisses a stanza from a poem by Dr. Johnson, Wordsworth briefly summarises his own view regarding discerning reading. In reflecting upon "I put my hat upon my head/And walk'd into the Strand,/And there I met another man/Whose hat was in his hand," Wordsworth criticises Johnson's poem for its pedestrian matter-of-factness, its blank appeal to the obvious and mundane. A subject so ordinary also reflects a mode of composition that is equally spurious, because it aims to apply the style of sincerity to an idea which--and he emphasises this by quoting from the children's rhyme "Babes in the Woods"--is worthy of a vehicle as modest as its freight. Johnson is guilty here of a feeble overdetermination of literary style--an ornamental frailty that exposes its actual self-emptiness. For Wordsworth, the poem is evidence of the sort of imaginative

ignorance that can mechanically compose a work utterly lacking in affect and substance. The poverty of Johnson's stanza troubles Wordsworth for several reasons, notably its perpetuation of a certain Enlightenment aesthetic he strongly opposes, as well as its trivialisation of literature as a mode of mimesis rather than contemplation. But another presumed reason for Wordsworth's dislike of the stanza is that it displays something Johnson's art achieves in vulgar excess: a mode of literary representation that would annul the world of experience and referentiality. It is not that Johnson strains towards a type of metaphysical vagueness here, but that he anticipates the degree to which style can be thought of as a disjointed thing, out of phase with its subject matter. Johnson reminds Wordsworth of something that runs throughout the Preface contradicting his essential argument: the tenuousness of his own poetry. That tenuousness surfaces especially when his thoughts appear to pressure themselves towards the opposite side of originality where a similar fall into a Johnsonian emptiness appears imminent (compare Johnson's poem with Wordsworth's notorious "I wandered lonely as a cloud"). It is as if Wordsworth here has been forced to reflect upon the mediocrity of both his thoughts and the realisations that have caused them to be so unnaturally exposed.

Wordsworth's counsel that the reader be on guard for such poor specimens of verse suggests that the sins of the poet are repeatable in the memory of his readers. The memorisation of Johnson's lines will only dull the poor reader's mind with the banalities of inferior verse. Wordsworth seeks to protect the reader's intelligence; more specifically, he wishes to secure the ability through reading to discriminately expand the thoughts of literature into the project of the world. The reader must believe in this relationship between art and reality: he must *appreciate* it as a reflection upon his mind, figuring for his own indestructibility in light of the questions and arguments that forcefully stimulate it:

> I have one request to make of my Reader, which is, that in judging these Poems he would decide by his own feelings genuinely,

> and not by reflection upon what will probably be the judgment of others... I have therefore to request, that the Reader would abide independently by his own feelings, and that if he finds himself affected he would not suffer such conjectures to interfere with his pleasure. (613)

Wordsworth perceives Johnson's errors as weak instances of a type of pathetic loss improperly expressed by the caprices of a previous generation of writers. Instead of registering human presence, the waning affect of Johnson's poetry inevitably makes itself obsolete by resorting to mimesis and artifice instead of substantially developing its content and composition. Like Johnson, however, Wordsworth is confronted with the systematisation of style which dictates an originality distinct from all modes of external responsibility, as his psychology of the mind suggests: "such habits of mind will be produced, that, by obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits, we shall describe objects, and utter sentiments, of such a nature and in such connection to each other" that they will become salubrious for the affections (598). The retreat into such an ability to organise sense data until it gains the guise of familiarity, intimates a desire to find sequence in thought rather than synchronicity--consistency of mental progress and its indestructible presence through literature despite the possibility that such illumination is fated to appear and then vanish like a burning coal.

> The subject is indeed important! For the human mind is capable of being excited without application of gross and violent stimulants; and he must have a very faint perception of its beauty and dignity who does not know this, and who does not further know, that one being is elevated above another, in proportion as he possesses this capability. It has therefore appeared to me, that to endeavour to produce or enlarge this capability is one of the best services in which, at any period, a Writer can be engaged; but this service, excellent at all times, is especially so at the present day. For a multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and unfitting it for all voluntary exertion ot reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor. (599)

As mind becomes richly exposed for its operations, so its transfer to solitude becomes more ideally complete; likewise, all consequent solicitations to the mind's

impermeability become perceived as a threat. The origin of the moral activity of Wordsworth's writing is thus displaced away from relations to introspection--speaking between ourselves is the outcome, not beginning, of an amelioration of such speech. The fear is of a "state of almost savage torpor" when the mind will cease to discriminate and understand itself. Neil Hertz observes that Wordsworth's poetry is often inspired by a peculiar doubling of consciousness that portrays the poet as seeking a mediating presence in order to refurbish his own activities: "The result is to split the self into a poet existing in the present and 'some other being' who acts as a mediating figure...What he thus succeeds in creating is a chain of successive and analogous relations...Nature: child: : child: Poet:: poet: reader" (25-6). The other possible schema would be as follows: society and writer, writer and reader, reader and text. The enlargement of the poetic voice as it promises the reader what he knew and perhaps will now know with greater complexity and truth in reading the Lyrical Ballads, also paradoxically comes to extinguish itself at the peak of its own lyrical independence. The omniscient narration of the Preface emblematises more than simply what Keats perceived as the Wordsworthian egotistical sublime, but rather the disappearance of that narration into a stark impersonality, an otherworldliness that comes after reading the prose and the poetry and which unnervingly suggests that the poet's account of the world has *come to be his world.*

What animates such an observation even further is Wordsworth's own fascination with its entanglements. Quinney notes that the "self thrown back on itself by the loss or discreditation of its external objects is in a critical predicament; it is then forced to think, and to do much work which will likely be fruitless. This theme introduces a significant degree of refinement in the description of subjectivity, as the uneasy mind... reflects upon its condition, dreads it, and is driven to odd, moving, delicate struggles for adjustment" (" 'Tintern Abbey' " 137-8). More than simply straying aside to lament for itself, the ambiguous self of the Preface signals its lost substantiality as both a quality

of its dissatisfaction with the world of literature up until the present moment, and an indication of its own authority and governance. Certainly sadness is not the *central* affect of the Preface, nor is Wordsworth's thought peculiarly melancholic in this instance. But more precisely, the Preface's insistent claim that it effects a break with tradition conceives of the sorrows of literature in terms that move beyond the theories of poetic influence. It is not the hint of a legacy but rather its temporal elision altogether that justifies the impersonal solitude of Wordsworth's poetry as a measure of loss that proves to be a premium for the poet: "Wordsworth's approach to the visionary actual halts at a verge marked by the intensification of the feeling of the complete submissiveness of reading, a dramatic threat of attenuation toward complete self-loss" (Christensen 146). The obituary written by the new poet amid a cemetery of the mind is a standard topos of writing, but it is the threat that history will repeat itself, that the poetry of the Lyrical Ballads will also prove to be specious and irrelevant, that positions Wordsworth's enterprise between filling the emptiness and recognising its drawing power. That emptiness becomes an escape from interdependence and exemplarity, an inverse version of the sort of power nominated in the Prospectus to The Recluse. If Johnson is guilty of an overdetermination of effect, Wordsworth's *affect* here is deliberately absorbed and dispersed into the fabric of the poetry, gaining a separateness that is authentically Wordsworthian even if the poet himself seems spookily unavailable. Thought becomes selfishly involved with its own literary complexity, or as Christensen lushly describes it, "a schizophrenia of the text blind to all compacts, wherein the sole engagement of writer and reader is like an impersonal conflict that subtends no ideology, promises no spoils, and gives no quarter" (146).

The loss that goes almost unfelt in the Preface--a loss, of course, that becomes singularly, movingly plangent in the poetry--is thus attributable to the poet seeing himself as a presence that *anticipates* the world he describes. The poetry of Bowles, Collins, and Gray (amongst others) already suggests a certain view of death and selfhood that

finds its richest expansion in Wordsworth, and becomes even more evocative once the death of the author himself is made the subject of the poetry.[5] That death becomes the unsaid principle conveyed by the Lyrical Ballads, published anonymously as an experiment and offered to the reading audience as a test of the claims by two writers who in spite of their insistence for a more immediate poetic medium, deliberately explored the fictionality of poetry itself, that is, poetry's motive to encompass a world that is at once referential and uniquely inaccessible. The poets remain nameless because they are represented in the poetry itself, just as the compliments of the reader are absorbed into the literature as a function of the Preface's own recommendations. What becomes fascinating here is the uncommon ascendancy in Wordsworth of something that has come to be so familiar it risks being deadened altogether: the solitude of speech. Language appears almost invulnerable in the Preface because it is self-contained. But this type of security also underscores language as fragile, as a strangely solitary companion--it has become essential in a way that suggests that only the starkness of words now can redeem the value of the poet's presence after all:

> I am sensible that my associations must have sometimes been particular instead of general, and that, consequently, giving to things a false importance, sometimes from diseased impulses I may have written upon unworthy subjects; but I am less apprehensive on this account, than that my language may frequently have suffered from those arbitrary connections of feelings and ideas with particular words and phrases, from which no man can altogether protect himself. (612)

The arbitrariness of "feelings and ideas with particular words and phrases" is mentioned not so much apologetically, as conceded in exhaustion. The displacements in meaning here would be too easily subsumed by a deconstructive reading were not the sort of rhetorical volatility Wordsworth describes a feature of the Preface's broader, derealising nature. The suddenness of the poet's revelation--and it is indeed not only "Wordsworth"

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[5]This point is discussed in the works by Averill, Brown, Jacobus, and Quinney.

here speaking exclusively, but a narrator even grander and more unknown than the gentleman of the Lake District--recognises its own false certainty as it suffers to recover its representation by appealling to the poet's authority. The voice slips effortlessly and with wise reflection into the tragic point of the last line--"from which no man can altogether protect himself" and *literally* gives in to its own vulnerability as a consequence of the spiritual disbelief it confides.

The poet presumes that our thoughts can be a liability to us, can lead us to become disabled by a desire to finalise them; but more than even this, he emphasises the role of consciousness as it suffers to make sense of itself despite its own possible disappearance. The recognition of such a failure of intellectual unity redemptively figures as the final availability of thought and art, although in Wordsworth this aesthetic security is primarily an aspect of memory, an exaggeration of thought clinging to more thoughts. The significance of remembrance measures the loss that the present ineffably indicates--whereas the past is conclusive, the immediate is doomed to suspension. Wordsworth further derives in the Preface a curious story emphasising the concerns of temporality, one which seeks to both humanise and mystify a thwarted prospect of poetic genius as the legend of a historical development. It emerges in a passage that concludes his discussion of the similiarities between prose and poetry:

> [Poetry and prose] both speak by and to the same organs; the bodies in which both of them are clothed may be said to be of the same substance, their affections are kindred, and almost identical, not necessarily differing even in degree; Poetry sheds no tears 'such as Angels weep,' but natural and human tears; she can boast of no celestial Ichor that distinguishes her vital juices from those of prose; the same human blood circulates through the veins of them both. (602)

The theme of Wordsworth's argument generates imagery in excess of the mere specifics of literary genres. Drawing upon an ancient, Platonic birth of writing (a project more fully realised as a history of readership in the 1815 "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface"), Wordsworth envisions the muses of Poetry and Prose as temporarily exiled

from one another on account of the blank indifference of modern life. Their exile is profound because it has essentially denatured them, and made the structure of their own "lives" endlessly alien to the elements of reality. What has now become a familiar distinction between the lyric and the novel, at one time described an affinity between the two genres that was closer than anyone could now imagine. Wordsworth mythologises that similarity so passionately that its wistful memory crowds the chillness of form with an emergent story that retrieves the history of literature as a history of true and living, familial bodies. The sadness of literature, then, is interpreted as a recorded tragedy so fundamental that it moves beyond its own essential fictionality to conceive of the estrangement of poetry and prose as a frustrated embarkation upon further literary knowledge.

In order to deepen the affectiveness of this estrangement, Wordsworth states that "Poetry sheds no tears 'such as Angels weep,' " and that her pains are equal to those of her sister--"she can boast no celestial Ichor." The emphasis in the passage on actual pain, on the physical crisis of this literary alienation, not only stirs the lamentable *inseparability* of these sisters in their exile from one another, but also tests their bond at the most intense moment of loss. As sister is torn away from sister, the cry that has through the ages signalled the formal definition and separateness of poetry from prose is regiven to us through Wordsworth's myth with all the realness and anguish of an actual despair. As well, it weirdly suggests that the concerns surrounding the distinction between poetry and prose could be subtly directing attention to the possibility that aesthetics perhaps develop as the outcome of a severe unhappiness, that our preoccupation with literature somehow involves an involuntary memory of a distant and disturbing relationship of extreme pain. As a contemporary example, Walter Benjamin's image of the aura also famously distinguishes its own splendour as the coincidence of past and present memories, flickering within one another in the melancholic temperament of the modern critic and observer: "Experience of the aura thus rests on the transposition

of a response common in human relationships to the relationship between the inanimate or natural object and man. The person we look at, or who feels he is being looked at, looks at us in turn" (184). The aura is "the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be"; it emerges as more beautifully illuminative as *that* distance becomes more apparent and reminds us, much like a backward glance directed at something left behind in the road, of an ancient sense of ritual and preservation valourised within the aura's essence. Leo Bersani remarks that "Benjamin's emphasis on the sense of distance as central to the effect of the aura makes it clear that even the most familiarizing associations leave the object itself intact in its unknowability...the primary effect of the aura...is to make the original, the unique work of art *unapproachable*" (Culture 58). The limit of knowing that aura, or in Wordsworth's case, the irreconciliation of that first sisterhood between Poetry and Prose, seeks to sustain the inevitability of striving for that primal experience without ever fully exhausting the mystic desirability of its sad alienation. The sisters Poetry and Prose, like the aura, are thus most splendid when they are recalled as being beyond any reparability.

Wordsworth shares Benjamin's--and for that matter also Proust's--unhappy memory, and this memory I believe functions in a way that is not exclusively necessitated by the lure of literary competition (as Bloom interprets it in his reading of "Tintern Abbey"[6]). The unhappiness Wordsworth suffers and persuades us to associate with, an unhappiness that the prose however obscurely strains to express, seems to originate a mode of reflection that desires to be independent, solitary, free of the sort of conjecture and opinion that literature has relentlessly, and almost cheerfully, become. Sadness becomes almost a form of resocialisation[7] that paradoxically restores us to a world

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[6] See "Wordsworth and the Scene of Instruction" in his book Poetry and Repression. A consideration of this piece is inseparable from an understanding of Bloom's theory of poetry, and this perhaps colours all too severely his baroque reading of Wordsworth.

without reprieve, one where knowledge can be traced to a lingering sustenance for first and simple things, and subsequently becomes the inspiration for an imaginative project that must account for a dark emptiness at its source.

Part of Wordsworth's enterprise is to apply his broadest strokes with an appeal to our sense of tragedy, of discomfort and unease, taking such feelings--as much as joy and pleasure--as the necessary experiences for establishing the authenticity of his own position. The vulnerability specific to Wordsworth's own work as a poet is interpreted as a quality he shares with his reading public, who assume that the poetry and the author can be both trusted and indeed *entrusted* with their varied expectations because texts and writers suffer the same frail affections that are reflected in the reading public itself, affections which have brought the readers sympathetically to literature in the first place:

> To this it may be added, that the Reader ought never to forget that he is himself exposed to the same errors as the Poet, and perhaps in a much greater degree: for there can be no presumption in saying, that it is not probable that he will be so well acquainted with the various stages of meaning through which words have passed, or with the fickleness or stability of the relations of particular ideas to each other; and above all, since he is so much less interested in the subject, he may decide lightly and carelessly. (612)

The banality of Wordsworth's observation here suggests something that has crowded his image of the poet for long: the poet is aware of the paths literature takes, but his awareness is constituted as a silent witness. The instability of language, the trickery of poetical artifice, are traps along the way that screen the requisite emptiness of the text itself which becomes a project of the poet's undecided and undecidable self, as well as the linguistic embodiment for his residence *in absentia*. It is as a reader that the poet approaches the text, as a member of his own audience, and it is precisely at this moment that he subjects the whole category of the social to revision as audience and poet merge into one fibrous subjectivity that remains unfilled because it is, quite simply, everywhere.

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[7]See Esther Schor for an elaboration of this point in Bearing the Dead.

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I now turn to the poetry which enlarges upon the charmed emptiness I have come to describe so far on the part of the writer. Wordsworth wrote "The Discharged Soldier" some time between January and March of 1798, a year that proved to be especially rich and diverse in terms of the maturing career of his poetry. The poem, like its companion lyric "A Night-Piece," was probably inspired by entries made by Wordsworth's sister Dorothy in her Alfoxden Journal. It was composed as an independent poem although never published separately, and was later assimilated to Book IV of The Prelude with several amendations.[8] In many ways "The Discharged Soldier" generously evokes a meditative intensity that we have come to identify as Wordsworthian: the thoughts of the speaker, slowly enlarging their ambit to encompass not only the objects of thought but also the sources for those objects' possibility, are rendered neither through induction nor common revelation, but through the media of feeling, perception, and hearing. What is often characterised as Wordsworth's loyalty to the contemplative moment also delineates the extent of his humanism. In Appreciations, Pater perceptively notes that the phenomenological impulse in Wordsworth's poetry develops in profound contrast to the vulgar boisterousness of everyday life: "That the end of life is not action but contemplation--*being* as distinct from *doing*--a certain disposition of the mind: is, in some shape or other, the principle of all the higher morality" (62). The pensive mood figures for both the restoration of the self and the world by the graceful project of emotional reparation. The morality Wordsworth conveys in this poem and others similar in design lies in the poetry's avoidance of the very modes

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[8]For a discussion of this see Beth Darlington's article, "Two Early Texts: 'A Night-Piece and 'The Discharged Soldier.' " Although outside the scope of this essay, there are some valuable considerations worth making about the relationship of these two poems, not only about their similar content but the temporality of their composition. See also Neil Hertz's discussion of "A Night-Piece" in "Wordsworth and the Tears of Adam" in The End of the Line 22-27.

of insistence that would be particular to a type of didactic, moral teaching, usually associated with texts that are conspicuously allegorical. Vigilance taken toward others is relaxed in order to preserve the distracting vagaries between thought and action, although as I shall show, such a reprieve is compromised by a darker influence ranging within the possibilities of the poem.

Part of the sustaining mood of "The Discharged Soldier" derives from its development of Wordsworth's theme of solitude: it contains and is endorsed by the possibility of remote feelings generated by solitary evocation. But the revelation of a sort of Wordsworthian reciprocity between mind and space that we have come to traditionally expect, transforms into the pretext for a meditation upon the hard price and separation of that relationship in the first place. Reciprocity contributes a self-knowledge that is achieved in the presence of another; inseparable thus from the speaker's subjectivity is the attitude taken towards the soldier who is both part of and alien to the environment. What at first emerges as a singularly profound concern for the specificity of the speaker's feelings is carefully undone and complicated by its own eloquence.

> I love to walk
> Along the public way when for the night,
> Deserted in its silence, it assumes
> A character of deeper quietness
> Than pathless solitudes. At such a time
> I slowly mounted up a steep ascent
> Where the road's watry surface to the ridge
> Of that sharp rising glittered in the moon
> And seemed before my eyes another stream
> Stealing with silent lapse to join the brook
> That murmured in the valley. (1-11)

The speaker expressively persuades us that he has already undergone the psychic process of restoration he presently seeks to describe. That the natural world is both the frame of reference and the reflection of his thoughts all to evidently tropes on the Romantic notion of the mind's relation to nature; but it also suggests that the speaker has composed

that world as wholly his own. It is so fulfilled in terms of its representation that our own reading of Wordsworth's thoughts *naturally* moves to interpret the world as a function of his consciousness: "Deserted in its silence, it assumes/ A character of deeper quietness /Than pathless solitudes." The open space of the landscape does not so much designate barrenness as its own metaphysical absorption into the mind's territory. The meeting on the deserted road with the soldier, the spare exchange and observation, the final sad farewell--all blend into the suggestive distance of the first person account which is asserted against any demonstration of images that could be differentiated from such a consciousness. Nature does not figure for a mood in which the speaker participates: it becomes literalised as a figure within the speaker's mood, part of the imagination's literary composition.

The speaker charts this embedded silence first through images of the "watry" road which is given its stream-like illusion by the moon. As it flows into the murmuring brook that leads to the valley, the weave of imagery rhythmically coalesces into the speaker's designed intent: "On I passed/Tranquil, receiving in my own despite/Amusement, as I slowly passed along" (11-13). His movements cadence with the image of the "watry road," or better, they predictably fulfill the prior event. This initial section of the poem is indeed permeated by Wordsworth's sense of wish-fullfillment, his thoughts confirmed as it were in their train by the "harmonious imagery" (29) that is retroactive proof of their original, flowing appropriateness. As the moon performs the *trompe l'oeil* change of the road into a stream, the mind is nurtured upon a tranquillity that is both learned from and comparable to the moon's, and the half-siept iuii of the poem finally comes to resolve the speaker to figure as both its subject and object.

The style of the poem moves according to a sense of inviolacy, of an undisturbed selfhood, behind which lies the rumour of an ego reminding us of the Romantic legend that was to encode the reputation of the poem's creator within the structures of what one of his heirs called "the egotistical sublime." And in the course of this poem, the poet's

calling card slowly begins to move within the range of what was first understood to be the anonymity of the speaker. I shall shortly try to demonstrate how even such a predictable move is compromised by the poem's melancholy claim upon its own annoucements of identity. For now I would like to fill out some features of that anxious legend. It is part of Wordsworth's style to praise himself while resorting to rhetorical humility in order to show himself as unworthy of the sponsoring solitudes of "cliff or sea,/The dark blue vault, and universe of stars" (19-20). And yet, the "deeper joy" is what Wordsworth already possesses, poetically; his art has already predetermined the experience he is a part of. He seems to *think* like the natural world because he has made it. From those pinnacles which seem suspended in their own impenetrability, Wordsworth intuits a solitude only different in degree from his own. But if his thoughts are natural, organic, they evoke the spooky belief that his consciousness will have a career independent of the world itself, although that world may continue to exist as a shadow of his mind's night. Keats loads this into the background of his reproach of Wordsworth, lushly described in a letter to John Hamilton Reynolds:

> Many a man can travel to the very bourne of Heaven, and yet want confidence to put down his halfseeing. Sancho will invent a Journey heavenward as well as any body. We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us--and if we do not agree, seems to put its hand in its breeches pocket. Poetry should be great & unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle it or amaze it with itself but with its subject.--How beautiful are the retired flowers! how would they lose their beauty were they to throng into the highway crying out, "admire me I am a violet! dote upon me I am a primrose!" (540)

Keats perceives to his own detriment that Wordsworth has qualified poetry as his own. As he comes to be identified, finally, with the speaker, he overwhelms the subject of poetry by inhabiting it, by *becoming* it. Like the moon lingering as a lonely harbinger, he selfishly rehearses both the dream of poetry as it enters the passive soul and the very impregnation of that dream. The subject and object of poetry, as well as their influence, are indistinguishable as our own readerly acceptance of Wordsworth as the voice of the

poem merges with that sufficing knowledge.

Keats' own view of the poetical character as "not itself--it has no self--it is everything and nothing--It has no character" reflects the sort of demise of the body's specificity that concludes the first section of Wordsworth's poem:

> Thus did I steal along that silent road,
> My body from the stillness drinking in
> A restoration like the calm of sleep
> But sweeter far. Above, before, behind,
> Around me, all was peace and solitude:
> I looked not round, nor did the solitude
> Speak to my eye, but it was heard & felt. (21-27)

These lines recall imagery that is repeated at a critical moment in "Tintern Abbey": "Until, the breath of this corporeal frame/And even the motion of our human blood/ Almost suspended, we are laid asleep/In body, and become a living soul." When Keats goes on to say that "The identity of every one in the room begins so to press upon me that, I am in a very little time annihilated," his own poetical death stirs the pleasure of painful affection just as he is most conscious of his fragility--especially as it is alarmed by Wordsworth's influence. Wordsworth's happiness at the beginning of "The Discharged Soldier" evokes the intensification of the senses beyond the speaker's awareness of an actual death. Solitude is unwound: it is no longer perceived, but more importantly, loses its boundless, unknown menace. The choice to not know or forget something allows for a consciousness to move without guilt or censure; it can act without responsibility.

> Oh happy state! What beauteous pictures now
> Rose in harmonious imagery--they rose
> As from some distant region of my soul
> And came along like dreams, yet such as left
> Obscurely mingled with their passing forms
> A consciousness of animal delight,
> A self-possession felt in every pause
> And every gentle movement of my frame. (29-34)

The imagery returns as an index of Wordsworth's own resourcefulness to reconstitute his

body as a bright shadow of the form it shed. Gaining the form of a spectre, Wordsworth has cancelled the conditions under which his initial love of nature depended. The worthy, deeper joy of the "distant prospect, cliff or sea,/The dark blue vault, and universe of stars" is now travelled by a similar distance in the region of the soul--one that is ephemeral and expansive, rather than explicitly visible. As John Ashbery says in the initial joy of the opening of his "Evening in the Country": "Now as my questioning but admiring gaze expands/To magnificent outposts, I am not so much at home/With these memorabilia of vision as on a tour/Of my remotest properties...", being led "On motionless explorations of how dense a thing can be,/ How light, and these are finished before they have begun/ Leaving me refreshed and somehow younger." (Double Dream 33). Wordsworth announces his second birth and body decisively by appropriating the power of the exterior world as it also serves to influence the project for his own self-embodiment.

The ascension of thought here would be no more remarkable were it not to precede the meeting that is central to the poem's narration. Chancing upon the soldier off a turn in the road, Wordsworth *attempts* a description that has little in common with the "beauteous pictures" engendered by his recent happiness. The anxious sight of the soldier corresponds perhaps to a secret unwillingness to register that meeting intially, but I would argue it is more suggestive of a fear of the unacknowledgeable otherness of the soldier. His appearance at once feebly reflects and undermines the half-deathly form of Wordsworth's thoughts and body, as well as reminds him of their iconographic felicity as features of loss and mortality. The soldier does not so much disprove them as encourage Wordsworth to revise his knowledge of their derivation:

> There was in his form
> A meagre stiffness. You might almost think
> That his bones wounded him. His legs were long,
> So long and shapeless that I looked at them
> Forgetful of the body they sustained.
> His arms were long & lean; his hands were bare;
> His visage,wasted though it seem'd, was large

> In feature; his cheeks sunken; and his mouth
> Shewed ghastly in the moonlight. (43-51)

The meagreness of this description assigns life to the soldier at a moment when he appears to be in fact barely alive. It utterly denatures him. The limited life of this image, very much a death-in-life, is far more severe than anything witnessed in Pater. What was at first a celebrated reclarification of the poet's consciousness and the subsequent labours undertaken by such a consciousness, is soberly demystified in the reality of the soldier. The meeting is exemplary of what Wordsworth has described as a "disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present; an ability of conjuring up in himself passions, which are indeed far from being the same as those produced by real events (especially in those parts of the general sympathy which are pleasing and delightful)" (Preface 603-4). Here, an imaginative privilege and the project that it entails are envisioned as vaporous, and inevitably come to yield a *revenant*: the soldier doubles the poet as a subject outside of his consciousness, a member of the afterlife, and presses upon it with another version of solitude, one that is separate and unspeakable because it is beyond meaning and happiness, and impeaches the poet's liminality and own renewal altogether: "in his very dress appear'd/A desolation, a simplicity/ That appertained to solitude. I think /If but a glove had dangled in his hand/ It would have made him more akin to man" (63-5). The recognition of another ironically affects Wordsworth to similarly confront his solitude as a feature of the self-differentiation of his own consciousness, which had previously been constituted as merely a condition perceived and qualified on its own terms without any external compromise or comparison. What begins as a shared awareness of mortality comes to add pressure upon the structures of that awareness which rest midway between determination and erasure.

In a section from Either/Or entitled "The Ancient Tragical Motif Reflected in the Modern," Kierkegaard wistfully points out that any attempt at exposing the diachronic

aspect of the concept of the tragic is confronted with the changeless essentialism of the tragic itself. What he regards as a permanent theme developing alongside that of the tragic is the gradual solitude of the world:

> isolation constantly gets more and more the upper hand, something one can best be convinced of by giving attention to the multitudinous social exertions...The isolationist idea is always in evidence where men assert themselves numerically. When one man will assert himself as one, then this is isolation; in this, all friends of association will concur, even if unable or unwilling to see that there is quite the same isolation when hundreds stress themselves simply and solely as hundreds. (139)

Kierkegaard's suggestion, which also recalls Keats', that self-determination is synonymous with the egotistical retreat of isolationism, means to establish the history of the world upon a theme of sadness: "One characteristic our age certainly has to a greater degree than Greece, this, namely, that it is more melancholy, and hence it is more profoundly in despair. Thus, our age is melancholy enough to realise that there is something which is called responsibility, and that this indicates something significant (139-40). It is not just modernity Kierkegaard alludes to: the actual progress of the world has evolved upon melancholy and loss. This lost reponsibility results in a black comedy: the lonely refusal to answer to the world even though one's response has already been conditioned by the isolationism of history, emerges as the tell-tale style of a sad absurdity.

What was raised to sublime heights is now opposed, through irony, by a realisation that at once reinforces and disturbs that aggrandised illusion. For Wordsworth, the effect is bathetic. As Thomas Weiskel notes: "Bathos, in Wordsworth's leveling muse, becomes expressive pathos."[9] This quality is precisely captured in the almost insignificant detail of the glove: "If but a glove had dangled in his hand/It would have made him more akin to man" (66-7), more like a man because such a detail captures

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[9]Weiskel 19-21.

that which is most irreducibly human about him. The movement from transcendence to the immanence embodied in the soldier offers several revelations: it sadly reminds Wordsworth not only of the generational theme of loss that bitterly replaces the stasis of solitude, but of the inherent divisiveness within socialisation brought about by what Kierkegaard illuminates as the inevitable sadness of contingency. The soldier's appearance in the world as almost a ghost, walking undead amongst us, invests him into the afterlife of society, a realm which is imagined as a slighted image, much like Kierkegaard's shadowgraphs or pictures that are imperceptible at first glance but slowly reveal their nature only when the viewer casts them against a wall and sees their fair designs. Those in the afterlife are at once alone and yet bound to one another by virtue of their homesickness for *our* world. Their sadness is guiltless because it is time that has permanently removed them from actual participation in the world. Kierkegaard notes that society at once assimilates but preserves isolation as it forces us to acknowledge ourselves as part of a whole, but only as the summary of *parts*.[10] That complexity at once confers autonomy and dissolves it in Wordsworth's imagination, as he also realises another sadness: the soldier cannot fully remind him of anything at all. What was thought to be a self-sufficiency is now shocked and disturbed by another who is unlike anything the first-person would have thought. This is the stark undercurrent of the Preface, as well as Kierkegaard's destitute preference for a community of swine rather than humans. Sadness emerges as Wordsworth's Kierkegaardian recognition of responsibility: his consciousness acknowledges the soldier's (after)life, but is obliterated just as it is confirmed. The form and style of a sympathetic relationship is undertaken, but it is marked more by a movement of attempt and retreat rather than fulfillment.

The soldier is at first superficially described as an unchanging element, a human

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[10]For a discussion of individuation and the sublime, see Frances Ferguson's Solitude and the Sublime: Romanticism and the Aesthetics of Individuation.

principle in the landscape to which Wordsworth must adhere to: "Long time I scanned him with a mingled sense /Of fear and sorrow. From his lips meanwhile/There issued murmuring sounds as if of pain/Or of uneasy thought; yet still his form/Kept the same fearful steadiness. His shadow/Lay at his feet & moved not" (68-73). But he is also a register of temporal change: his naturalisation, like the title character in "The Cumberland Beggar," as well as his deathliness, are signs of his fluidity--the dark side of ideas and feelings that succeed one another in a series triggering a fear, rather than a pleasure, for their temporal end. "The perception of differences acts for us as a guarantee of both renewal and death: to be aware of difference, in mental and physical phenomena, is to know that life exists, that is, that things appear and disappear, that there are birth and death" (Bersani, A Future 158). Such change is felt in Wordsworth's language: immediate images and the knowledge about their imaginative fixity is entrusted to a discourse that is errant and "watry" in its meditative contours. The soldier is himself given up to this speculative flow by being rendered speechless:

> I asked his history, he in reply
> Was neither slow nor eager, but unmoved,
> And with a quiet uncomplaining voice,
> A stately air of mild indifference... (95-8)
>
> While thus we travelled on I did not fail
> To question him of what he had endured
> From war & battle & the pestilence.
> He all the while was in demeanor calm,
> Concise in answer: solemn & sublime
> He might have seemed, but that in all he said
> There was a strange half-absence & a tone
> Of weakness & indifference, as of one
> Remembering the importance of his theme,
> But feeling it no longer. (137-146)

The fascination for the soldier loses some of its illumination as it gives way to a darkness: the inadequacy of the poet's crystallisation of feeling. Terms like sublimity thus come to be undercut by a doubt marking the boundary between the poet's art and the soldier's

representation in that medium. The integrity of the art is dissolved by the reflected emptiness of the soldier who lives under the sign of remembrances, but has lost the stimulation of their feeling.

Happiness has been left behind. The darkest lesson of tragedy is not found in its dramatic exemplarity, its representation, but in the perverse and unintended belief that tragedy and its lesson are utterly empty, affectless--"Remembering the importance of [a] theme,/But feeling it no longer." This is the poverty of the soldier cast upon Wordsworth, whose own implied presence in the poem is weakened and derealised. The separateness between the soldier and Wordsworth as the poem's speaker, is repeated in the disjunction felt between Wordsworth and that speaker. In both cases, the relation has been negatively confirmed according to a mutual vulnerability. It is also in the process of this gradual softening of consciousness, of a mind in surfeit, that the persistent rumour which has worried the text from the start emerges as a viable alternative: the speaker may very well be completely different from Wordsworth himself. This is not to say that such an un-clarification occurs precisely at this moment in the poem; rather, its possibility has been everywhere in the poem but in suppressed form.

The revisionary aspect of the depersonalising process I have described works less to improve than to *impoverish* the poem's, and the speaker's, integrity. It is bound up in the pressures that bear upon us when we consider what it means to be without words, without consolation, what it means to believe that the limits of our world possibly tend towards the arbitrary. Earlier on in the poem, the speaker, whom we can read as being shed of his biographical specificity, offers to help the soldier by promising food and shelter with a labourer who lives beyond the wood: " 'No one there,'/Said I, 'is waking; we must measure back/The way which we have come' " (109-111). The prospect of a healing charity is revived here as the perspective of the poem turns subtly backward to the village, to the sources of human life, and most suggestively, to the remedial joy of its first section which figures as a retrospective consolation for the speaker (and the reader)

that such a project of happiness is indeed still available:

> He said, "My trust is in the God of heaven,
> And in the eye of him that passes me."
> By this the labourer had unlocked the door,
> And now my comrade touched his hat again
> With his lean hand, & in a voice that seem'd
> To speak with a reviving interest
> Till then unfelt, he thanked me. I returned
> The blessing of the poor unhappy man,
> And so we parted. (164-172)

What restrains this final gesture from being almost a blessing, capable of reconciling the poem's moral and aesthetic fears, is the solitude which had ironically rendered its composition possible from the start. The limits of the world, like the limits of the poem, remain soundless and impermeable--no dog barks, streams, or dream visions. We can believe that this end is a restoration, is a golden gain like a morning in spite of the conditions that have made it so unbearable, poetically and morally. We can also believe that the soldier joins the same company of martyrs like Margaret, the Cumberland beggar, the leech-gatherer, by providing and becoming a part of the vision that subsumed the poem even before its narrative began. And yet what this revision has taught us is that such a faith is only provisional. The soldier remains unaware of his innocent pain, as does the speaker who fails to acknowledge it. The loss the poem harvests *is* its inescapable truth. Frances Ferguson notes that "the passions have no memory, which explains why activities like lovemaking and grieving are and must be repeatable...The narrative of the visual and verbal forms supplants the memorylessness of the passions, creating a time as well as a place where neither time nor place were once felt to exist" (Wordsworth 133). In the "Discharged Soldier," there is something sufficiently similar to a "memorylessness" that is evoked in the speaker's frustration: an end to creativity, to happiness. A type of exhaustion that forces us to survive our *disillusionment*. Wordsworth's point in "The Discharged Soldier" is that memorylessness invariably confronts us with our own inner scarcity. Loss is confirmed but only at the price that

it will be remembered as an exclusion of presence; it consists in an endless irreparability.

"I returned/The blessing of the poor unhappy man,/And so we parted" (170-2). The poet's investiture into a moment of charitable conversion--a moment that recalls the ascension of the first passage--begins as the poem nears closure, as the social bond reaches both its clarification and its most complex form. The hesitancy here to dilate evokes the earlier passage but only as a mournful summary and revision of it. The speaker shares in something that Robert Harbison reserves for Pater's Marius: "[his] experience takes place before everything and after everything: there is not time for all that has happened to him, so all his knowledge will feel like that of a past life or another life. The cause of these estrangements is that his experience is book experience, his raptures only a kind of sleep-walking" (118). What is at issue is the security of terms like solitude, consciousness, and being, which are revised as a result of literary recollections. Wordsworth composed the poem after having possibly read excerpts from the journal kept by his sister, and the odd undoing of referentiality that I have proposed as operating in the poem, finally comes to range the speaker, the poet, and the sister all under the general rubric of the lost.

In the entry for the 26th of January, 1798, in the Alfoxden Journal--a day after the entry that inspired "A Night-Piece" and a day before the one that supplied material for "The Discharged Soldier"--Dorothy notes a day of exceptional peacefulness--sheep tracks and sheep-bells, "locks of wool still spangled with the dewdrops," sunshine, the sound of a stream, a woodman with his pony, "the blue-gray sea, shaded with immense masses of cloud, not streaked; the sheep glittering in the sunshine" (4). A peace that, unlike the sort her brother feels, is registered with a flat, matter-of-fact particularity. That simplicity, however, evokes something else within the form of its silence, something imaged in real and literary retrospect:

> Returned through the wood. The trees skirting the wood, being exposed more directly to the action of the sea breeze, stripped of

> the net-work of their upper boughs, which are stiff and erect, like black skeletons; the ground strewed with the red berries of the holly. Set forward before two o'clock. Returned a little after four. (4)

The skeletons of trees, ground strewn with red berries like blood--death encroaches upon the scene, not as an actual event but as a hidden menace. It is the flatness of the prose that allows this intrusion nevertheless, neither challenging nor being shocked by it. Death is evoked by the writer as if it was there all along, unacknowledged, part of the landscape. As if the writer was never needed in the first place.

Chapter Three

The Face of One's Friend: Identity and Loss in Walter Pater

To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim.

Oscar Wilde

A remarkable feature of Walter Pater's writings, a feature often cited with the desire to ensure the *leit motif* of his life and art, is their sadness. This has often been assumed as a specific theoretical necessity in Pater, whose aesthetic and historical discriminations are frequently described as suppressed after-images or memories of a dated and absent happiness. There is a vital intensity that the experience of sadness, no matter how subtly evoked, registers in Pater. His regret for an unreclaimed and unrepeatable history is implicated in the urbane pleasure he takes in identifying such ephemerality in the first place, and often such a pleasure transmutes into the confessional and relentless style of a prose so mindfully luxurious, that its critical discernments achieve their most intriguing force as they gingerly range among feelings seemingly out of phase with critical propriety. The sadness, then, of Pater as critic seems to conspire against that golden exhaustion he invokes in "the moment, for instance, of delicious recoil from the flood of water in summer heat" (Renaissance 186) that is both an emblem for the delivery of a sudden happiness, as well as the subjective abandon from the innocence of that happiness itself.

The slippery temporal shifts between presenting and remembering in Pater's writing are particularly suggestive of the nostalgic claim that the experience of art is always kindled at its paradisal farewell, carefully enfolded in the token element of some formerly realised project. Speaking of some broad aspects of modernity, Leo Bersani asks "How, then, can we speak of that from which we have mutated? Is the mournful

consciousness that describes this evolutionary drama the vestigial remnant of an extinct mode of being?" (Culture 48). Bersani's question is brought to bear upon Walter Benjamin, with whom Pater shares, amongst other concerns, a ritual love for nostalgia and particularly the desire to inscribe knowledge itself with an intrinsic quality of loss. But more specifically, a comparison of these two writers perhaps brings out a subtler nuance in Bersani's question, namely how can we forget to remember? And how can we phrase such a question in the form of both a lament and an instruction?

The overlapping themes of extinction and remembrance measure a difficulty that the impasse of Pater's prose valourises. Critics have often interpreted Paterian sadness as the consequence of the knowledge of an inadequacy between aspiration and accomplishment (Bloom). Others have assimilated Pater to deconstructive projects, interpreting his techniques as mourning, albeit in a prolific way, their own operations and establishments of meaning (Hillis Miller). Even further, melancholy has been seen as an enabling aspect of Pater's prose: the perceived difficulties of Pater's style, often applying its most gifted illuminations through the impasto of elaborate phrasings, are described as the exhausting *physical* evidence of the critic's work to make such efforts recognisable and available for all their broad complexities (Fellows, Meisel). I propose to offer a complementary argument, to study Paterian sadness along many of these same lines, although I would like to pose the question of Pater's literary impenetrability from another perspective. In spite of the redemptive sense of his writing--that is, the belief that writing itself justifies and fulfills the experiences of art and reality--there remains an opacity surrounding Pater and his subjects which also involves our own contribution as readers. As criticism modulates seamlessly in Pater into the shapelessness of introspection, the less its focus on objects is concise and accurate, and consequently the more searching does our own labour, as readers, become: "in aesthetic criticism the first step towards seeing one's object as it really is, is to know one's own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly" (Renaissance xix). But even more than this,

the disappearance of physical limits to the work of the critic is spookiest when his interiority appears as alien as his actual knowledge of others, and the spaces of literature and reality find themselves compatible in the belief that we are all as unknowable to one another as we are to ourselves. This more than merely restates aestheticism as a colourful depersonalisation of the world--more discreetly, it claims that life and the creations of that life suffer because the sadness that Pater seeks to describe holds behind itself the knowledge that writing continues to challenge and identify the ignorance and the desolation that materialise once we cease to ask "What is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or in a book, to *me*? What effect does it really produce on me? Does it give me pleasure? and if so, what sort or degree of pleasure? How is my nature modified by its presence, and under its influence?" (Renaissance xix-xx). Pater remains as impenetrable as the poetry of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Rossetti, the landscapes of Leonardo, Botticelli, the School of Giorgone, and the sculptures of Michelangelo. As with all these artists, that which is absent and missed comes to measure singular aesthetic achievement. Pater also reminds us of our own anonymity and secrecy, our fear that our most private lives and feelings will never be understood and unjustly discriminated, and that our discretions are ultimately activities of possible oppression.

The secret life of such feelings corresponds to a mystic theory of art in Pater, where the aesthetic is simultaneously understood as a realisation of our lives, and an entity totally distinct from them. The mystery proper to human existence is not conceived by Pater as an essence, if we define the latter as some unchanging element that supersedes random being. Rather, the mystery is similar to a version of the impressionistic beauty he solicits through his writings. Art and life appear to characterise each other at the point where they seem most numinous and indeed alien. For Pater, they share an intrinsic insubstantiality--not that they are without content, but they are most meaningful when they appear undetermined. Though our lives can be plotted,

the sense of the plot remains obscure in order for the design to be woven. Art and life redescribe the world as an abundance in proportion to their own growing inaccessibility, but how does Pater allow us to conceive of such a movement in the first place? How can experience be restored while at the same time, its referentiality becomes even more ambiguous?

> There are some to whom nothing has any real interest, or real meaning, except as operative in a given person; and it is they who best appreciate the quality of soul in literary art. They seem to know a *person*, in a book, and make way by intuition: yet, although they thus enjoy the completeness of a personal information, it is still a characteristic of soul, in this sense of the word, that it does but suggest what can never be uttered, not as being different from, or more obscure than, what actually gets said, but as containing that plenary substance of which there is only one phrase or facet in what is there expressed. (Appreciations, "Style," 27)

The ghostly appearance of soul in art corresponds to a stimulating realisation within the reader, writer, and spectator--"to whom nothing has any real interest, or real meaning, except as operative in a given person." The recognition of aspects of the soul in the aesthetic makes us aware of (as well as lends support to the belief in) art's humanity, its inexpressible moral that enters into interpretation once the silent, priestly insight of our senses is allowed to expand. Such an experience also serves to redeem faith in our *own* humanity as we approach art as a reflection of ourselves. At the same time, however, we steadily learn something else--namely, how removed we are from the world in our comtemplation as we participate in an experience that is a sacrifice rather than a pure spectacle of our subjectivity. For Pater, the aesthetic moment amounts to a fall into indeterminacy that operates as a sort of relieving vacuity, hovering at the border between life and death. The pleasures of art's insights extend the duration of time in order to construe an infinite possibility for thought that is beyond embodiment. The experience of soul thus tends to imbue the knowledge of art as liminally surreal. Its most intense moment of affect reverberates like the death of the body merging into its afterlife: it is *imaginatively*, as opposed to *realistically*, conceivable.

> At their best, these [profane] writers become, as we say sometimes, "prophets"; such character depending on the effect not merely of their matter, but of their matter as allied to, in "electric affinity" with, peculiar form, and working in all cases by an immediate sympathetic contact, on which account it is that it may be called soul, as opposed to mind, in style. And this too is a faculty of choosing and rejecting what is congruous or otherwise, with a drift towards unity--unity of atmosphere here, as there of design--soul securing colour (or perfume, might we say?) as mind secures form, the latter being essentially finite, the former vague or infinite, as the influence of a living person is practically infinite. (Appreciations, "Style," 26-7)

The language of this passage drifts with its intellectual entanglements into an ultimacy that is more fanciful (like "perfume, might we say?") and infinite than the immediate concern of the argument. Describing the ascendancy of soul in literature, Pater hints at the exhaustible elements of literature itself, indirectly suggesting that the sort of limitations ordinarily exhibited by writing--formative and finite--would cease once the potential of another form of experience were to evolve into an influence that prefers the transient sensibility of atmosphere, design, and colour. In fact, the task of the writer would even come to be seen as limited in profound contrast to the world evoked by the soul's radiance. The extraordinary metaphysical quality of Pater's writing often seems repellent to readers particularly because he appears at times to claim to condense all possible systems of thought to a state of being that is pure pathos or persuasion, easily substituting the notion of "soul" for "mind" in order to facilitate the drift of his own elisions. Such a state has often been read as characterised by an excessive torpor or stasis that contrasts with the world's activity, and has been pursued even further as an indication of a life-in-death or death-in-life, an extreme example of the Romantic image that Frank Kermode has charted in the work of English Decadent literature. A degree of that lifelessness strives towards a sort of emblematic splendour in what Pater famously described in the essay "Aesthetic Poetry" as "a beautiful disease or disorder of the senses: and a religion which is a disorder of the senses must always be subject to illusions. Reverie, illusion, delirium: they are the three stages of a fatal descent" (748). In the

fever of this passage Pater encrypts both the beginning and evolution of a subject whose first act of descent is a death, a self depleted with the simultaneous disappearance of those social fields widely available for its self-realisation.[11]

Critics have interpreted the morbidity of Pater's work as a feature of his assimilation of French Symbolist and English Decadent tendencies, and the broader consequence of this comparison has inevitably recorded a necrology of aesthetic martyrs whose lives have become inextricable from the sadness of their literary accomplishments– the *poètes maudits*, Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson, Oscar Wilde, all of whom represent the punishing wages of Decadence. It is too simple and indeed specious, however, to interpret anyone of these writers, including Pater, as aligned with an inconsolable despondency; rather, the literary sadness they present can be read as an experience of something that we ourselves as readers fail to understand, to attentively empathise with. The tragic paradigm that appears at work in someone like Pater can be seen to measure the degree to which literature deliberately complicates and questions our relationship to the world and to ourselves by asking us to believe in something hidden behind the tenuous representations of fictionality. The sort of frustration that Pater's work struggles with and evokes lies beyond utterance, as he himself frequently admits. Its meaningfulness resides in the sad exile outside of speech and writing where emotions are rarefied and made delinquent from the ordinary fields of literary reception. A piece like "Style" which errantly traces its subject without finality and decision, is as mysterious and unfulfilled as the undeserved misery of a character like Denys L'Auxerrois whose *real* guiltlessness becomes suspended in favour of a narrative of

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[11]In a subtle deconstructive reading, J. Hillis Miller remarks: "The relation of a dead body to the meaning it contains by not containing it is the most extreme form of that discrepancy between the material image and its meaning which governs all Pater's insight into artistic signs" (90).

the dread of not knowing the truth about him, no matter how much the text pressures s to sympathise with his plight. When one commentator notes that "Pater's prose is most alive when it is involved in the accoutrements, morbid or otherwise, of death" (Fellows 130), the qualification indicates the extent to which we are ourselves responsible for rendering it dead in the first place.

What is often read therefore as a defeating theme of melancholy in Pater exposes itself as a dissatisfaction with the structure and truth of the external world. In discussing the language of the depressive, Julia Kristeva characterises it as either deliberately spare because of vastation, or profusely abundant yet devoid of meaning. The depressive's language, however, is not without significance, if we recognise such language as also forming the literature of melancholic writers: "Cependant, si la parole dépressive évite la *signification* phrastique, son *sens* n'est pas complètement tari. Il se dérobe parfois...dans le ton de la voix qu'il faut savoir entendre pour y déchiffrer le *sens* de l'affect" (66). The literary voice here belongs to that of a survivor in retreat to a space that represents our human finitude as an imaginative strength, but represents it as such *only to him*. The audience for such a voice remains necessarily in abeyance, because it is the difference between the two that draws attention to the sensitivity of the survivor's claim. The writer's sadness is an embarkation upon the qualities and conditions of that containment.

The faint glimpse of soul in literature thus encompasses a larger argument surrounding the imagination. The vision of an essence that paradoxically constitutes itself as a non-essence, its status neither palpable nor distinguished, is deprived of circulation in the world as a material object by being converted into the alien property and evocation of the mind. The imagination and its object merge into a fragile subjectivity, which in the process succeeds in making the world of the living wholly incompatible with itself. The imagination, in other words, recognises itself just as it fails to abide:

> [The] whirlpool is still more rapid, the flame more eager and devouring. There is no longer the gradual darkening of the eye, the gradual fading of the colour from the wall--movements of the shore-side, where the water flows down indeed, though in apparent rest--but the race of the midstream, a drift of momentary acts of sight and passion and thought.
> (Renaissance, "Conclusion," 87)

It is difficult to describe how the conceptual mobility of this passage strains toward its extinction as both a celebration and an enslavement of its liberalism. The faint particulars of a darkened eye and fading colours on a wall (Wilde: "My wallpaper and I are fighting a duel to the death. One or the other of us has to go."[12]) are temporarily overcome as the fatal signals of an all too permanent and lifeless receptivity; they are given up to the comparatively richer derealisations found in "impressions, unstable, flickering, inconsistent, which burn and are extinguished with our consciousness of them" (Renaissance 187). But this choreographed extinction, which has the merit of an artistic achievement, a fictional demise facilitated by and perfectly displaying the aesthetic control of the writer, is also set against a type of repressiveness that moves midstream in order to spirit away and deaden a consciousness all too willing to fight the devouring whirlpool. Art here quickens, then, what death has already in store.

Elaine Scarry observes that both pain and the imagination share an anomalous relationship by virtue of their unique configuration with objects in the world. Where the imagination wholly consists of objects that provide experiences not unique to the imagination itself, pain has no intentional object that can properly alleviate it. What Scarry finds most interesting about this condition is that "the very state in which [a person] is utterly objectless is also of all states the one that, by its aversiveness, makes most pressing the urge to move out and away from the body" (162). Pain develops into the need for an experience of painfulness that motivates the evacuation and abstraction of a body in grief. This is perhaps the flow midstream that Pater writes

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[12]Ellmann 546.

about as superseding the rapidity of the deadly whirlpool--the imagination here collides with pain in a deathstate that finds peace only as it obliterates both. Michelangelo, Leonardo, Botticelli, and other persons both real and unreal, are unique in their work due to an ability to interpret the environment as consisting of avatars of both life and afterlife. It is precisely their suffering and quiet sadness that propels them towards death and alienation, as well as provides for the diversity of their aesthetic triumphs: "So he lingers on; a *revenant*, as the French say, a ghost out of another age, in a world too coarse to touch his faint sensibilities very closely" (Renaissance, "The Poetry of Michelangelo," 71).

Both our appreciation of the artists and *their* own sense of themselves is registered as a posthumous impression that takes on the form of a first dawn of genius:

> ...dreaming, in a worn-out society, theatrical in its life, theatrical in its arts, theatrical even in its devotion, on the morning of the world's history, on the primitive form of man, on the images under which that primitive world had conceived of spiritual forces. (Renaissance 71)

If the imagination is proof of the possibility of alleviating pain through invention, as Scarry suggests, it also administers that pain by encouraging the sort of dissolution of selfhood that pain appears to necessitate. It at once creates the objects of its attention that it subsequently wishes to do away with. I think it is to this grief that William Flesch responds in his concept of literary extremity: "the endlessness of that fragility and the endlessness of the process by which community and selfhood can be lost" (Generosity 12). For Flesch, such a process draws upon themes of solitude and emptiness which become the only available forms of liberation mandated by the pressures of a world Scarry sees as made and un-made through the cruelty of the imagination. "Literature may consist largely in the process of characterization, but it can rise to its most intense plangency when it passes beyond the limits of relatively stable characterization, beyond the personal and the social, into an evocation of extremity" (Generosity 12). To wrestle with soul in literature opens us up to the vulnerability of seeing the world around us as

having grown less secure. It has us believe that the ineffable source we desire within ourselves and elsewhere represents the risk between realising all our desires, and remanding them to the emptiness of a fiction whose designs remain singularly unknown.

The specular nature between the artist and his work achieves its subtlest description in the desire to reconstitute the world as a reflection of the artist's presence that is diversified to the point of endlessness and contingency. For Pater, the literary romance between artists lies in their shared nothingness, the empty sense that they are most themselves not as writers, but as the dead, as in the case of Charles Lamb: "And if, in deeper or more superficial sense, the dead *do* care at all for their name and fame, then how must the souls of Shakespeare and Webster have been stirred, after so long converse with things that stopped their ears, whether above or below the soil, at his exquisite appreciations of them; the souls of Titian and of Hogarth too" (Appreciations 111). Though there is no real loss felt here--the dead are recalled and enriched as memories within Lamb's writing--the artists arise as posthumous realisations of their genius, much like Pater's impressions distilling themselves just as they are mourned. But the souls of Shakespeare and Webster, Titian and Hogarth, do not simply flicker in memory in order to briefly draw attention to themselves: they signal the fact that Lamb has himself become part of their mortal company. Remembering Lamb as he writes about him, Pater has acknowledged Lamb to be as dead as the subjects of his writings. Lamb is equal to them now not in terms of genius, but of space. He is part of an experience of mourning that is at once the antithesis of life and its sad inevitability. His death has not enshrined him, but rather given him up to a sort of afterlife of literature whose fascination consists of an endless repetition of the possibility of Lamb's resurrection as both a person and an influence on other writers. The eloquence needed to describe such a space encourages Pater in the ambitions of his literary attendance: his own work positions itself between being a homage and a retrieval.

The critic's insight into others translates into an opportunity for self-examination.

As a reader, he addresses these hallucinatory shifts by examining himself in their light and is in turn confronted with a spooky revelation: he knows as little about himself as he does of the world of art. It is not that he has simply become a *flâneur*--purely external and absorptive in terms of his selfhood; rather, when the critic comes to locate the art object within himself, he is confronted with both the objects and the perception of those objects at once. He substitutes himself for the art work and finds therein a final darkness: his self is as mystified as the objects of the world that compose the truth of art. To know oneself thus becomes part of a process of alienation and forgetting that is like an alternate means of Socratic discovery which attempts to intellectually ensure the self. Like Lamb who illuminates and introduces us to the lives of artists he never knew except through literature and the task of his own writings, so the critic who follows him will inevitably participate in a tradition of aesthetic mourning (Shakespeare, Webster, Titian, Hogarth, Lamb) that does not know *realistically* whom it mourns, but attends to those aspects of the past that have been, or are being, forgotten. At the same time, the critic will also be saying something about himself as he writes about the long dead. His own writing comes to not only define a literary style, but the actual dimensions of his own (after)life. In other words, writing about the dead makes us more aware of our own inescapable fate. To know what the dead mean and hold is inscribed in the living words of literature, which commune with this otherworldliness. The work of the critic reconciles us with persons long gone as if they were not simply brought back to life, but as if we had suddenly become alive and animated with them in death.

For Lamb the authority of books and long-dead writers brings an awareness of the lifelessness of their *human* authority, even though they remain exemplary. And in turn, the security of knowing everything about the writers and their work is fulfilled only when the critic/reader himself joins the afterlife as well. Another instance where Pater more literally explores the complexities of posthumous redemption comes in the final chapter "Anima Naturaliter Christiana" of Marius the Epicurean. In spite of his

weariness, indeed a final weariness comparable to "the wretched, sleepless nights of those forced marches" when he was a prisoner of the Romans, and his grief over losing Cornelius when he grants him escape by sacrificing himself to the captors, Marius is still buoyed by the love for a stillness more golden and redeeming than any other comparable act of faith or charity. The deathbed scene reverberates with all the intensity of a will to vision, of a confidence to linger meaningfully in this world a bit longer. But more than being merely contented with that which the price of enduring sleep can afford a broken and dying traveller, Marius' peacefulness enfolds into the prospect of a future investment:

> Yes! through the survival of their children, happy parents are able to think calmly, and with a very practical affection, of a world in which they are to have no direct share; planting with a cheerful good-humour, the acorns they carry about with them, that their grandchildren may be shaded from the sun by the broad oak-trees of the future. (295)

The cheerfulness of influence in this passage, precursor innocently at home with his inheritors, is nonetheless belied by a shadowy truth. The generations to follow Marius, his redeemers, will not be his own but the children of others. What they may represent in the form of a retroactive stability for his dying mind remains possible only within the pure faith of the imagination, which temporarily grants death a reprieve and the cure of an afterlife on the basis of a false myth of ancestry. What is interesting is that Marius imagines these generations *only after* he has imagined that Cornelius, who has escaped, will repay his life-saving generosity in kind by going "on a mission to deliver him also from death" (295). That mission will be as endless as the death that is ineluctably Marius'; it is not that he truly believes in the hope of his own renewal, but rather like the equally doomed Margaret in Wordsworth's "The Ruined Cottage," it is the desire to refute the impotence of such hope that ironically delivers and determines Marius to a self-imperilling illusion. Cornelius saves Marius from death only within the scope of the boy's dying mind; the interminable failure of his action thus negatively certifies the eternity of Marius' death according to the emptiness of his own life-saving fictions.

The literary power of sadness thus illuminates not only those hard circumstances that are very much affectively real to us in the world; it serves to also plot and design circumstances that remain unattainable and relegated to the limits of ineffability. Thoughtful readers of Pater have long been scrupulously aware that the silences amidst his writings are inextricable from a certain aesthetic morality, but it is also valuable to trace some historical contexts for these silences which can serve to specifically account for their plangency. The type of currency that an absent, Paterian life comes to unusually promote is most striking when we recast that absence as the quality of countless "unmentionables" during the nineteenth century who, like Pater himself, wore their silence, rather than hearts, on their sleeves as repressed proof of the love that dared not speak its name. The price paid by homosexuals is an oblivion imagined by the campaign of a society that enforces such an oblivion as the inevitable world both out of and into which homosexuals must be consigned. The destiny of Marius reflects the literary designation of a fear that was--and still remains--provocative as a source of secrecy and damnation. Even more treacherous is the argument that perceives Marius as important only when he ceases to be: like other exiled characters that inhabit the margins of Pater's writings, he will be remembered at the point where he also becomes totally permeable, vanished.[13]

Marius' death, like Wilde's, only becomes lucrative once it enters into an economy that puts his life into an endless, anonymous circulation. And like the community of posthumous writers awaiting Lamb's company as a fulfillment of their own spectrally social bonds, the life of future generations depends upon Marius' absence, his dispersal into the economy as he is liquidated as a liability. Parentless and ultimately beyond

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[13]In The Afterlife of Property, Jeff Nunokawa gives a description of how the alienation of property in the nineteenth century becomes implicated in a broader programme of social marginalisation that construes the homosexual as a necessary focus of abjection and dispersal.

parenting himself, Marius dramatises the fate of the bachelor, the dandy, the homosexual, and the gentleman, who as Joseph Bizup has analysed, reflects some of that twilight ephemerality of Victorian England that is in dangerous collusion with its own infirm repressiveness. In fact, it is the gentleman as conceived by Pater's precursor, John Ruskin, who comes to be scarcely defined by his physical vigour than by his sensitiveness. The Ruskinian gentleman, then, already begins to foretell the instability that Pater was to mourn in his own representative: "The heightened receptivity which opens [Marius] up to Christianity is ultimately a prelude to death. In Ruskinian terms, his nature becomes so fine that he cannot continue living. With Marius' death, the ideal gentleman dissolves just days after his realization" (Bizup 66). Who survives? Barely beyond the confines of the book and the lives it briefly charts, the reader/critic of Marius the Epicurean mourns a very real series of losses that are guarded yet carefully disclosed with all the delicacy of a special code of gestures and tones. The subtlety of this code goes hand in hand with a literary style that harvests sadness as an index of the writing's critical depth and sensibility, both of which are stirred in the face of a certain dread that visits the writer himself as he sympathetically moves out within the range of his own fictions.

The distant legend of a recovery to such loss is constituted by Pater in the earliest and most providential image found in his writings: the crystal character. But even this transparent, recuperative alien, most himself when he is not himself, is only suited to *remind* us of the very process of liberation he is to enact, without ever coming to actually accomplishing it: "It is like the reminiscence of a forgotten culture that once adorned the mind; as if the mind of one...fallen into a new cycle, were beginning its spiritual progress over again, but with a certain power of anticipating its stages" (Miscellaneous Studies, "Diaphnaeite," 250). Careful to objectify the character as an androgynous "it" that figures for a stage before, between, and after the present norm, Pater vaguely describes him as a "higher form of inward life" but also a "mind of taste lighted up by some

spiritual ray within. What is meant by taste is but a sterile kind of culture. It is the mental attitude, the intellectual manner of perfect culture, assumed by a happy instinct" (250). What Pater achieves is a figure beyond figuration: he is entirely based upon the sensations of a rumour in which lurks the eccentric "basement type" (254) of a history that embraces the world while remaining one of its shadowy secrets.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has helpfully paired the term "open secret" (which she specifies to be synonymous with a "homosexual secret") with another that proves felicitous for Pater's figure, "glass closet": "the swirls of totalizing knowledge-power that circulate so violently around any but the most openly acknowledged gay male identity" (164). Sedgwick states that this glassy and indeed crystalline trope simultaneously expresses *and* suppresses the referential gay male body by circumscribing its accessibility within a secret epistemology. This trope, which Sedgwick sees as being literarily driven in nineteenth-century narratives like The Picture of Dorian Gray which promote it as both the veil and sign of homoeroticism, also anticipates the implicit homophobia within the modernist project of abstraction, "a space bounded by hollowness, a self-reference that refers back to--though it differs from--nineteenth century paranoid solipsism, and a split between content or thematics on the one hand and structure on the other that is stressed in favor of structure at the expense of thematics" (165).[14] Sedgwick reads characters like Dorian Gray as determined by such a policing art of obscurity, but even more than this, I think it is one of the implications of her argument that these "unmentionables," the sodomites of Wilde and Pater's London, reinscribe the world with a tenuousness that lies within their own grasp, even as they fail to confer their own marginalised identities upon it. They do this because, after all, they, you, and I are part of its heterogeneity. Characters like Marius, Denys L'Auxerrois, Dorian Gray, Wilde and Pater prove

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[14]Sedgwick 163-167; 182-212. Also Nunokawa, The Afterlife of Property 108-111.

that the world is as marginal as it also appears universal in its claims. It is the summary of all our secret and guiltless aspects, and is as much a fragile thing as it is the representation of our most central, brightest beliefs.[15] The crystal character hears and intuits everyone despite his own reserve. Everything is open to his raptures, and standing in the world he figures for a sort of endless abandonment, an Orpheus still midway between passion and despair because he lives in a world he cannot properly make his own until he recovers his lover. Pater stresses the crystal character's unhappiness as a signal of our own incompatibility with his idealised status: unable to love or respond to him because he represents a secret narrative we have termed a liability, we and the character remain always defined several paces away from fulfillment, sadly internalising a formula of displacement Sedgwick calls "I do not *love* him; I *am* him."

Sadness here is evoked as the response to an ineffable truth about ourselves and the world: neither of us is entirely known or knowable. And the progress of aesthetics for Pater, who matches the obscurity of the crystal character with an equally complex literary style (Wilde perceptively noted the lack of freedom in Pater's writing), ultimately renders the critic as unfathomable to himself as he is to others. When Pater, in response to Matthew Arnold's "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," says that "in aesthetic criticism the first step towards seeing one's object as it really is, is to know one's own impression as it really is" (Renaissance xix), he is setting himself up for Wilde's epigrammatic parody, "the primary aim of the critic is to see the object as in itself it really is not," which only means that the object has now been subjectively localised, for better or worse, in the fabric of the self. Withholding the object, then, from proper

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[15]Flesch defines this as an aspect of what he terms extremity and generality, and he reads certain figures in literature as indicative of the world's contingency: "often they are fictional, like Proserpin gathering flowers; sometimes they are utterly unremarkable, like the pilot of the skiff on the Norway foam. They too are at issue and at risk; they too belong to the world, but it is the world into which a world of woe has been brought. They belong to a general fragility, or a fragile generality" (Generosity 13).

perception, the critic keeps it as an avatar--it is nothing without him.

Freedom from such tedium invariably depends upon the question: What is my work now? One form of such work is writing itself, the expenditure of grief *in the face of* grief. Literature as elegy, however, does not simply serve to transcend an experience of loss by perceiving itself as a consolatory act--it authenticates the status of fiction as a condition and symptom of that initial loss. The sort of emptiness or lack we have come to deconstructively identify as complicit with the inherent fragility of language itself, does very little to salvage such emptiness as a meaningful experience for its own sake. As Peter Sacks remarks, "this view risks abandoning a true sense of the experience of loss, or at least tends to slight the dialectical relationship between language and the grieving mind" (xii). The knowledge that our modes of literary representation serve a feeble charity, that they are ultimately incapable of placating a grief that is beyond the particulars of the career of literature itself, does not disparage these modes but rather directs our attention to the reasons why such impoverishment persists as not only a function of literary genre, but more importantly, as the signal of a writer's deliberate self-censoring or self-cancellation.[16] This provocative emptiness, like Leonardo's strange hermaphrodites who are guiltless although they appear to us as sinful, contains a truth disproportionate with our knowledge of it. Its unredeemed space universalises our

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[16]For obvious reasons, I cannot properly address this argument in my work, although I believe that the methodology of a post-structuralist theory like deconstruction, as it is displayed in the writings of Paul de Man, is enraptured by a sadness that predetermines criticism to see itself and literature as outcomes of unhappy thought. Deconstruction—and here I side with Laura Quinney who believes it to be in league not with nihilism but with a tragic paradigm in literature (Literary Power xvii)—does not so much demystify texts in order to prove our own naivete in the face of their mimetic features, as it suggests that such a demystification itself sadly fails to address the anonymity of literary works—that is, the reason for their resistance to interpretation. Similarly, a fascinating book like Bersani's The Culture of Redemption which exposes the meretricious "saving grace" of art, partakes in this theme of sadness: the refusal to grant art a transcendental nature is tied in with a dissatisfaction over how reality and its examples of suffering remain ignored in the idealised ascension of art.

sadness, but also extends it as an aspect of our marginalisation.

The darker side of Pater's work thus uncovers a grief without bounds, and in this respect, it seems thematically similar to the Freudian account of mourning and melancholia. Mourning is described by Freud as "the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction that has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal" (243). The process of mourning incorporates the loss object as a fantasy of the self, allowing the mourning subject to extend the life of the lost object until it is definitively relinquished. The postponing of that relinquishment, however, is also what defines mourning's aberration, melancholia. But for Pater, sadness and loss are experienced with a subtle difference: where for Freud the therapy is evoked in the instant one forgets the circumstances of loss, Pater's unhappy person mourns an object he does not know--nor ever knew--well enough. Loss for Pater is thus a moral failure. The universalising tendency of sadness which I have suggested, the belief that everyday life has obscured an inalienable truth about our actual insufficiency as persons and made that obscurity the source for our pain, describes an affection on Pater's part for the singular power of literature to both contain and develop those elements that collide with its formal precision. Loss becomes translated into the aesthetic imperative of *ascêsis*, a Freudian emblem for culture and civilisation which nonetheless contains an odd doubling within itself that appears to unsettle and recall those elements that it apparently serves to discipline. Perry Meisel reads this ambiguity in Pater as a convolution of cultural and organic metaphors which do not so much seek priority over one another, as they strive to richly complicate the terms of their original usage, extending their revisions over a wider sweep of Pater's aesthetic programme:

> Such a difficulty in making continuous or coincident the figures of chemical fusion and *ascêsis* with those of flowers, blossoms, and other kinds of natural growth suggests that there is a 'residue' or 'surplusage' in Pater's transparent vision after all...
>
> Such a formulation nonetheless maintains the irreducibility of the opposition between nature and culture, with the supposed 'freshness'

> of Pater's heroes and their work coexisting uneasily with their status of exemplary sufferers. Indeed, the tension is in some ways a classically Victorian one between science and religion, reason and affection, which Pater reinterprets and brings to bear as tropes on questions of art and culture in his attempt to achieve a higher level of argument capable of resolving contradiction, or at least of dismissing some of the factors that contribute to it. (70-72)

Denys L'Auxerrois, the Prior in "Apollo in Picardy," Florian Deleal in "The Child in the House," all are exemplary sufferers who cannot fully express themselves because their silence is a condition of their exemplarity, of the phantom pain they harbour and through which they haunt our deepest attention. They are forced to abandon their lives because they are manifestly characters within the limits of a fiction that has determined those lives to be shadowy and unnamed. In psychoanalytic terms these characters survey the theme of an aberrated mourning; as forces of literature, they require Pater's compassion for their ceaseless nomadism because they prolong and intensify the comparative wanderings of his own prose. Each character implicitly shares a biographical specificity with Pater, but each also loses such correspondences--as does the writer himself--to the vicarious narration of the third-person. This narrator is also generically determined to remain in exile, unknown, reflecting the speechlessness of the Prior who grieves for the dead boy he loved, wrongfully victimised and prevented from furnishing such grief as a sympathetic account for the accidental death that now dooms his life through rumour and implication.

Pater's insights do not always produce the possibility of a mournful memory behind all objects and persons, but he does suggest that memory and the act of recollection itself possess an aesthetic intensity that aspires towards and evolves a type of sadness that is specific to the pleasures of art. In "A Prince of Court Painters," the first story in the volume Imaginary Portraits, art, sadness, and memory are all involved in an *avant*- Proustian display of what Pater would otherwise term appreciation--the unflagging attention he recommends we bring to other persons and art works. The desire

to remember in the story figures as both the sorrow of the diarist/narrator, as well as the significant artistic contribution of the artist Watteau to painting. Watteau materialises posthumously in the journal entries of the story's female narrator who secretly longs for him even while he becomes a totally distant character, and like other Paterian subjects he comes to have no existence apart from these sketched memories and reflections. Watteau throughout does not respond to the writer's reveries, and while his muteness is a function of the journal form's essential privacy, it also serves as an enabling device that preserves the painter as an important influence woven into the substance of the narrative. By the time the journal concludes with Watteau's death, the final words that ring as a memorial to him acknowledge that the peculiar genius of his paintings was perhaps underwritten by an insufficiency in his life: "He has been a sick man all his life. He was always a seeker after something in the world that is there in no satisfying measure, or not at all" (48). When the narrator makes this admission--and the story perhaps marks that rarest of occasions in Pater's writings, like the chapter "Sunt Lacrimae Rerum" in Marius the Epicurean, where the narrating voice speaks to us in the first person, albeit not in Pater's--Watteau has gained the reputation that he has laboured towards for years, now having become a teacher who hopes to make the boy Jean-Baptiste disciple and heir to his unfinished works. Watteau has himself charted the passage from student to professional, but more importantly he has become an influence over others: he is now a part of the reality that he has rendered so many times on canvas for others. His effect is now omniscient and diverse, rather that particular. As he has accumulated status, Watteau has become even more inaccessible to those that know and have known him, and it is the fear that he will become totally unrecognisable that weighs upon the narrator, who believes there is "a pity which strikes deep, at the thought of a man, a while since so strong, turning his face to the wall from the things which most occupy men's lives" (47). The unhappy chance that Watteau will entirely disappear into the mere thread of a life haunts the narrator's memory--in fact predetermines it--and

shapes it to conceive of the ambiguity of Watteau's identity and reputation in the early image of an half-materialisation of him on the road, where the impression of his arrival shimmers with the longing of a last farewell:

> With myself, how to get through time becomes sometimes the question,--unavoidably; though it strikes me as a thing unspeakably sad in a life so short as ours. The sullenness of a long wet day is yielding just now to an outburst of watery sunset, which strikes from the far horizon of this quiet world of ours, over fields and willow-woods, upon the shifty weathervanes and long-pointed windows of the tower on the square--from which the *Angelus* is sounding--with a momentary promise of a fine night. I prefer the *Salut* at Saint Vaast. The walk thither is a longer one, and I have a fancy always that I may meet Antony Watteau there again, any time; just as, when a child, having found one day a tiny box in the shape of a silver coin, for long afterwards I used to try every piece of money that came into my hands, expecting it to open. (25-6)

The possibility of seeing Watteau, who is merely an apparition or illusion on the road like the *trompe l'oeil* box in the shape of a silver coin, is continuous with the desire on the part of the narrator to extend time and space in order to relegate Watteau to the future of happy expectations--something that will never happen like the day that has come to nothing, measuring its radiance in a watery sunset that promises sleep and a fine night. The watery sunset mingling over the landscape like light doused with water--at once an illumination and a flood that distinguishes as it engulfs--destroys the possibility of cognition and improvement just as it wakens hints of their arousal in the brevity of the day. The recovery here of an aesthetic splendour that also superficially characterises the half-finished style of Watteau's melancholic art, paradoxically succeeds in cancelling its own substance by turning the splendour out of phase with the content of its recollection. Instead of supporting the generative quality of memory, the narrator's sense of loss--which is narratively perceived as being irreparable since Watteau figures as a *future* presence, never to be expected--depersonalises memory to assume the same alien quality as a work of art. The substance of her remembrances never heals the loss felt in the present tense. Such immediate loss is assimilated to the narrator's journal where its

beauty is heightened by the actual estrangement of its author.

In fact, Watteau risks being almost lost to the narrative altogether when the boy Jean-Baptiste is at first dismissed. And for that matter, our knowledge of the painter comes only through the boy and the narrator, themselves fictional characters offering us only an intuition or impression of Watteau's true semblance: "Jean-Baptiste! he too, rejected by Antony...And still as he labours, not less sedulously that of old, and still so full of loylaty to his old master, in that *Watteau* chamber, I seem to see Antony himself, of whom Jean-Baptiste dares not yet speak,--to come very near his work, and understand his great parts" (27). In recalling Watteau with "wonderful self-effacement," Jean-Baptiste convinces the narrator to remember the elder painter through the medium of art, and her memory of him is expressed with all the force of a moral exhaustion: "So Jean-Baptiste's work, in its nearness to his, may stand, for the future, as the central interest of my life. I bury myself in that" (27). But by this time we have become so vulnerable to the sadness of the entries, to the truth that Watteau will not survive the narrator, that it is almost impossible not to doubt the hopes and memories that the characters of the story hold onto. The boy survives the master by accumulating his own "touch of truth, in which all his heaviness leaves him for awhile, and he actually goes beyond the master," and in fact measures his survival "precisely at those moments that he feels most the difference between himself and Antony Watteau" (30-1). It is not that these characters are ever too late in finding one another, but that they never indeed *knew* each other from the beginning. What the story suggests through its recollective narrative is that the pleasures of art are complicit with the intolerability of human loneliness, that there is something to be dreaded and appreciated in the exceptional fictionality of unknown feelings and experiences that stimulate us. And it is the narrator herself that offers us the most jarring instance of such an anxiety, her love of art tinged with all the unfulfilled longings of desire and hope which are brought out when she reads Manon Lescaut:

> There is a tone about it which strikes me as going well with the grace

> of these leafless birch-trees against the sky, the pale silver of their bark, and a certain delicate odour of decay which rises from the soil. It is all one half-light...And I could fancy myself almost of their condition sitting here alone this evening, in which a premature touch of winter makes the world look but an inhospitable place of entertainment for one's spirit. With so little genial warmth to hold it there, one feels that the merest accident might detach that flighty guest altogether. So chilled at heart things seem to me, as I gaze on that glacial point in the motionless sky, like some mortal spot whence the death begins to creep over the body! (40-1)

In spite of this seasonal decay, however, it seems that literature may yet perform a final recovery:

> And yet, in the midst of this, by mere force of contrast, comes back to me, very vividly, the true colour ruddy with blossom and fruit, of the past summer...when the thought of cold was a luxury, and the earth dry enough to sleep on. The summer was indeed a fine one; and the whole country seemed bewitched. A kind of infectious sentiment passed upon us, like an efflux from its flowers and flower-like architecture--flower-like to me at least, but of which I never felt the beauty before. (41)

Delight in the summer is rendered as a temporary antidote to the wintry uncertainty that clouds the mind, although the poles of the imagination here are subtly asserted at levels of maximum difficulty which repeat rather than revise the sadness of the narrator. Recollection itself does not dispel dangers entirely, but rather recovers a world of extremes that broadens the longings of memory, especially sustaining the loss that is the central affect of the narrative's compelling evolution. The juxtaposition of these passages, however, also brings out a further preoccupation--the deliberate triviality, the littleness or rather the contingency of impressions that surface in Pater as not only those elements that are often deemed forgettable, but more importantly, those that require exaggeration and concern. Leafless birch-trees straining against a sky coloured in the winter half light, or the blossom and fruit of summer--both phenomena are indicative of possibilities restrained and yet cautiously stirred within the narrator's mind, which remains always far away from its own fulfillment. Time here becomes a deliberately literary manifestation that undoes the impressions of the first person by construing them

as mournfully present, *here*. They are the thoughtful accumulation of uncertain pasts and futures that amount to nothing except the incessantly affective luxuriousness of the unhappy present tense which reflects the unremarkable, unnoticeable "littleness" of representation: "People talk of a new era now dawning upon the world, of fraternity, liberty, humanity, of a novel sort of social freedom in which men's natural goodness of heart will blossom at a thousand points hitherto repressed, of wars disappearing from the world in an infinite, benevolent ease of life--yes! perhaps of infinite littleness also. And it is the outward manner of it that, which, partly by anticipation, and through pure intellectual power, Antony Watteau has caught, together with a flattering something of his own, added thereto" (35).

The apparent lack of a biography for Pater ("Was he ever alive?" we might ask with Wilde), a life that indeed resists any hint of overt illumination whether it be in the platitudes of the letters or the substance of a proper critical interpretation, exemplifies in the extreme the sort of aesthetic loss of the self that surfaces in his writings. And it is this mystery surrounding Pater, a mystery that has employed readers and critics alike in the effort of establishing a credible profile for a writer who refuses any defining personality regardless of his own aesthetic recommendations, that asks us to consider the literary power of sadness as a very real circumstance despite its fictionality—a circumstance that designates literature as a simultaneous revelation *and* parallel of reality. This is the modest reverberation that lies behind the most provocative of Pater's remarks, provocative because their essential truth is expressed as an innocence prior to all other forms of attentions, all other preoccupations: "To define beauty, not in the most abstract but in the most concrete terms possible, to find, not its universal formula, but the formula which expresses most adequately this or that special manifestation of it, is the aim of the true student of aesthetics" (Renaissance, "Preface," xix). In the case of the narrator of "A Prince of Court Painters," beauty's individuality initiates her own self-reflection with and against art. There is something unhappy that overshadows her voice,

an unhappiness that Watteau, Jean-Baptiste, Manon Lescaut all evoke. It is exaggerated beyond the immediate form of the narrative, and her own place in the story as its sole entrusted observer gives her a telling vulnerability. A kind of comparative work will discover on the story's margins that Jean-Baptiste is the name of the painter and student of Watteau, Jean-Baptiste Pater, who could have been a possible cousin of the writer himself, and who perhaps chooses to figure in his own story as a woman.[17] If we see the latter observation as more than merely an anecdote, more than innuendo, what can we make of it as an actual *choice* of the narrative? The narrator cannot be a man, cannot express the longing for Watteau as specifically homosexual, cannot be Pater himself. The secrecy that is powerfully evoked in these questions weaves an interesting diversity throughout the experience of Pater's fictions, which suggest that what is often thought to be either pure narrative silence, anonymity, or ignorance on the part of the writer can be reevaluated as a displaced acknowledgement of the unspoken, nameless content that art as a creative, interpretative, and moral practice can provide.[18]

This point can be further illustrated by a small watercolour of "A Prince of Court Painters" executed by the American artist Charles Demuth, who appropriates Pater's story for a revelation about himself and his own relation to the literary original. The portrait of Watteau holding a slipper is oddly cold and formalised and not especially distinguished, although the washed out frailty of the composition suggests some of the

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[17]I find an insight by D.A. Miller, made in another context, particularly applicable here: the "wish is not to detach male homosexuality from effeminacy...but to disengage it from the double bind of that femininity to which our culture on the one hand obsessively remands it (for definition, understanding, representation) but on the other ruthlessly prevents it from laying the slightest legitimate claim, even in the concessive form of a 'woman's prerogative' " (Bringing Out 10).

[18]Along these same lines, Whitney Davis makes some stunning remarks about the intersections of art, art history, sexuality, and gender in his essay "Winckelmann Divided: Mourning the Death of Art History."

emotional awkwardness and anxiety that Watteau himself captured in his displaced "Pierrot." In the story, the only hint of intimacy between the narrator and the artist is alluded to when we learn that she had posed for an unfinished portrait of herself by the artist. The other allusion to a romantic pursuit--this time with another woman--refers to Watteau's affair with the consumptive female painter Rosalba. As Jonathan Weinberg notes in his commentary on the watercolour, Demuth is unclear as to whether or not his work refers to these possible liaisons, or to something more ambiguous within the painter himself. This sort of suggestiveness also reflects Demuth's close affinity with the story and its writer: he comes to find his alter ego in the painting by drawing our attention to a man's fascination with an article of woman's clothing which serves as an indication of the homosexual self he paints:

> Through the shoe Demuth both creates a sense of Watteau's sexual ambiguity and reproduces something of Pater's dominant tone of longing. The shoe suggests absence--perhaps the female narrator who cannot fully make it into Watteau's life--but it also converts the image into a kind of *vanitas*. Watteau is contemplating a piece of woman's finery in much the way hermits are showing looking at skulls. The difference is that Watteau is thinking not so much of death as of desire. (88)

Demuth identifies with and reproduces for himself the intricacies of the story that intimate in detail his own transhistorically homosexual kinship with Pater. He thus similarly reveals an innocent desire about himself that is obscured and refined by the secrecy of art and its representations, which become the enabling sources for an interpretation of male desire that need not be obstructed by the discreet composition of either story or painting.

The almost convenient disappearance of Pater the man from the persona of Pater the writer comes to unusually provide an illustration for the sort of concealment that operates at the level of his writings. The obscurity of his work, often imbued by a very real sadness translated into a literary imperative, moves within the range of our own lives and experiences, conjuring a type of mournful pleasure that Walter Benjamin perhaps

registered in the brittle, preserved photographs that fascinated him, and in which he detected the aura as illuminating both the presence and the actual inaccessibility of others within and without art: "Thus the critic inquires about the truth whose living flame goes on burning over the heavy logs of the past and the light ashes of life gone by" (Illuminations 11). When Pater famously says in the "Conclusion" to The Renaissance that "While all else melts under our feet, we may well grasp at any exquisite passion, or any contribution to knowledge that seems by a lifted horizon to set the spirit free for a moment, or any stirring of the senses, strange dyes, strange colours, and curious odours, or work of the artist's hands, or the face of one's friend" (189), aesthetics comes alive as a sudden history of loss that has accumulated in lieu of art's growing fascination and anonymity. It is these discoveries that deserve our interest and ceaseless appreciation.

Chapter Four

Ashbery Loses

> My quietness has a man in it, he is transparent
> and he carries me quietly, like a gondola, through the streets.
>
> Frank O'Hara, "In Memory of My Feelings"

On the surface, there is a curious transition from the work of Wordsworth and Pater, to John Ashbery's poetry. Perhaps it has more to do with the places where silence and shadow cast an evasive glare, than the direction of any positively allusive content. First impressions are drawn to the poetry's wandering mode of conversation, to the reprieve Ashbery apparently gives to pondering and designating the contours of thought within the forms of lyric, although the career of the thought arabesques beyond such deliberately generic confines. There is a thoughtful sustenance evoked in Ashbery's poetry, a willingness to trust oneself although any hint of that self's exposure remains censored and unjustified. It is as if the eloquence needed to ensure the continuity of the speaking voice is also viable as an alternative means of dispossessing that voice altogether in favour of the pursuit of a competing dream of becoming a theme or subject totally its own, separate from the poet's identity. The stumbling, almost shy delivery of the poetry, engaging in its own interpretation just before it even hazards to establish anything definite that would amount to the most meagre element of a reverie, seems completely incapable at times of generating its own assertive courage.

Geoffrey Hartman has observed that although Ashbery's conversational tone has "saved" modern poetry from dwelling in solipsistic extinction, "casualness can become excessive. The more excessive it becomes, the more you feel an internal pressure that is being evaded" (Hartman, "Interview," 648). But that pressure is part of

poetry. The reverberating tension of the language, rather than its dispersal and smoothing out, contributes to the splendour of the thematic self-interestedness Ashbery suggests, without every weakening his own investments in the arrogance of the subject. The ambivalences in language point to a more severe understanding of the poet's relation to his own work, because the act of acknowledgement needed to legitimise the *oeuvre* perfectly registers the degree to which Ashbery indeed fights against his own literary evidence and solicitations.

What would it mean to grant a poem total anonymity in terms of its reception and production, or better, what would the theme of such anonymity have in common with the theme of literary sadness? I have been attempting to chart some of these evasions as more than mere distractions or ignorances on the part of writers. These evasions, as seen in Wordsworth and Pater, suggest that the redemptive view of literary sadness--that its overcoming is near--is insufficient for responding to the maturity of melancholic experience in literature which diversifies meaning even when it is made dumb by the impotence of speech, or as with Pater's fictional exiles, it is made seemingly irretrievable like the fates of theme, person, narrative, and even (auto)biography. Such evasions are most familiar as synonymous with a type of modernist escapism--canonical impersonality--that also shares its powerful affects with the funeral rites for the death of the subject in formalist, structuralist and post-structuralist theory. Ashbery has betrayed many of the same designs whenever he discusses his own preference for writing a type of poetry irreducible to critical interpretation. If we take Ashbery at his word, what does this irreducibility have to do with the structure of loss in his poetry, its contribution to the evasiveness that is at once given the privilege of experience, as well as made the remainder of a very palpable grief?

In response to an interviewer once asking him if happiness is a rare feature in his poetry, Ashbery recalled an observation made by his friend Frank O'Hara: "I don't see why Kenneth [Koch] likes John's work so much because he thinks everything should

be funny and John's poetry is about as funny as a wrecked train" (Ashbery, "Interview," 183). The observation is itself comical although ultimately desperate in its concern; O'Hara's comment, far from being merely anecdotal, earnestly denotes the intermingling of sadness and parody that critics have often distinguished as a characteristic of Ashbery's work. Such a blend goes beyond merely suggesting an affective conflict in the structure of the poetry; it throws light upon the chance of stirring a state of mind capable of balancing the potentially divisive elements of despair with comedy. Emotion comes to be oddly rinsed of its natural substantiality in Ashbery, of its own meaningfulness. The contingency of such feelings has proven their individual ripeness beyond any summary of their general form, and the drift of thoughts, wistfully Paterian in their aims, is reduced to an elaborate textual posture. This is perhaps one feature of postmodern criticism's distrust of affect in some of its more rarefied discourses, and it has contributed to one popular appreciation of Ashbery as a poet whose private language of address is a ruse meant to shore up of the stylishness of style. In The Tennis Court Oath, for example, emotional irresponsibility or rather irrepressibility seem to typify an attitude exhausted by worn formalities and declarative constraints. Such an attitude also perhaps influenced what has become for better or worse known as the New York School of poets (which as Ashbery has suggested is more of a limitation as a definition than an improvement), periodised as anticipating a new postmodern aesthetic that flouts categories, affect, style, and subject matter, and effortlessly calls into question the actual basis of the terms themselves.

Ashbery's own exuberant display of sociability described by some critics (Douglas Crase, for instance) makes manifest the subjects and terms for such a debate. The shift in Ashbery's work between comedic and tragic elements of literature is often ponderous, often deadpan, both modes folding into one another with the effect of exaggerating the mockery of the line into a defence for its actual standoffishness. But they rarely permit us to appreciate either mode as a vehicle for truth: if we define

Ashbery in postmodern terms, his work is exceptionally free from realisations and projects, in the sense that such designs are usually aligned with the traditional tropes surrounding the imaginative projects of Romanticism. But he has also become the most readily canonical of modern poets: the Bloomian programme of searching for a school of inheritance between Whitman, Stevens, and Ashbery, not only solidifies their shared cultural worth but also transports and *transvalues* the aesthetic concerns of one poet into the designs of another. The melancholy of the poet--a condition at the heart of Bloom's theory of poetic influence--concerns as much the material loss of literary property as it does the sorrow of the self which stubbornly inspires, grieves, and generates the frustrating work of originality. So in a piece like "Evening in the Country" which Bloom perceptively compares to Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" ("Wordsworth" 61), the juxtaposition brings out a remarkable beauty that supports and undermines tradition:

> I am still completely happy.
> My resolve to win further I have
> Thrown out, and am charged by the thrill
> Of the sun coming up. Birds and trees, houses,
> These are but the stations for the new sign of being
> In me that is to close late, long
> After the sun has set and darkness come
> To the surrounding fields and hills.
> But if breath could kill, then there would not be
> Such an easy time of it, with men locked back there
> In the smokestacks and corruption of the city.
> Now as my questioning but admiring gaze expands
> To magnificent outposts, I am not so much at home
> With these memorabilia of vision as on a tour
> Of my remotest properties, and the eidolon
> Sinks into the effective "being" of each thing,
> Stump or shrub, and they carry me inside
> On motionless explorations of how dense a thing can be,
> How light, and these are finished before they have begun
> Leaving me refreshed and somehow younger. (Double Dream 33)

The final line of this passage both articulates the dimensions of the reverie that has provoked the poem, and serves to underwrite the poem's appeasement of the speaker's restfulness. Ashbery appears to casually condense the sense and topoi of "Tintern

Abbey" within his own by abbreviating its distinct eloquence, but without losing the mindfulness that is inescapably Wordsworthian. Ashbery's tone is uniquely lightened and precise to the point of not even seeming self-pressured into evaluation; it takes place under the apogee of a clarified life that does not easily yield to regard itself as troubled by the liberty of its idle pleasures. The "still, sad music of humanity" here is consonant with a form of attentiveness on the part of Ashbery that seems easily harmonious because its source is ostensibly purified, and such a claim is based on the sense of stability preserved despite the movements and gestures of distraction that the lyric intimates. The spirit of the place manifests in Ashbery's poem as thematically reinforcing the speaker's confidence, and a faith in it becomes strengthened as it ensures the speaker's transport. The poem moves towards a conception of itself as renewed and renewing, as it insinuates a non-passive organisation of space: the speaker's "admiring gaze expands" as the vista is transformed into the motions of a voyage, "a tour/Of my remotest properties," which precipitates the ideal "sinking" of the eidolon--a symbol ostensibly outside of material space and time--into the " 'being' of each thing,/ Stump or shrub." Speaking of the poem "Popular Songs" from his first collection Some Trees, Ashbery describes how "It was written in an attempt to conjure up the kind of impression you would get from riding in the car, changing the radio stations and at the same time aware of the passing landscape. In other words, a kind of confused, but insistent, impression of the culture going on around us" (qtd. in Shoptaw 31). The general reflection is resolved of its immanent and transcendental elements through "motionless explorations of how dense a thing can be," which retain the sense of innocence, of a first dawn of apprehension: "Leaving me refreshed and somehow younger." The speaker's evocation rests upon an emotional interchange between grounding and the internal mobility of a self that is groundless. Such a relationship must rely upon recovery for the continuity of its expression, and it is this structure that I will later show to be informed by aspects of loss and melancholy.

The sense of doubleness discreetly touches the balance that characterises the

speaker's poetic harmony, a doubleness that contrasts with the voicings of "Tintern Abbey" where the subtle dialogical aspects of the poem seem unable to alleviate the speaker's mature disappointment.[19] Ashbery's freedom, however, is an illusion that differs in kind from Wordsworth's: it is to be admired but subsequently revised in order that its happiness not be designated as final. The poem performs this scepticism by developing the doubleness--already introduced as a harmonising feature--into a compromising element that renders the speaker uncertain and anonymous. This anonymity is somewhat similar to Pater's in that it generates its own remarkable intensity behind the obscure narrative, but with Ashbery the effect is to minimise the kind of speculation that in Pater designates the ethical requirement (to follow Flesch's argument on Proust) of attending to the anonymous and the absent. It is not that Ashbery is entirely disinterested in the world of poetry and, of course, the poetry of the world; rather, he wishes to hold back the poem from redemption and interpretation. By keeping it contingent and reflective, he reaffirms that contingency as necessarily human and stubborn to the capacity to articulate.

I want to examine the elaborate image of the sinking eidolon in "Evening in the Country" because it helps to refine some of the notions I have been suggesting about the complication of voice and form in the poem. Ashbery's use of it interestingly recalls the trope's notable appearance in Whitman and Hart Crane. As Tim Dean has observed, the word denotes something at once ideal and insubstantial that is curiously raised to the level of materiality in Crane's poetics through language manifestedly violent, both aesthetically and intentionally.[20] Dean refers to Crane's poem "Legend" in which the word is qualified by the adjective "bleeding" (Twice and twice/ [Again the smoking

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[19]Laura Quinney discusses the theme in her essay " ' Tintern Abbey,' Sensibility, and the Self-Disenchanted Self."

[20]Dean 93-98.

souvenir,/ Bleeding eidolon!]) which renders it the image of an image-- the literal result of the former stanza's hacking which begins with "It is to be learned--/This cleaving and this burning,/ But only by the one who/Spends out himself again." The rapturousness of this lesson underscores the double voicing Dean locates in the poem. The cleaving aspect within it provides, and is a mark of, the speaker's selflessness, but in the special way in which the word eidolon brings to fruition this poetic ecstasy, it is bled into its own corporeality which is superseded for the sake of the erotic liquidation itself.

Ashbery's eidolon is hardly an allusion to Crane, although both share an interest in developing a complex, idiosyncratic poetics, not merely as a rhetorical curiosity, but because of the lush meanings that language can afford as an independent source for inspiration. Ashbery's eidolon emerges as an outside object functioning like an icon or image that uncertainly sinks into the equally unstable "being" of each thing, and unlike Crane's poetics which verge on an excruciatingly physical rendition of a poetical predicament, the sense of creativity rendered through Ashbery's eidolon is already purified, divested of its meaning to the point of having its status sceptically introduced between quotations. The eidolon here is either an external manifestation or indicates the arising of something within the speaker, but it is registered nonetheless after the speaker has been becalmed into the consideration of his "remotest properties," which are almost phenomenologically reduced in this instance. The stumps and shrubs are either possessed by the eidolon or repeat its intrinsic undecidedness, leaving the speaker "refreshed and somehow younger" as he is proven to be as light and insubstantial as the grace of a primal vision can afford. In this way, the eidolon effectively distinguishes and divides self and outside, although it also fulfills the reintegration of the speaker as he is now familiarised with that external world--*it was always there because it was already in him*. The eidolon highlights the change in consciousnesses that the poem entails, moving between happiness and disillusionment. That sense of lightness, however, is not entirely blithe; rather, it is informed by the speaker's considered sadness of his mission:

Night has deployed rather awesome forces
Against this state of affairs: ten thousand helmeted footsoldiers,
A Spanish armada stretching to the horizon, all
Absolutely motionless until the hour to strike... (Double Dream 33)

The figural extensions of night here creates a true ridiculousness, but this is not a complaint against the poem. Rather, I think it hints at the type of falsity that Ashbery seeks to describe: a mistaken trust in realness, in re-integration and articulation. It is with a surprising interruption that the speaker announces that "So we might pass over this to the real/Subject of our concern,and that is/Have you begun to be in the context you feel/Now that the danger has been removed?" The real question here interrupts the innocent convalescence of the first part, asking us to revise its palpable confidence, although as I have already described, the notion of division is already inscribed in its lines.

Light falls on your shoulders, as is its way,
And the process of purification continues happily,
Unimpeded, but has the motion started
That is to quiver your head, send anxious beams
Into the dusty corners of the rooms
Eventually shoot out over the landscape
In stars and bursts? For other than this we know nothing
And space is a coffin, and the sky will put out the light.
I see you eager in your wishing it the way
We may join it, if it passes close enough:
This sets the seal of distinction on the success or failure of your attempt.
(Double Dream 34)

The late knowledge Ashbery is conscious of at the poem's conclusion emerges as a secondary voice that furnishes an alternative to the initial state of comfort. It revises that first happiness with all the severe resourcefulness of a line like "For other than this we know nothing/And space is a coffin" with its claim of an indisputable, mournful reason that also fatally sequesters the theme of space in the poem, now darkening the romantic tour of the speaker into a play of shadows on the walls of a deathly chest. Here the doubleness I first suggested in Ashbery's poem emerges with a broader stroke.

The revisionary stance of these lines weighs upon the poem's indeterminacy by turning the second voice into an absolute: it not only interrogates the first voice but designates it as a required contrast to its own, more ponderous delivery. But while it is the sadness of this second voice that asks us to reconceive of the poem as not completely fulfilled in its claims of peace, its effect is not so much to privilege itself as to erase the knowledge that would be specific to both. The earlier happiness becomes a memory instead of signalling a state of anticipation, and is turned into the illumination of a loss posing in the disguise of a golden age. The anonymity of the poem is guaranteed by its crossing of voices, a quality Shoptaw describes in relation to "Popular Songs" and which also applies in this instance: "[It] cuts rapidly from one narrative language to the next in part because there is no single narrative vantage point. There are traces of an oral narration...but not enough to inhibit the poem's hyper-activity...the poem disappoints only those looking for narrative rather than discursive consistency" (31).

Sadness, then, not only necessitates the revision but is distinguished in the revision of the second part in order to maintain the anonymity of the poem's operations. The scepticism of this second voice emphasises the already complicated vista that is deemed innocent at the beginning, a doubleness suggested in the sinking of the eidolon which differentiates the self from the other as it also makes that difference a part of the integration it indirectly describes. The theme of the theme of the "naive" self is at odds with the death of the self. The two voices combined indeed yield a vision that is internally compromised. Like Crane, whom Dean describes as following a poetic style obsessed with intensity and feeling, Ashbery makes the ecstasy of the smallest moment of experience the test for the expansion of that self beyond its subjective confines. "Have you begun to be in the context you feel/Now that the danger has been removed?" raises the possibility that we have failed to ask that question altogether, our concerns lying in profoundly other matters which touch upon the "process of purification," though the motion "That is to quiver your head, send anxious beams/Into the dusty corners of

the rooms? Eventually shoot out over the landscape/In stars and bursts" is utterly ignored. Ashbery does not void the self in this poem; he suggests that the endless thinking characteristic of the impersonal secondary voice forgets the type of ecstasy that *should be* indistinguishable from its condition: "I see you eager in your wishing it the way/We may join it, if it passes close enough:/This sets the seal of distinction on the success or failure of your attempt." Being "still completely happy" Ashbery seems to wonder if the positive pull exerted by this affirmation was arrived at by a suspicious comfort with surroundings:

> There is growing in that knowledge
> We may perhaps remain here, cautious yet free
> On the edge, as it rolls its unblinking chariot
> Into the vast open, the incredible violence and yielding
> Turmoil that is to be our route. (Double Dream 34)

Excessiveness here partly fulfills Hartman's remarks. The passage seems to address its own opacity through a mode of violence that does not defend but rather tramples the meaning into an unknown distress. This exaggeration hardly characterises the tone of Ashbery's poetics, whose professions of faith are far from the rhetorical severities of such poets as the Futurists, or at best, the more democractic and erotic significations of Crane's poetry. What the passage does underwrite is the quality of violent doom present in the expression of loss, as tenderness moves within the range of a pain that is as expressive as its opposite passion. The effect is also bathetic, though not simplifying; it continues the ironic dissatisfaction with origins that becomes a problem of the future. The sadness of the lines does not lament an earlier state, or the voice's naivete which opens the poem; it is the deliberate, insubstantial posture of a secondary voice that comments on the insubstantiality of all voices to begin with. The naive condition is based upon an epistemological premise that is developed for us by the second voice which displays an overwhelming and yet questionable knowledge. An exclusivity is arrived at here, one that for all its claims, seems to merely redistribute

emptiness instead of pure content.

The emptiness perhaps speaks to the sort of retiring convalescence Bloom identifies when he describes Ashbery, and it is also the quality Baudelaire notices in Constantin Guys in his description of the *flâneur*, a state of being coloured by a receptivity that is not quite child-like and naive, but awake to the possibility that its sickness is interwoven with the capacity to perceive aesthetically: "But genius is nothing more nor less than *childhood recovered* at will--a childhood now equipped for self-expression with manhood's capacities and a power of analysis which enables it to order the mass of raw material which it has involuntarily accumulated" (139). The convalescent here also prefigures the dandy who typifies complete exteriority as he optically absorbs the scenery, while himself passing from one space to the other without the slightest hint of detection: "He is an 'I' with an insatiable appetite for the 'non-I,' at every instant rendering and explaining it in pictures more living than life itself, which is always unstable and fugitive" (140). The adventurousness of the world is aligned with the fugitive persona cut by the dandy, and it is within such a dynamic that Baudelaire locates the potential recognition of modernity at its moment of irretrievability: "By 'modernity' I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable" (142).

To illustrate what he means by modernity, Baudelaire concentrates on the specific features of the subjects of portrait painting: their clothes, coiffure, gestures, glances, and smiles. In fact the peculiarly beautiful privilege of the modern lies in the relative details that are bound to be overlooked because they seem so irrelevant, or better, because they themselves are temporary and fleeting. For Baudelaire, those portrait painters that remain true to representing the world around them in contemporary detail, rather than those like Ingres who "impose upon every type of sitter a more or less complete, by which I mean a more or less despotic, form of perfection, borrowed from the classical ideas" (143) will be original in their work. They will not be seduced into

reproducing mere falsities and copies of masterpieces like those painters that depict the present in the fashions of the past. The latter representations are guilty because they mark a disjunction in the body and spirit of the subject. The originality of modernity lies in its transitory recognitions: what is modern in the past is that which we register as specific to it; the details ring with the lost qualities of their ephemerality, as well as our own separation from them. The work that reproduces the past in the present is guilty of a type of Freudian melancholia, retrieving history's store in order to colour the present by holding onto a lost object that has become totally distinct from the subject itself. It is as if the subject were draped with things that were not its own, pointing attention to its own discomfort wearing the emperor's new clothes: "If for the necessary and inevitable costume of the age you substitute another, you will be guilty of a mistranslation only to be excused in the case of a masquerade presrcribed by fashion" (142-43). The fashion is a fatuous ornament, whereas in the true modern work the detail that proves a work original and contemporary is precisely that which is fated to disappear under the absorptive gaze of the *flâneur*. This excursion into Baudelaire helps to illuminate the affinity Ashbery shares with his theory of the modern, specifically the insistence on the fugitive elements of art. Loss is perceived as inextricable from the composition of a masterpiece. In Ashbery, this susceptibility to detail and relative fascinations yields a profundity disguised as a purely exterior manifestation, one that comes across as deliberately cosmetic and casual:

> *Back home from the beauty contest*
> *And its attendant squalors, she doesn't feel*
> *Like much. The world*
> *Is vaguer and less pejorative, a time*
> *Of stressful headache but also*
> *Of architectonic inklings and inspiration:*
> *Agony for a day, and then the refreshing dream*
> *Bubbles up like an artesian well in all its*
> *Wealth of accurately observed detail,*
> *Its truth of being, on the surface*
> *But striking long, pointed roots into the dull earth*

Behind the mask. Yet like a pain
That went away, its immanence
Is very much an ongoing thing, its present
Departed in the greater interest of the whole. (As We Know 27-8)

The artesian well materialises and sublimates all the complexities of the dream not simply in its overall shape, but in the accuracy of detail. It is these same details, their individuality taking away from the well's "*truth of being*" that defies the sublimation of the whole by evidence of its "*long, pointed roots into the dull earth.*" Pain here is registered as it barely disappears into the details that evoke the tired attentiveness of the *flâneur*-speaker, whose own modernity is evoked through the minor, persistent caprices of the world. The opposite passage on the two column page of this long poem marks a telling emphasis:

You can neither define
Nor erase it, and, seen by torchlight,
Being cloaked with the shrill
Savage drapery of non-being, it
Stands out in the firelight.
It is more than anything was meant to be.
Yet somehow mournful, as though
The three-dimensional effect had been achieved
At the cost of a crisp vagueness
That raised one twig slightly higher than the
Morass of leafless branches that supported it,
and now eager, fatigued, it had sunk back
Below the generally satisfying
Contours of the rest. (28)

Perspective here serves to obscure the already unknown meaning of the thing "seen by torchlight," its perplexity an extension of the world's ongoing sadness made invisible.

An early poem like "Errors" rehearses such a dynamic: the erotic tension scrupulously woven through the lines deepens the severity of their poetic eloquence as it also strives to unravel them:

Jealousy. Whispered weather reports.
In the street we found boxes
Littered with snow, to burn at home.
What flower tolling on the waters

You stupefied me. We waxed,
Carnivores, late and alight
In the beaded winter. All was ominous, luminous,
beyond the bed's veils the white walls danced
Some violent compunction. Promises.
We thought then of your dry portals,
Bright cornices of eavesdropping palaces,
You were painfully stitching to hours
The moon now tears up, scoffing at the unrinsed portions.
And loves adopted realm. Flees to water,
The coach dissolving in mists. (Some Trees 47)

The refined intelligence of this passage (Shoptaw calls it Proustian) betrays a slight unwillingness to admit loss in the detailed fragmentariness of the poem, which appears haphazardly sewn together. As a whole, the poem intimates a rare, self-enclosing pleasure enfolded in the very possibility of such a loss. Whatever the event is or may have been, whether it happened before or is being anticipated by the speaker, is not as important here as the questions left behind by these trivialities, impressionistically recalled like lugubrious shades of light whose endearing features, like Benjamin's aura, are imparted in the speaker's lingering delivery. The ephemerality of sensations coheres with the shadowy glimpses of objects and allusions that appear as if only to further deepen their inviting obscurity: "All was ominous, luminous./Beyond the bed's veils the white walls danced/Some violent compunction." The display of these impressions is erotic, not by suggestion but as half-shadows of a loss that promises more that can be immediately felt: "We thought then of your dry portals,/Bright cornices of eavesdropping palaces,/You were painfully stitched to hours/The moon now tears up, scoffing at the unrinsed portions." Though these glances are useless, this does not take away from the seductiveness of the poetry which turns the deceit of its lines into a theme of temptation revealing itself as an eternal doubtfulness. The eloquence veiling the speaker's recollections is the compensation for their sense of loss, although their substance is not entirely given up. "This play of veiling and unveiling is, of course," writes Paul de Man on Shelley, "altogether tantalizing. Forgetting is a highly erotic experience; it is like

glimmering light because it cannot be decided whether it reveals or hides...it is like a trance or a dream because it is asleep to the very extent that it is conscious and awake, and dead to the extent that it is alive" (53).

The poem refrains from fully personalising itself despite the privacy of the speaker's lines; in other words, it does not necessarily impute the atmosphere of intimacy entirely to the domain of an expressive and involved self. But this is an effect of the poem's style which seeks to obscure the speaker's vagaries as it simultaneously imbues them with delight and insinuation. Although the suddenness of the remarks seems to draw them out of context and render them contingent and unrestorable, their strangeness is also achieved by a weird generalisation of the lines. The poem's narrating voice refers to itself in the absent third person plural "we" throughout with a mildly detached severity that also seems somewhat aloof in the pauses and disjunctions between the lines. The generalised nature of this "we" also seems to make the poem's "you" even more fragile as it appears outnumbered by the omnipresence of the scrutiny trained upon it. The disappearance of the other in the poem does not aggravate the narration but rather renders it somewhat useless in contrast to the general voice that only grows in confidence. The concluding stanza altogether abandons the rumours of the first as it increases the objectivity of its gaze:

A wish
Refines the lines around the mouth
At these ten-year intervals. It fumed
Clear air of wars. It desired
Excess of core in all things. From all things sucked
A glossy denial. But look, pale day:
We fly hence. To return if sketched
In the prophet's silence. Who doubts it is true? (Some Trees 47)

Ths final, suspended question raises again the doubt concerning the provenance of the entire poem, which has been working its persuasiveness upon us from the begining. But the question also serves to emphasise the aesthetic doubtfulness that the final stanza now describes: "To return if sketched/In the prophet's silence." The loss hinted at

throughout the work as the object of a possible erotic sadness becomes the generative element of its own gradual anonymity and cryptic sensibility: "From all things sucked a glossy denial." The poem's art extends rather than sublimates the loss, the worlds of art and life becoming almost indistinguishable in their capabilities because both have been made totally indistinct and mysterious, as in Pater's view of the mystery of art and reality. The proof of the poem's vitality lies in its rejection of an "[e]xcess of core in all things," although it is this very insubstantiality that makes its intrigue even rarer as it distills into the structures of loss and recollection. The poem's details slowly move from what Baudelaire calls the "ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art" of modernity to assume the other half defined as "the eternal and the immutable" (142). They define these two perspectives in the way Baudelaire envisions: cohering within each other while giving up their articulation to the voice of a poetic *flâneur*. The theme of a disappearance of a theme of loss and sadness inverts the structure of the loss to serve the poem's anonymous expression and history, commemorating it with a style that shifts between knowing itself and knowing everything without falling into the errors of disclosure.

I would now like to discuss Ashbery's anonymity with reference to "And the Stars Were Shining," the long poem that concludes his book of the same title. Although I do not plan a full-scale reading of it, I suggest that the gentler style of the poem--again recalling Hartman's judgment about conversationality which seems optimally fulfilled in Ashbery's latest poetry--underscores a weariness with the hardness of anonymity that seems problematic throughout his work.[21] Like other long poems (but not exclusive to this genre) such as "Fragment," "Fantasia on the Nut-Brown Maid," or the

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[21] Ashbery's most recent book of poems, Wakefulness, was published at the time that I was completing this study. To my mind, it powerfully displays those qualities of enchantment, urbanity, and sadness that he has developed over the course of his career, with an even more acute perception of their lyrical energies.

book length Flow Chart, "And the Stars Were Shining" chronicles a frustration of love that is paradoxically fulfilled once failure and loss are recognised. The complaint of love, however, does not make the poetry any more impatient in its speech, but rather appears to denature it. The poem does not lose any of its sympathy by virtue of the ambivalences in the language, nor is the often disinterested complexity of the style at odds with a solicitous attitude taken up by the speaker towards his addressee, as well as his readers. It is difficult to evaluate the peculiar beauty of the work because of these shifts in tonality and form, but it is precisely such movements that characterise the growing familiarisation with anonymity in the poem, an anonymity that moves away from the austerity of the earlier work to preserve sadness not as a debilitation but as a habit and quality of the self, perhaps similar to the temperament of the narrator of Pater's "A Prince of Court Painters," or Watteau's Pierrot for that matter. The speaker in "And the Stars Were Shining" appears to begin to explicitly address somebody in the poem's final sections, although that explicitness does nothing to dispel the alterity that lyrical voice describes and illustrates in his reflections. The inaccessibility of the voice here is permeated by more than a regressiveness or gradual loneliness, because its fruition actually depends upon the splendour it finds in moving towards and away from complete disclosure. Loss is expressed and ultimately subsumed into the buoyancy of the poem's progress which balances precariously upon the speaker's own unwillingness to give up his solitude, while at the same time being conscious of the attention being paid to him by an external vigilance. What sustains this movement is the endless delay heard in the speaker's voice--eloquently observant and dodging the possibility that his knowledge is impermanent and compromised because it is a thin defence against the trouble at the centre of his thoughts.

> It was all the same to us,
> we came in and out,
> were thoughtful as strawberries, and the great athlete overturned us,
> made us obsolete. Now that was a day I can trace

with a little mental calisthenics
and find I know what I was doing, to whom
I spoke, the kings, carriages, it was all there. (XI, 95)

If this is some prelude to a profession of devotion, its odd delivery is severely challenged by a casualness that makes its failure as inconsequential as its salvage. Recalling Wordsworth's severe judgement of Johnson, it is not difficult to reserve the same criticism for Ashbery, who at time appears to flounder in the deceiving emptiness of his images. But if Ashbery's poem indeed lacks sense, it is because the poet here has deliberately taken the mundane as the object and medium of his attention. He has become singularly obsessed and saddened by the overload of effects that attract him despite the apparent thinness of his own self. The strangeness of these lines adds an alien quality to the usual, making the speaker hard to believe in the blunt weirdness of his statements, although he does seem equally credible since he is the sole guarantor of his eccentric thoughts. This style subscribes to more than just Pater's dictum to add strangeness to beauty--it is an undreamed of extreme version of it. It turns the voice out of phase with what it is describing, a type of alienation from its own words. The loss experienced here is that of a participatory world, a world of intelligibility and relationships that is the sumptuous domain of the lyric. And it is this quality that perhaps brings up again the figure of the *flâneur*, who randomly absorbs external influences as a prerequisite of his being. The attention that Ashbery's speaker provokes in *what* he says diverts us from acknowledging *who* is saying it, since it is such a slippage that makes the poem's anonymity a signal of its endless inventiveness in the face of all obligations.

There is a certain irrelevance in the passage that is characteristic of the tone of the entire work, an irrelevance that significantly moves into the realm of disjunction and, ultimately, dejection. The speaker contemplates a world that gives him all the difficulties inherent in the imagery he composes, but it is also imagery that is strangely dissociated from anything that we would identify as immediate or pertinent. None of the sections of the poem seem remotely connected, although we are forced to infer a continuity in the

structure of the whole. The assumption here is that what the speaker has to say is indeed valid, is rich and deserves our attention although the nature of his thoughts is unusual and mysterious. Take this example from the second canto:

> To have been robbed of a downturn
> today, I have drunk some water,
> rollicked in the texture of a late,
> unfinished sonata,
> sinking into snow,
> falling forward in the oratory.
> violent as the wolf's cue and anything
> you take from that side of the ledger
> only beware of boredom, boredom-as-spell. (78)

Seemingly without logic, the lines do not ask to be organised so much as *recognised*: "only beware of boredom, boredom-as-spell" is an enchantment that is beyond the poem's own mad elegance. There is a distinct abundance in this canto as in the rest of the long poem, and it comes from an inexhaustible desire to express without qualification everything that is seemingly viable as an object of poetic contemplation. The convalescence, then, that Bloom identifies in the early Ashbery becomes even more pronounced in this work: immobility becomes the ideal condition for registering the flow of thoughts and things. This is by no means a poetry freed of consciousness or doubt that tries to undo the lyric from its psychological history. Rather, that history is more the secret recess of a pure anonymity amongst the crowd, the version of the *flâneur* expressing himself *as* he assimilates himself:

> One of those things like a length of sleep
> like a woman's stocking, that you lay flat
> and it becomes a unit of your life and--this is where it
> gets complicated--of so many others' lives as well
> that there is no point in trying to make out, even less read,
> the superimposed scripts in which the changes of the decades
> were rung, endlessly... (I, 76)

Ashbery does not so much wish to dissolve interpretation entirely as bring out the alterity hidden in the simplicity of his language. Even when the work becomes explicitly

intimate in its address, it does not abandon its features of estrangement. This is something that is similar to the poetry of Crane, especially the love sequence "Voyages," where the intention of rendering love more expressive seems to remove the speaker entirely from the initial motive of the poem. Ashbery's language not only dims the clarity of the emotions, but also naturally assigns external details with the excesses of personal affect:

> But there are a giant two of us,
> the remnant, or product, or a complex
> bristling-up-around, then a feigning of disinterest
> in a corner of the room, and the fuse ignites
> the furniture with blue. It's earth shattering, they say,
> as long as you contain it,
> and you have to, can. (XI, 96)

Here the communication between lovers turns coy, as the meaning of the approach is veiled by the speaker's deliberately stilted delivery. The speaker seems to suggest that this is a reflection of the lovers' wordless ecstasy: "The brain-alarm is being recalled/but the message exists when with no words to inflict it,/no stanzas to be cherished" (96). Love both aggrandises its two representatives, but also draws them apart into the sad separateness that infuses the intensity of their relationship. As the corners of the room are exploded into this blue furniture, so the stanzas themselves are assimilated entirely to the mock lyricism of the final lines:

> For we end
> as we are forgiven, with chords the bird promised
> caught in our throats, O sweetest song,
> color of berries, that I lied for and extended
> improbably a little distance from the given grave. (XI, 96)

Solace here in the love relationship is measured, paradoxically, according to the spectacle of the loss and emptiness of that relationship itself. The appeal to song dies in its apostrophe as the tone of the poem incarnates a voice that is even more harmonious and fine. The more vulnerable the line, the greater the tenuousness of the speaker who almost hallucinates these words because their vigour breathlessly draws out the energy that

is their initial sustenance. Steven Meyer has remarked that the entire poem is written under "the sign of Death" (160) because its subject is committed to a wintry imagination, not malevolent but deliberately passive and defenceless as it arouses an impersonal attraction that is folded into the finality of the themes of love and loss. This reduction, however, does not altogether account for the charm of the poem's darkness, which is not so much aligned with death as it is with anonymity, or the space of impersonality that the poem evokes. The words rarely exert themselves to the point of alarm, rather summoning a strange allure as they call upon the absence of the world as a condition for their own persuasiveness. These words are entirely in the zone of forgiveness and forgetting, particularly forgetting and the loss of objects and things. They orient the speaker not towards death, but to the theme of a life that tries hard to forget memory, to forget anterior recognitions that weigh and repress the clarity of the present. There is a similarity here with Elizabeth Bishop's poem "One Art," where the inevitability generated by the villanelle form responds to an immediate need to evolve something in the present moment out of the various timely losses that the speaker is convinced must not destroy her, must not jeopardise her sense of self despite the recurrence of disappointments fated to lose both her and the poem:

> --Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture
> I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident
> the art of losing's not too hard to master
> though it may look like (*Write* it!) like disaster. (178)

The ease of losing for Bishop signifies the extent to which the present must be an evolved summary of something better than merely a series of misfortunes. Similarly, loss in Ashbery becomes the expression of a self gradually improving upon the range of affects that only superficially appear to be synonymous with death and dying. Hence the ghostly quality of the poem--loss becomes very much an integral feature in the world of the living, and the experience of sadness is entirely curtailed to a meagre normalcy:

> Say something that will strengthen me,

let me sip all the colas of the world
before I dive off this reed, into
that region of ferns and bubbles that awaits us,
where all are not so bright, but a few are. (XII, 97)

The poem suggests that we accept the tension of this relationship, understand primarily this voice that delivers to us the terms of the relationship, but ultimately leaves behind the belief that we must *expect* sadness as a feature of the world because the ironic happiness gained from such sober thoughts depends upon our own anonymity, our sense of being vulnerable and willing to be forgotten:

Soon, all will be hidden,
like a stage behind a red velvet curtain,
and this mole on your shoulder--no need to ask
it its name. In the brisk concealment
that has become general everything thrives:
bushes, lampposts, motels at the edge of airports
whose blue lights guide the descending vehicle
to a safe berth in soon-to-be night,
as wharves welcome their vessels, however frumpy
they may seem, with open arms. (XII, 98)

This catalogued geography takes on a greater meaning than its superficial virtuosity appears to intimate. The concealment operating as a type of security generates an appeal that is totally separate from the themes of loss and absence. The generalised tone of the passage offers a comfort that is neither austere nor sentimental. Its charms confront us as perfectly self-evident, seeking out a resonance that is ordinary and natural, like the rich, vague memories that return to Beckett's Krapp as he plays back his spools.
The poem's conclusion attempts to distinguish the solace of the last lines with an eloquence that maintains the exclusivity of the lovers, despite their rare attraction:

but I think we can handle it together,
and this is as good a place as any
to unseal my last surprise: you, as you go,
diffident, indifferent, but with the sky for an awning
for as many days as it pleases to cover you. (XII, 99)

This beautiful section outlines the protectiveness of the final parting in the graceful guise of a reunion, with the image of the sky as an awning being blessed upon the other as the

speaker willingly sees himself retracing his steps. The image is unusually peaceful yet animating: it offers a type of succor in the form of a promise that appears to be exclusive from the relationship that frustrates the poem. Perhaps Ashbery's work comes closest to echoing a more imposing precursor for his painful affections in its final lines:

> Do you see O my brothers and sisters?
> It is not chaos or death--it is form, union, plan--it is eternal
> life--it is Happiness.

Whitman declares all to be Happiness although he becomes even more dissociated from the forces that provide the context of his utterance. The happiness commemorated at the end of "Song of Myself" is also a burial that recognises the power of witnessing: the reader is subject to the loss but has earned the gift of tradition from the speaker. Continuity emerges just as the poem disperses into its final animations. Similarly in Ashbery, the exhausted, concluding lines of his poem appear to be comfortable with their own disappearance. Loss has become an irredeemable part of the speaker's wisdom and practice, and a necessary one at that:

> You get hungry,
> you eat hot.
> Home's a cold delivery destination.
> The emphatic nose puts it on hold.
> Clubs are full.
> I kind of like the all-night dust-up
> though I'm sworn to secrecy,
> with or without a cat. (XIII, 100)

The third line is almost entirely perfect in summarising this stasis. The speaker is caught between moods, neither going forward nor backward. There is a recollection involved that temporarily brings back past longing, "I let so many people go by me/I sort of long for one of them, any/one, to turn back toward me,/forget these tears," but the memory is delivered with such utter flatness that it comes across as evacuated of any substance. It has become so common that the intimacy of the speaker's voice in this final canto seems unperturbed by its own realisations. "Am I forgetting anything" is also the call

to remember; it launches the desire for the fugitive, Baudelairean details to outperform the lyrical voice with a modern theatre of the senses, even as the call seeks to reconcile itself with the loss that distinguishes the poem at its apotheosis.

In "And the Stars Were Shining," the discourse remains obscure and strangely oblique, the phrases piling upon one another with semantic and grammatical complexities that load the poem with a generosity that is imparted through the discretion of emotions and insight. Ashbery exemplifies a type of aesthetic adherence to the singularity of objects that is the special lesson of Pater when he designates "appreciation" as the term best suited for distilling the essence of his projects. Ashbery's work addresses itself to a shadowy truth about ourselves, a desire to believe that the summary of our experiences are eloquently communicable although the idiom of that communication is beyond the conservatism of the mind, no matter how mundane or inconsequent its thoughts may appear to be. Ashbery seems to help his readers overcome an ignorance within themselves, one that is at once betrayed and assured by language that orients us towards the absence of meanings and structures that effectively make that ignorance an investigative practice trained upon itself.

Chapter Five

Conclusion: Nobody's Fault?

> Why should he be vexed or sore at heart? It was not his weakness that he had imagined. It was nobody's, nobody's within his knowledge; why should it trouble him? And yet it did trouble him. And he thought--who has not thought for a moment, sometimes--that it might be better to flow away monotonously, like the river, and to compound for its insensibility to happiness with its insensibility to pain.
>
> Charles Dickens, Little Dorrit

Thinking leads to the river. Like the sore heart that isolates itself even as it looks for universal approval in the store of disappointments that at once generically specify *and*, by the nature of ungrateful disappointment*s* themselves, make unknown to all of us its tender secrets, the literary work of sadness regards its own composition as both a talking cure against further pain, and an excursion without bounds on the very fact of that pain's persistence. As Arthur Clennam realises, quietly, between the pages of Dickens' novel whose "other" title absconds with all characters and characterisation in its own sharpening up to the matter that it truly is Nobody's Fault that all narrative sadnesses have been found to coincide, the greatest share of heartbreak imbibes the theme of its own scattering, its waste. Who is nobody then? Clennam knows this nobody to be just what it purports to be and suffer from--the liberty and simultaneous oppression of its untouched (and untouchable) transience, justified by the same evasiveness that fails to confer a name and entitlement on the summary of its marginalised affections. And yet this nobody can be no more resourceful in suggesting how it also manages to absorb *every*body into its sign: that space where "no" and "know" become absolute equals also betrays the specular nature of the negative body that ac*know*ledges the face that has no body, except for its uncoloured sorrow--"And yet it did trouble him." Clennam's

unspoken knowledge is peculiarly Dickensian; it goes orphaned without a name because the distraction of thinking is inserted here at the moment Arthur in the third person believes ("And he thought--who has not thought for a moment, sometimes--") that *it* is better off not being told. The heart's ghostly freight is instead displaced to the drift of rivers whose monotony folds into the rhythm of the insensibility of a pain unlike the imagination, which Elaine Scarry qualifies as beyond any healing, intentional objects.

Clennam's river is not out of limits despite his metaphors, but precisely the ironic mark of the limit of his pain--the loss unlimited that projects all sadness into an infinity that, on second glance, is only a portion of a world where sadness does not entirely reign. When de Quincey infamously, and comically, reproached Wordsworth for not having his Wanderer comfort Margaret in "The Ruined Cottage" with counsel, reason, and a guinea, he did more than merely anticipate the criticisms of despair half-veiled in disgust over the poem's savaging of hope and consolation. He indirectly asked why a mournful world like Wordsworth's is applicable to our own, why it should be permitted to mingle with its fears as if they were corrections, even as the literary disappointment that pronounces its own brand of misery in the poem ineluctably will serve Margaret with the summons spelled in the words of a fateful sleep. Wordsworth, like Dickens, restores the "nobody" even as it is abolished between the lines of literature and culture. He has us conceive of sadness as entirely inhabitable and hospitable, if not entirely homesick; it is an experience at the hearth of literature, because like the writer in "Tintern Abbey" who recalls the country as his soul is plundered at his city job, it benefits contemplativeness while the writer's hand writes another's story. More importantly, it also deeply revises the type of thinking that questions literature and its moral sympathies--art's knowing which often encourages the memory of others to be lost. Wordsworth disinters the silences that mention themselves (even when the writer is caught off guard), like Clennam's nobody or the discharged soldier faceless on the road, in the interstices of the experience art provides--spaces that instead of losing the eye in the weave of its minute,

colourful fabrics, mute it altogether in the broader design that forgets the details it engrosses. Wordsworth believes sadness to be an extension of the limits of literary talent, or rather the test of those talents en route. It measures the point where the poet ceases to know what he describes and thinks, and must learn that emptiness as he draws us towards it, pointing a finger at it with readerly perusal while his voice and eyes have been indefinitely blocked.

The charge, then, of abstraction, of difficulty, is raised as a specifically literary problem, resurfacing as a feature of sadness' occlusion of the self. But if the themes of loss and anonymity that I have been assessing in this study cast literature in the form of an enquiry into the measurement and originality of their (re)presentation, then it is their prevalence that deserves to be especially remarked upon. The ritual complaint against Pater that the ministries of style lead up to a dead-end, only throws back to his detractors the question of how a writer incites us to triangulate amongst his writings even when the only ostensible directive is numinously aesthetic. What appear to be matters of an *explication* of the text itself, in fact covertly survey the dislocations and impasses that generate a fictional coherence that recommends its own aesthetic and ethical requirements which go beyond the enforcement of "literary architecture" or style. The disappearance of characters, themes or subjects, or the immersion of criticism and fiction in a sadness that propels both forms towards similar ends of abjection in Pater, suggests that there is more left to know about the condition of the relationship of art and life which aspires to an elegiac music. Like Wincklemann's youths that bear an innocent influence on their elder admirer, one that is to become the double-talk of an entire history of art, Pater's secrets are not always recognised by the terms of the audience's propriety, which would rather do away with the love that dares not speak its name in book, painting, sculpture, or "the face of one's friend." Sadness, however, in Pater does not endure because the world is an accumulation of loss: its necessity intimates the degree to which melancholy commemorates the reverberation of memories and images otherwise

repressed into habit or obliteration by society and self alike. Pater's sadness resists, then, the comprehensive ban on personality that Arnoldian and Eliotic criticism, for example, proscribe for fear of infecting the contemporary soul that wishes to recathect to a world of subjects and friends--not objects--of abjected loss, love, and lovers. Even better, Pater's own needful fear could be seen as one which D.A. Miller elegantly describes in another critical context as "a fear lest, like an engine in the cold, the broken heart should refuse to *turn over* and suffer fracture of a different order: fracture that would not be the result of any given loss, but of the drastic inhibition of whatever psychic energies might register or respond to that loss" (Bringing Out 53). What he valued in Wordsworth, Pater extracts for himself: the ability to *be* rather than *do*, where doing means to perform and outdo the self, and being responds to a quieter lesson of pause, remember, and consider the self *with* those selves silent to the text even as it works to make their witness pervasive.

The belief that anonymity is not a punishment but a gain for the sad heart is refurbished in Ashbery: it describes a temperament that suits all speculation and poetry. Neither abandoned nor caught inattentive, the Ashbery speaker revises thought to become even unhappier as it proportionally grows ironic and volatile enough to be inspirited by the possibility that its eloquence may be the final thought passed on objects as they cease to profit from any further elaboration. Sadness almost does not figure anymore in Ashbery because it has been so well assimilated to a born ease. It fails to discourage since it has become the condition of an experience finessed by the originality of the poetry's desire to improve and restore the world to a normalcy where sadness would be *comme d'habitude*. Despite the hallucinatory quality of the poems, of a style that destroys the poet's critique as he himself similarly turns his readers to depreciate the critical act levelled at the lines' discretion, there is a stunning matter-of-factness in Ashbery, a mastery of inherited difficulties. Whereas Wordsworth and Pater are induced to work through sadness and prove its usefulness through a style that deepens artistic and

cultural accomplishments, Ashbery does away with the specifications of sadness in order to make it appear usual and predeterminative. Our lives are recast according to an oddly liberating sadness that weighs our claims in order to elicit a more personal fantasm of reality, personal because the person in Ashbery is resolved to be unhappy like the speaker at the end of "Wet Casements" who declares, absolutely: "I shall keep to myself./I shall not repeat others' comments about me." With this catch: the body here comes full circle to meet the same strategy of willful expulsion of which it was informed in Wordsworth, Dickens, and Pater; the same charge though not quite deemed a token of arrest, yet. Authorial representation becomes in Ashbery as impossible, finally, as the speaker, whose invisibility relativises the poetry to include all voices in its tremors as they try to bespeak only *their* own, not as a defence against but a pleasure for the poetry's spectators and oppressors that try endlessly to win it back.

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