2010-05-01

Betrayals, Secrets, and Lies: Unfaithful Reading in Modernist Undecidability

Lucas H. Harriman

University of Miami, lucas.harriman@gmail.com

UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

BETRAYALS, SECRETS, AND LIES:
UNFAITHFUL READINGS IN MODERNIST UNDECIDABILITY

By

Lucas H. Harriman

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty
of the University of Miami
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Coral Gables, Florida

May 2010

UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

BETRAYALS, SECRETS, AND LIES:
UNFAITHFUL READINGS IN MODERNIST UNDECIDABILITY

Lucas H. Harriman

Approved:

_____
Ranen Omer-Sherman, Ph.D.
Professor of English

_____
Terri A. Scandura, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

_____
Frank Palmeri, Ph.D.
Professor of English

_____
Joel Nickels, Ph.D.
Professor of English

_____
Derek Attridge, Ph.D.
Professor of English
University of York

HARRIMAN, LUCAS H.   (Ph.D., English)
<u>Betrayals, Secrets, and Lies:</u>   (May 2010)
<u>Unfaithful Readings in Modernist Undecidability.</u>

Abstract of a dissertation at the University of Miami.

Dissertation supervised by Professor Ranen Omer-Sherman.
No. of pages in text. (261)

This dissertation presents an argument for the ethical value of a reader's inability to fully comprehend works by Jorge Luis Borges, G.K. Chesterton, William Faulkner, and Brian O'Nolan (aka Flann O'Brien). Such texts demand creative engagement by the reader which could be described as a necessary betrayal of the text. Viewed in the context of the so-called "ethical turn" in literary theory, the revaluation of infidelity accomplished by such unfaithful reading can foster a greater openness toward the unknown, and ultimately unknowable, other. Similarly, by juxtaposing the work of Faulkner, a canonical modernist writer, with more nontraditional writers such as Chesterton and O'Nolan, I mean to betray the sort of limitations created by employing such categorical terms as "modernism" itself.

In an introductory chapter, I use the work of ethical theorist Emmanuel Levinas, as well as the socio-political theory of Zygmunt Bauman and Ernesto Laclau, to develop a theoretical framework for the project, taking some examples from the writings of Borges. My chapter on Chesterton presents *The Man Who Was Thursday* as a site of multiple betrayals which can awaken the reader to the instability of any fixed notion of identity. I conclude the chapter with a specific show of infidelity in the 1924 Russian adaptation of Chesterton's novel for the Kamerny theater in Moscow, an intentional

"misreading" that reveals aspects of the work glossed over by years of more ostensibly faithful interpretations. My third chapter features a sustained reflection on the ethics of reading Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, a work which stubbornly "keeps its secret," to use Derrida's phrasing. Since any reading of this story must be, on a certain level, a betrayal, I discuss the possibilities opened up by resisting the tendency to fix the meaning of such an undecidable work. In my final chapter, I consider the work of O'Nolan as a testimony to the constitutive power of betrayal. In his deconstruction of authorial presence, his Judas-like betrayal of James Joyce, and his provocative 1943 "translation" onto the Dublin stage of the Čapek brothers' *Insect Play*, O'Nolan is always unfaithful to his object; however, the revaluation of infidelity posited by this dissertation suggests that his traitorous stance could paradoxically do more justice to the objects of his focus than would a more ostensibly faithful approach.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation,

firstly,

to my wife Diane …

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The most lucid writer finds himself in the world bewitched by its images. He speaks in enigmas, by allusions, by suggestion, in equivocations, as though he moved in a world of shadows, as though he lacked the force to arouse realities, as though he could not go to them without wavering, as though, bloodless and awkward, he always committed himself further than he had decided to do, as though he spills half the water he is bringing us. The most forewarned, the most lucid writer nonetheless plays the fool…. Modern literature … certainly manifests a more and more clear awareness of this fundamental insufficiency of artistic idolatry.
　　　　　　　　　　　– Emmanuel Levinas "Reality and Its Shadow" (13)

I don't think you should try to be loyal to your century or your opinions, because you are being loyal to them all the time. You have a certain voice, a certain kind of face, a certain way of writing, and you can't run away from them, even if you want to. So why bother to be modern or contemporary, since you can't be anything else?
　　　　　　　　　　　– Jorge Luis Borges Borges on Writing (51)

This project argues for the ethical value of a reader's encounter with undecidability in fictional narrative. Specifically, I consider literary narrative from the early twentieth-century by G.K. Chesterton, William Faulkner, and Brian O'Nolan (aka Flann O'Brien)—works which emphasize the impossibility of total comprehension—and I claim that such texts demand a crucial level of creativity on the part of the reader.[1] Chesterton's use of the fantastic literary mode, Faulkner's polyphonic modernist texts, and O'Nolan's pseudonymity and metafiction all work to reveal the ultimate failure of the literary work to accurately portray lived reality. In other words, they require a reading practice that does something more than simply remain faithful to the text. Viewed in light of the so-called "ethical turn" in literary theory, the revaluation of infidelity

---

[1] "Creativity" in this dissertation should be interpreted in the sense Derek Attridge gives it in *The Singularity of Literature*, where he emphasizes the extent to which a creative reading always entails an element of betrayal: "A creative reading is … one that, in its striving to do full justice to the work, is obliged to go beyond existing conventions. It is a reading that is not entirely programmed by the work and the context in which it is read, including the psychological character of the reader, even though it is a response to (not simply a result of or reaction to) text and context—and in this sense it might be called a necessarily unfaithful reading" (80).

accomplished by such unfaithful readings can foster a greater openness toward the unknown, and ultimately unknowable, other than parallel notions of commitment that are often put forward in ethical discourse. To accomplish this revaluation of infidelity, I will draw especially on Jacques Derrida's linking of literature with both secrecy[2] and lying[3] to argue that the practice of creative reading that attempts (but inevitably fails) to "betray the secret" of a literary work can prepare one to approach the ethico-political decisions of everyday experience with a humility born from an awareness of one's own contingent position. While it has traditionally been more common to speak of the value of loyalty in ethical relations, Borges's statement in the epigraph indirectly suggests the potential of imagining a careful disloyalty that would extend us beyond the epistemological limits of our own spheres of belonging. In the readings conducted below, the importance of commitments, of the sort Borges describes here as inescapable—"you can't run away from them, even if you want to"—is subordinated to an intentionally vulnerable relation to alterity which can only be understood using the terminology of betrayal.

---

[2] In "Literature in Secret: An Impossible Filiation," a short piece on Kafka included in the second English edition of *Gift of Death*, Derrida ties the institution of literature to the impossibility of speaking the secret, claiming "literature (in the strict sense, as modern Western institution) implies *in principle* the right to say everything and to hide everything, which makes it inseparable from a democracy to come," and also "literature is the place of all these secrets without secrecy, of all these crypts without depth, with no other basis than the abyss of the call or address" (156, 157). Here, as well as in the interviews published in *A Taste for Secret*, Derrida works to maintain this three-part connection between the literary, or literarily read, text, the secret, and a democratizing relation to one's socio-political moment. This topic will be more fully developed in my third chapter.

[3] Technically, he speaks more often of perjury than lying, arguing that it is necessary to maintain a place for the contingent status of the truth being betrayed by such a speech act. Where lying typically connotes the statement of actual falsity, which hinges necessarily on the possibility of telling the "whole truth," the perjurer merely attempts to make a false statement, speaking against his own limited perception of truth. As Hammerschlag points out in her discussion of Derrida's relationship with Jewish belonging, "Derrida introduces literary language into the political sphere … because literary language can itself be understood to perjure…. As opposed to the philosophical concept, the *Begriff* which claims to seize its object, literary language introduces the turn, the trope…. Through the act of figuration, literature introduces the element of deceit into representation. For Derrida this perjury would in fact be the sign of fidelity to the antinomy that is at the heart of 'being-Jewish'" (96–97). See also Derrida's essay in *Acts of Narrative* titled "'La Parjure,' *Perhaps*: Storytelling and Lying ('Abrupt Breaches of Syntax')," to which I will turn in my discussion of truth in Chapter Two.

Indeed, Borges might be read here as a model for the type of writer I am considering in this dissertation, the modern writer who, as ethical philosopher Emmanuel Levinas puts it, is painfully aware of the "fundamental insufficiency of artistic idolatry." The images of Borges most ready to hand allow us to easily picture him as the writer Levinas so creatively presents in this early essay on the moral weakness of creative presentation: awkwardly unable to manage his commitments, clumsily spilling half of the "water" he offers to his readers, whatever this mysterious liquid might signify in the end for Levinas—in other words, presenting a flawed and incomplete gift in his fiction, but presenting it nonetheless. The questionable status of loyalty and commitment, which runs as an undercurrent through Levinas's "Reality and Its Shadow," recurs often in the work of Borges, who states in a 1979 homage to Victoria Ocampo, "creo que es buena esa ambición de ser cosmopolita, esa idea de ser ciudadanos no do una pequeña parcela del mundo que cambia según las convenciones de la política, según las guerras, con lo que ocurra, sino de sentir todo el mundo como nuestra patria" [I believe it is a good thing, this ambition to be cosmopolitan, this idea of being citizens not of a small piece of the world that changes according to political conventions, according to wars, to what happens, but instead to feel that the whole world is our native country] (*Borges en Sur* 326; my translation). This cosmopolitan worldview often comes across in his interviews, essays, and short stories, with Borges disparaging attempts at writing authentically Argentinean literature in favor of a more all-encompassing artistic vision. The writers I consider in the chapters below share a similar discomfort with questions of belonging. Whether displayed in Chesterton's uneasy shuffling between heresy and orthodoxy; or in Faulkner's troubled relationship to the Deep South, echoed in Quentin Compson's

memorable disavowal at the conclusion of *Absalom, Absalom!*: "*I don't hate [the South]* he thought … *I don't. I don't! I don't hate it! I don't hate it!*" (378); or in O'Nolan's lovingly satirical treatment of "the Plain People of Ireland" in his *Irish Times* column, each of these writers could be said to gesture haltingly in the cosmopolitan direction while remaining somehow especially fixed within his own socio-political sphere.

This movement toward cosmopolitanism is not always received favorably.[4] For example, Clive James calls Borges's lucidity into question when he ironically asks, "Can a great writer be blind to the world around him?" He refers to this same apology for global patriotism in "Homenaje a Victoria Ocampo" in order to charge Borges the Argentinean citizen with irresponsibility for his silence in the face of terroristic local politics. James explains to his reader that, although "he created a fairyland, he did not live in one," thereby asking us to discern a kinship between unrealistic fiction and a certain inability to act ethically in the real world. Does the idealistic cosmopolite merely use art as an escape from his historical moment with all its pressing responsibilities? One of the goals of my dissertation will be to problematize this common connection and to argue that, on the contrary, writing and reading undecidable works of literature, especially those

---

[4] Nevertheless, cosmopolitanism has been on the rise in recent literary theory, as has the similar concept of transnationalism, though the latter remains markedly less universalistic by focusing typically on the articulation of two or three nations as opposed to the more all-embracing aims of the cosmopolite. Both suggest the urgent necessity of moving beyond the unit of the nation in discussions of identity. See Rebecca Walkowitz's *Cosmopolitan Style* for an overview of cosmopolitanism in cultural studies, where she discusses the presence of five tropes in cosmopolitan literature: "naturalness," "triviality," "evasion," "treason," "mix-up," and "vertigo." Interestingly for the purposes of this dissertation, one reviewer singles out her use of "treason" as being somehow out of place: "'Treason' … to my mind the least helpful term— designates how 'the willingness to test and change allegiances' operates at multiple levels to promote a critically comparative awareness that undermines exclusivist models of community. Walkowitz's discussion of Ishiguro's rhetoric of misunderstanding, demonstrated through a brilliant reading of pronoun confusion, stands out here, but it bears no necessary relation to treason" (Wollaeger 163). On the contrary, I would argue that treason, along with its lexicographical cousins betrayal and traduction, speaks to a crucial aspect of cosmopolitanism that would move beyond mere touristic consumption, an aspect which our strict adherence to the value of commitment and loyalty makes us reluctant to embrace, as Wollaeger's criticism reveals. I am arguing alongside Walkowitz for recuperating treason as a viable approach to literary work.

which draw attention to their own ultimate failure to successfully represent reality, can have productive consequences for ethical action in the public sphere. Because such works foreground the contingency of a variety of spheres of belonging, the resulting destabilization in the reader can prepare the way for cooperation that might otherwise be precluded by more rigid conceptualization of both community and identity.[5] Borges goes on in his description of Ocampo's cosmopolitanism to explain, "Ser cosmopolita no significa ser indiferente a un país, y ser sensible a otros, no. Significa la generosa ambición de querer ser sensible a todos los países y a todas las épocas" [To be cosmopolitan does not mean to be indifferent to one country and sensitive to another, no. It signifies the generous ambition of wanting to be sensitive to all countries and all times], an ambition he refers to as "el deseo de haber sido muchos" [the desire to have been many] (327). The disappointment latent in this "desire *to have been*" is crucial for any understanding of Borges's praise of the cosmopolitan. His writing is filled with this sense of longing and self-conscious conviction of his own failure, and I would argue that this sensibility ties him, and other writers with a similar appreciation for their own failings, to the ethical writings of Levinas, whose work Diane Perpich has described as an ethics of the failure of ethics (76–78). In order to do justice to this conceptualization of cosmopolitan literature, readers must employ creative reading practices, admitting to the

---

[5] For example, there has been a consistent complaint raised from within the political left of the United States about the failure of progressive politics to accomplish the sort of strategic cooperation achieved on the right where, in many cases, widely disparate political subjectivities are able to rally around a cause to work for "the good of the party." Such is the case with the so-called pro-marriage movement of recent years. Patrick Allitt describes this strategy at work in the founding of *National Review* by William F. Buckley, Jr.: "His aim was to set up a big tent, bringing in as many types of conservatives as possible, and to keep them together despite their differences" (175). Allitt goes on to discuss the importance of carrying this strategy into the present: "If the history of conservative thought and politics in America is a good guide about how to remain faithful to conservative spirit, then conservatives ought to find the self-restraint to resist the delusive lures of sectarian purity and harmonious unity" (278). This prospect of rejecting the purity of sectarian community for the sake of a greater fidelity is an example of the sort of political cooperation so often lacking in the US radical left.

fact that their own readings are essentially unfaithful to a text which is itself unfaithful to reality.

The central concern of this study, "Betrayals, Secrets, and Lies," is thus to establish what is at stake ethically in emphasizing fidelity to the text in the reading process, viewing the reading, along with the usually concomitant interpretive act, as a relatively successful unveiling of the text's mystery or a more or less coherent statement of the "truth" of the work. I would argue for a correlation between the epistemological confidence assumed by such reading practices and a parallel drive to comprehend the socio-political other, a drive which can foreclose the possibility of functioning ethically in what Paul Armstrong has described as an "irreducibly multifarious world," where "we need to create forms of community that allow us to negotiate our differences without assuming a prior common ground or an ultimately attainable consensus" (2). In this sense, I will be considering the previously mentioned ethical turn in literary theory not as a turn away from the political but as an effort to maintain the very politicization of the political by resisting the drive for closure that would push democracy to realize its inherent totalitarian potentiality.[6]

If the encounter with literary undecidability can in fact lead to this productive revaluation of betrayal in the ethical subject, one might argue that all literature offers the opportunity for such creative reading practice. Indeed, in the work of Derek Attridge and

---

[6] Butler's "Ethical Ambivalence," along with some of the other essays assembled by Garber, Hanssen, and Walkowitz in *The Turn to Ethics*, express the worry "that the return to ethics has constituted an escape from politics" (15), even as they argue for the importance of reclaiming ethical discourse from the hands of "the moralizers." For the totalitarian threat at the heart of democratic theory, see especially Laclau's *On Populist Reason* (164–71) and Derrida's "Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides." Also see Hägglund's discussion of these two thinkers in the final chapter of *Radical Atheism* (164–205). Simply stated, there is always a threat in the truly democratic government that the unpredictable will of the people will choose the comfortable intellectual complacency of totalitarian rule.

other literary critics writing in a deconstructive vein, the Derridean trope of undecidability has been tied to the singularity of literature itself rather than to a particular form, genre, or mode.[7] However, as indicated by my subtitle, "Unfaithful Readings in Modernist Undecidability," I intend for this project to intervene in the classic argument about the irresponsibility of literary modernism in contrast to realism.[8] While this debate has gone through various phases over the course of the last few decades, there is a sense in which literary critics still tend to detect a measure of withdrawal from the ethico-political sphere in the more formally innovative and enigmatic works of the early twentieth century. This attitude can be seen, for example, in one critic's complaint about the difficulty of evaluating the "political meaning of Modernism, especially when we are taught that its most notable—indeed, perhaps *only*—unifying feature was the attempt to transcend the political altogether" (Blair 157).[9] My treatment of various modernist texts

---

[7] Even though he admits, in *The Singularity of Literature*, "In discussing the question of the literary in terms of otherness and singularity, I have tended to stress the element of unfamiliarity, resistance, and difficulty in our reading of works of literature" (75), Attridge still applies his discussion of singularity to the entire field: "It is the case, I believe, that some sense of strangeness, mystery, or unfathomability is involved in every encounter with the literary" (77). Although this may be true in the strictest sense, I am arguing here for a specific ethical value in literary works that wear their strangeness on their sleeve, so to speak.

[8] The short pieces by Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin, and others collected in *Aesthetics and Politics*, give an adequate sense of the two sides to this classic debate. Lunn's *Marxism and Modernism* provides a carefully researched and balanced presentation of the positions and traces the argument's ramifications into the late twentieth century.

[9] Moglen's study gives evidence of the persistence into the twenty-first century of the Lukács/Brecht divide over literature and politics on the left. He looks back on the canonization of High Modernism during the Cold War as a markedly political affair, and discusses what he sees as a "divided response to American Capitalism" in the work of two strains of early twentieth-century American literature (3). The authors we typically read (and teach) as modernists, such as Faulkner and Eliot, share a pessimistic view of the losses incurred in late capitalism, writing what he terms "melancholic modernism." The other strain, "mourning modernism," also acknowledges a pervasive feeling of loss; however, according to Moglen, works by writers such as Hurston, Hughes, and H.D. present attempts to work through this loss, claiming "the most corrosive forces at work in American life might be altered and ameliorated" (8). In this thought-provoking narrative of literary history, the failure of the former strain to provide answers to the problems caused by capitalism won them a place in the hegemonic canon at the expense of the latter. In Moglen's study, it is precisely their incurable undecidability which renders these High Modernist classics ethically and politically suspect. While it is not my intention to simply reverse the poles of his critique, I am definitely arguing for a revaluation of this very refusal to write decisively.

will call such prevalent claims of transcendence into question. In arguing for the ethical value of betrayal, I am suggesting that, rather than simply being politically irresponsible texts, works of literature that foreground their own undecidability can accomplish—or at least prepare the way for—a different sort of political work than more strictly realistic literature, political work which remains more ethically open towards the unknown and unknowable others of the public sphere.[10]

Philip Weinstein has described literary modernism in terms of its favoring of epistemological doubt over the confident pursuit of knowledge which, in Levinasian terms, would aim to reduce the other to an aspect of the same.[11] I will lean heavily on the revaluation he effects in *Unknowing: The Work of Modernist Fiction* as I focus my gaze specifically on this period of literary production. While his approach suffers somewhat from the rigidity of the linear progression he traces—from a realism bent on knowing, to a modernism favoring unknowing, to a postmodernism going beyond knowing—much of what he says about the ethical potential opened up by the destabilized and destabilizing literary work is helpful. Perhaps the very qualities of modernist fiction which its detractors use to argue for its apolitical irresponsibility could offer a new way of considering the relationship between reading literature and taking ethico-political action.

---

[10] This openness is a different sort of approach from the "rational-critical communication" which characterizes the public sphere as defined by Habermas. While faith in the pursuit of "consensual truth" purports a conditional openness to the other, the assumption of common ground ultimately limits such discourse to communities of the like-minded. I would argue that, as with the ethics of reading presented in Wayne Booth's *The Company We Keep*, such a conceptualization of ethical interaction between two parties relies too much on a firm confidence in one's own rightness which inevitably degrades the other's position.

[11] In Section I of *Totality and Infinity*, "The Same and the Other," Levinas discusses the process of coming to know as the reduction of otherness to the same (33, 60–69). Levinas finds this sense of reduction in the story of Ulysses, whom he often uses to personify the Western pursuit of knowledge. For example, he writes in "The Trace of the Other," "*The Work* thought radically is indeed a movement from the Same towards the other which never returns to the Same. To the myth of Ulysses returning to Ithaca, we would like to oppose the story of Abraham leaving his homeland forever for a still unknown land and even forbidding his son to be brought back to its point of departure" (348).

At the same time, by confessing from the start to the unfaithfulness of my own readings, I betray a desire to test the limits of such classificatory labels as "modernism" itself. To this end, the authors I consider below range from the comfortably modernist William Faulkner to more questionable figures in G.K. Chesterton and Brian O'Nolan, both writing on the temporal and ideological fringes of what is generally agreed to be the era of literary modernism. As I attempt to do justice to these texts, I demonstrate that such a desire can produce what Derrida calls, in a reference to Levinas's work, "this fidelity that makes one unfaithful" (*Adieu* 52), carrying the creative reading beyond the limits imposed either by the text itself or by any institutional attempts at categorical understanding.[12] It is my contention that such infidelities can effectively open both specific works and entire classificatory oeuvres to new interpretive opportunities. And even more importantly, the resulting openness can find its way from the admittedly provincial sphere of literary scholarship into the reader's own ethical subjectivity.

Though there are numerous places one could go to question the role of betrayal in the writing and reading of literary modernism, my selections are meant to perform the very unfaithfulness they thematize. Rather than attempt, as Weinstein does for example, to reconsider an exemplary set of figures from the modernist canon, I have chosen to articulate the relatively uncontested modernism of Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, with both an Edwardian text by Chesterton (how does one classify such a prolific and incurably

---

[12] In her discussion of Derrida's "Violence and Metaphysics" as a "necessarily partial" reading of Levinas, by the author's own admission, Robbins asks, "Would not a 'partial' reading be more adequate to the hermeneutical demands of Levinas's nontotalizing thought? But *in this attempting to be faithful* to the hermeneutic demands of Levinas's ethical thought—which states that the generosity of the work should go out to the other without return, should be received in ingratitude—*must one not be unfaithful*?" (xviii; my emphasis). In a similar vein, I would ask whether a faithful response to literature so self-conscious of its contingency and undecidability in fact requires a confession of infidelity on the part of the reader, an admission to the failure of one's own interpretation. I return to this question of necessary infidelity at the heart of fidelity throughout the chapters that follow.

paradoxical writer?), and the multifarious body of work produced by Brian O'Nolan, whom many of his readers consider to be a postmodernist *avant la lettre*.[13] Before moving into the more sustained readings of these three writers, I first discuss in Chapter One the importance of revaluating the role of betrayal in the ethical, socio-political, and literary spheres. Taking occasional examples from the writings of Borges, I use the work of ethical theorist Emmanuel Levinas, as well as the socio-political theory of Zygmunt Bauman and Ernesto Laclau, to develop a theoretical framework for the project. By what appears to be a fortunate accident, each of the writers I go on to consider was read enthusiastically by Borges in the years he reviewed literature for *Sur* and *El Hogar*. Perhaps one reason for his enthusiasm lies in what these works reveal about commitment and betrayal.

In Chapter Two, "The Betrayal of Truth in G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*," I turn to a novel written by one of Borges's most consistent influences. While widely read during his lifetime, Chesterton's work is seldom considered in current studies of early twentieth-century literature. One goal of this chapter will be to determine the extent to which the concept of fidelity has contributed to this decline. Paradoxical to the core, his fiction offers the reader plenty of opportunities to interrogate what it means to tell the truth about a literary text. To what extent does the truth of the work coincide with the author's own conceptualization? How much depends on the evaluation rendered by

---

[13] Of course, Faulkner's status as a modernist was not always uncontested. See Singal, *William Faulkner: The Making of a Modernist*, for a discussion of the process by which he was gradually incorporated into the modernist canon. His depiction of two Faulkners, one "Victorian" and one "Modernist," is helpful in determining early classificatory difficulties. The most common categorical term in Cleanth Brooks's work on Faulkner is "Romanticist." Also see John Duvall's introduction to *Faulkner and Postmodernism* for a discussion of the boundary-crossing characteristics of this protean novelist. For a specific treatment of *As I Lay Dying*, see James Mellard's contribution to *Faulkner and Ideology*, where he sees traces of realism, naturalism, and an emergent modernism in the novel. This is all to say that the boundaries of the modernist canon are permeable and always shifting.

popular reception? With such questions in mind, I will argue that one must betray a story such as *The Man Who Was Thursday: A Nightmare* in order to do it justice. The reader who sets as his goal the faithful discernment of any message hiding within such a novel is doomed to mistake partial understanding for truth.

Reading this phantasmagoric novel as itself the scene of multiple betrayals can reveal the constitutive act of betrayal lying at the heart of any ethical approach to the other of the text, indeed, at the heart of any vital conceptualization of ethics. The story's action hinges primarily on its policeman protagonist performing the role of anarchist in order to infiltrate the enemy's camp, only to discover gradually that those who are ostensibly his enemies are in truth similarly disguised "friends." Using Derrida's discussion in *The Politics of Friendship* of the difficulties of working collectively in a socio-political sphere rife with undecidability, I will posit the constitutive potential of the ambiguous social positions represented by Chesterton. The oscillating identities presented in this novel reveal the limitations inherent in our attempt to know the others around us. Like O'Nolan's prolific use of pseudonyms, Chesterton's shifting presentation of social and political identity works to unmoor the reader's sense of comprehension. If, as Derrida's works suggests, a truly democratizing approach to the other requires the risk that accompanies partial understanding, then the apparent betrayals of *Thursday* could be viewed as moments of ethico-political potential rather than as mere inconsistencies. I conclude the chapter with a reading of what must be the most provocative and creative betrayal of Chesterton's story in Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky and Alexander Tairov's 1924 staging of a dramatic adaptation of *The Man Who Was Thursday* in Moscow's Kamerny Theater. Though Chesterton complained often about this "misreading" of his

work, I would argue that the adaptation suggests the potential that unfaithful readings hold for revealing truths about their object which have been concealed beneath the sedimentation of years of more faithful reception.

Chapter Three, "Faulkner's Taste for the Secret," continues the interrogation of our ability to tell the truth about literature in an extended reading of *As I Lay Dying*. Faulkner's *tour de force* is a markedly undecidable work of American modernism, and, like Chesterton's novel, it resists any attempt by the reader at total comprehension. In this way, the story could be said to "keep a secret" from the reader, no matter how determined one might be. Establishing a connection between this sense of secrecy in literature— which is outlined by Derrida in much of his later work and particularly in the series of interviews published as *A Taste for the Secret*—and Faulkner's well known love of privacy, I consider the possibilities opened up by difficult, reticent literature. Because, like its author, it so jealously guards its privacy, *As I Lay Dying* calls for an active violation by the reader, forcing us into a relationship that necessarily exceeds the boundaries of our comfortable and confident comprehension. Faulkner repeatedly frustrates the tools of categorical understanding that readers often bring to bear on the literary work, such as the search for a clear hero or an undisputedly evil enemy, leaving an undecidable terrain in which readers are left to grapple with the limits of our ability to know.

In order to accomplish such a reading, I first discuss the difficulty, and indeed impossibility, of passing ethical judgment on the work or its characters. After commenting on the various "readings" offered by Faulkner's chorus of neighbors of the family's tragicomic journey to bury the (rapidly decaying) body of Addie Bundren, I

present a reading of Anse Bundren which aims to partially recuperate this character, whom critics tend to judge as monstrous and ethically reprehensible. Viewing Anse's determined fidelity to his wife's request as a parallel to the biblical account of Abraham's testing on Mount Moriah casts his often distressing and shocking decisions in a new light. I then go on to consider what the undecidability of Faulkner's early texts—as opposed to his later work, which often encourages more unequivocal interpretation—might reveal about the controversial relationship between modernism and fascism. Arguing that Faulkner's most enigmatic work presents a certain kind of anti-fascist aesthetic, I then reread the betrayal of Darl which closes the novel as a comment on the totalitarian threat at the heart of democracy. The secrecy held variably by both Derrida and Faulkner to be necessary for a democratic society is violated in the novel by Darl's supernatural and markedly antimimetic ability to detect the inmost thoughts of other family members. I read his expulsion at the story's end not only as a selfish and monstrous action on the level of plot, but also as a symbolic rejection of the sort of "fraternization" Derrida critiques in *Politics of Friendship*, a fidelity to natural belonging which would foreclose the sort of contingent unions necessary to form ethical community.

In the fourth chapter, "Brian O'Nolan and the Long-Overdue Rehabilitation of Judas Iscariot," I use one of the most common scenes of betrayal to further establish the place for infidelity in responsible reading practice. O'Nolan—who wrote under many pseudonyms, the most prominent of which are Flann O'Brien and Myles na gCopaleen— produced a body of work that, in the estimation of Kelly Anspaugh, "is full of betrayals," offered up by "the joking Judas of Dublin" (11, 14). I will consider the role of the revelatory betrayal in three areas of O'Nolan's work. First, I will examine his

multifaceted authorial presence in the context of what Judith Butler says about the difficulty of telling the truth about ourselves. In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Butler describes the narratives by which we form a sense of identity as necessarily incomplete and opaque. The many sides of O'Nolan, who once claimed that "the compartmentation of personality for the purpose of literary utterance ensures that the fundamental individual will not be credited with a certain way of thinking, fixed attitudes, irreversable [*sic*] technique of expression" ("De Me" 41), suggest that the act of "giving over"—of handing over, traducing, betraying—oneself or the other can become an act that is less treacherous than revolutionary, less reprehensible than revelatory.

After first using Butler's comments on the divided and necessarily incomplete nature of self-knowledge to interrogate O'Nolan's notions of identity and authorship, I will turn to the most dominant theme in O'Nolan scholarship: his relationship with James Joyce. Although O'Nolan plays Judas to Joyce's Jesus in more ways than one, his most obvious betrayal of the master is found in the final novel he wrote, *The Dalkey Archive*. Using Derrida's discussion of archives in *Archive Fever*, as well as his theorization of the messianic as an unmitigated welcome and openness to the future, I will argue that O'Nolan's treatment of Joyce always serves to undermine any sense of closure critics might impose on his work, opening a breach in what can often be a hermetically sealed Joyce industry. In this way, O'Nolan performs the sort of creative reading I am calling for in the other chapters. In a letter written to his British editor, Timothy O'Keeffe, in the early stages of composition for *The Dalkey Archive*, O'Nolan claims, "Anything can be brought in, including the long-overdue rehabilitation of Judas Iscariot" (qtd. in Jones 374). If Derrida calls for an attitude toward the future that is "messianic without

Messiah"—without, in other words, the closure that would come with the arrival of the awaited one—then perhaps O'Nolan's work suggests the "betrayal without traitor" that will infinitely facilitate its coming. Such a betrayal without a traitor evokes the etymological complexity of the word, which allows us to speak of a blush betraying an imperfectly concealed emotion.

Finally, I move from this most widely discussed matter in the criticism to what is likely the least discussed: O'Nolan's 1943 translation/adaptation of the Čapek brothers' *The Insect Play*. While the play only ran for a week and was greeted with mixed reviews, his attempt to stage this particular play, which presents an overt commentary on the folly of war, in an Ireland declared to be neutral at the height of World War 2, warrants closer attention. While O'Nolan took wide liberties in his adaptation, leaving little trace of the original in certain scenes, he often refers to the performance as a "translation" of the Čapek's play. Like the Russian betrayal of Chesterton, O'Nolan's version of the *The Insect Play* is unfaithful to its object. Where in Chapter Two, my attention is mainly on the concept of literary exportation, focusing on the fantastic text that is being translated, adapted, displaced, here I shift my gaze to the site of importation, treating the moment of betrayal from the side of the traitor rather than the object. Again, O'Nolan's approach proves exemplary of the traitorous reading practice outlined below. However, if, as I propose, betrayal is a crucial aspect of any ethical approach to the other, if one must confess to the impossibility of complete fidelity which lies at the heart of any attempt to know one who is *tout autre*, entirely other, then O'Nolan's willingness to betray these various authors, along with his traitorous stance toward Irish identity in general, could paradoxically do more justice to his objects than would a seemingly more faithful

approach. Such is the case with each of the writers I discuss here, and, as the first chapter's discussion of postmodern ethical discourse will reveal, such is the case with every attempt to do justice in a world characterized by undecidability and contingency.

CHAPTER 1

Rereading Betrayal in the Context of Postmodern Ethics

Much has been written in the past two decades about the relationship between literature and ethics.[14] While various explanations for this trend have been offered, there is general agreement that, at least in work done by writers in the United States, this new kind of ethical criticism is conducted largely in response to an apparent shift in the later work of Jacques Derrida.[15] In particular, Derrida's various engagements with the work of Emmanuel Levinas have been productive as writers in literary theory who had already responded to the linguistic implications of deconstruction's legacy began to follow Derrida's lead in considering what this revelation of endemic uncertainty and undecidability might mean in the ethico-political sphere. Literary theorists writing in the wake of anti-foundational, deconstructive criticism have sensed the need to avoid the temptation toward nihilism that such philosophical dismantling tends to present. On the

---

[14] For a description of the field, refer to the introductory essays provided for two special issues on ethics and literature: by Lawrence Buell for the 1999 issue of *PMLA* and by Mark Sanders for the 2002 issue of *Diacritics*. Also see Critchley's *Ethics and Deconstruction* and the essays collected in *The Turn to Ethics*. See Karnicky for a very recent attempt to navigate through the discourse of postmodern ethics, where he moves beyond the act of reading itself into the space of "teaching an ethics of reading" (164). Though I will not go so far in the present essay, any consideration of the ethics of reading will have inevitable implications for the pedagogy of the literature classroom.

[15] Derrida and many theorists inspired by him have denied the presence of an ethico-political turn in his later work, arguing that the seeds of what is said in the nineties and later are present in the early work. See Harpham's discussion of the aftermath of the "de Man affair" in 1987 and its role in the increased emphasis on ethics in the work of Derrida and other continental philosophers (*Shadow of Ethics* 18–37). Cheah and Guerlac discuss "the issue of the legitimacy of introducing any kind of periodic division in Derrida's writings" in the introduction to their *Derrida and the Time of the Political* (3–9). Also see Harpham's "Derrida and the Ethics of Criticism" (*Shadow of Ethics* 50–66), and Attridge's "Derrida's Singularity: Literature and Ethics," both of which argue that the insistence on a turn to ethics is meant to weaken the forceful implications of Derrida's early publications, and that it largely stems from a refusal to read this complex body of work before dismissing it.

other hand, there is a persistent element of failure in such deconstructive theorizing, an acknowledgment of lack when it comes to living ethically in one's day-to-day life, which might seem unduly pessimistic, or even nihilistic, at first glance. This insistence on failure presents a necessary corrective to the universalistic discourse of ethics that began with Kant and continues into the present, a conversation that inevitably suffers from the disease of the particular, where the "good" of a specific group takes on the mantle of transcendence and the question of ethics is ultimately considered to be an answerable one.

While the arguments posed in my individual readings will rely more on Derrida's writings on ethics, any attempt to interrogate the intersection of ethics and literature must first address the influence of Levinas on late twentieth-century ethics.[16] Especially in my effort to recuperate the insistence on failure in the ethical approach, I mean to appropriate the paradigm shift effected by Levinas's strange elaboration of phenomenology. What Heidegger's *Being and Time* did for the concept of ontology, Levinas's first major work, *Totality and Infinity*, accomplished for ethics, bringing it to the forefront of continental philosophical discourse. Levinas stresses the need to move "beyond being" and consider ethics, not ontology, as "first philosophy" (*Totality and Infinity* 42–48, 304).[17] The

---

[16] Terry Eagleton links the two thinkers inextricably in his survey of ethical discourse, *The Trouble with Strangers*, claiming, "The ethical thought of Jacques Derrida need not detain us long. It is for the most part an extended footnote to Levinas's own meditations" (247). For Eagleton, both write theory that is "symptomatic of an era in which the whole concept of human communality has been damaged almost beyond repair," evidenced by Levinas's "extreme wariness of identity and generality [which] has its roots in a history of fascist and Stalinist barbarism. For him, as for some of his postmodern progeny, there is a discernible path from the generic to the Gulag" (233). While I do not share Eagleton's suspicion of these "postmodern ethicists" (the adjective is pejorative for Eagleton), he is right to see a wariness toward community as a unifying thread running through work by Derrida and Levinas.

[17] The title of his other major philosophical treatise, *Otherwise than Being; or, Beyond Essence*, reveals the extent to which this departure was a consistent concern throughout his career. See the later essay, "Ethics as First Philosophy," for one of Levinas's clearest discussion of this phrasing, especially as it entails a move

general tenor of his contribution could be described as a desire to shift the discussion from the traditional roots of ethics and morality in the *ethos* or *mores* of community, in other words from an ethics of the Same, into the realm of alterity, articulating an ethics of the Other. Along the way, ethics gets redefined as "the calling into question of the same by the other" (*Totality and Infinity* 43), an approach to alterity that maintains a respect for the "otherness of the Other" and resists its incorporation into what is already known.

Early in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas develops what Jill Robbins refers to as the "habitual economy" (3), or the general function of the knowing subject in which the Other is incorporated into the Same, thus eliminating the distance, or otherness, of the known object. Likening this general approach to alterity to the practice of eating, Levinas shows how ontology-centric thought imagines a knowing "I" perpetually satisfying a felt need by incorporating a known being into the sphere of its Same: "Their *alterity* is thereby reabsorbed into my own identity as a thinker or a possessor" (33).[18] For Levinas, the traditional Western "primacy of the same" is inherently linked to concepts of imperialism, conquest, and war:

> The neutralization of the other who becomes a theme or an object—appearing, that is, taking its place in the light—is precisely his reduction to the same. To know ontologically is to surprise in an existent confronted that by which it is not this existent, this stranger, that by which it is somehow betrayed, surrenders, is given in the horizon in which it loses itself and appears, lays itself open to grasp, becomes a concept. (43–44)

---

beyond the phenomenology of Husserl as well as the focus on ontology that characterizes Heidegger's work.

[18] See *On Escape*, one of Levinas's first publications, where he discusses the satisfaction of need and the self-sufficient "I" it assumes as a fundamental aspect of the "bourgeois spirit and its philosophy" (50, 58–60). He also develops this theme in a later section of *Totality and Infinity*, titled "Enjoyment and Nourishment" (II.B.2; 127–30).

This privileging of knowledge, this assertion of the ultimate *knowability* of the other that Levinas later ties to "the terror that brings a free man under the domination of another" (44), is precisely what he says is interrupted by the ethical encounter, when the "I" is confronted with the face of the Other. I am called into question by the face of the Other, which effectively resists my comprehension. This is the crux of Levinasian ethics. Echoing the biblical injunction, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 9.10, and elsewhere), Levinas declares that trembling in the face of the absolutely Other is the beginning of philosophy, what he redefines in *Otherwise than Being* as "the wisdom of love" (162).[19]

Such an extensive revision of epistemology will obviously have repercussions in the field of artistic representation. Since art, and especially literature, is often purported to offer a means of obtaining knowledge about reality, it could be said to share in the depiction of knowing described in these early sections of *Totality and Infinity*. Indeed, the image of the avaricious reader *consuming* book after book, evokes the sort of incorporation of the Other into the Same which Levinas rejects as an inherently flawed "egology." In some of his earliest work, Levinas actually gives voice to concerns that are

---

[19] All biblical quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version. The biblical echo in Levinas's work is certainly no accident, and the importance of Judeo-Christian thought for his philosophy has been extensively discussed, even though, as Robbins points out, Levinas always insisted on keeping his "talmudic readings" separate from his philosophical work "as the difference between an exegetical adherence and a phenomenological inquiry aware of its own presuppositions" (xvi). Samuel Moyn's treatment of the theological foundations of Levinas's thought is revealing for the present discussion, as he argues that Levinas effected an "appropriative betrayal," or a "creative betrayal in his mature 'invention' of Judaism," as well as in his adaptation of the thought of Franz Rosenzweig, about whom Moyn wishes to show "how appropriatively Levinas read—and how fundamentally, in a sense, he betrayed—his predecessor's point of view…. [Rosenzweig] did not find a loyal echo in Levinas's work." According to Moyn, "Levinas boldly imagined Judaism within philosophy and in a way that made it compatible with a striking and compelling, but idiosyncratic, personal and controversial philosophical vision—a vision therefore dependent on his philosophical formation and historical age rather than inherited or discovered independently of it" (15–18). In other words, his betrayals of Rosenzweig and Judaism reveal something about his own historical moment as well as the objects betrayed. This conceptualization of influence and creative reading is close to what I am articulating in this dissertation.

similar to those raised by critics of Borges's seemingly apolitical fantasies, as in what is probably the most memorable image from "Reality and Its Shadow": "There is something wicked and egoist and cowardly in artistic enjoyment. There are times when one can be ashamed of it, as of feasting during a plague" (12). He sometimes describes artistic consumption as an irresponsible, "bourgeois" refusal to act. Yet, even as Levinas works to devalue art for the ethical subject in this brief essay, he finds himself writing text that could only be described as literary. As in the epigraph to which I alluded earlier, the figures he uses in his essays to convey philosophical realities—the face, the hostage, the stranger—all partake in the rhetorical flourishes common to literature. Derrida describes this double-bind in "Violence and Metaphysics": "Certainly, Levinas recommends the good usage of prose which breaks Dionysiac charm or violence, and forbids poetic rapture, but to no avail: in *Totality and Infinity*, the use of metaphor … shelters within its pathos the most decisive moments of the discourse." Because of this, at least in Derrida's estimation, "*Totality and Infinity* is a work of art and not a treatise" (312). Similarly, in C. Fred Alford's estimation, "Because he is so abstruse, one does not immediately think of Levinas as a great story teller, but he is" (97). Indeed, the most memorable moments of Levinas's philosophy are literary, from the story of the face-to-face encounter that is interrupted by the intrusion of the third, to the captivating narrative of the self being traumatically taken hostage by the other, a plot that recurs frequently throughout his later work.[20]

---

[20] While these stories inevitably present an oversimplified account of Levinas's thought, they testify to the extent to which enduring philosophy lives on within its most memorable narratives. Perhaps Plato's "story of the cave" is the most pertinent example, although one that is particularly resonant for the present study on lying and secrecy is Kant's narrative, found in the essay "On a Supposed Right to Lie for Altruistic Motives," of the murderer who comes to the door asking for his intended victim, who happens to be inside the house. See Korsgaard for her discussion of this narrative and the imaginative lengths to which Kant goes in order to suggest that the host's honesty *might* prevent the murder: "it may be that he has slipped out

According to Robert Eaglestone, while Levinas is highly suspicious of the ethical value of artistic representation, critics err when they mistake this suspicion for outright rejection.[21] As he describes the troubled role of the aesthetic in Levinasian ethics, Eaglestone focuses on a specific conception of reading which the philosopher repudiates: "Levinas wishes to reject ontological claims for art as something which can give us knowledge of the absolute (for example, Hegel's claim that 'art has the vocation of revealing the truth')" (99). Rather than presenting a foundation for rendering all artistic production and consumption unethical, then, his indictment seems to be limited to a particular practice of reading, one which sees the reader increasing in accurate, effective knowledge of the world: "as representation or mimesis, the artwork is excluded because of Levinas's distrust of the act of representation itself. Indeed, the art works which Levinas does discuss at length, and sometimes favourably, attempt to be non- or anti-realist" (100). Perhaps, then, only a certain sort of reading should be viewed as egoist "feasting during a plague." Surprisingly though, Levinas seems to reverse the generic rejection often attempted in literary criticism: the dismissal of certain literatures as "escapist" in favor of more effectively grounded reading material. For him, it is precisely the grounded literature that is more ethically dangerous, more susceptible to the egology that would promote the total knowability of the other by ostensibly representing the truth

so that he does not come in the way of the murderer" (qtd. in Korsgaard 326). See Attridge "Posthumous Infidelity" for an account of how the tale of the intrusive third not only simplifies Levinas's thinking, but also occludes the extent to which his earlier presentation in *Totality and Infinity* presents a somewhat different narrative in which "the third" is already present in the face-to-face encounter.

[21] In *Altered Reading: Levinas and Literature*, Robbins takes on the difficulties inherent in conjoining the two terms of her subtitle. She points out in her introduction that, although Levinas often claims that literature, and especially the Russian novel, "was [his] preparation for philosophy," this does not negate the fact that a study such as the one she is undertaking "has also to deal with the incommensurability between Levinas's ethics and the discourse of literary criticism" (xix, xx). Also see her chapter titled "Facing Figures" where, among other things, Robbins discusses Levinas's extensive use of figuration in *Difficult Freedom* (39–54).

to the reader.[22] I would argue that this indirect privileging of the more self-consciously anti-realistic text in ethical discourse provides an important background against which to consider the ethics of reading after Levinas.

While the preceding discussion of Levinasian ethics is necessarily partial, the importance of failure, undecidability, and aporia for his philosophical approach should at this point be evident. Thinkers following in this aporetic strain always resist the desire to arrive at a totalized, coherent systematization of ethics. No matter what the foundation of such a system might be—humanism, utilitarianism, nationalism, religion—all are revealed to be unstable, leaving the discourse of ethics floating on a sea of constant negotiation and articulation. As Attridge points out in "The Art of the Impossible," while "most attempts to construct a practical ethics try to find a way to rank responsibilities," the current trend in ethical theorizing argues "that such systems are necessarily incoherent, for they use a systematic philosophical language in an attempt to capture and legislate for what is constitutively resistant to such language" (62). Thus the description of Levinasian ethics offered by Diane Perpich could perhaps apply more generally to this current trend in postmodern ethics: "to be ethical in Levinas's sense is to know that ethics is in danger. Ethics is a matter not of having a secure principle, but of realizing that the principle is never secure enough. It is a matter of being overwhelmed by the infinity of the demand" (77). This sense of being overwhelmed in the face of the ethical relation is

---

[22] Though I can only afford to broach the topic here, it would be interesting to reconsider the negative connotations attached to "escape" in literary reading in the context of Levinas's early essay *On Escape*: *De l'évasion*, in which he describes the drive for transcendence (though he uses the term "excendence") as a desire to "escape from being." Andrew Gibson glosses the notion of excendence as "the spontaneous *and immediate* desire to escape the limits of the self, a desire generated as those limits are experienced in their narrowness, even their sheer absurdity." In Gibson's reading, escape, or *l'évasion*, "is the ethical impulse towards or openness to the other that effects a release from the confines of the self" (37). In literary criticism, to label a particular text "escapist" is equivalent to asserting its apolitical and even unethical status. This is particularly relevant in the context of fantastic literature. An articulation of this early Levinasian concept with such literary works might suggest an ethical quality in the notion of escapism.

crucial for the varied means by which postmodern ethics attempts to correct the brazen certainty of systematic ethics.[23]

Indeed, the importance of this trembling state of ethical responsibility for Levinas should allow a rereading of the "shame" of artistic enjoyment described in "Reality and Its Shadow." Where traditional ethical discourse would focus on providing a systematic means of avoiding such immoral postures as "feasting during a plague," postmodern ethical work consists in revealing the inescapability of such an unjust situation, more along the lines of those seemingly callous words of Jesus in the book of Matthew: "For you always have the poor with you" (26.11). Rather than pretending to offer a formulaic approach to salve the liberal conscience, postmodern ethicists are more intent on evoking a trembling awareness in their readers as they are confronted with the impossibility of "getting it right" ethically. But what happens once these systematic foundations are effectively dismantled and the need for an ethical relation to the other remains? How is one to make the decision when overwhelmed by this awareness that any attempt at essentially ethical action will be inherently flawed?[24]

Surprisingly, many accounts of postmodern ethics still attempt to fall back on the concept of fidelity, or faithfulness, whether to the other, to humanity in general, or to

---

[23] Philip Harold sees in Levinas a similar willingness to let go of certainty, especially in *Otherwise than Being*: "For the late Levinas … the concern is no longer the maintenance of my identity, the security of knowing that I am in the right when I venture out to be ethical, that I cannot lose, that everything I lose will be regained a hundredfold in the 'infinity' of the relation" (94). I will return to this necessary loss of security in the next section.

[24] The idiomatic usage of "make" in this phrase is employed advisably. The French idiom "prendre une décision," whose most direct translation would have the decision being taken or grasped rather then made, has permeated ethical and political discourse on the implications of deconstruction, both through English translations of French theory and through the use of the phrase by writers employing British English, in which decisions are said to be "taken" somewhat more often than in American English. I will consistently speak of decisions being *made* since it speaks to the sort of assemblage and creative articulation that is involved in the act/event of decision, as will become more important later when I consider the ethical construction of hegemony within the socio-political sphere.

one's "conception of the good." In *Infinitely Demanding*, a brief but valuable consideration of the relationship between ethics and politics, Simon Critchley gives a formal definition of ethics, claiming, "an *ethical subject* can be defined as a self relating itself approvingly, bindingly, to the demand of its good" (20), where that good could be anything from my own need to satisfy my sexual cravings to the ideal of universal liberty; thus, "I can be as much a failing Sadist as a failing Kantian" (21). What lies at the core of Critchley's concept of ethics is commitment, or fidelity, a concept he claims to appropriate from Alain Badiou. According to Critchley, Badiou replaces Kantian universalism with a "situated universality" as a series of "processes of truth," where he notes "that 'true' is here being used in a manner close to its root meaning of 'being true to' or 'troth,' namely an act of fidelity that is kept alive in the German *treu*, loyal or faithful. For Badiou, truth is 'the real process of fidelity to an event.' One is true to a demand insofar as one persists in being faithful to its summons" (42–43). So while he still wishes to maintain the fundamental impossibility of the subject being faithful to all the demands placed on it, this Levinasian "infinite responsibility" doesn't eliminate for Critchley the productivity of the concept of loyalty, fidelity, or commitment for conceptualizing the ethical subject.

As I am arguing for an ethics of betrayal in this dissertation, it might seem that I would be in strict opposition to Critchley here. On the contrary, I find his work to be an important addition to the ethical thread in deconstructive theory. He reveals precisely what is at stake in these recent arguments and directs his reader toward the necessity of struggling through the difficulty of living politics ethically: "If ethics without politics is empty, then politics without ethics is blind. The world that we have in sight overwhelms

us with the difficult plurality of its demands. My view is that we need ethics in order to see what to do in a political situation" (120). Critchley's work effectively demonstrates what I would call the primary challenge of elaborating an ethics of reading in the twenty-first century: namely, the necessity of synthesizing two strains of literary theory which emerged from the past century struggling for dominance. For the sake of argument, we could call these two lines of thought post-foundational deconstruction and post-Marxist criticism. Critchley puts the challenge this way in an earlier project, *Ethics—Politics—Subjectivity*:

> What the infinite ethical demand of deconstruction requires is a theory of *hegemonization*, that is, an account of the political conceived in terms of strategy and tactics, power and force…. The logics of deconstruction and hegemony need to be soldered at this point, I think, in a reciprocal relation of supplementarity. For if what deconstruction lacks in its thinking of the political is a thematization of democratization as hegemony, then what the theory of hegemony lacks is the kind of messianic, ethical injunction to infinite responsibility that prevents it collapsing into a voluntaristic decisionism. If ethics without politics is empty, then politics without ethics is blind.[25] (279)

With a bit of oversimplification, we could read "deconstruction" and "hegemonization" here as shorthand for the two approaches to literature that variously challenged New Criticism in the latter half of the twentieth century. Taking such liberty with these phrases begins to reveal how Critchley's discussion of ethics in *Infinitely Demanding* presents an

---

[25] Of course, Critchley's identification of deconstruction with ethics in this catchy motif that runs through his work is not without its difficulties. Thomson discusses the ramifications of this equation, deciding that its primary weakness lies in the impossibility of ridding the term "ethics" of its humanistic connotations (50–51). I would tend to argue for a recuperation of ethics rather than the seemingly easier, but markedly more intellectually irresponsible, prospect of merely discarding the concept based on past usage. Such an approach would certainly lead to a poverty of usable terminology if followed to its logical end.

effort to articulate these two lines of thought—an effort which I would argue is unavoidable if we want to move beyond the polar pitfalls he delineates.[26]

As I make my own articulation of deconstruction and hegemonic logic, however, I find the concept of fidelity to be a limiting one. What the theorizing of an ethics of betrayal could add to Critchley's description of the ethical domain is more a fleshing out of what is somewhat cursorily acknowledged rather than an actual counterargument. For the seed of betrayal is already there in the interstices of ethical theory—it simply needs to be brought to the surface in order to better understand the way a careful rethinking of *in*fidelity can address some of the conceptual difficulties of the pressing need to "do justice to" the singularity of the other, especially as we attempt to articulate the ethical with the socio-political sphere of decision.

I would argue, recalling the discussion of Borges which opens the Introduction, that commitment to the subject's own sense of the good is a fairly automatic aspect of the ethical realm, one which requires no training or "culture." In other words, it treats the descriptive aspect of ethics rather than the normative, merely describing an ethics of commitment already at work in the subject. Because Critchley, along with his fellow philosophers of postmodern ethics, refuses to offer more than a formal definition, refuses ultimately to ground the ethical decision, each ethical subject potentially finds herself

---

[26] Ernesto Laclau seems to agree about the need for such an articulation, describing a symbiotic relationship between the two theoretical strains: "This is exactly the point at which deconstruction and hegemony cross each other. For if deconstruction discovers the role of the decision out of the undecidability of the structure, hegemony as a theory of the decision taken in an undecidable terrain requires that the contingent character of the connections existing in that terrain is fully shown by deconstruction" (*Emancipation(s)* 90). See Derrida's response to Laclau in *Deconstruction and Pragmatism* (83–85), where he is considerably sympathetic to the latter's position (especially as opposed to Rorty's). On the other hand, in his study of Derrida's relevance to democratic theory, Thomson rejects the need for a supplement to deconstruction (42–52). In my view, the theory of contingent articulation presented by Laclauian hegemony offers a productive way of speaking about the ethico-political "response" which answers to the "call" of deconstructive reading practice.

responding to a different standard from her neighbor, a standard which appears to be somewhat arbitrary. Without a transcendental basis on which to evaluate the goodness of these demands, alternate decisions in a given situation also begin to seem arbitrary and ethically equivalent.

Precisely because I agree with Critchley on the need to supplement Derridean deconstruction with a logic of the decision—especially in our attempt as readers of literature to discern the ethics at work in the reading process—I would argue that the element of betrayal in this schema must be treated more directly than it has been up to this point. A consideration of the idiomatic use of the word "betrayal" will clarify why a rethinking of infidelity can be productive in ethical discourse. When we speak of betrayal, we generally refer to a subject acting unfaithfully with respect to an object, where the "thing" betrayed could be a person, country, or creed. As the *Oxford English Dictionary* indicates, the word "betray" enters the language through French from the Latin, *tradare*, which can be broken down further into *trans + dare*, meaning "to hand across, to give over." Thus the primary meaning listed is, "to give up to, or place in the power of an enemy, by treachery or disloyalty." For example, if I betray my friend, I have acted in such a way as to pass her from the sphere of my protection into one where our friendship no longer governs my decisions. In the archetypal betrayal of the Christ by Judas Iscariot, a crucial myth for the contemporary Western stance toward fidelity and betrayal, the once faithful apostle hands his leader over to enemies who wish him harm. Jesus is the object of the betrayal and Judas the agent.[27]

---

[27] For a provocative treatment (or treatments) of this Über-betrayal, see Borges's "Three Versions of Judas." Importantly for our purposes, Borges's fictional scholar ultimately values the betrayal as the salvific act rather than the sacrificial death, heretically raising Judas to the status of savior. This short story will be examined in greater detail in Chapter Four.

Yet this is not the only way the term can be used. In a sense, we can also refer to Judas as the one betrayed in this instance. When Shakespeare has Adriano de Armano in *Love's Labour's Lost* say, "I do betray my self with blushing," for example, he puts into play a meaning arrogated to the word somewhat later in its history, listed in the *OED* as its sixth denotation: "To reveal or disclose against one's will or intention the existence, identity, real character of (a person or thing desired to be kept secret)," with even the latter qualification as to intention eventually becoming optional. We could speak meaningfully then of Judas being betrayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, or of Judas *betraying himself* with the infamous kiss. This usage characterizes the act as revelatory rather than simply treacherous—it reveals who Judas *really* is, and therefore "hands him across" from the darkness of secrecy into the epistemological light of truth.

Furthermore, the etymological history of the English word "betray" is tied to the less commonly used "traduce," or "traduction," a word likewise stemming from the Latin, *trans* + *ducare*, meaning "to deliver, or lead across"—nearly identical to the formation of betrayal, though its closest relatives in the Romance languages refer to linguistic translation. So while Christ is traduced by Judas's action, the traitor's "true" nature also goes through a process of traduction: it is translated from the realm of unknowing to the realm of the known. These multiple meanings of betrayal—an act of disloyalty, to be sure, but also a revelatory translation of the unknown, a boundary-crossing "handing over" from one sphere to the next—are all present in each usage of the word, and each factors into the ethical discussion at hand.[28] Against this background of

---

[28] Because the word "traduce" eventually comes to mean something close to "insult" or "slander" in common English parlance, the two denotations can seem to render polar opposite interpretations: in the one sense, the reality of the object being traduced is veiled by false accusation while, in the other, the reality is unveiled by being traduced. To return to Kafka's *Trial*, is Josef K. guilty or not? As Butler points out,

lexical ambiguity, referring to the ethical approach to the unknown and unknowable other as betrayal reveals some of the important implications of postmodern ethics more effectively than contrary attempts to renovate notions of commitment or fidelity.

I would argue that one of the areas in which the repercussions of postmodern ethics are most keenly felt is the discourse of the political decision.[29] As Critchley moves in *Infinitely Demanding* from the ethical sphere to the socio-political, he reveals the need for betrayal in the formation of political subjects in the context of the most persistent criticism of Marxian economism: "Against Marx, I argue that the accelerating dislocatory power of capitalism does not lead to the emergence of a unique political subject, but rather to the multiplication of social actors, defined in terms of locality, language, ethnicity, sexuality or whatever. As such, the task after Marx is the reactivation of politics through the articulation of new political subjectivities" (91). Indeed, the fragmentation of identity witnessed by the twentieth century proved contrary to Marx's prophecy of the increasing simplification of the socio-political sphere, and there is little need at this point for argumentation in suggesting the plurality or heterogeneity of late-capitalist society.[30] However, it is interesting to note the way Critchley portrays the end

---

versions that translate the German *verleumdet* as "have been telling lies about" eliminate this ambivalence (82–83), but it would seem the story is impoverished by this clarification, not improved.

[29] Philip J. Harold's *Prophetic Politics: Emmanuel Levinas and the Sanctification of Suffering* makes an important leap forward in this area. Admitting that "Whether Levinas's works are read or ignored, accepted or rejected, nothing logically follows for a political philosophy" and that, "[f]or the political thinker, it seems Levinas can be safely disregarded" (xv), Harold goes on to argue, "The truth that is found by philosophy is never politically neutral" (xvi). He convincingly uses the profound sense of inadequacy that courses through Levinas's work to frame his thought as a "prophetic politics, a thinking that can sense the enormity of injustice" (xxx). In the next section, I attempt to articulate how such a political approach can inform the formation of collectivities.

[30] This is the starting point for Laclau and Mouffe in their 1985 study of hegemony: "The plural and multifarious character of contemporary social struggles has finally dissolved the last foundation for that political imaginary" of classical leftist discourse which allowed for "the illusory prospect of a perfectly unitary and homogeneous collective will" (2). Their pivotal work repeatedly refers to this multifarious

result of this fragmentation. He sees a multiplicity of "social actors," each one "defined" by some trait or characteristic. How exactly does this social definition of actors take place? According to Critchley, it is through the function of the ethical demand. The terms he lists here, "locality, language, ethnicity, sexuality or whatever," enter into the formal equation he outlines early in his study, where "an *ethical subject* can be defined as a self relating itself approvingly, bindingly, to the demand of its good" (20). Thus, accelerated by the workings of advanced capitalism and supported by the various contemporary manifestations of Kantian universalism, ethico-political subjects are constituted in fixed social positions, hopelessly closed off from relation to the differently-constituted others around them.

At this point, the need for betrayal begins to emerge. While Critchley remedies this closed-off aspect of subjectivity by appealing to a more knowing, more effectively directed notion of commitment and loyalty, I would emphasize instead the betrayal such commitments necessitate. To be truly open to the other, the subject must first let go of the concept of commitment that has served him up to that point in an effort to open himself to the "good" of the other. Of course there is risk involved in such an act, for there is no certainty that the good of the other will translate into good for the subject thus constituted; nevertheless, the preceding exploration of betrayal suggests that such an opening has the potential to reveal, or unveil, the subject rather than simply lead to its demise.

Instead of an effort to comprehend or apprehend the other, intentions which have rightly been decried as imperialistic in effect if not intent, thinking the relation to the

---

social landscape in an effort to deconstruct the stubborn persistence of essentialist categories in the face of the obvious plurality of the social.

other as betrayal is motivated by a refusal to aim at total comprehension of the Other by the Same, in Levinasian terms. This refusal can drastically reshape the public sphere as new contingent alliances are forged and once-closed ethical relationships are fractured and realigned, whether among individual subjects or, in a more collective sense, among the myriad communal identities increasingly brought into contact in our globalized historical moment. Before moving to a discussion of the role unfaithful readings can play in promoting this readiness to betray, it would be helpful to consider further how such an approach could function in the socio-political sphere.

AGAINST COMMITMENT IN LIQUID TIMES

Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, whose scholarship has provided one of the most cogent descriptions of ethical relation in postmodernity, has recently abandoned the terms "modern" and "postmodern" due to the confusing ways these words are employed. Instead, he has found it more helpful to discuss "solid" and "liquid" phases of modernity.[31] As I turn now from the role of betrayal in ethics to discuss its function in a socio-political landscape characterized by undecidability, this metaphorical treatment is most suggestive. He delineates these two phases in a recent work, setting a solid modernity, "bent on entrenching and fortifying the principle of territorial, exclusive, and indivisible sovereignty, and on circumscribing the sovereign territories with impermeable borders," against a subsequent liquid modernity, "with its fuzzy and eminently permeable

---

[31] Best known for the 1989 work *Modernity and the Holocaust*, in which he ties the events of World War 2 directly to the ordering processes of what he would eventually call "solid" modernity, Bauman went on to write *Postmodern Ethics* as an exposition of the strikingly different way the West reacts to uncertainty in the second half of the twentieth century. He first outlines his metaphorical use of solidity and liquidity in 2000 in the forward to *Liquid Modernity* (1–15), and each of his publications since then has relied on and further developed this classification.

borderlines, the unstoppable … devaluation of spatial distances and the defensive capability of territories, and the intense flow of human traffic across all and any frontiers" (*Does Ethics* 8). Where the earlier, solid phase of modernity attempts to respond to the uncertainty of the modern era by imposing order, eliminating undecidability, and promoting the clearly defined category as the most effective mode of knowing, the "thaw" accomplished by the various atrocities of the first half of the twentieth century effectively liquefies these rigid classifications.

Bauman's perspective on our current socio-political climate provides an excellent vantage point from which to consider the role of commitment in the formation of the political subject. Any recommendation of strict fidelity in the ethico-political realm must rely, at least partially, on the confident ordering practices characteristic of Bauman's solid modernity. But as he attempts to describe social action in the second phase of modernity, he continually returns instead to the terminology of betrayal. For example, in a concise summary of his recent thought, *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty*, Bauman describes several departures that have contributed to our current sociological moment. Again and again, he emphasizes the flexibility required to function within such an environment:

> The virtue proclaimed to serve the individual's interests best is not *conformity* to rules (which at any rate are few and far between, and often mutually contradictory) but *flexibility*: a readiness to change tactics and style at short notice, to abandon commitments and loyalties without regret—and to pursue opportunities according to their current availability, rather than following one's own established preferences. (4)

According to his assessment, everything about the current sociological situation encourages a readiness to abandon, rather than cling to, one's commitments. One can

hardly miss the critique of various ethics of commitment, such as Lacan's insistence on not "giving ground relative to one's desire." Instead of "following one's own established preferences," for good or ill one is called to continual acts of betrayal, acknowledging, and even promoting, the permeability of one's own social position.

Of course, it might be argued that Bauman is merely offering a description here rather than attaching any ethical significance to such an attitude. And, as is often the case in sociological discourse, it is sometimes difficult to tell whether he is merely presenting a descriptive *is* or offering a more polemical, normative *ought*. Yet if we take into account the various dangers he attributes to the ordering strategies of solid modernity, especially the "mixophobia" Bauman discerns in the prevailing inability to accommodate the unknown and unknowable other—to whom he refers in his later work consistently as "the stranger"—his preference for the liquid relation to commitment and loyalty becomes evident. As Bauman discusses the temptation toward solidity which encourages people to "stay in a uniform environment—in the company of others 'like them' with whom they can 'socialize' perfunctorily and matter-of-factly without incurring the risk of miscomprehension and without struggling with the vexing need to translate between distinct universes of meaning" he expresses his fear that such people "are likely to 'unlearn' the art of negotiating shared meanings and an agreeable modus covivendi" (*Liquid Modernity* 88). In other words, the strength of commitment to their particular "community of similarity," however illusory such a community proves to be in the end, serves as an insurmountable barrier to the sort of "inter-universe" translation necessary for any "mode of living together" amenable to the heterogeneity of the current socio-political moment. Such is the evaluation of Roberto Esposito, who argues that much of

our thinking about community is still overly influenced by Rousseau's "myth of communal transparency" that effectively prohibits the formation of what he calls *communitas*:

> [Rousseau's] is a myth of a community that is transparent to itself, in which every one communicates with the other one's own communitarian essence, without mediation, filter, or sign to interrupt the reciprocal fusion of consciousnesses. There is no distance, discontinuity, or difference with regard to another that is no longer other, because the other too is an integral part of the one. (54)

While such a community of the same certainly provides the illusion of security and harmony, Bauman, Esposito, and others would suggest that this security comes at the cost of truly ethical collectivity.

James Joyce alludes to such communities of similarity at a memorable moment in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* as Stephen Dedalus muses on the soul of the Irishman: "When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets." In Davin's response, "a man's country comes first. Ireland first, Stevie," Joyce suggests the limitations imposed by such notions of belonging (220). Of course, the question of whether Stephen succeeds in breaking free from these three communities of the Irish nation, the English language, and the Catholic faith has been the topic of much debate over the years, especially as Stephen's character is further developed in *Ulysses*. Joyce chooses to repatriate Stephen after time spent abroad, and he demonstrates the power of these nets to prevent interpersonal connection, especially in the failed encounter between Stephen and Leopold Bloom in the "Ithaca" chapter, where Stephen's anti-Semitic song saddens and alienates Bloom (17.795–849). O'Nolan will accomplish a

similar problematization of the prospect of "flying by the nets" when he includes an elderly Joyce as a character in *The Dalkey Archive*. I will discuss this imaginative repatriation of Joyce more fully in Chapter Four, but it is worth noting here that O'Nolan, who was one of the few Irish artists of his time to never experiment with life on the continent as an exile, has a sense both of the necessity and of the impossibility of breaking free from communal belonging.

Instead of the possibility of successfully committing to a "community of similarity," Bauman suggests the constitutive potential of "[b]eing loyal only in part, or loyal 'à la carte'" (*Does Ethics* 24).[32] Rather than continuing to view the traitor as the incarnation of antisocial threat, he calls for an acknowledgment that, because of the inevitable multiplicity of one's belongings, the betrayal can actually be viewed as providing a possible point of conjunction between previously sutured spheres of identification, those "distinct universes of meaning" which, if left to the logic of commitment, would remain separated from each other indefinitely. As Paul Armstrong sees it, this sort of translation is especially crucial now, wherever these seemingly distinct universes might be found:

> Creating and maintaining spaces in which different forms of life
> with incompatible values and beliefs can productively interact is a
> nontrivial challenge across a variety of social settings—from the
> classroom and academic department, where ideological battles are
> sometimes fought with alarming ferocity, to the national arena (not

---

[32] Judith Butler echoes the need for such tempered loyalty, especially in the context of the theory of war. In an interview on the subject of her recent book, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*, Butler discusses her current efforts to establish a critical theory center devoted to scholarship about war. In response to the interviewer's questions, "Do you mean to say that the concept of war might be recovered, as William James proposes, for instance, in 'The Moral Equivalent of War'? Is war's ferocity of commitment possible without the bloodlust and the bloody victims?" she mentions the importance of holding our loyalties lightly: "Perhaps the issue is to become less ferocious in our commitments, to question certain forms of blind enthusiasm, and to find forms of steadfastness that include reflective thought. Nonviolence is not so much about the suppression of feeling, but its transformation into forceful intelligence" ("Carefully Crafted F**k You").

> only in the United States), where ethnic and other kinds of diversity all too often lead to reciprocal demonization, and to the international scene, where in our fluid, post-Cold War, postcolonial situation the collapse of previously stabilizing oppositions has resulted in a proliferation of conflicts. (9)

Like Bauman, Armstrong uses the metaphor of liquidity to argue against the sort of compartmentalized diversity which makes it difficult to establish any sort of negotiation between groups. The social traitor, then, is the person who resists the temptation of total fidelity to one aspect of social identity, one "belonging" among many, and instead establishes a point of conjunction between spheres. While we typically view infidelity as a unidirectional event, a simple switching of sides, perhaps it would be more productive in the socio-political context to speak of betrayal as establishing a link, or articulation, between two sides.

Where Bauman and Armstrong focus primarily on the more informal, everyday negotiations of life, the function of ethical betrayal assumes even greater significance when considered in the context of political decision-making. Before moving on to the role of unfaithful reading in preparing the way for the revaluation of betrayal, I will look briefly at the status of commitment in the political theory of Ernesto Laclau, a political theorist whose writings on hegemony have important implications for the ethico-political value of the type of creative reading practice presented here. Laclau is most well-known for the book he coauthored in 1985 with Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. There the argument was for a reconfiguration of leftist politics in light of certain twentieth-century failings. One way of describing the central thrust of this pivotal study is that it presents a plea to leftist thinkers to move away from a "logic of difference" towards a "logic of equivalence." Such a shift would enable the sort of hegemonizing

articulation which Laclau and Mouffe see at work in the politics of the ideological right. At the risk of oversimplifying the admittedly complex issues at hand, I would like to superimpose these two "logics," which Laclau continues to develop throughout his career, onto Bauman's two reactions to the uncertainty of the post-Enlightenment modern era: solid and liquid modernity. Viewed in this context, Laclau's equivalential logic of hegemony hinges on a sense of creative infidelity similar to that which functions in liquid modernity, a recognition of the contingency of one's position which results in a readiness to hold one's commitments loosely.

Though there are several points in Laclau's work where he delineates these two logics at work in "constructing the social," I will quote from his most recent extended study, *On Populist Reason*, where he both reiterates what he has said earlier about the function of hegemony in politics and extends it to comment on the contingent creation of "the people" in populist rhetoric.[33] Note the importance of surrender for Laclau's equivalential logic:

> So we have two ways of constructing the social: either through the assertion of a particularity … whose only links to other particularities are of a differential nature (as we have seen: no positive terms, only differences); or through a partial surrender of particularity, stressing what all particularities have, equivalentially, in common…. I have called the first mode of constructing the social *logic of difference*, and the second, *logic of equivalence*. (78)

Here a view of the social field as comprising numerous categories, carefully defined and compartmentalized, is contrasted with a less rigid construction which relies on a certain

---

[33] See *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* 127–34 and *Emancipation(s)* 36–45 for two other places where the logics of difference and equivalence receive sustained treatment.

ability to yield on the part of each element.[34] As he works to explain how a political subject is created through the process of hegemony, or the contingent joining together of disparate elements into a tenuous unit for purposes of decisive political action, Laclau continually returns to this picture of necessary infidelity to one's own position in order for negotiation and articulation to occur.

In an essay written around the same time as *On Populist Reason*, Laclau characterizes a tendency to cling to differential logic as a socio-political failure, much in the same way that Bauman rejects the "mixophobia" which would keep people ostensibly isolated "in the company of others 'like them.'" In a discussion of the American populism of farmers, at the end of the nineteenth century, he claims their efforts "failed because the attempt at creating chains of popular equivalence unifying the demands of the dispossessed groups found a decisive obstacle in a set of structural differential limits which proved to be stronger than the populist interpellations." Specifically, the negotiation and cooperation necessary for these farmers to engage one another in a politically effective manner were thwarted by "the difficulties in bringing together black and white farmers, the mutual distrust between farmers and urban workers, the deeply entrenched loyalty of Southern farmers to the Democratic Party, and so on" ("Populism" 41). Indeed, each of these categories relies to some extent on a "deeply entrenched loyalty," and it is precisely this loyalty which would foreclose the possibility of decisive

---

[34] In his recent work on community, Esposito describes a concept of modern individuality that closely resembles that of both Bauman and Laclau. In his view, the current model of community is more a concept of "immunity," whereby one's belonging is meant to immunize, or protect one from a certain level of risk. He sees this mode of belonging as coming at the cost of true *communitas*: "Modern individuals truly become that, the perfectly individual, the 'absolute' individual, bordered in such a way that they are isolated and protected, but only if they are freed in advance from the 'debt' that binds them one to the other; if they are released from, exonerated, or relieved of that contact, which threatens their identity, exposing them to possible conflict with their neighbor, exposing them to the contagion of the relation with others" (13). Esposito's concept of *communitas* as "the totality of persons united not by a 'property' but precisely by an obligation or a debt" (9) will be important for my discussion of Faulkner in Chapter Three.

political action. Laclau seems to imply that, rather than a more accurate or properly directed conceptualization of commitment, what these dispossessed individuals required was a more healthy appreciation of the political efficacy of carefully considered betrayal. In fact, though Laclau typically remains suspicious of such terminology, what is required in such a situation is an awareness of the contingency of one's own position which will result in an ethical openness to the socio-political others with whom one must interact.[35]

It has become evident in Laclau's later work that he considers the concept of universality as central to the reconfiguration he has called for in political theory.[36] In his collaboration with Judith Butler and Slavoj Zizek titled *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, he posits the enabling potential of viewing something like the "universal emancipation of society" as "simultaneously *impossible* and *necessary*" (74). This paradox is evident as he delineates two fundamental aspects of his theory of hegemony: "If the first dimension of hegemony stresses the moment of the universal's subordination to the particular, th[e] second dimension emphasizes the universalizing effects which are necessary if there is going to be politics at all" (209). The universal functions as a perpetually imagined, or fantasized, horizon lending weight to the decisions of particular social agents. After responding to some of the objections made by his collaborators,

---

[35] This suspicion is evident in his review of Derrida's *Spectres of Marx*, first published in *Diacritics* and reprinted in the collection of his essays, *Emancipation(s)*. Although his comments are largely favorable— "A first remark … is that I have nothing to object to" (70)—he resists a transition to the language of ethics "frequently made by many defenders of deconstruction and one to which the very ambiguity of Derridian texts gives some credence." For Laclau, it is important to maintain that, "from the fact that there is the impossibility of ultimate closure and presence, it does not follow that there is an ethical imperative to 'cultivate' that openness or even less to be necessarily committed to a democratic society" (77). He worries that Derrida's insistence on the fact that undecidability goes "all the way down" sounds too much like an ethically normative *ought*. Against this concern, I would argue specifically for a "cultivation" of openness which refuses to commit, whether to a democratic or to any other sort of society (except perhaps to the infinitely deferred *democratie á venir*, a commitment to which requires the perpetual betrayal of any and all of democracy's present incarnations).

[36] The project he has been working on for the last few years is tentatively titled *Elusive Universality*.

Laclau comes to the following conclusion: "The central point is that for a certain demand, subject position, identity, and so on, to become political means that it is *something other* than itself, living its own particularity as a moment or link in a chain of equivalences that transcends and, *in this way*, universalizes it" (210). This statement offers a suitable summation of his theorization of hegemonic logic, and it also demonstrates the crucial role imaginative infidelity to one's "own particularity" plays in political action. Returning once more to the quotation from Borges which began the present line of inquiry into the relation between universality and particularity, what might it look like to be "*something other* than" oneself when, at least in Borges's estimation, "you are being loyal to [your century or your opinions] all the time" and "you can't run away from them, even if you want to"?

I would contend that there is an important role for the imagination to play in cultivating the ability of an identity or subject position to, in Laclau's fantastic terminology, "live its own particularity as a moment or link in a chain." It is in this sense that the unfaithful reading practices undertaken in this dissertation can be said to accomplish important ethico-political work. In *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, Laclau suggests, "Hegemony is not a type of articulation limited to the field of politics in its narrow sense, but it involves the construction of a new culture—and that affects all the levels where human beings shape their identity and their relations with the world" (189). Certainly, this includes the ways in which we read and teach works of literature and culture. The undecidable work of literature presents a perfect opportunity to experiment with the sort of humility which imagines oneself to be, in Laclau's words, among "the poor men and women who think and act in a present which is always

transient and limited," but at the same time embraces that same limitation as "the condition of our strength" (*New Reflections* 188). On the other hand, there is a simultaneous temptation presented by each act of reading to close down the ambiguity of the text, to foreclose the openness to the unknown, and to confidently "comprehend" the work, reducing the other to a mere reiteration of the same. There is a sense of urgency, then, in the call for reading practice that resists the possibility, or even the desirability, of ultimate fidelity to the literary work, reading which does justice both to the work and to the liquidity of our current socio-political moment.

TRAITOROUS READING

In order to consider this prospect of unfaithful reading, there is no better place to turn than to the cultural moment when the thaw to which Bauman alludes in his concept of liquid modernity began to become a lived reality. This is what makes the modernist period of artistic production such a provocative and multivalent field. Writers working in the first half of the twentieth century were intimately involved with a solid modernity whose illusion of rigidity was being challenged on all sides. How these works are read becomes an important aspect of the persistence of their literary value. Armstrong begins his study of the politics of modernist form with the provocative claim, "Reading is an important but neglected site of the political work done by literature"—provocative in the sense that "[t]o some socially minded critics of literature, the idea that reading could be a political activity is no doubt implausible and contradictory" (ix). With this simple statement, he invokes the multitude of invectives by the political left against "apolitical" and "uncommitted" modernist works. Like Armstrong, I am arguing here for a certain

value in reading these texts, though I choose to couch my argument more in the discourse of ethics than in political theory.

As I have discussed thus far, in order for the ethical formation of collectivities to take place in our increasingly fluid, global context, there must be a willingness to deny the necessity of prior common ground and, somewhat pessimistically, to relinquish the hope that the triumph of reason will lead to future unity. There must be a welcome extended to the unknown other which would allow for the persistence of unknowing. Armstrong posits literary reading as a possible contribution to the mentality necessary for such contingent community formation. Readers "learn to become citizens in the community of communities that a genuine democracy should be" (xiii) as they are led to respect the undecidable aspects of literature and at the same time are required to negotiate these moments of uncertainty with interpretive decisions which, as they are fully aware, are hopelessly contingent and incomplete. This respect for the secret in the literary work is ultimately a pseudo-ethical relation, which can subsequently be redirected to the socio-political sphere. Armstrong rejects "conventional wisdom," which would claim, "the novel lost its political conscience in the early twentieth century when, turning inward, it became more concerned with psychological exploration and formal experimentation than with representing the manners, morals, and conflicts of the contemporary social scene." He points out that, even though the current consensus "that the very process of knowing is social and political has prompted a rethinking of the politics of modernism" in general, this has not resulted in "the full-scale reconsideration [of] the problem of reading" that such a literary historical shift calls for (172). A crucial aspect of this reconsideration must be a revaluation of notions of fidelity in responsible reading practice.

One of the most thought-provoking approaches to literary modernism in recent years is the one presented by Weinstein in *Unknowing: The Work of Modernist Fiction*. As the title indicates, the goal of the study is to attribute to modernist narrative a sort of epistemological attack whereby the texts work to "subvert the Enlightenment project of knowledge in its two directions: knowledge of the larger world, consequent knowledge of oneself" (9). Instead of contributing to the reader's ability to function knowingly in her world, the proper encounter with literary modernism unmoors the reader, leaving her confident only of the limits to her own certainty, distressingly aware of the contingency of her own position. In Weinstein's view, the literature we typically refer to as "modernist" features a rejection of various post-Enlightenment protocols governing the "knowing subject," protocols he sees as fundamental for the two centuries of realism which preceded, and prepared the way for, its coming.[37]

As he puts it, "coming to know, gradually refining one's identity within orientational space and linear time, is the bread and butter of Western fiction," and the possibility of progressing toward a greater sense of apprehension in Weinstein's three areas—space, time, subjectivity—has traditionally been a key element in establishing the ethical, social, and political value of artistic consumption. "Modernist 'unknowing,'" on

---

[37] The taxonomic dangers of Weinstein's book are evident from the start. His nicely ordered three-tiered grouping of works under the umbrellas realism, modernism, and postmodernism reveals the extent to which our need for the epistemological category and our enduring adherence to modes of "knowing" can serve to obscure the complexity and permeability of these apparently rigid compartments. While he acknowledges the difficulty of establishing "[l]arge claims about the assumptions and procedures of Western fiction … on a deliberately reduced number of instances and analyses" (5), perhaps the argument for exemplarity is even weaker than he suspects. Indeed, he does so good of a job in a lengthy explanatory note justifying his particular grouping of writers—Proust, Kafka, and Faulkner rather than, say, Joyce, Woolf, Mann, or a number of others—one wonders whether his labeling of the former as "three of [Western modernism's] central novelists" (1) retains any of its generalizing power. I would argue that an argument on the literary *mode* of "unknowing" would be more helpful than attempting to limit such a treatment to the somewhat arbitrarily established boundaries of modernism; hence my own design to offer readings *in* modernism rather than *of* it.

the other hand, "operates, precisely, as an attack on the confidence in Western norms for securing identity and funding the career of the liberal subject" (3). Whether or not one chooses to speak so assuredly of a unified "project" for literary modernism, as Weinstein sometimes does, his conceptualization of epistemological subversion in a strain of early-twentieth-century narrative resonates with much of the most powerful, engaging literature of the period. In retrospective attempts to determine what was distinctive and innovative about works like Kafka's "Metamorphosis" or Joyce's *Ulysses*, this skeptical attitude toward confident knowing often manifests itself.

The central tenet of the present study is that such a rejection of confidence clandestinely smuggles in a simultaneous rejection of *fidence*, or faithfulness. If Weinstein is correct in discerning in some central modernist texts the call, "Awaken … from the sleep of knowing into the strangeness of unknowing" (7), then a proper response to this call would reside in a fundamental reappraisal of infidelity. The realistic text is presented to the reader as an object to be "taken on faith." It purports to offer a true picture of the world, perhaps a glimpse into a lived reality to which one wouldn't otherwise have access. In such a scenario, there is an assumption that by remaining true to this text, by reading faithfully what is encountered there, one will gain a firmer grasp on reality and a more confident grounding for one's own subjectivity. This is not to suggest a naiveté in the reader which would perceive the events of the text as being "real" in the same way his own lived experience is real. As Weinstein notes, the process is more complicated than that: "Such novels entertain/process nonverbal experiences in complex ways that move us because the experiences are richly recognizable. They participate in verisimilitude so that we can relate to—not believe or believe in—them" (53). Still, what

is crucial for the identificatory appeal Weinstein sees at work in the realistic novel, is a sense of the literary work's truth, its faithfulness to reality. Once again, the notion of "truth" points, not to some ontological assertion of what is there, but to the root meaning which, as Critchley indicates, carries notions of "'being true to' or 'troth,' namely an act of fidelity that is kept alive in the German *treu*, loyal or faithful" (*Infinitely* 41). The most successful reading process is then assumed to be defined by faithfulness to a text which is faithful to lived reality.

This is precisely where the works examined by Weinstein, and likewise the works read in this dissertation, part company with nineteenth-century realism. The fiction produced by Kafka, Faulkner, and Proust—or at least some of their works—allow their readers to revel (or perhaps wallow) in the contingency of their own position in reality. Rather than comforting us with the assurance that, though the world and its others may be unknown, they are certainly knowable, such literature breaks the spell cast by the Enlightenment's glorification of reason and assures us we are right to follow Levinas in trembling before the face of an Other which cannot be ethically appropriated within the Same. Instead of increasing confidence that one can "do right by" the other person, other culture, other reality, such works suggest the inevitability and necessity of infidelity if one is to engage the other at all.

I add "some of their works" because one of the most interesting moments in Weinstein's discussion centers on the difference between two works by William Faulkner: *Sanctuary*, written firmly within the modernist period and displaying much of the "work of unknowing" described in his study, and *Requiem for a Nun*, a work written after World War 2 in a more strictly realistic literary mode. As I will discuss in Chapter

Three, the works of Faulkner's pre-war career, epitomized by *As I Lay Dying*, are markedly different from those written in the late forties and fifties, more enigmatic and self-aware of their own failure to represent the truth about the US South. The difference between these two periods is interesting for the present study because of what they assume about the reading process. As I argue for the ethical viability of reading unfaithfully works of literature which are irredeemably unfaithful to reality, Weinstein's comments on the different ways the reader appropriates these two texts are insightful. Although there is no need to go into too much detail, I will focus on his explanation of the two distinct representations of Temple Drake encountered in the works, separated by a period of twenty years. When one reads the troubling story related in *Sanctuary*, one is confronted with a hopelessly fragmented character in the teenage protagonist Temple: "Relentlessly, she is being temporally and spatially discoordinated: unable to control her movement, unable to guess what comes next … unable to think as well" (152). She is "a being undone" by the violent action of the novel (153). However, what Weinstein notes about the more realistically presented Temple of the later novel, when Faulkner returns to the same material in order to better comprehend what took place, is her presentation as "a gathered, integral being who was given her choices and (within an implicitly realistic model of identity) failed them." In fact, the most striking difference Weinstein sees in the two novels is found on the level of ethical judgment: "something appears now that never surfaced the first time around: moral recrimination. *Requiem* is afloat in it" (155). In other words, the attempt to present the narrative action more realistically is driven by and results in a confident sense of judgment, whereas the earlier narrative of unknowing leaves the reader's capacity to moralize on the action shattered and unsure.

It isn't difficult to see what sort of criticism one might direct toward these fictions of unknowing. There is an inherent trend toward nihilism in the problematization of knowledge and the rejection of faithfulness encouraged by such works. However, I would agree with Weinstein's final assessment that, though both sorts of texts are embroiled in the production of a type of knowledge, we should hesitate before too quickly seeing the capacity to moralize as a victory over the doubt and undecidability characteristic of Faulkner's earlier work:

> My argument risks sounding perverse. I propose that *Requiem for a Nun* (1951) is to *Sanctuary* (1931) not as solution to problem—moralized recovery after nihilistic fall—but rather as problem to solution. For *Sanctuary* produces, despite its apparent shattering of all cultural truisms, a kind of truth nevertheless, to which *Requiem*'s retrospective commitment aspires, but which the later text cannot produce: the truth of Temple's somatic, time-and-space-disabled being. (151–52)

Though the more confident treatment of Temple's tragic story appears to offer truth to the reader, this pretense of verisimilitude is an illusion, and in my view, a potentially dangerous one. If as readers we fail to appreciate the sort of partial truth, or compromised truth which undecidable fiction offers us, then we prepare ourselves for a similar intolerance of the unknowability encountered in socio-political sphere. On the other hand, when the reader is willing to play the role of hesitant traducer rather than confident deducer,[38] willing to encounter undecidability with a deference toward what cannot be grasped, he cultivates an openness to negotiating "in the dark" which is crucial for any socio-political engagement that answers to the difficulties posed by postmodern ethics.

---

[38] Or, in Wayne Booth's more collective terminology, "coducer"—a reader working cooperatively "in the company of others 'like them'" (Bauman *Liquid Modernity* 88) to forcefully bring meaning into the (partially) communal sphere of knowing (see *The Company We Keep* 70–77). I refer to Booth's ethics of reading more directly and discuss my own distance from it in Chapter Three.

This sort of practice is, in two important senses, traitorous reading. It forces us to consider firstly the inter-universal role of the reader, who is working both within the fictional sphere of the text and in the socio-political sphere of reality. If we see the act of creative reading as a translation of the truth of the fiction from one sphere to the other, what is lost in the translation—the secret of the literary work—attests to our own inability to fully comprehend the other. Like the traitor, the careful reader who produces a "reading" of the work could be said to "give over" that work into the hands of others. Referring to such an action as a betrayal is meant to bring into question the ontological value of both the work itself and the comprehension of the work by both the creative reader and the reading audience at large. As I hope to have shown in the discussion thus far, the condemnation of the traitor relies on the relative confidence with which the traduced object is thought to be grasped prior to its betrayal. However, in an environment such as ours, which allows for the fluidity of meaning and the contingency of truth, the traitor's action can resonate more with the revelatory strain of betrayal. Instead of simply telling a lie that is demonstrably untrue about its object, the unfaithful reading could betray, or unveil, an aspect which has up to this point been obscured by previous, more faithful, treatments. In that way, traitorous reading resembles a certain kind of inheritance Derrida discusses in *For Nelson Mandela*:

> You can recognize an authentic inheritor in the one who conserves and reproduces, but also in the one who respects the *logic* of the legacy enough to turn it upon occasion against those who claim to be its guardians, enough to reveal, despite and against the usurpers, what has never yet been seen in the inheritance: enough to give birth … to what had never seen the light of day. (17)

The readings that comprise the next three chapters might be said to attempt such an authentic inheritance of their literary predecessors. They are unfaithful in the sense that

they often turn the work's logic against previous readings, whether by other readers or by the retrospective authors themselves. However, they are never unaware of a deep indebtedness to that preceding heritage.

Finally, the creative reading is unfaithful because it refuses to rely faithfully on categorical understanding to determine the many interpretive decisions which the difficult literary work forces upon the reader. What Weinstein's study brings out is the potential for the fragmented, compromised knowledge offered by literary undecidability to awaken the reader to an appreciation for the unknown in the other. This is not the exoticized sense of a knowable, conquerable strangeness which ultimately leads to the various imperialistic, colonizing, and egotistic appropriations of the other repeated *ad nauseum* in the narratives and histories of the West. Such a stance toward alterity still presumes the possibility of being faithful to the truth of the other, resulting in a situation where success in the enterprise only compounds the failure of ethical interaction. As Levinas puts it in "Ethics as First Philosophy," "in knowledge there also appears the notion of an intellectual activity … of seizing something and making it one's own … an activity which *appropriates* and *grasps* the otherness of the known." In order to be true, or faithful to the other, one must first gain a firm hold, an epistemological approach which "belongs to that unit of knowledge in which *Auffassen* (*understanding*) is also, and always has been, a *Fassen* (*gripping*)" (76). On the other hand, the unfaithful reading hinges on a willingness to *let go*, an appreciation of contingency which holds to one's commitments loosely.[39] While it might look like treachery from within the sphere being

---

[39] "Letting go" is a recurrent trope in Spivak's *Death of a Discipline*, a work which could be described as a betrayal of Comparative Literature in an effort to open the way for interdepartmental cooperation in the academy. The "loose grip" is precisely the contribution she sees literary study most qualified to offer to an increasingly globalized (or, to use her own term, "planetary") socio-political context: "The most important

betrayed, from another angle it resembles a revelatory moment of illumination similar to the eye-opening experience of the convert.

BORGES AS EXEMPLAR

In order to trace some of the implications of the foregoing claims, I will turn once more to Borges, himself a traitorous reader and writer who was enthralled by the question of fidelity, both in his literary work and in his own ethico-political subjectivity. His work serves as a fitting preamble to the readings of Chesterton, Faulkner, and O'Nolan that follow because, like these authors, he appeals for a qualified cosmopolitanism that results in a provocatively troubled relationship to the various spheres of belonging on which one typically relies for a sense of identity. We see this in Borges's relationship to his native language, for example, in that he often confessed to having first read "the *Quixote*" in English and that he has always viewed Cervantes's Spanish version as an inferior translation. Such claims invariably offend some in his audience, even to the point of seeming traitorous. Ilan Stavans contemplates the significance of such rancor in an essay on Borges's translation of Faulkner's *The Wild Palms*, where he makes a similarly unfaithful remark on the Argentinean's use of language, claiming, "he tastes equally good or better in translation than in Spanish" (496). His comments on the extent to which such statements offend are worth quoting in full, as he sees the practice of inter-linguistic

---

thing, as far as I can tell, is knowing how to let go. And here fiction, as I suggested in the previous chapter, can be a teacher…. We must learn to let go, remember that it is the singular unverifiability of the literary from which we are attempting to discern collectivities" (34). If fiction is the teacher, then the central lesson seems to be "let go," and, as I have suggested earlier, some literary works are more enabling of such pedagogy than others.

translation as an act of resistance to the sense of communal belonging described by Bauman as troublingly "mixophobic":

> Why is it so distressing to suggest that Borges in English feels like "at home"? And why does it infuriate that a translation might supersede its source? Because our approach to literature is filtered through the lens of malleable nationalist feelings. We enjoy claiming that an author, any author, is the sole property of an individual culture and that his oeuvre holds the keys to understand it. This view, needless to say, promotes the idea of human imagination as a series of loosely interrelated ghettos, each controlled by its own self-righteous inhabitants. But translation as an endeavor presupposes that no man is an island. (504)

Leaving aside Stavan's merging of the ghetto and island metaphors, though each would have interesting implications for the present discussion, suffice it to say that this picture of translation as a counter to insular nationalistic sentiment is crucial for the discussion of Borges's cosmopolitanism. Keeping in mind the kinship between betrayal, translation, and the formation of contingent socio-political identities, I want to consider his intentional infidelities under the guise of the ethics of unfaithful reading developed in this introduction. As a reader, and sometimes translator, of the three authors discussed in my next three chapters, the traitor Borges sets the stage for the various revaluations of betrayal which follow.

Inarguably one of the most influential writers of the twentieth century, Jorge Luis Borges is nevertheless not without detractors. Throughout his long career, and even up to the present day, his position on the particular/universal spectrum has caused many readers to react negatively to his work. They see in his poetry, short stories, essays, and miscellany the denial of a particularized Argentinean identity in favor of a self-styled universal identity inevitably resulting in political quietism. Against such readings, I see his sustained interpenetration of the worlds of reality and fantasy pointing to the

possibility, and preferability, of the sort of undecidable identity required to form hegemonic alliances in the ethico-political sphere. Specifically in Borges's fantastic deconstructions of univocal authorship, as well as in his continual return to the tropes of the multiple self and "the traitor," we glimpse a complex portrayal of social interaction, one which resists any facile cries of quietism or escapism.

As he boarded a plane in 1963 to return to Europe after having been exiled twenty-four years in Argentina, the Polish writer Witold Gombrowicz allegedly responded to a journalist who asked what must be done in order to bring Argentinean literature to maturity: "¡Maten a Borges!" [Kill Borges!].[40] Like Clive James and other critics of Borges's literary approach, Gombrowicz rejects the allure of this fantastic, universalist literature. While my goal is not to fully rebut this sort of critique by delving into Borges's political involvement or allegiances, this move to devalue the writer's literary reputation based on his poorly played role as an Argentinean citizen serves as a good starting point for this discussion. James's evaluation is certainly not a new one—in fact it has divided the Anglo-American reception of Borges's work ever since his explosive appearance on the English-speaking literary scene in the 1950s, although recent years have seen a careful reconsideration of his politics. In the introduction to *Reading Borges after Benjamin*, for example, Kate Jenckes describes the situation in these terms: "Borges was long accused of being a writer of unreality who thought with his back to history. In the last twenty or so years, the emphasis has been on bringing him 'back' to history, that is, to place him into a historical and cultural 'landscape'" (xiv). One such rehabilitating attempt can be seen in Eliot Weinberger's *Selected Non-Fictions*, which

---

[40] See Joaquín Marof for a recent analysis of this scenario from 1960s Buenos Aires, an anecdote that has nearly reached legendary status.

includes eight recovered pieces for a section entitled "Notes on Germany and the War," six of which were not included in the five-volume *Obras Completas*. Such efforts are meant to present a properly committed Borges, one to whom the responsible twenty-first century reader can, in good conscience, remain faithful as well.

Rather than recapitulating such attempts to render Borges more palatable to the contemporary reader by emphasizing his "human" side—his disdain for Hitler and anti-Semitism or his vehement stance against what he considered the insidious fascism of his contemporaries—I am more interested in the ethico-political implications of reading Borges as "a writer of unreality." What to make of his love for the fantastic? There may in fact be specific texts in which Borges pulls back the veil and reveals his political convictions to the reader, but perhaps these do not present the most fertile ground for a consideration of the ethico-political value of Borgesian literature. After all, it will always be easier to picture Borges as a solitary "Librarian of Babel," quietly thumbing through an account of thirteenth-century Icelandic sagas, than to imagine him writing a political rant against the inhumane condition of concentration camps. For the former Borges is the one read with voracity and delight by such a wide array of readers worldwide, the one who has done so much to shape our perception of the world around us. The reader who has encountered a particularly Borgesian tale is left with a skepticism toward fidelity which, in my view, is crucial for ethical action in the liquid socio-political field described by Bauman, Laclau, and others. His work seems to cultivate in his readers a sense of what Laclau calls elsewhere "unfixity," a negotiable sense of identity that will allow them to escape the political dead-ends which result from uncritical loyalty to the various

patrias of Borges's time and ours. I will consider a few telling moments in his work that speak to his revaluation of commitment.

The plural and undecidable self is one of the most recurring themes in Borges. From his early essay "The Nothingness of Personality" to the often printed "Borges y yo," he is working out the "intention" he declares in the former: "I want to tear down the exceptional preeminence now generally awarded to the self…. There is no whole self" (*SNF* 3).[41] His most memorable stories present a self which ultimately can not be nailed down to a known identity. Thus, for example, readers are convinced they are gradually getting a firm grasp on the protagonist of "Las ruinas circulares," only to realize at the end that he is merely a dreamed figure. Similar reversals and epiphanies abound in his fiction, where identity is anything but fixed and the decisively dividable aspect of the "individual" is foregrounded and celebrated. Being "true to oneself" in this context is shown to be a misguided illusion at best. Like the work of Weinstein's prototypical modernists, his stories promote unknowing as they deconstruct the various protocols of realistic fiction.

This cultivation of undecidability is by no means limited to his fiction. In fact, his problematization of the Western knowing subject only becomes more interesting when encountered under the nonfictional guise of truth. In the essay, "Definition of a Germanophile," it becomes clear that to be "German" is more complex than it might appear at first. Borges derides the so-called Germanophile who "is perfectly ignorant of Germany, and reserves his enthusiasm for any country at war with England." He is "also anti-Semitic, and wishes to expel from our country a Slavo-Germanic community in

---

[41] Unless otherwise indicated, quotations from Borges's essays are taken from the English translations compiled by Eliot Weinberger in *Selected Non-Fictions*, hereafter cited parenthetically as *SNF*.

which names of German origin predominate" (*SNF* 204). The Argentineans he chastises here have relied on a categorically fixed notion of "Germanness" in order to properly direct their devotion. Borges's position, as a different sort of "lover of Germany," is governed by different principles which allow him to slip in and out of fidelity to "Germany" based on what this tendentially empty signifier represents at any given moment. In fact, it is this type of slippage of loyalty that seems to fascinate Borges most, especially in the years leading up to and directly following World War 2. We can see in his various treatments of the traitor, or what he calls in one tale the "*illuminatus*" or convert, the facet of Borges's work which speaks most specifically to the revaluation of infidelity presented in this dissertation.

In his 1952 essay, "The Modesty of History," Borges opines on the historical significance of an account by Icelandic historian Snorri Sturlason where a Norse king is defeated in battle by a Saxon and subsequently rejects the conditional offer of peace extended by his conqueror. As he relates the scenario, Borges betrays his passion for the mentality which holds loosely to one's natural filiation:

> Only one thing is more admirable than the admirable reply of the Saxon king: that an Icelander, a man of the lineage of the vanquished, has perpetuated the reply. . . . Saxo Grammaticus wrote with justification . . . : "The men of [Iceland] are very fond of learning and of recording the history of all peoples and they are equally pleased to reveal the excellences of others or of themselves."
>
> Not the day when the Saxon said the words, but the day when an enemy perpetuated them, was the historic date. A date that is a prophecy of something still in the future: the day when races and nations will be cast into oblivion, and the solidarity of all mankind will be established. The offer owes its virtue to the concept of a fatherland. By relating it, Snorri surmounts and transcends that concept. (169–70)

We can see in this Icelandic historian one of Borges's precursors, in the sense that, as he said of Kafka, "each writer *creates* his precursors" (365). He does not endeavor to present his reader with an unequivocal, patriotic praise of his subject, a filtered discourse which is meant to promote devotion in its readers. Likewise, Borges resists in his writing the simplistic representation of reality, where good and evil are clearly defined and nicely contained. As Jenckes puts it, "Borges suggests that the belief that the world can be contained, comprehended, or represented without remainder is the basis of totalitarian movements such as fascism and Stalinism" (101). Thus he adopts a position toward comprehension similar to that of Levinas, and this stance has important implications for the ethico-political value of his work. After all, the conclusion he takes from the Sturlason episode is certainly not offered without an agenda—it cannot be labeled simply "apolitical." While it is clearly to an unrealizable goal that Borges is gesturing, this does not obviate a commitment to political change. In fact, the "solidarity" he speaks of here is reminiscent of Laclau's concept of the universal, an "impossible necessity" which drives political action, an "empty signifier" around which various negotiable subject positions can coagulate.

Borges is particularly invested in the concept of "switching sides" in two collections of fiction published in the 1940s: *Artifices* and *El Aleph*.[42] In the former,

---

[42] This is not to suggest his interest in these topics is limited to this period. In his reading of the 1969 story, "El etnógrafo," for example, Idelber Avelar still sees questions of fidelity and infidelity as pivotal for any approach which would do justice to the text: "The difficulty of interpreting 'The Ethnographer' stems from Borges's refusal to offer any anchoring points that could turn the story into a transparent parable." In other words, the parabolic interpretation would require the very categorical solidity which Borges rejects throughout his career. Instead, as in the case of Faulkner's original presentation of Temple Drake, Avelar says, "In that matter-of-fact tone characteristic of Borges's narrators, the reader is confronted with a tale that prevents any moralization as to a 'proper' way of approaching the other…. It seems fairly obvious that the story is talking about ethics, but unlike most tales that thematize ethical codes, Borges's does not advocate any choice in particular" (55–56). If it is tale about ethics, then ultimately it must be deemed a

which was included in the influential 1944 publication of *Ficciones*, one need only read the table of contents to detect this dominant theme. "Tema del traidor y del héroe" and "Tres versiones del Judas" point to the thematizing of betrayal which characterizes the work of this period. In "La forma de la espada," Borges makes an appearance as the narrator, who listens to the recounting of a treacherous betrayal. It is a complex story where the man telling Borges of the cowardly traitor Vincent Moon is revealed in the end to be Moon himself

While this earlier set of stories might thematize betrayal and reveal Borges's enduring fascination with the subject, it is only in his 1949 collection *El Aleph* that he moves beyond thematization into the realm of celebration. Borges recounts two "conversion" tales in "Historia del guerrero y la cautiva," though by referring to them with the singular "historia"—just as he uses the singular "tema" in the earlier story—he suggests the two tales are somehow one and the same. The narratives both revolve around a movement between cultures. First the reader is told a story Borges retells after finding it retold by Croce who found it retold by the historian Paul the Deacon, thus demonstrating the enduring legacy of the character Droctulft, a barbarian who deserts his own army and dies defending the city of Ravenna from his own compatriots. Before seeing the city, we are told he was "loyal to his captain and his tribe—not to the universe." The resonance of Borges's comments on cosmopolitanism is evident. After he dies, the people of Ravenna inscribe a Latin epithet on his tombstone which translates, "He loved us, repudiating those of his kin, and recognized Ravenna as his fatherland." Borges offers the following analysis:

---

failure, not because it presents some sort of "bad ethics" but precisely because it refuses to present one at all.

> No fue un traidor (los traidores no suelen inspriar epitafios piadosos); fue un iluminado, un converse. Al cabo de unas cuantas gerenaciones, los longobardos que culparon al tránsfuga procedieron como él; se hicieron italianos …. Muchas conjeturas cabe aplicar al acto de Droctulft; la mía es la más económica; si no es verdadera como hecho, lo sera como simbolo.

> Droctulft was not a traitor; traitors seldom inspire reverential epitaphs. He was an *illuminatis*, a convert. After many generations, the Longobards who had heaped blame upon the turncoat did as he had done; they became Italians…. There are many conjectures one might make about Droctulft's action; mine is the most economical; if it is not true as fact, it may nevertheless be true as symbol. (558/209)[43]

Borges claims "ésta me conmovió de manera insólita" [he was enormously moved] when he read this story and was reminded of a similar story he had heard from his English grandmother, the same grandmother who instilled in him a love for fantasy and for the literature of her native tongue. She told him about an English woman who had been brought to Buenos Aires and was kidnapped by an Araucan tribe. She became the wife of a minor chieftain and, when Borges's grandmother offered to rescue her and her children from this barbarous life, refused the offer, ansering "que era feliz y volvió, esa noche, al desierto" [that she was happy, and she returned that night to the desert] (559/210–11). The only other time the two women saw each other was during a surreal scene where the grandmother left the city to go hunting: "en un rancho, cerca de los bañados, un hombre degollaba una oveja. Como en un sueño, pasó la india a caballo. Se tiró al suelo y bebió la sangre caliente. No sé si lo hizo porque ya no podia obrar de otro modo, o como un desafío y un signo" [alongside a squalid hut near the swamplands, a man was slitting a sheep's throat. As though in a dream, the Indian woman rode by on horseback. She

---

[43] For Borges's fiction, the first citation refers to the location of the Spanish text in volume 1 of *Obras completas*, and the second to Andrew Hurley's translation in his volume, *Collected Fictions*.

leaped to the ground and drank up the hot blood. I cannot say whether she did that because she was no longer capable of acting in any other way, or as a challenge, and a sign] (559/211). So we are presented in this brief two-part story with "a symbol" and "a sign." But what do they signify? Perhaps they gesture toward the "day when races and nations will be cast into oblivion" alluded to in "The Modesty of History"; perhaps to Laclau's empty signifier of the universal.

Possibly the most provocative example of Borges's treatment of the theme of negotiable identity comes in the next story published in *El Aleph*, "Biografía de Tadeo Isidoro Cruz (1829-1874)." Here Borges retells through the viewpoint of a minor character the epic gaucho poem *Martin Fierro*, considered by many to be the national poem of Argentina. Following on the heels of such an intentional celebration of inter-cultural betrayal, this beautiful, brief biography relates the night when Cruz deserts his army post, betrays his uniform, and is converted to the cause of Martin Fierro, who incidentally is also a deserter. In Borges's view, this one event "agota su historia" [encompasses his entire story] (562/213).

He does give us some background information though. We are told that, like many of Borges's most memorable characters, Cruz is an "infamous" man, a murderer. We learn that he is forced into the army, where he took part in the civil wars: "sometimes he fought for his native province, sometimes against it." Eventually he learns to live a rather domesticated, normal life. And then we arrive at, what was for Borges's Argentinean readership, that familiar fateful night when Cruz would encounter Fierro. I'll quote the conclusion of the story in its entirety as an example of decisive action in

Borges's world, where good and evil, order and disorder are not such distinctly closed

categories:

> Gritó un chajá; Tadeo Isidoro Cruz tuvo la impresión de haber vivido ya ese momento. El criminal salió de la guarida para pelearlos. Cruz lo entrevió, terrible; la crecida melena y la barba gris parecían comerle la cara. Un motivo notorio me veda referir la pelea. Básteme recordar que el desertor malhirió o mató a varios de los hombres de Cruz. Este, mientras combatía en la oscuridad (mientras su cuerpo combatía en la oscuridad), empezó a comprender. Comprendió que un destino no es mejor que otro, pero que todo hombre debe acatar el que lleva adentro. Comprendió que las jinetas y el uniforme ya lo estorbaban. Comprendió su íntimo destino de lobo, no de perro gregario; comprendió que el otro era él. Amanecía en la desaforada llanura; Cruz arrojó por tierra el quepis, gritó que no iba a consentir el delito de que se matara a un valiente y se puso a pelear contra los soldados junto al desertor Martín Fierro.
>
> A crested screamer cried; Tadeo Isidoro Cruz had the sense that he had lived the moment before. The outlaw stepped out from his hiding place to fight them. Cruz glimpsed the terrifying apparition—the long mane of hair and the gray beard seemed to consume his face. A well-known reason prevents me from telling the story of that fight; let me simply recall that the deserter gravely wounded or killed several of Cruz's men. As Cruz was fighting in the darkness (as his body was fighting in the darkness), he began to understand. He realized that one destiny is no better than the next and that every man must accept the destiny he bears inside himself. He realized that his sergeant's epaulets and uniform were hampering him. He realized his deep-rooted destiny as a wolf, not a gregarious dog; he realized that the other man was he himself. Day began to dawn on the lawless plain; Cruz threw his cap to the ground, cried that he was not going to be a party to killing a brave man, and he began to fight against the soldiers, alongside the deserter Martin Fierro. (563/214)

For the purposes of this discussion, I will draw attention to just two aspects of this climax

in closing. Cruz makes his decisive action to fight against the killing of a brave man in

the darkness of "the lawless plain." Traditionally, in order for the traitor to be vilified,

there must be a clearly delineated "right" which he is betraying in order to embrace a

distinctly evil enemy. Such predetermined valuations do not hold in Borges's fantastic landscape, where he deliberately blurs the lines between social entities. Nor, I would argue, do such conceptualizations of "us and them" hold in a fractured modernity, where the multiplicity of spheres of belonging results in the social liquidity that Bauman so eloquently theorizes.

A second point of interest in this conversion tale comes with Cruz's realization that "his sergeant's epaulets and uniform were hampering him." Recalling my earlier discussion of Laclau's logics of difference and equivalence, the symbols of national allegiance, which are shown through the course of the story to have been imposed on the protagonist rather arbitrarily, prohibit Cruz from making the decisive articulation based on the reality of his subject position. It is only when he encounters the other face-to-face and positions himself against what he deems an unjust political action that he is able to surpass the limitation of his uniform. For Borges, these decisions to switch sides point beyond any arbitrary loyalties toward a qualified universal horizon which, though ultimately impossible, is nonetheless necessary for socio-political action to remain ethically responsible to the unknown and unknowable other.

In each of the chapters that follow, I continue in the spirit of this Borgesian revaluation of infidelity as I read literary works produced during the intellectual "thaw" Bauman has posited as the transition from solid to liquid modernity. The texts considered in this dissertation range from the widely read to the nearly forgotten, from the center to the margins of Anglo-American modernism. As I argue for the ethical potential of unfaithful literary reading, I hope the ramifications of such a claim will resonate out into the field at large. The effort presented here to revaluate betrayal not only in the discourse

of postmodern ethics but also in the sphere of socio-political interaction is offered not only as a corrective to more strictly faithful approaches to reading and teaching literature, but also as a confession of failure that is meant to be both humbling and liberating. In that way, the overarching theme of the project might be said to echo the last words of Samuel Beckett's *The Unnamable*: "I can't go on. I'll go on."

I first turn in Chapter Two to a favorite of Borges, the book G.K. Chesterton referred to as his anti-anarchist romance, and in many ways it is a surprising place to begin. Robert Caserio offers a reading of *The Man Who Was Thursday* in a recent collection of essays titled *Outside Modernism*, and Chesterton certainly appears, at least at first glance, to have conceived of his novel as an antidote to the modernist disease. However, contemplating the title of the anthology in which his study appears, Caserio muses, "I have found myself wondering, thanks to Chesterton, if modernism is not also outside of itself" (67), and I will argue for a similarly provocative element in this 1908 text. Given the unequivocal position Chesterton later took on the work, it is remarkable that, as Caserio points out, the story "remains sympathetically responsive to the terrorist Lucian Gregory, even though Gregory is the villain of the piece," as well as "the book's spokesman for modernism" (63, 73). Indeed, in a story literally filled with shifting allegiances, Chesterton's characters provide ample material for a reconsideration of the role betrayal might play in the ethical encounter with alterity, as well as in the creative reader's most faithful attempt to tell the truth about fiction.

CHAPTER 2

Betraying the Truth in G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*

> *He read voluminously all spring, the beginning of his eighteenth year:… "The*
> *Man Who Was Thursday," which he liked without understanding.*
> –F. Scott Fitzgerald This Side of Paradise *(36)*

As Fitzgerald lists the spring readings of his young protagonist Amory Blaine, he stops at

G.K. Chesterton's 1908 novel to comment on its reception. What do we make of this

brief review? Or, more pointedly, what can these two aspects of Blaine's reading—

"liking" and "understanding" a work—tell us about the process and purposes of literary

scholarship? This fictional response to *The Man Who Was Thursday: A Nightmare* in

many ways typifies early readership of the fantastic text, and we see it echoed by one

contemporary reviewer, who claims, "while one is greatly entertained and amused in

reading Mr. Chesterton's brilliant prose and watching the will-o'-the-wisp play of his

fancy, one lays down the book with no earthly idea of its *raison d'être*" (Conlon *Critical*

152).[44] This sort of reading, one which allows meaning to remain in the sphere of

undecidability and rejects the possibility of full comprehension, is paradoxically truer to

the original than other, more epistemologically confident approaches. The reader who

sets as his goal the faithful discernment of Chesterton's message behind the text of a

---

[44] In his introduction to *The Annotated Thursday*, Gardner summarizes the history of the book's reception by referring to the undecidable identity of a crucial character: "Many readers over the decades have found it difficult to understand who Sunday is," though, in his view, "Chesterton himself made it plain enough, not only in his novel but also in comments about the novel" (11–12). See Conlon *Critical* 144–58 for a collection of reviews from the months immediately following publication. Among these is a review by Austin Harrison, who concludes, "I think that is what Mr. Chesterton means. But he may mean something entirely different. This is certain. Mr. Chesterton has done an admirable thing, and probably knows it" (146). Though the majority of Chesterton criticism written in the past fifty years exudes much more confidence in its evaluations (some gushingly laudatory, others scathingly condemning), his early readers had a greater appreciation for the difficulty of locating the paradoxical writer's position in the work.

novel such as *Thursday* is doomed to mistake partial understanding for truth. In this case, the only responsible approach is a self-conscious betrayal, a reading aware of its limits, a reading, in other words, that refuses to adopt the pretence of literary fidelity.

In what follows, I will argue that such an ultimately undecided reading, especially called for by ambivalent works like Chesterton's *Thursday*, allows meaning to overflow the boundaries often imposed on a literary work by traditional scholarship. This phantasmagoric novel by one of the twentieth century's most prolific and paradoxical writers, already itself the scene of multiple plot-level betrayals, can reveal the constitutive act of betrayal lying at the heart of any ethical approach to the other of the text, indeed, at the heart of any vital conception of ethics in general. The reader is most true to Chesterton and his novel when he resigns himself to the necessity of playing the role of traitor, confessing to the inevitable failure of his reading to deliver the truth of the text. The story's action hinges primarily on its policeman protagonist performing the role of anarchist in order to infiltrate the enemy's camp, only to discover gradually that those who are ostensibly his enemies are, in truth, similarly disguised "friends." In other words, *Thursday* performatively demonstrates the inherent limitations of approaching the other from the perspective of epistemological confidence. In this way, it can provide a model for re-imagining the concept of "welcoming the other," so central to current discussions of the intersection of deconstruction with the discourses of ethics and politics.[45] Jacques

---

[45] For an overview of the field, refer to Lawrence Buell's introduction to the special issue of *PMLA* he coordinated in 1999. Also see Critchley's *Ethics and Deconstruction* and the essays collected in Garber, Hanssen, and Walkowitz's *The Turn to Ethics*. See Karnicky for a recent attempt to navigate through the discourse of "postmodern ethics," where he pushes beyond the act of reading itself into the space of "teaching an ethics of reading" (164). I would argue that this pedagogical focus is crucial for current debates on the tenuous position of the humanities in academia. Redefining the ethics of modernist undecidability could return a sense of urgency to the literature classroom, which has been challenged due to the ethical void assumed to have been left by five decades of anti-foundational thought.

Derrida has discussed, in *The Politics of Friendship* and elsewhere, the difficulties of working collectively in a socio-political sphere rife with undecidability, and naturally, political theorists who have become convinced of the accuracy of his portrayal are left to puzzle over the possibility of working responsibly in such an environment. One such theorist is Ernesto Laclau, who has spent the past thirty years elaborating his theory of hegemonic logic as a means of deciding in the face of such irremediable undecidability. After establishing the troubled status of the truth in *Thursday*, I will borrow from these two theorists to interrogate the ever-oscillating allegiances at work in the novel's sphere of action. If, as Derrida and Laclau suggest, a truly democratizing approach to the other requires the risk that accompanies partial understanding, then the apparent betrayals of *Thursday* could be viewed as moments of ethico-political potential rather than as merely traitorous inconsistencies.

This potential can be found not only in the work's internal infidelities but also in approaches to the text from without which fail to remain "true" to Chesterton's intention. Specifically, I will conclude this chapter by creatively reading a historical betrayal of *Thursday* occurring on the Russian stage of the 1920s. When eminent director Alexander Tairov decided to stage an adaptation of the novel in his Kamerny Theater in Moscow, a decision often derided by Chesterton as an outrageous absurdity, he revealed aspects of the work that could not have been elucidated by faithful adherence to authorial intent, to the cultural context of the work's production, or to any other decoding methodology set to render a univocal, fixed meaning of the work. Tairov's free translation—or "traduction"[46]—of *Thursday* suggests the potential that unfaithful readings hold for

---

[46] I use this archaic nominal form of the verb *traduce* in order to allow the etymological connections with the French *traduction*, or translation, to resonate fully. One of the most familiar literary occurrences of the

revealing truths about their object which have been concealed beneath the sediments of years of more faithful reception.[47]

The productive undecidability at the etymological core of betrayal—that undecidability which allows us to allude simultaneously to treachery and revelation[48]—is certainly suggestive as we contemplate precisely how the notion of constitutive betrayal might factor into a creative reading of Chesterton's novel. Any reader who comes to this fantastically energetic text will find it difficult to read for consistent, univocal meaning. In the poem with which he dedicates *Thursday* to his friend, Edmund Clerihew Bentley, Chesterton asks rhetorically, "Who shall understand but you?" Looking back later in life, he remembers that "a book-reviewer very sensibly remarked [in reply] that if nobody understood the book except Mr. Bentley, it seemed unreasonable to ask other people to

word "traduce" is found in certain English translations of Kafka's *The Trial*, which begins memorably, "Someone must have traduced Joseph K., for without having done anything wrong he was arrested one fine morning." For a discussion of the relationship between traduction, translation, and betrayal, see Butler's "Betrayal's Felicity," where she discusses the story. Because "traduce" eventually comes to mean something close to "insult" or "slander" in common English parlance, the word can seem to render polar opposite interpretations: in the one sense, the reality of the object being traduced is veiled by false accusation while in the other, the reality is unveiled by being traduced. In Kafka's *Trial*, for example, is Josef K. guilty or not? As Butler points out, versions that translate the German *verleumdet* as "have been telling lies about" eliminate this ambivalence (82–83), but it would seem the story is impoverished by this clarification, not improved.

[47] In the essay, "'Le Parjure,' *Perhaps*: Storytelling and Lying ('Abrupt Breaches of Syntax')," Derrida muses on the connections between and among creativity, infidelity, and revelation in his discussion of J. Hillis Miller's analysis of "the anacoluthonic lie" in Proust: "It is as if, extending and generalizing, the analysis were *inventing* it [the concept of anacoluthon] in some way. I believe I must prefer here this word 'invention' because it *hesitates perhaps* between *creative* invention, the production of what is not—or was not earlier—and *revelatory* invention, the discovery and unveiling of what *already* is or finds itself to be there. Such an invention thus hesitates *perhaps*, it is suspended undecidably between fiction and truth, but also between lying and veracity, that is, between perjury and fidelity" (202). Thus the creative reading invents its object: on the one hand, it reveals what has "truly" been there all along, and on the other hand, it creates something entirely new, thereby telling a lie about the original. This oscillation between truth and lying is essential for the traitorous readings conducted in this dissertation.

[48] See my introduction, where I discuss the etymological ambivalence that allows us, when referring, for example, to the biblical scene of betrayal *par excellence*, to speak meaningfully of both Jesus and Judas being betrayed in the Garden of Gethsemane: on the one hand, Jesus is "handed over" to the enemy, and on the other, Judas's "true" intentions are revealed through the action. In other words, the traitor's kiss effects a dual betrayal, translating both objects—the person of Jesus, the concealed intentions of Judas—from one sphere into another.

read it" (*Autobiography* 99). What is it exactly about Chesterton's fiction that resists the

reader's comprehension, that potentially leaves us with "no earthly idea of its *raison*

d'être"? As a short answer to this question, we could say that *The Man Who Was*

Thursday enacts a continual oscillation between a fixed sense of reality and the

destabilization of that fixity. The text works on every level to portray an easily

comprehendible reality only to reveal the limits of that comprehension a few pages later.

These limits are betrayed by such moments of oscillation, and the careful reading will

attempt to emphasize this undecidability rather than explain it away. While it might be

tempting to succumb to frustration when confronting the work of this champion of

paradox and sustained contradiction, taking *Thursday* at face value allows paradox to

emerge not merely as a theme, but as a functioning methodology in the story's

unfolding.[49]

NIGHTMARISH UNDECIDABILITY

> [T]hough I know very little about The Man Who Was Thursday, only a very
> casual acquaintance is needed to make sure that if it is a novel it is a bad novel.
> To do it justice, by its own description, it is not a novel but a nightmare.
> – G.K. Chesterton (qtd. in Gardner 272–73)

Thursday is a terrific read, a phantasmagoric romp through the London of Chesterton's

nightmares, with a surreal ending that forces the reader back into the depths of the

novel's labyrinthine text in search of final meaning. It is above all a provocative text,

functioning, as Adam Gopnik puts it in his recent *New Yorker* essay on the work, as "one

of the hidden hinges of twentieth-century writing, the place where, before our eyes, the

nonsense-fantastical tradition of Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear pivots and becomes the

---

[49] See Kenner for an early appreciation of Chesterton's paradoxical fiction and its relationship to his non-fictional production.

nightmare-fantastical tradition of Kafka and Borges" ("Back" 52). The action begins and

ends in an imagined suburb of London called Saffron Park where the "sky-line was

fantastic, and even its ground plan was wild" (31–32).[50] Here we meet the resident poet

of "the lawlessness of art and the art of lawlessness," Lucian Gregory (36), whose well-

ordered praise of anarchy is politely entertained by the bourgeois intellectuals who

frequent the park. One day, as evening falls with an oppressive and ominous sunset, a

second poet enters the park claiming to be a "poet of law, a poet of order; nay, he said he

was a poet of respectability" (38). This is Gabriel Syme, the hero of Chesterton's novel

and, in many ways, a figure for the author himself since Syme's line of argument often

mirrors the argumentation found in Chesterton's other 1908 publication, *Orthodoxy*.[51]

When the two poets reach their inevitable disagreement, with Gregory charging

Syme with defending the artfulness of the orderly underground railway system and Syme

calmly challenging the seriousness of Gregory's commitment to chaos, the disgruntled

anarchist vows to prove him wrong. After securing his oath never to reveal what he is

---

[50] *The Man Who Was Thursday* (hereafter, *Thursday*) was first published by Dodd, Mead and Co. in 1908. All quotations in this chapter are taken from Gardner's *The Annotated Thursday: G.K. Chesterton's Masterpiece,* The Man Who Was Thursday (1990). I would also refer the reader to his extensive notes, many of which have been carried over from the notes supplied by Denis Conlon for the Ignatius Press edition of *Thursday* contained in Chesterton's *Collected Works*. In general, Gardner's additions tend to allow more for speculation and editorial interpretation.

[51] Interestingly, the original scriptwriter for Tairov's Kamerny production of *Thursday* did not find such an obvious correlation between Syme and the author, as Malikova explains: "Глубоковский находит в романе Честертона внутренний конфликт 'необычайной фантастики современности' и фантастики 'литературной'…. Борьба в Честертоне 'Леонид-Андреевской' риторической фантастики и гофманианской эксцентрической фантасмагории воплощена в фигурах 'поэта беспорядка' Грегори и 'поэта законности и порядка' Сайма: 'Честертон-Грегори — прекрасен. Честертон-Сайм — скучен, как проповедь викария'" [Glubokovsky found in Chesterton's novel an internal conflict between 'the extraordinary fantasy of contemporaneousness' and a 'literary' fantasy…. The struggle in Chesterton between 'Leonid-Andreyev-like' rhetorical fantasy and eccentric Hoffmannesque phantasmagoria is embodied in the personages of the 'poet of disorder' Gregory and the 'poet of law and order' Syme: [quoting Glubokovsky] 'Chesterton-Gregory is marvelous. Chesterton-Syme is dull, like a vicar's sermon.'"] (I am indebted to Joanne Turnbull for her translation of Malikova's article, as well as the passage from Koonen's memoirs). That Chestertonian argumentation in fact finds its way into the mouths of both "poets" is important for the present consideration of ambiguity at the heart of *Thursday*.

about to witness, Gregory takes Syme to a secret meeting of the London branch of the serious anarchists, where they are about to elect their representative for the Central Anarchist Council, a body of seven members, each one bearing the name of a day of the week. But Gregory receives two unwelcome shocks when, just before the election begins, his visitor reveals to him (only after securing Gregory's own vow of silence, of course) that he is actually an undercover policeman; and then when, outperforming Gregory in the rhetoric of anarchy, Syme is elected to serve as the next "Thursday" and is whisked off to meet the other members of the council and its enigmatic president, the terrifying character referred to as Sunday.

As the action unfolds, Syme eventually discovers the other five members of the council are, like him, undercover policeman recruited by the mysterious chief of police to infiltrate the council and bring Sunday and the anarchists to justice. In truth, nothing is as it seems in this fantastic landscape, even down to the larger-than-life enemy himself. For when the six bewildered servants of Scotland Yard ultimately confront Sunday, demanding of him "Who are you? What are you? Why did you get us all here?" (224), the leader replies, "Since the beginning of the world all men have hunted me, like a wolf—kings and sages, and poets and law-givers, all the churches, and all the philosophies. But I have never been caught yet," and he leaps over the balcony, bounces on the stones "like a great ball of India-rubber," and leaves his pursuers gaping after him, but only after revealing one important aspect of his identity: "There's one thing I'll tell you though about who I am. I am the man in the dark room, who made you all policemen" (225). And when Syme finally reaches some enlightenment as to the meaning

of his Job-like suffering at the hand of this all-powerful adversary, and he asks him, "have you ever suffered?" he receives an even more troubling revelation:

> As he gazed, the great face grew to an awful size, grew larger than the colossal mask of Memnon, which had made him scream as a child. It grew larger and larger, filling the whole sky; then everything went black. Only in the blackness before it entirely destroyed his brain he seemed to hear a distant voice saying a commonplace text that he had heard somewhere, "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of?" (263)

So with the words of Jesus to His disciples, this chief of anarchy reveals himself as the incarnate deity.[52]

Readers can therefore sympathize not only with the several bewildered reviewers of Chesterton's day, but also with the character who at one time was called Tuesday when he complains, "I can't make head or tail of old Sunday's little game any more than you can" (220). Any attempt to evaluate the various positions in the novel—for example, asking whether it is for or against anarchism—is undermined by the story's swinging pendulum of positive and negative attribution. A reader who brings even a notion of Chesterton to the reading will immediately be tempted to perceive Syme as a mouthpiece for the author.[53] And yet the effusive praise of order he spouts in the book's first chapters is just as challenged by Sunday's antics as is Gregory's active nihilism. Likewise, if, as

---

[52] With an apparently ecumenical motivation, Chesterton and others often attribute the declaration vaguely to "God" rather than speaking of its specific allusion to the question as Jesus poses it to two of his disciples desiring a place of prominence. When their mother requests, "Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on your right hand and the other on the left, in your kingdom," Jesus responds, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" to which they reply, with unthinking fidelity, "We are able" (Matthew 20.21–22). In addition to the Christological implications, Chesterton's allusion calls up the scene's interpersonal conflict, though his later commentary downplays it.

[53] Though for more devoted fans of Chesterton, Lucian Gregory's red hair will certainly remind them of other red-haired protagonists who seem to mimic the author's journalistic and philosophical discourse, adding yet another layer of uncertainty to the reader's perception of identity. See Kenner (152, n.32), who refers to the eccentric protagonist of *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* as "Adam Wayne, the earliest of the red-haired Chestertonian heroes innocently and unconsciously imbued with the Chestertonian vision" (71).

the most unmediated reading of the text would suggest, Sunday speaks allegorically of the divine, his perspective must carry quite a bit of weight for the Catholic Chesterton. In fact, what is probably the most destabilizing aspect of the process by which the reader works to comprehend, to appropriate Syme's character is that this seemingly central figure appears to be enlightened through the course of his adventures, but the expression of that enlightenment offered at the story's end can only be described as convoluted, if not deliberately contradictory.

When he is challenged to describe his attitude at the revelation of Sunday's true identity, Syme demonstrates an intellectual distance from his fellow policemen/ anarchists: "I am grateful to you [Sunday], not only for wine and hospitality here, but for many a fine scamper and free flight. But I should like to know. My soul and heart are as happy and quiet here as this old garden, but my reason is still crying out. I should like to know" (260). Here Syme echoes the epistemological desire of the careful reader who has pursued meaning, or perhaps "truth," through the maze of the novel's many twists and turns and can see that there are only two thin pages left in which to encounter it. We want to know what *Thursday*/Chesterton means so that we can at least agree or disagree, at least decide whether Chesterton is friend or fiend.[54] Syme, at least, doesn't have to wait much longer since, at the entrance of "the real anarchist," Lucian Gregory, everything

---

[54] Attridge's discussion, in his essay on "Knowing Works of Art," of the epistemological temptation literature offers its readers is relevant to the Chesterton's novel here. The story moves us toward a sense that we are confidently increasing in our knowledge of the plot and its significance, even as it coyly guards its secrets: "though the work may stage the search for knowledge, and the reader or viewer may feel thoroughly involved in this staged search, there is no knowledge as such waiting to be uncovered. Every work is a knowing work, every work smiles enigmatically, because there is no way we, or it, can satisfy the thirst for knowledge that it generates" (33). I would also share this sense that the reading of literature does not necessarily change us by adding to our knowledge, but by altering our entire approach to knowing.

appears to become satisfactory to his reason as well. The tone of his realization has all the

triumph and clarity of the climax of a morality tale:

> Syme sprang to his feet, shaking from head to foot.
> "I see everything," he cried, "everything that there is. Why does each thing on earth war against each other thing? Why does each small thing in the world have to fight against the world itself? Why does a fly have to fight the whole universe? Why does a dandelion have to fight the whole universe? For the same reason that I had to be alone in the dreadful Council of the Days. So that each thing that obeys law may have the glory and isolation of the anarchist. So that each man fighting for order may be as brave and good a man as the dynamiter. So that the real lie of Satan may be flung back in the face of this blasphemer, so that by tears and torture we may earn the right to say to this man, "You lie!" No agonies can be too great to buy the right to say to this accuser, "We also have suffered." (262–63)

As an explanation, however, this outburst only goes so far. Offered in the guise of an

epiphany, the sublime elucidation seems to answer a question that hasn't been asked. Is

this some sort of justification of universal antagonism? And, more importantly, where

does this leave Syme with regard to his confident praise of order in the comforts of

Saffron Park? Drawing clearly from the biblical account of Job, Chesterton presents the

reader with an answer to the challenge Satan gives to God in the first chapter of the *Book

of Job*: "Does Job fear God for nothing? Have you not made a hedge around him, around

his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his

hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But now, stretch out your hand and

touch all that he has, and he will surely curse you to your face" (1.9–11).[55] This biblical

scene is alluded to in *Thursday* by the sleepy musings of one of the confused detectives

when Gregory runs into the room: "'And there came a day,' murmured Bull, who seemed

---

[55] Chesterton wrote an introduction for the *Book of Job* one year before the publication of *Thursday*. For correspondences between *Thursday* and *Job*, see Gardner's introduction 14–16 and Knight 145–49.

really to have fallen asleep, 'when the sons of God came before the Lord, and Satan also came with them'" (261). The lesson Syme appears to draw from the trial is an apology for meaningless suffering.

There are definite similarities between the claims of Satan and the accusations leveled by Lucian Gregory when he bursts in on Syme and his friends in their confrontation with Sunday. Both accusers direct their indignation at a measure of favoritism on behalf of the deity. Yet the clarity Syme receives is not given to Job. Chesterton's protagonist is able to discern the motivation behind this period of testing, that everyone might be "as brave and good a man as the dynamiter," a motivation which seems to run counter to the biblical account; there the story of the protagonist's suffering is offered as an impetus toward patient obedience in the sphere of persistent unknowing.[56] However, the clarity of Syme's epiphanic moment stands in sharp contrast to the climax of Job's trial. The discrepancy becomes evident when Syme's speech is considered side-by-side with Job's final monologue, spoken at the nadir of his suffering:

> I know that you can do everything,
> And that no purpose of yours can be withheld from you.
> You asked, "Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?"
> Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
> Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.
> Listen, please, and let me speak;
> You said, "I will question you, and you shall answer me."
> I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear,
> But now my eye sees you.
> Therefore I abhor myself,
> And repent in dust and ashes. (42.1–6)

Quite a different lesson has been learned in the course of each of these two adventures. Chesterton's decision to have his character experience a sense of epistemological

---

[56] This was the early church's interpretation of the book, at least, as evidenced in the New Testament instruction, "Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord…. You have heard of the endurance of Job" (James 5.7,11).

victory—"I see everything … everything that there is"—destabilizes the allegorical correspondence to the *Book of Job* that seems hiding around every corner. Furthermore, while Syme might be assured of the meaning behind his adventures, readers can only remain skeptical at best.

These final chapters, in which the God-character is described in contradictory, often unflattering terms, potentially contribute most to the reader's confusion. Isn't Chesterton supposed to be a Christian apologist? The equation of the chief anarchist to God—and specifically to Jesus Christ as incarnate deity—in the penultimate scene is undeniable, as it is offered to the reader in the form of encoded revelation.[57] And things only get more resistant to interpretation if we take the advice of an older, more assured Chesterton and read the book's often ignored subtitle. In the autobiography he wrote toward the end of his life, he has this to say about the book's reception: "I have often been asked what I mean by the monstrous pantomime ogre who was called Sunday in that story; and some have suggested, and in one sense not untruly, that he was meant for a blasphemous version of the Creator. But the point is that the whole story is a nightmare of things, not as they are, but as they seemed to the young half-pessimist of the '90s" (98). Several aspects of this "clarification" demand attention. Chesterton stubbornly avoids committing to unequivocality, even when he is ostensibly responding to criticism. With the phrase "in one sense not untruly" and in the distance he establishes between his present self and his 1908 self, he refuses to allow his faithful reader to read Sunday allegorically for the Christian God. Then, in an even more intense disavowal, he

---

[57] Such coded theophanic revelations are common in Christian literature of the early twentieth century, as at the end of Christopher Fry's play, *The Boy with a Cart*, where the mysterious speaker is identified as a Christ figure by means of biblical association rather than direct naming: "I cried out, and I cried at last 'Who are you?' / I heard him say, 'I was a carpenter' …" (39). The call of the allusion is meant to be met by the response of the faithful reader.

embraces the "whole story" under the umbrella of "a nightmare of things, not as they are, but as they seemed to the young half-pessimist of the '90s." If we take this description literally, taking the author at his word, the action of the story appears to be twice removed from the way things are (presumably, the way they *always* are—"permanent things"[58]—not merely how they are in 1936 when the sentence is uttered). So we are told the author was deluded at the time of writing the novel, though he attempted to portray a nightmare of that misperceived reality to his reader.

The importance of the subtitle recurs throughout Chesterton's commentary on the novel, seemingly as a means of demonstrating how his critics might have taken him too seriously. In the same section of his autobiography, he explains: "what interests me about it was this; that hardly anybody who looked at the title ever seems to have looked at the sub-title; which was 'A Nightmare,' and the answer to a good many critical questions" (98). In his final recorded discussion of *Thursday*, from his column in *The Illustrated London News* (13 June 1936), Chesterton returns to the book's enigmatic conclusion:

> and then the discovery that the mysterious master both of the anarchy and the order was the same sort of elemental elf; who had appeared to be rather too like a pantomime ogre. This line of logic, or lunacy, led many to infer that this equivocal being was meant for a serious description of the Deity; and my work even enjoyed a temporary respect among those who like the Deity to be so described. But this error was entirely due to the same cause; that they had read the book but had not read the title page. In my case,

---

[58] Taking its title from T.S. Eliot's "The Idea of a Christian Society," a 1990 conference hosted by Seattle University and Seattle Pacific University, along with the volume of essays that followed, *Permanent Things: Toward the Recovery of a More Human Scale at the End of the Twentieth Century*, addressed the current relevance of Chesterton's work, in addition to that of C.S. Lewis, T.S. Eliot, Dorothy Sayers, and Evelyn Waugh. Again, this forum was closely affiliated with the Catholic church and thus speaks to the persisting limitation of what one contributor to this volume confidently calls "a steady resurgence of interest in the works of G.K. Chesterton" (31). Since I am positing Chesterton's fiction as a tribute to the impermanence, undecidability, and endless slippage of "things," this chapter, like the two that follow, could be said to be unfaithful readings in the scholarship, an infidelity that is meant to open the work to a broader audience. This theme will be taken up in greater detail in Chapter Four when I discuss Brian O'Nolan's "playing" in the Joyce archive.

> it is true, it was a question of a sub-title rather than a title. The book was called, "The Man Who Was Thursday: A Nightmare." It was not intended to describe the real world as it was, or as I thought it was even when my thoughts were considerably less settled than they are now. It was intended to describe the world of wild doubt and despair which the pessimists were generally describing at that date: with just a gleam of hope in some double meaning of the doubt, which even the pessimists felt in some fitful fashion. (qtd. in Gardner 281)

Coming as they do at a point late in his life, from within the "settled" confines of Roman Catholicism, these disavowals seem to conceal as much as they clarify. His use of the language of dreams, along with his description of his own thoughts as unsettled, cast a fog of uncertainty over the novel. Indeed, like many writers before and since, Chesterton didn't think much of his early work. He would no doubt have been shocked to know that his fictions have endured to a much greater extent than have his essays or works of literary criticism and apologetics. So if the story is a nightmare—or at least was to his pessimistic younger self—what does this do to the ostensible lessons of the work? Are we to view Syme's revelations in a circumspect manner? The uncertainty Chesterton perpetuates here makes it necessary to proceed cautiously in any attempt to ascertain significance of the text. This ability to literally captivate his reader in the paradoxes of his fiction is one of the traits that make Chesterton so provocative as an example of fictional undecidability.[59]

---

[59] At this second use of the adjective "provocative" to describe the author, I should mention my sense that this sort of fiction has the potential to function as an *agent provocateur*, an agent who infiltrates the ranks of the enemy, only to provoke them to incriminating action. In the reading process, we might imagine the resistant text as provoking even the most faithful reader to the sort of necessary betrayal described in my introduction. Needless to say, Chesterton is both captivated and horrified by the trope of the *agent provocateur* in his fiction, an element of the story that is not lost on Malikova: "Честертон явно хотел использовать тематику и стилистику провокаторства, 'азефовщины' (полицейский-революционер; богемная театрализованность быта подпольщиков; жуткость, вызываемая принципиальной неопределенностью ситуации — Азеф был одновременно эсером-террористом и полицейским осведомителем, наводящая на страшные, до агностических, сомнения) в качестве литературного приема" [Chesterton clearly wanted to use the themes and stylistics of provocation, 'Azefism' (the

I would argue that there is a parallel "nightmarish undecidability" in the life of the author as well, and that the several attempts at "deciding" Chesterton's position, at fixing his place in literary history have made it difficult to do justice to the singularity of his work. Gopnik is certainly not alone when he claims, "Chesterton is an easy writer to love—a brilliant sentence-maker, a humorist, a journalist of endless appetite and invention" (52). Nevertheless, the question remains of why Chesterton was widely read in his own day and then largely set aside as the twentieth century wore on.[60] Primarily viewed now as a reactionary thinker with a depoliticizing attachment to the Catholic church, his brand of paradoxical wit rarely makes its way into current literary scholarship outside the specified critical spaces of *The Chesterton Review* and various journals devoted to the study of Catholic thought.[61]

---

policeman-revolutionary; the bohemian theatricality of life underground; the horror evoked by the fundamental uncertainty of the situation…) as a literary device]. This allusion to the career of Yevno Azef, perhaps Russia's most infamous *agent provocateur*, is important for the subsequent discussion of the novel's Russian reception. The actions of Syme in the novel are strikingly similar to those of Azef, whose secret collusion with the imperial police while he served as an organizer of assassinations for the Socialist-Revolutionary Party happened to have been exposed in 1908, the year *Thursday* was published.

[60] Mark Knight feels the need to thank Fordham University Press, itself affiliated with the Catholic church, for taking on his study, *Chesterton and Evil* since "G.K. Chesterton is not the most popular of subjects in some scholarly circles" (viii). His introduction (1–20) provides a thorough discussion of the reasons for this decline of interest, resulting in a state where "it would not be unreasonable to add Chesterton himself to the list of things in need of a contemporary apologist." He explains that, "in spite of the healthy awareness among current scholars of his potential to contribute something interesting, there is little doubt that Chesterton has of late become an increasingly marginal figure in literary studies" (1). Though Knight gives several strikes against Chesterton that might persist in the mind of the twenty-first-century reader, he concludes, "the criticism that has helped marginalize Chesterton has more to do with the theological content of his work than with his polemical writing per se," criticism that, according to Knight, "is exaggerated and bears the traces of a modernist propensity toward artistic disengagement" (7). This anti-religious bias is also typified by George Orwell, who assesses the prolific writer's career as an intellectual loss: "Chesterton was a writer of considerable talent who chose to suppress his sensibilities and his intellectual honesty in the cause of Roman Catholic propaganda" (Conlon *Half Century* 102). Knight neglects to mention among his reasons for Chesterton's decline the allegations of anti-Semitism, as do several others who would count themselves among the author's faithful apologists.

[61] *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*, published by the University of St. Thomas, and *Renascence: Essays on Values in Literature*, published by Marquette University, are examples of the latter, and Chesterton is often featured in their pages.

While there might be several reasons for Chesterton's fall from grace in the eyes of thoughtful readers of the past sixty years, the two most damning are probably his praise of localism in a century that was moving swiftly toward globalization and the persistent allegations of anti-Semitism, which are, to the ongoing dismay of his defenders, all too easy to support.[62] For Gopnik, the two are intimately connected: "The trouble for those of us who love Chesterton's writing is that the anti-Semitism is not incidental: it rises from the logic of his poetic position. The anti-Semitism is easy to excise from his arguments when it's explicit. It's harder to excise the spirit that leads to it—the suspicion of the alien, the extreme localism," etc. (57). Archival support on both sides keeps the argument alive, with critics especially referring to Chesterton's vitriolic correspondence during the Marconi scandal and defendants triumphantly citing the statement by the Wiener Library, the London archive of anti-Semitism and holocaust history: "With Chesterton we've never thought of a man who was seriously anti-Semitic …. He was a man who played along, and for that he must pay a price; he [had], and has the public reputation of anti-Semitism. He was not an enemy, and when the real testing time came along he showed what side he was on" (qtd. in Coren 215).[63] The archivist's use of the adverb "seriously" here is perhaps the most revealing commentary on

---

[62] The most extensive work to date on the topic of "Chesterton and the Jews" is currently being done by Ann Farmer in *The Chesterton Review*. Her 2005 essay by that name reveals the extent to which definitive claims on both sides neglect the issue's ambiguity, and her recent article on Chesterton's "Politics of the Underdog" presents an extensively researched discussion of the writer's shifting position. The most defining characteristic of Farmer's treatment is her insistence on the ultimate undecidability of Chesterton's anti-Semitism. For a very recent debate on the issue of Chesterton's supposed anti-Semitism, see the reaction evoked by Gopnik's 2008 article both in *The New Yorker* and elsewhere (e.g. see Douthat's defense of Chesterton in *The Atlantic* and the caustic and extensive commentary that follows).

[63] For a description of Chesterton's involvement in the insider trading debacle referred to as the Marconi scandal, see Gopnik (56–57) and Farmer ("Religion" 167–69). Chesterton came to the defense of his brother Cecil, who was the editor of *The New Witness*. Many accused the publication of perpetuating an anti-Semitic "Jewish financier" stereotype in its critique of another pair of brothers, Rufus and Godfrey Isaacs, those most implicated in the allegations of fraud. See Chesterton's own discussion and defense of his actions in his *Autobiography* (199–217).

Chesterton's anti-Semitism to date, though the first two sentences of this quotation are usually omitted by those who long to absolve their man of any guilt. There have indeed been many who have diligently worked to surgically remove this unsightly taint from Chesterton's work, but their efforts, like similar efforts to rehabilitate other openly acknowledged anti-Semites of the thirties and forties, inevitably force them to impose a sense of fictiveness on the author and his body of work. In the name of truth, they offer a fabrication; of course, such apologies cannot stand up under the tension.

The book jacket for Michael Coren's biography of Chesterton makes the bold claim, "Coren tackles head-on the charge of anti-Semitism and finally exorcises it," thus creating a striking metaphor for such reactionary and defensive scholarship: it is as if this exorcised specter, once freed from the work, is able to haunt indiscriminately, increasing in strength. Each time a critic calls up Chesterton's most hurtful and obviously racist comments, only to unequivocally validate their man—"Belloc was an anti-Semite. Was Gilbert? No" (Coren 206)—the demon only gains in strength. When, as one reviewer puts it, a writer "quotes and excuses Chesterton's anti-semitic remarks and verses" (Pearce), there is a blatantly willful blindness at work, which only serves to temporarily plaster over the deeper significance of his racialism.[64] When *The Jewish Chronicle* is able to

---

[64] Here it becomes evident that one can harm a work or writer as much by ardent fidelity as acerbic criticism. Gopnik's description of the paradox is illuminating: "Those of us who are used to pressing his writing on friends have the hard job of protecting him from his detractors, who think he was a nasty anti-Semite and medievalizing reactionary, and the still harder one of protecting him from his admirers, who pretend that he was not. His Catholic devotees are legion and fanatic … but not always helpful to his non-cult reputation…. [H]is most strenuous advocates are mainly conservative pre-Vatican II types who are indignant about his neglect without stopping to reflect how much their own uncritical enthusiasm may have contributed to it" (52). Also see his earlier article on C.S. Lewis, where he discusses "a kind of admiration not so different in its effects from derision. Praise a good writer too single-mindedly for too obviously ideological reasons for too long, and pretty soon you have him all to yourself. The same thing has happened to G.K. Chesterton: the enthusiasts are so busy chortling and snickering as their man throws another right hook at the rationalist that they don't notice that the rationalist isn't actually down on the canvas; he and his friends have long since left the building" (88).

refer to Chesterton in 1933 as one of "the most confirmed anti-Semites in Great Britain" ("Hitler" 100), any reader trying to do justice to his work must first acknowledge the reality of the charge, whatever its implications might be.[65]

Of course, a similar danger lies in the other direction, in the assumption that the confining jacket of anti-Semitism fits the corpulent Chesterton as comfortably as it does any garden-variety neo-Nazi of our current moment or, closer to his own time, the malicious and more openly bigoted Hilaire Belloc.[66] As Gopnik tells the story of Chesterton's anti-Semitism, he occasionally portrays the situation more tidily than it might otherwise appear. For example, after discussing Chesterton's conversion to Catholicism in 1922, Gopnik asserts, "And right around here is where the Jew-hating comes in" (56), linking his racism more tightly to Rome than it probably was.[67] While it might be tempting to blame his increasingly uncritical attachment to the church for this unattractively racialized view of the world, keeping the "wonderful spirit of early Chesterton" (Gopnik 58) untainted by such matters, the truth is more complicated. In Chesterton, we are confronted with a living paradox, an embodiment of undecidability. He was both the author of inane, insulting verse: "I am fond of Jews / Jews are fond of

---

[65] As Farmer indicates (95), the irony of *The Jewish Chronicle* using the example of this "confirmed anti-Semite" and his concern for the increasing precariousness of Jews in Europe to awaken the British populace to the dangers of Hitlerism should not be overlooked in attempts to determine the implications of Chesterton's racism.

[66] One common line of defense among Chesterton apologists is to claim the author's "softness" and intellectual generosity toward those in his company who were "actually" anti-Semitic (see Coren 203–07 and Pearce). Farmer has promised in the third and final installment of her project to "look at the influence on Chesterton of his many conflicting friendships, and study the tension as it played out in his fiction" ("Religion" 178).

[67] This seems to be the gist of American Chesterton Society president Dale Alquist's objection when he claims, "But far more troubling is his argument that Chesterton, the Catholic convert, has this pervasive nastiness woven into the very fabric of his philosophy. Whether consciously or not, Mr. Gopnik has broadened his implication to include the whole Catholic Church." Generally, the case could be made for the reverse since, as Gopnik's own essay incidentally makes evident, many of Chesterton's most offensive statements were made before he got serious about religion. Farmer sees his growing commitment to Catholicism as a weakening force on his anti-Semitic tendencies (169–73).

money / Never mind of whose. / I am fond of Jews / Oh, but when they lose / Damn it all, it's funny" (qtd. in Coren 207); and at the same time, he was a vehement objector to Hitler's actions, even in the early thirties when many in England were willing to give the new chancellor time to prove himself (see Douthat).[68]

In his introduction to a collection of Chesterton's nonfiction, Alberto Manguel refers to an incident where, "when his adversary at a debate failed to make an appearance, Chesterton took both stands and argued brilliantly both for and against the question of the evening." For Manguel, this speaks to his tendency to "refute himself again and again with deadly accuracy," a tendency that makes it difficult to ascertain an accurate grasp of his world view: "In the same way, his most bigoted remarks are demolished by his own arguments a few pages later" (14–15). This picture of contradiction, self-debate, and inconsistency should cause readers to approach his work with caution. Indeed, I would argue that his imaginative fiction undoes the most narrow-minded attempts he made at comprehending his world. Undecidable works like *Thursday* will not allow the parochial claims of either its characters or its author to have the final say. And this speaks to a further reason for a certain coolness shown to his literary work by the late-twentieth-century academy. His fiction has certainly suffered from a trend in reading and teaching literature Derek Attridge refers to as "literary instrumentalism." The

---

[68] In his treatment of Chesterton's anti-Nazi work, Gopnik is perhaps overly dismissive. Though he admits, "He did speak out, toward the end of his life, against the persecution in Nazi Germany, writing that he was 'appalled by the Hitlerite atrocities'" and references the well-known hyperbolic claim, "I am quite ready to believe now that Belloc and I will die defending the last Jew in Europe," Gopnik seems to wave this aside largely due to the fact that his denunciation of Hitler was made "in the context of a wacky argument that Nazism is really a form of 'Prussianism,' which is really a form of Judaism; that is, a belief in a chosen, specially exalted people" (57). That this "wacky argument" is basically the same one Derrida makes in his lectures on "philosophical nationality" (see Hollander 101–29) speaks both to Chesterton's insight into the complexity of the Zionists' position and to the haste with which Gopnik wishes to downplay any pro-Semitic remainder in his troubling portrait.

difficulty faced when attempting to read univocal meaning into Chesterton's fiction, the undecidability at its core, makes it difficult to use as a means to an extra-literary end.

Attridge describes this critical trend in *The Singularity of Literature* as running counter to what he sees as literary scholarship that does justice to the work: "What I have in mind could be crudely summarized as the treating of a text … as a means to a predetermined end: coming to the object with the hope or the assumption that it can be instrumental in furthering an existing project, and responding to it in such a way as to test, or even produce, that usefulness" (7). Readers from various schools of thought and theoretical approaches would likely find themselves in agreement with this conceptualization of valid literary study. Included in such approaches would be the tendency to value a work for what it tells us about the cultural context of its production, for the emotional response it provokes in its readers, for the philosophical ideals expressed by its characters, and similar purportedly valuable effects. Attridge's point is that, while these ends may be valuable in themselves, they are not reached by means of the work's *literariness*. Other types of textual production—from philosophical treatises to sermons, from travel guides to political propaganda—can accomplish these same results.[69] It is easy to see why a reader with an instrumentalist approach to literature would be hesitant in embracing the general tendency to throw up one's hands in joyful

---

[69] Attridge is careful to note that recent discussions on the false dichotomization of literary vs. non-literary render any such distinction suspect. What seems to reactivate the distinction in his study and enable him to speak of literature's "singularity" is Attridge's persistence in focusing on the reception of the text, appearing to argue that whatever we read as literature *becomes* literary (4–6, 58–62). Thus we can encounter Darwin's *Origin of the Species* literarily just as we can read Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* in order to learn about nineteenth-century Russian society. Since Attridge believes the work comes into being as a work only when it is read, the first reading would produce a literary work while the second would not: "This is what a literary work 'is': an act, an event, of reading, never entirely separable from the act-event (or acts-events) of writing that brought it into being as a potentially readable text, never entirely insulated from the contingencies of the history into which it is projected and within which it is read" (59). His emphasis on the performative aspect of the work, an emphasis he shares with Derrida and other creative readers, seems to be confirmed in the ever-shifting curricula of literature classes.

(or not so joyful) confusion after reading Chesterton. For what use can one make of a
work that produces such non-signifying reactions:

> Mr. Chesterton's extraordinary fantasy will not commend itself to
> dull sticklers for commonsense. But it will be relished by every
> reader who can enjoy keen wit and broad fun without scrutinizing
> too closely the occasions from which they spring; and it will be
> enjoyed immensely by everybody who can fling sanity to the
> winds, and enter gaily into the spirit of a mad revel. (Conlon
> *Critical* 151)

Since the text apparently refuses to yield a clear meaning to the careful reader, it can
seemingly serve no purpose in the affairs of quotidian reality.

In fact, this aspect of Chesterton's writing in particular points to the place in
Attridge's conception of literature and literary reading where I see my own argument
diverging from his. He is presenting his reader with the "singularity of *literature*," and
throughout his study consistently demonstrates the translatability of his commentary
across generic, formal, and modal boundaries. However, as he becomes more specific by
treating realistic fiction that claims to be mimetic, generic difference stands out more than
some sort of trans-genre uniformity: "Thus the tradition of realist fiction should be
understood—in so far as it is literature and not a type of history read for its vivid
representation of past events—as a staging of objectivity, an invitation to experience the
knowability of the world. We learn from literature not truth, but what the telling (or
denying) of truth is" (96–97). If this is truly what is learned in the reading of realistic
fiction, then perhaps we should look elsewhere for an experience of literariness that
leaves room for an openness to what remains unknown, an education in the world's
ultimate resistance to total comprehension. Attridge suggests as much in the aside, "Other
literary works offer the contrary experience of the unknowability of the world, or of

elements in it: other people, the past, the future, oneself" (97), but he does not pursue the implications of this distinction.[70] In my view, this introduces into his comments on literary experience an important qualification that leads to a necessary promotion of works, genres, and forms that lend themselves more readily to the presentation of unknowability, as when he grants, "In discussing the question of the literary in terms of otherness and singularity, I have tended to stress the element of unfamiliarity, resistance, and difficulty in our reading of works of literature" (75). While he is ostensibly discussing literature in general (and even, at times, all artistic production), he locates the key elements for ethical reading in works that are, in his view, innovative: "There is thus an ethical dimension to any act of literary signification, and there is also a sense in which the formally innovative work, the one that most estranges itself from the reader, makes the most sharply challenging (which is not to say the most profound) ethical demand" (130–31). I would like to supplement this position by claiming mimetic literature in general—works that ask readers to accept their presentations as perfectly plausible re-presentations of readers' own lived reality—are less likely to promote the constitutive betrayal that ethical reading requires.

In light of this distinction, *Thursday* emphasizes—or, following Attridge, we might say creates during the act of reception (*Singularity* 56–58)—the permeable boundary between perception and reality, between appearance and essence, between fiction and truth. The governing principle of the novel is oscillation, rather than a

---

[70] Attridge does seem to indirectly favor the anti-realist work of literature in *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event*, an exploration of the South African writer's oeuvre that was also published in 2004 (he refers to *Singularity* as this book's "companion volume" [*Coetzee* xiii]). The reader can refer especially to the book's first chapter: "Modernist Form and the Ethics of Otherness" (1–31). However, since *Singularity* takes on the role of the theory behind the other's critical practice, he presents this favoring of anti-mimetic fiction as merely personal preference.

progression from unknowing to knowing, as one finds in detective fiction, or even a direct movement from knowing to unknowing, which characterizes some postmodern fiction. The first real shock comes as Syme follows Gregory across the threshold into the world of the "serious anarchists." Up to this point, readers have no reason to suspect that anything is "rotten" in the state of London. The scene is written as a classic encounter with narrative undecidability, bringing into play issues of perception, interpretation, and significance. Gregory takes Syme to what seems like "a particularly dreary and greasy beershop" (50), but turns out in fact to serve exquisite *pâté de foie gras* and lobster mayonnaise on request. But Syme is to receive an even stronger sense of disconnect as they finish their meal:

> Syme took the cigar, clipped the end off with a cigar-cutter out of his waistcoat pocket, put it in his mouth, lit it slowly, and let out a long cloud of smoke. It is not a little to his credit that he performed these rites with so much composure, for almost before he had begun them the table at which he sat had begun to revolve, first slowly, and then rapidly, as if at an insane séance.

And the fantastic element of the scene intensifies when, in the next moment, "the smoke of his cigar, which had been wavering across the room in snaky twists, went straight up as if from a factory chimney, and the two, with their chairs and table, shot down through the floor as if the earth had swallowed them," though we are assured that "Syme was still smoking, with one leg thrown over the other, and had not turned a yellow hair" (52). Here we are given, in miniature, the experience of reading the irremediably undecidable work of fiction. We encounter a perfectly mundane series of events, and interpret them as such, only to find they are being performed in an unnatural, super-real setting. In a sense, the tables turn on the reader as well, who is continually led to readjust his expectations to receive what is to come. I would argue that, as the reader encounters this resistance to

fixity, as long as it is allowed free play within the text and not prematurely assumed into the sphere of comprehension, he is practicing the sort of constitutive betrayal required for ethical relation to the other.

We come to the literary text with varied expectations, which ultimately govern the way we interpret what we find there. In her essay arguing for the value of the unanswerable question—a characteristic she finds in literary modernism in general, and Joyce's *Ulysses* in particular—Maria DiBattista says we often look for a semblance of order to counter the troubling uncertainties of our lived experience: "Even though—or perhaps *because*—so many questions remain unanswered in our own lives, we hold the novel to a higher standard of answerability. Fiction should not only represent life, but account for it, explain it, that is, endow it with a plausible and self-consistent form" (265). However, the distinction here between literature and life can be misleading, for, as with the case of Chesterton's anti-Semitism, our preference for consistency over uncertainty can obscure our view of the human other just as much as it leads to a misreading of the textual other. As DiBattista goes on to suggest, the uncertainties we encounter in fiction can condition us to more ethically handle the ones we meet in the socio-political sphere:

> Perennial questions may frustrate us, but they also advise us not to confuse definitive and prescribed answers with knowledge of life…. Joyce's unanswered questions are healthy antidotes to the disease of the single self (or its literary counterpart, the omniscient narrator), explaining what was what and who was who. These questions give us the freedom, not of the tourist, but of the genuine quester after facts (many of which prove to be wrong or worthless) and truths (many of which prove elusive or painful). (274).

What she refers to here as perennial questions, and what I have been calling a work's irremediable undecidability, can encourage us to reject the temptations toward "the

disease of the single self," the ease with which we might classify and categorize people or works. In this sense, the question of Chesterton's anti-Semitism and the question of meaning in his fiction present a similar temptation toward univocality, and yet each offers a nightmarish resistance to such closure. Acknowledging the incompleteness of any final claim on total comprehension can enable a fuller engagement with the other, a more welcoming approach that still leaves room for cooperation rather than establishing firm barriers to such collective work.

In the experience of reading *Thursday*, one is made aware of both the necessity and the impossibility of univocal significance. Whereas the identities of Syme and Sunday are key sources of instability in the work, which are only heightened by a greater understanding of Chesterton's authorial perspective and journalistic persona, an even more productively destabilizing feature emerges in the novel's shifting interpersonal relationships. As I argue for a vital connection between the undecidability encountered in the act of reading and the risk and betrayal involved in the ethical relation, the hegemonic logic enacted by *Thursday*'s characters can serve as a suggestive model.

GABRIEL SYME AND THE POLITICS OF F(R)IENDSHIP

> *[T]he sage, for friendship's sake, disguises his friendship as enmity. But what is he hiding? His enmity, for the coldness and lucidity of his true nature are to be feared only where they may hurt and reveal some aggressivity. In sum, the sage presents himself as an enemy in order to conceal his enmity. He shows his hostility so as not to hurt with his wickedness. And why does he take such pains? Out of friendship for mankind, philanthropic sociability. His pose consists ...* in feigning to be precisely what he is*, in telling the truth to conceal the truth and especially to neutralize its deadly effect, to protect others from it.*
> – *Jacques Derrida* The Politics of Friendship *(60)*

In the introduction to his sister-in-law's three-act play based on *The Man Who Was Thursday*, Chesterton attempts to describe his intention in writing the novel nearly twenty years earlier. In his description, the retrospective author discusses what he refers to in an

interview later that same year as "the foundation of the story" (qtd. in Gardner 276)—namely, the unmasking of the undercover detectives. Again, the identification of the book as "nightmare" plays a central role:

> I was not then considering whether anything is really evil, but whether everything is really evil; and in relation to the latter nightmare it does still seem to me relevant to say that nightmares are not true; and that in them even the faces of friends may appear as the faces of fiends. I tried to turn this notion of resistance to a nightmare into a topsy-turvy tale about a man who fancied himself alone among enemies, and found that each of the enemies was in fact on his own side and in his own solitude. That is the only thing that can be called a meaning in the story; all the rest of it was written for fun. (274)

This mistaking of friend for fiend, and vice versa, is not only crucial to the plot of Chesterton's story; it also goes to the heart of any discussion of decisions made in the socio-political sphere.

As the repeated mantra of Derrida's *Politics of Friendship* puts it, "Oh my friends, there is no friend," underlining the contingency of any true friendship, as opposed to a friendship based on predetermined criteria such as brotherhood, family, or nation, where a "natural bond dictates my allegiances, and thus disables responsibility and decision" (Thomson 16). In this complex and provocative essay, Derrida examines the implications of anti-essentialist, anti-foundational thought on the formation of political subjects. Both in the apostrophe with which he opened each session of the 1988–89 seminar on which the book was based and in his employment of the Nietzschean reversal of that principle ("Enemies, there is no enemy!"), Derrida demonstrates that the significance of such paradoxical thinking about the political sphere "is not that it introduces something absolutely new to the tradition of thinking about friendship, but that it exposes a structure that has always been present within that tradition, in this case, the

reversibility of the relationship between friend and enemy. Or, as Derrida describes it, a friend could not be my friend if he was not, at least potentially, capable of being my enemy" (Thomson 13). If we come to accept that friendship—and thus by extension, democracy—relies on the possibility of enmity, then any political rhetoric that claims to enshrine commitment to an essential relationship as the foundation of political decision-making must be labeled as depoliticizing. Democratizing politics must always involve the risk of betrayal.

As Derrida describes his work in the foreword to *The Politics of Friendship*: "This essay resembles a lengthy preface. It would rather be the foreword to a book I would one day wish to write" (vii). In other words, the work accomplished in this rather long (three-hundred-page) preface requires a supplement, indeed, it creates the necessity for that supplement. The revelation of an endemic undecidability in the political sphere, a state that makes it impossible to confidently determine the identity of one's allies, calls for a logic of the decision. One of the most important theorists of such a supplemental logic has been Ernesto Laclau, who has spent the last three decades arguing for the potential that what he calls "unfixed identity" can have for meaningful articulation in the socio-political sphere. The narrative that unfolds in Chesterton's tale enacts a "double move" of deconstruction and Laclauian hegemony which destabilizes political cooperation based on sameness—what Derrida calls fraternization—and moves toward an articulation that welcomes the alterity of the other. As we watch the playing field of *Thursday* continually shift, characters passing from one side to the other, we might consider the role of betrayal in this re-articulation. The sort of disavowal examined in the previous section offers a productive site for the sort of reading conducted in anti-

foundational, deconstructive criticism, as readers are seemingly doomed to oscillate between various possible meanings to the text, only to find that the signified is ultimately undecidable. But "undecidability" is not necessarily synonymous with "meaningless," or ineffective. On a practical level in Chesterton's plot, it allows for the reactivation of Syme's field of decision, requiring him to continually reconsider his relation to the others he encounters during his long nightmare.

If the oscillations of Chesterton's *Thursday* exemplify the potential of this dual movement of deconstruction and hegemony, then a brief excursion into the work of these two theorists might contribute to a more balanced reading of the novel. While Derrida assures us of the void at the heart of any politically constructed collective, Laclauian hegemonic logic urges us toward such impossible constructions. He continually calls for a movement toward "a logic of equivalence" that entails a rejection of the dominant "logic of difference" that governs current political discourse. His political theory necessitates the betrayal of a certain understanding of ethics in the creation of a more responsible political subject.[71] This specific act of betrayal, to which *Thursday* and the other literary works considered in this dissertation give thoughtful and sustained

---

[71] The specific phrasing, "a certain understanding of ethics," calls to mind the overlap between Laclau's thought and that of Derrida and Levinas. Moreover, as Thomson points out, it gives insight into the primary way in which Derrida distances himself from Levinas, though it is more common to discuss their similarities (e.g. Žižek's hyphenated "Levinasian-Derridean Otherness" [24]). According to Thomson, "[w]hat is at stake in this problem [Levinas's tendency to 'ascribe a priority to "my people and my kin" who happen to be "my neighbours"' in discussions of Israeli politics] is precisely that which Derrida raises: the possibility of either founding a politics on an ethical basis or of questioning politics from an ethical standpoint." Thomson sees terminology at the heart of the problem, and he argues against the recent use of ethical terminology in political discourse: "If the 'ethical' is given a priority over juridical and political laws, there is a danger that ethics—even an ethics of hospitality—will dictate the priority of the same over the other, of the family over the stranger, of my nation over another nation…. Politics is already the name of dissensus and dispute—ethics is rooted in a community, or a presumed consensus of some sort, even if not in a thinking of blood or race" (140–41). These sentiments echo Laclau's reluctance to fully embrace Derrida's ethical discourse, as discussed in "The Time is Out of Joint," his largely favorable review of *Spectres of Marx* (see especially *Emancipation(s)* 77–79, 81). It is my contention that retaining the discourse of ethics while, at the same time, betraying "a certain understanding" of it, can reactivate what, for Levinas, tends to remain depoliticizing.

treatment, suggests a more potent role for undecidability in the socio-political sphere than the temptations toward nihilism and apolitical relativism often attributed to deconstructive reading.

Laclau's career could be summarized as a salvaging deconstruction of Marxism. While he acknowledges the common argument concerning the fundamental disconnect between undecidability and ethical injunction, which can lead to ethical nihilism, he still maintains that deconstruction has valuable consequences for both ethics and politics; indeed, it has the potential to "become one of the most powerful tools at hand for thinking strategically" (*Emancipation(s)* 82). In the context of Laclau's articulation of undecidability and political decision, the unmoored, troubled identities of Chesterton's characters take on new light:

> I see the matter this way. Undecidability should be literally taken as that condition from which no course of action necessarily follows. This means that we should not make it the necessary source of *any* concrete decision in the ethical or political sphere. In a first movement deconstruction extends undecidability—that is that which makes the decision necessary—to deeper and larger areas of social relations. The role of deconstruction is, from this perspective, to *reactivate* the moment of decision that underlies any *sedimented* set of social relations. The political and ethical significance of this first movement is that, by enlarging the area of structural undecidability, it also enlarges the area of responsibility—that is of the decision. (*Emancipation(s)* 78)

Thus, as Syme's grasp on reality is continually challenged, his ability to ground his decisions in his contingent identity as a policeman is increasingly attenuated. Where he might have been tempted to make his decisions using the received categories of social relation—the traditional roles of policeman and anarchist, for example—his experiences in the employ of both Scotland Yard and the Central Anarchist Council work to deconstruct these identities. The decision is no longer automatic and is therefore

reactivated *as* a decision. This is where the second movement is put into play, a movement Laclau calls hegemonic logic, where elements that have been loosed from their moorings are joined together in a productive and meaningful articulation according to a "logic of equivalence."[72] While it may seem out of place to imagine such political theory being staged on the level of fictional narrative, there is a sense in which the act of reading the unknown fictional text shares much in common with the sort of political articulations to which Laclau refers.[73]

We can perhaps gain a better understanding of the intersection of these discussions of political decision-making with literary scholarship by looking briefly at a moment in Gayatri Spivak's *Death of a Discipline*, where she argues for a similar sense of unfixed, or negotiable identity in her discussion of postcolonial writers. For example, she describes Diamela Eltit's *The Fourth World* as a work containing "a sustained superrealism that signals another lexicon … [which] mimes the tone of the child-analyst who knows that metaphor and reality—inner and outer—have not separated themselves in the child's consciousness. 'Whole persons' have not congealed here. We are in a world of negotiable sexual identities, twin brother vanishing into twin sister." Undecidability is the norm in such literature, in which Spivak claims, "nothing, except an uneasy sense of everything, tells us that there is an entire body of political meaning here" (89). In

---

[72] There is no need to fully rehearse Laclau's long engagement with the Gramscian concept of hegemony, but interested readers can refer to his seminal work with Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* in order to place his political theory within the discourse of the so-called new left. For two concise discussions of hegemonic logic, see Laclau's "On Imagined Communities" and his essay, "Subject of Politics, Politics of the Subject" (*Emancipation(s)* 47–65).

[73] While much has been done to discuss the implications of Derrida's thought in the field of literature, Laclau's post-Marxist contribution has yet to be accounted for. To a certain extent, this is beginning to be remedied, as indicated by the special session at the 2008 MLA convention dedicated to "Reading Laclau: Theory and the Political." However, most work in this area is unilaterally concerned with the importance of the literary for Laclau—focusing especially on the role rhetoric plays in the constitution of political subjects—while the contribution Laclauian hegemony might make to our conceptualization of the act of reading remains relatively untheorized.

Chesterton's case, we are instead ushered into a world of negotiable *ideological* identities, and though the London we find in *Thursday* appears at first to be populated by "whole persons," the uneasiness Spivak senses ultimately reigns supreme. For Spivak, this reading of fiction, and I would insert here especially of fiction that draws attention to its undecidability, can serve as a model for the making of decisions in the social realm. Her stated project in *Death of a Discipline* is to imagine the future of comparative literature, and she finds the rigid identitarianism of the academy to be a formidable obstacle to forming necessary new institutional alliances: "The most important thing, as far as I can tell, is knowing how to let go. And here fiction … can be a teacher.… We must learn to let go, remember that it is the singular unverifiability of the literary from which we are attempting to discern collectivities." For Spivak, fiction serves as a "model for re-constellating" (34). This figure of re-constellation is an important one for her, and for me, as it speaks to the two-phase de-articulation/re-articulation of Laclau's hegemony.

What is *Thursday* if not the pantomime of re-constellation, where the protagonist is a "poet of order" who convincingly performs the role of the revolutionary, only to conclude his adventure in confused admiration for "the glory and isolation of the anarchist" (263). Although *Thursday* may begin as a fairly straightforward battle between chaos and order, between modernism and anti-modernism, as Robert Caserio puts it, "We find that the ins and outs of modernism are not as simple, not as dependent on clear contrasts as the book's antagonists initially declare, or as Chesterton himself belatedly avows" (64). Similarly, the middle of the novel, wherein Syme's opponents are unmasked one by one, presents more than simply a series of repetitive revelations of

"true" policemen behind their anarchist masks.[74] What would be the source of this true identity if not their commission by the man in the dark room, who is chief of both Scotland Yard and the anarchist council? To declare with confidence that these men *are* policemen is to impose a unified identity where there is only equivocation. In fact, we find that, prior to his police recruitment (and perhaps by means of that recruitment), the "poet of order" Syme was in a revolt of his own.[75]

After the protagonist's allegiance to Scotland Yard is revealed to his terrified anarchist companion, Gregory, Chesterton's narrator digresses to relate the process by which Syme became involved in his present line of work, for "Gabriel Syme was not merely a detective who pretended to be a poet; he was really a poet who had become a detective" (74). It turns out that the poet came from a family of extremists where chaos was the order of the day, and his love for order has carefully been conceived as a betrayal of that heritage: "Being surrounded with every conceivable kind of revolt from infancy, Gabriel had to revolt into something, so he revolted into the only thing left—sanity." However, as is typical of Chesterton's fiction, the narrator is quick to avoid the polar

---

[74] Krzhizhanovsky's script for the Russian adaptation of the novel brings out the convoluted quality of the various masks in the story. The stage directions following the list of characters require that "У всех, кроме Сайма-четверга, под гримами маркиза, драхлого професеора и Т.Д. бритне дипа сишмков из Скотланд-Ярда; у каждого персонажа-два голоса, а у Вторниеа и Пятница и два говора" [Every DAY, except Syme-Thursday and Sunday, should have the clean-shaven face of a Scotland Yard detective under masks of a marquise, a decrepit professor, and others; every character has two voices, while Tuesday and Friday also have two dialects] (1). My thanks to Kseniya Vladimirovna Rukavishnikova, my colleague at the University of Miami, for her help in translating the play from Krzhizhanovsky's original Russian typescript.

[75] This notion of the unfinalizable identity is, according to Mikhail Bakhtin, a key element of the polyphonic, or many-voiced novel. He describes the hero of Dostoevsky's work, the exemplar of such polyphony, as "not finalized and not predetermined by his image." Interestingly for the present context of Chesterton's novel, this quality allows that "[t]he circle of connections that heroes can establish, the circle of events in which they participate, is not predetermined and not limited by their character, nor by any social world in which they might actually have been embodied" (102). This "circle of connections" evokes the very logic of equivalence theorized by Laclau as the most responsible formation of political subjectivity. I would argue that the unfinalizability of identity praised by Bakhtin in Dostoevsky's protagonists is importantly pushed to the fore in literary modernism, and especially in works that are, like *Thursday*, written in the fantastic mode.

logic that his story seems to want to adopt: "But there was just enough in him of the blood of these fanatics to make even his protest for common sense a little too fierce to be sensible," and he is described as having "a spot on his mind that was not sane" when it came to his hatred of anarchy (75). So as much as we might like to set up a series of binary relationships—Gregory the poet of anarchy/Syme the poet of order, the Syme family of irrational fanatics/Gabriel Syme as the rebel into sanity—any attempt to do so is undermined by the work itself. We are told that, as an inquisitive policeman approached the disgruntled pre-Scotland Yard Syme, his demeanor was more rebellious and anarchic than the unhappy Gregory or his associates could ever be: "As he paced the Thames embankment, bitterly biting a cheap cigar and brooding on the advance of Anarchy, there was no anarchist with a bomb in his pocket so savage or so solitary as he" (75–76). There is no essential order to this character, nothing, in other words, that guarantees his enmity to the novel's purported anarchists.

And Lucian Gregory is no more certain of his own ideology than Syme is. Though he claims to hate order above all else, he is repeatedly mocked by his rival for his hypocrisy. As they enter the carefully constructed lair of the Central Council of Anarchists, Gregory politely states, "I must ask you to forgive me all these formalities … we have to be very strict here." Syme replies, "Oh, don't apologize … I know your passion for law and order" (53). The insufficiency of binary logic comes out best when Gregory confronts the victorious Thursday (Syme) after his election:

> "You are a devil!" said Gregory at last.
> "And you are a gentleman," said Syme with gravity…. "Perhaps we are both doing what we think right. But what we think right is so damned different that there can be nothing between us in the way of concession. There is nothing possible between us but honour and death." (72)

The devilish policeman and the gentlemanly anarchist present the reader with the ultimate ambiguity of political identity, where the relation between what one *does* and what one *is* remains perpetually in flux.

When Syme infiltrates the anarchist council on the night they are to elect their representative, the story demonstrates even more explicitly the extent to which performativity factors into notions of political subjectivity. In a somewhat contrived narrative twist, we find the two characters campaigning for the position of Thursday, and we are therefore allowed to listen in on their speeches as each bends all his rhetorical skill to a specified political aim. Since both are bound by an oath of silence to the other—an ironic instance of "honor among thieves"—the election proceeds with Syme playing the part of an observing ambassador from the office of Sunday. As he reassures his threatened opponent out of earshot of the other association members,

> I'm a policeman deprived of the help of the police. You, my poor fellow, are an anarchist deprived of the help of that law and organisation which is so essential to anarchy. The one solitary difference is in your favour. You are not surrounded by inquisitive policemen; I am surrounded by inquisitive anarchists. I cannot betray you, but I might betray myself. Come, come! wait and see me betray myself. I shall do it so nicely. (60–61)

Syme is more accurate here than even he is aware, for what follows is a series of betrayals that resonate with all the ambiguity I am allowing in this dissertation. Though both men remain faithful to the oaths they've taken to guard their enemy's secret, each offers an account of himself which betrays the level of undecidability at the core of his self-consciousness.

Each "campaign speech" bears witness to a performative betrayal. Since Gregory now realizes he is in the presence of the law, when he is nominated to serve as the next

Thursday, he relies on "his own literary power" to save him and his cause: "His best chance was to make a softened and ambiguous speech, such as would leave on the detective's mind the impression that the anarchist brotherhood was a very mild affair after all." Thus we hear him arguing passionately, "Our belief has been slandered, it has been disfigured, it has been utterly confused and concealed" (64), and countering an objection from a member of his audience by appealing to the love which the members of the council have for each other:

> In our society, at any rate, which loves him sincerely, which is founded upon love … there will be no difficulty about the aims which we shall pursue as a body, or which I should pursue were I chosen as the representative of the body. Superbly careless of the slanders that represent us as assassins and enemies of human society, we shall pursue with moral courage and quiet intellectual pressure, the permanent ideals of brotherhood and simplicity. (66–67)

Indeed, his rhetoric begins to take on an explicitly Christian tone as he tries to portray the innocuousness of anarchy, proudly declaring, "we are the true early Christians, only that we come too late" (66).[76] Thus, in the realm of political action, the performance of the political sphere, this confessed anarchist betrays himself for the sake of political expediency as he adopts phrasing that nearly echoes that of Syme in the first two chapters of the book.

Likewise, when Syme, to the shock of his new acquaintance, leaps from his chair in objection to this maudlin treatment of the anarchist doctrine, his speech strikes a chord

---

[76] Here Chesterton's readers will likely recall his own articulation of Christianity and anarchism in *Orthodoxy*: "By defining its main doctrine, the Church not only kept seemingly inconsistent things side by side, but, what was more, allowed them to break out in a sort of artistic violence otherwise possible only to anarchists" (96). See also Caserio 72–73 and Žižek 35–41 for more on this connection. Gregory's speech could be said to betray anarchism to Christianity by "handing it over" to the discourse of that other and by revealingly articulating, in the sense of forging a contingent alliance between, the subversiveness of the early Church and anarchist rhetoric.

with the crowd assembled in praise of chaos. His rousing cries of, "We are the enemies of society, for society is the enemy of humanity, its oldest and most pitiless enemy" (68), and "I do not go to the Council to rebut that slander that calls us murderers; I go to earn it" (69), are enough to convince the group to elect him. But, as in Gregory's case, there is more to this act than mere deceit. Drawing from what Chesterton gives us of the character's past, as well as the transformation (traduction) we see him endure by passing through the fiery furnace of his encounter with Sunday, we can conclude that this betrayal draws out the "real" Syme to a greater extent than could any strict fidelity to what he understands of the police force. (This becomes especially evident as we eventually find that so much of what he knows about his role as a policeman proves false by the end of the novel.) So just as Syme's betrayal facilitates the action of the novel, it also starts in motion a process whereby he becomes more fully known to himself and to his purported enemies.

The lies Syme tells through the course of the novel are always haunted by a specter of the truth. In this way, they resemble the fictive work in both its articulation and reception. In his essay on the novel *Le Parjure*, Derrida discusses the ambiguity in the title, whereby it could refer not only to the legal perjury that occurs on the level of the plot, but to the work itself: "*le parjure* could always be, for a somewhat vigilant and patient reader, the fiction, the novel itself, its signature, if you will" (211). The work is offered in the guise of the truth, but in reality is not "true to life," especially in a work that rejects verisimilitude. Derrida's description of perjury in this essay could be applied to Syme's deceitful utterances, indicating the epistemological uncertainty in the identity of this central character:

> Every lie is a perjury, every perjury implies a lie. Each betrays a promise, that is, an at least implicit oath: I owe you the truth from the moment I speak to you…. this problematic opens up the space to an at least implicit multiplicity of voices…. As soon as there is more than one voice in a voice, the trace of perjury begins to get lost or to lead us astray. This dispersion threatens even the identity, the status, the validity of the concept—in particular the concept of perjury, but also and equally the word and the concept "I." (200)

In so many words, Derrida expresses the potential the creative lie can have for, not only strategically dissimulating one's identity, but actually revealing and re-articulating one's sense of self. What better way to characterize the trembling Syme, as he proclaims to the surrounding crowd of anarchists, "We are the enemies of society, for society is the enemy of humanity, its oldest and its most pitiless enemy" (68), than possessing "more than one voice in a voice."[77] As he campaigns passionately for his new position, his coherent identity as a champion of order is provocatively threatened.

This scene of a strikingly democratic anarchist election, humorous as it might be in execution, forcibly brings into question the sort of uncritical fidelity, loyalty, and commitment typically valued in the ethico-political subject. In light of the performatively protean behavior of Chesterton's characters, what exactly does it mean to be "true" to oneself, to one's cause, to one's collective? Or, to situate the line of questioning within Derrida's *Politics of Friendship*, how is Syme, for example, to remain loyal to his "friends"—the brotherhood of Scotland Yard, proponents of law and order everywhere,

---

[77] Bakhtin offers the one of the most rigorous studies of the effect this multiplicity of voices, or polyphony, has in the literary work. In his study of Dostoevsky's fiction, Bakhtin sees polyphony directly tied to notions of truth: "truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction" (110). Thus, the campaign scene of *Thursday* challenges the idea that the characters' true selves are being veiled by convincing performance. In both the novel and Bakhtin's theorization of the polyphonic work, the dialogic notion of truth has direct effects on identity: "[a] dialogic approach to oneself breaks down the outer shell of the self's image, that shell which exists for other people, determining the external assessment of a person (in the eyes of others) and dimming the purity of self-consciousness" (120). When "there is more than one voice in a voice," it is difficult to tell a lie from the truth.

or even "humanity" in general—when it becomes increasingly evident his epistemological grasp on his surroundings cannot be trusted? In his attempt to open up a "breach" in the depoliticized political theory of Carl Schmitt, Derrida describes the necessity of total knowledge on which such decisionism rests: "If *the* political is to exist, one must know who everyone is, who is a friend and who is an enemy, and this knowing is not in the mode of theoretical knowledge but in one of a *practical identification*: knowing consists here in knowing how to identify the friend and the enemy" (116). Nonetheless, the sphere of political action Chesterton presents, which resembles the theoretical space articulated by Derrida, will not allow for such certainty. *Thursday* works to unravel this sort of "concept of the political" on every page, teaching Syme again and again "there is no friend," and "there is no enemy." Each new opportunity for socio-political cooperation requires a new engagement, one that acknowledges the ultimate undecidability of the friendship thus created.

And this is where the betrayal comes in. As Derrida indicates in the passage that serves as epigraph to the present section, Syme's betrayal of order in this scene could be read, paradoxically, as being performed "for friendship's sake." In this section of *Politics of Friendship*, Derrida is discussing the relevance of Nietzsche's reversal in *Human, All Too Human* of the Aristotelian apostrophe: *"'Freunde, es gibt keine Freunde!' so rief der sterbende Weise; 'Feinde, es gibt keinen Feind!' ruf ich, der lebende Tor"* ["Friends, there are no friends!" thus said the dying sage; "Foes, there are no foes!" say I, the living fool] (50). As he considers the many implications of this reversal, he finds in another Nietzschean paragraph "a key for a reading" of the two cries: "it happens that in another place, rather at one remove from here, Nietzsche himself seems to gloss these two

sayings of the sage and the fool" (59). This key lies in a performance; specifically, in a performance of enmity. As Derrida puts it, we can never finish determining all that lies at the heart of this lament for the loss of the enemy, precisely because of the irremediable undecidability of friend or foe. He imagines a sage here "playing the fool" and thereby introducing the mask into this pantomime described by Nietzsche: "the sage, for friendship's sake, disguises his friendship as enmity. But what is he hiding? His enmity." For the sake of "sociability" for the love of humanity, he dons a mask, but this is a revelatory mask—one that "tell[s] the truth to conceal the truth" (60). So, in this series of avowals and disavowals, what must never be forgotten is the effect of shifting identity. Derrida captures the effect well when he claims that such undecidable identity "provokes vertigo"; however, it is a necessary vertigo, one that, in Laclau's words, "reactivates the moment of decision" and "enlarges the area of responsibility."

In fact, it seems that Derrida's prefatory work in *Politics of Friendship* calls for political engagement characterized by this sort of performance of betrayal. After referring to Nietzsche's "wise man pretending to be a fool," Derrida goes on to ask a chain of linked questions, as he does throughout the essay, questions presumably meant to push the reader toward the cultivation of a *new* politics of friendship: "And what if tomorrow a new political wisdom were to let itself be inspired by this lie's wisdom, by this manner of knowing how to lie, dissimulate or divert wicked lucidity? What if it demanded that we know, and know how to dissimulate, the principles and forces of social unbinding, all the menacing disjunctions?" (60). As in other key moments of the essay, Derrida leaves these questions open, pointing to the messianic "democracy-to-come" he describes here and in other publications. I would argue that this "knowing how to lie" is modeled in

Chesterton's Syme, and it speaks to the troubled nature of the epistemologically secure "truth" in the novel. While it might surprise readers of Chesterton who have relegated him to the shelf as a depoliticized, reactionary thinker, *Thursday*'s plot powerfully demonstrates the need for a more permeable concept of political identity, one that resembles the contingent "political subject" Laclau has called for as a proponent of radical democracy.

This sense of "feigning to be precisely what he is" is also presented thematically as Gregory explains the anarchists' strategy to his opponent. When Syme asks him why, if his organization is so desirous of concealing their anarchic plots from the public, they "parade [their] whole secret by talking about anarchism to every silly woman in Saffron Park," he responds with a description of Sunday's ingenious strategy. After trying to disguise himself as a bishop, a millionaire, a major, and other proponents of societal order and being caught every time, Gregory went in desperation to the President of the Central Anarchist Council (who is also, of course, the chief of police who commissions Syme and the others):

> "He looked at me with his large but indecipherable face. 'You want a safe disguise, do you? You want a dress which will guarantee you harmless; a dress in which no one would ever look for a bomb?' I nodded. He suddenly lifted his lion's voice. 'Why, then, dress up as an *anarchist*, you fool!' he roared so that the room shook. 'Nobody will ever expect you to do anything dangerous then.' And he turned his broad back on me without another word. I took his advice, and have never regretted it. I preached blood and murder to those women day and night, and— by God!—they would let me wheel their perambulators." (56–57)

He feigns his enmity to conceal enmity, though for a different motive than Nietzsche's sage. Still, the ruse is there, and *Thursday* plays out the employment of this method of

"open secrecy" again and again.[78] When, under the pretense of his recent election as "Thursday," Syme first encounters the anarchist council, it is in broad daylight, with Sunday presiding over a very public breakfast. As his guide explains, "I'd better tell you that he is carrying out his notion of concealing ourselves by not concealing ourselves to the most extraordinary lengths just now," and while they used to meet in an underground cell, "now we flaunt ourselves before the public. We have our breakfast on a balcony— on a balcony, if you please—overlooking Leicester Square." When Syme politely inquires, "And what do the people say?" his guide explains, "They say we are a lot of jolly gentlemen who pretend they are anarchists" (92). At this point, then, the masks are becoming almost too multiple to count. Syme is a poet pretending to be a policeman (working undercover as a poet), pretending to be an anarchist, pretending to be a harmless citizen pretending to be an anarchist. In this context of undecidable identity, betrayal becomes inevitable. Whatever layer of himself to which Syme decides to commit, something will be betrayed. And the more self-conscious the betrayal, the more potentially revelatory the result.

It is not difficult to see why Chesterton presents this description of the socio-political field as a nightmare. In fact, when we interrogate this scene of multiplicity and duplicity against the background of some of the author's most troubling anti-Semitic discourse, it becomes evident that the fiction presents a possible counter to his narrow and dehumanizing racism. For Chesterton was fearful of the well-disguised Jew. When Gopnik draws attention to his "claims that he can tolerate Jews in England, but only if

---

[78] The trope of the open secret will resurface again in the next chapter in the context of William Faulkner's love of privacy and affinity for the inscrutable modernist novel. Like Poe's purloined letter, the works of literature considered in this dissertation are, on the one hand, there for all to see, but, on the other hand, jealously keeping their secrets from the reader bent on hermeneutically "decoding" them.

they are compelled to wear 'Arab' clothing, to show that they are an alien nation" in the

context of a reference to Hitler's "simpler demand for Jewish dress" (57), he zeros in on

the aspect of Chesterton's worldview that is most undeniably (even if it is not

"seriously") anti-Semitic.[79] Coren speaks of a "level of paranoia" in Chesterton and his

companions that "was based entirely upon fear," going on to describe the undecidability

of social interaction as the source of this fear:

> Gilbert was terrified that he would encounter a Jew, and not know
> it. They must identify themselves as Jews, Hebrews, Semites;
> otherwise, matters would go worse for them. If a Jewish caricature
> approached Gilbert he would be satisfied, even welcoming. If the
> Jewish individual was very English in his manners and dress, a
> threat was perceived. (207)

Here we should note that the most troubling aspect of this quotation is the persistence on

Coren's part in exonerating Chesterton of any "taint" of anti-Semitism, while at the same

time freely quoting the most damning evidence from the archive. What could possibly be

gained by such apophasis? Nevertheless, I would like to draw attention to this description

of Chesterton's likely hospitality toward the well-marked Jew: "he would be satisfied,

even welcoming." This is precisely the sort of "unwelcoming welcome" denied by

deconstructive texts like *Politics of Friendship*. By buying into notions of conspiracy and

widespread suspicion of the disguised Jew, Chesterton gives voice to one of the more

antisocial aspects of the British anti-Semitism of his day. The confirmed anti-Semite will

"welcome" the Jew conditionally, according to his terms. There is even a sense that the

welcome thus extended will benefit its recipient. However, Derrida and others are right to

---

[79] Kaufman draws a similar connection, though he creates a more aggressive, and unhistorical analogy, by
speaking of "Chesterton's final solution."

reject this definition of hospitality. Any condition attached to the welcome corrupts it, exchanging hospitality for veiled hostility.

Yet *Politics of Friendship* is not the only text we've considered here that rejects such notions of welcoming in the socio-political sphere. In his description of *Thursday* to an interviewer, Chesterton reveals the extent to which this early novel deconstructs the very trappings to which he himself was so prone:

> In an ordinary detective tale the investigator discovers that some amiable-looking fellow who subscribes to all the charities, and is fond of animals, has murdered his grandmother, or is a trigamist. I thought it would be fun to make the tearing away of menacing masks reveal benevolence.
>   Associated with that merely fantastic notion was the one that there is actually a lot of good to be discovered in unlikely places, and that we who are fighting each other may be all fighting on the right side. I think it is quite true that it is just as well we do not, while the fight is on, know all about each other. (qtd. in Ward 192).

The hope given expression here holds the key to the novel's action, and indeed, to the author's own mistaken notions of identity and commitment. The plot of the "ordinary detective tale" mirrors elegantly the paranoid fear of Chesterton and his anti-Semitic coterie. He is right to reject it, and the fantastic result that is *Thursday* gives the reader a paean to undecidability that allows for the possibility of good outside the boundaries of one's own understanding. It is as if Chesterton's imagination carries him beyond the limitations of his logic, demonstrating the power of the fictive to challenge the rigid categorizations of reality so damaging to interpersonal relations.

While the somewhat pedestrian unmasking of the five other incognito members of the anarchist council contributes to the story's instability, the most transformational effect of *Thursday*'s "tearing away of masks" is definitely found in the relationship between the

two poets we meet in its first pages. For, oddly enough, Syme's declaration to Gregory earlier, "There is nothing possible between us but honour and death," is proven incorrect by the strange ending of the story, an ending that most critics, along with the retrospective Chesterton himself, seem to have forgotten. I refer not to the epiphany of the penultimate chapter referred to earlier, where the identity of Sunday is revealed, but to the actual conclusion of the book. After swooning before the face of Sunday, Syme "could not remember having ever come to at all. He could only remember that gradually and naturally he knew that he was and had been walking along a country lane with an easy and conversational companion…. It was the red-haired poet Gregory. They were walking like old friends" (264). This paradoxical resolution is, at the very least, keenly frustrating to any reader working to pin down an underlying message to the novel. It would be equivalent to the *Book of Job* concluding with Satan and the restored protagonist walking off together into the sunset (or in this case, sunrise), engaged in "a conversation about some triviality."

The conversion of Gregory is almost ubiquitously overlooked in the scholarship, resulting in an easy classification of at least one character. In his introduction, Gardner refers to him as "the book's authentic anarchist," who at the end of the novel "becomes a symbol of Satan, the supreme destroyer" (18). Chesterton often repeated a comment by one of his Catholic colleagues, Father Ronald Knox, who apparently "said that he should have regarded the book as entirely pantheist and as preaching that there was good in everything if it had not been for the introduction of the one real anarchist and pessimist." The priest went on to wager that, if the book was around a hundred years from its publication, "they will say that the real anarchist was put in afterwards by the priests"

(qtd. in Ward 192). Now that we've passed that hundred-year mark, I can hazard a somewhat different conclusion: there never *was* a "real anarchist" in the story, whatever the author or his coterie might recall. Chesterton claims in a 1926 interview, "there is one character, the real anarchist, Lucien Gregory, who does stand for the forces of evil and despair" (qtd. in Gardner 276), and, in his comments on *Thursday* in his autobiography, asserts that because he "already knew too much to pretend to get rid of evil," he "introduced at the end one figure who really does, with full understanding, deny and defy the good" (99). But this "full understanding" is precisely what Chesterton's novel withholds from both his characters and his readers (unless the "figure" mentioned here is meant to be Sunday, which would take us down a very different path of interpretation). So while Chesterton presents a unified front in his backward-looking defense of the novel's clear meaning, a careful—and I might add, responsible—reader of *Thursday* finds this clarity difficult to accept.

The politics of this undecidable work are conducted in a sphere of shifting identity. Friends are mistaken for enemies, and avowed enemies are treated with the respect of unconditional friendship. Perhaps this is the "political wisdom … of knowing how to lie" Derrida prophesies throughout his work on politics and ethics. *Thursday* demonstrates the potential for political and ethical engagement that respects the unknowability of the other, that exchanges fidelity to one's own sense of the good for a conception that makes room for the "entirely other," even if this threatens the rupture of one's own political subjectivity. To conclude my consideration of the work's undecidability, I will now turn to a particularly revealing reading of Chesterton which can serve as a model of such ethical engagement.

Bolshevist Silliness?

> *[Tairov's] interpretation is not for those who are of the opinion that Mr. Chesterton is interested in restoring the ideology of the Middle Age form of Society, and thinks in terms of the sociology of that Age of democratic socialism, of groups and guilds and small communities and isolated property. Perhaps there is unsuspected by Mr. Chesterton a collectivism in the Middle Age guild system that is not understood by many people.*
> – *Huntly Carter* The New Spirit in the Russian Theatre *(228)*

Each step of the way through this reading of *Thursday*, I have relied on a comment by Chesterton to guide the inquiry, though in every case the most productive, most provocative strategy has been to betray this statement of intention in order to see what it might prohibit in the work's reception. As a final example of the revelatory potential of betrayal, I'd like to consider what Chesterton would likely call the most mistaken interpretation of this novel during his lifetime. I refer here to a fascinating "misreading" of *Thursday* found in, of all places, the Russian theater of the 1920s. In 1924, the Kamerny theater of Moscow, under the direction of Alexander Tairov, produced a dramatic adaptation of *The Man Who Was Thursday*, which Chesterton lamented several times, most notably in the introduction to his sister-in-law's play.[80] There he declaimed, "The Bolshevists have done a good many silly things; but the most strangely silly thing that ever I heard of was that they tried to turn this Anti-Anarchist romance into an Anarchist play. Heaven only knows what they really made of it; beyond apparently

---

[80] See Malikova for a thorough description of the production and its lukewarm reception, in which she claims the artists involved "они стремились дать в спектакле экспрессионистское изображение 'города-спрута,' а его эстетику в целом решить в ключе гофманианской эксцентриады и метатеатрального разыгрывания мотива двойничества" [strove to paint an expressionistic picture of the 'octopus-city' and to resolve its aesthetics mainly in the manner of Hoffmannesque eccentricity and a meta-theatrical presentation of the doppelganger motif]. See also the memoirs of Alisa Koonen, Tairov's wife, who described the play as ultimately being "об ужасе инфляции, безработице, о чудовищном угаре наркотников, … говорил о гигантской машине города, размалывающей человека своими шестернями" [about the horror of inflation, unemployment, about the monstrous intoxication of narcotics, … about the gigantic machine of the city, grinding man up in its gears], based on observations the couple made while touring in Western Europe (103).

making it mean the opposite of everything it meant" (Gardner 272). We can assume that

he might likewise be upset by the appropriation of Father Brown by Antonio Gramsci or

by the more recent interest shown in *Orthodoxy* by the avowed atheist Slavoj Žižek in his

Lacanian deconstruction of today's religious environment, *The Puppet and the Dwarf*

(2003), both of which involve a moment of constitutive betrayal on behalf of the reader.[81]

Whether or not these leftist thinkers actually misinterpret his work, it seems evident that

Chesterton himself does, or at least that he offers a much more rigid interpretation than

the text suggests. Each of these betrayals reopens a gap in Chesterton's work, reactivates

the level of undecidability in the text and therefore has the potential to reveal aspects that

are excluded or repressed when the author, or his "faithful" readers, attempt to fix the

work's meaning.[82]

Tairov's production reveals the potential that creatively reading the creatively

written text has for opening up the work to new and constitutive interpretation. It models

---

[81] For a discussion of Gramsci's praise of Father Brown over Sherlock Holmes, see Sassoon, who describes the imprisoned Italian Marxist's critical method in these terms: "Gramsci's creativity in going against the grain of so much taken-for-granted thinking on the left derives from combining rigour with an intellectual openness which allowed him to engage with the widest possible array of sources of knowledge." This way of working "reflects a desire to reach out to different genres as potential sources of understanding that may supplement other modes of discourse" (2). According to Sassoon, Gramsci found a literary comrade in Chesterton's detective, whose secret consists of his effort to enter the mind of the other. Sassoon quotes the priest's response to an inquisitive American as to his ability to always arrive at the identity of the murderer: "I had murdered them all myself … so, of course, I knew how it was done … I had thought out exactly how a thing like that could be done, and in what style or state of mind a man could really do it. And when I was quite sure that I felt exactly like the murderer myself, of course I knew who he was" (6). Neither Gramsci nor the Catholic Father Brown allow their ideologies to limit their epistemological pursuits. In that sense, they typify the creative reading, the act of betrayal I am discussing in these pages.

   Nothing could be more surprising than Žižek's employment of Chesterton—a man he somewhat erroneously cites as an exemplary "intelligent conservative" (15). However ideologically opposed the thinkers might seem on the surface, the fact remains that Žižek brings no less than 1300 words of *Orthodoxy* into his short work with very little critique or challenge. He translates, or traduces Chesterton in order to reveal what he calls "the perverse core," or kernel of Christianity.

[82] There is an important difference between Žižek's use of Chesterton's non-fiction and Gramsci's and Tairov's treatment of his fiction: namely, Žižek is able to more confidently speak of "the limit of Chesterton" (53) by identifying a limit in the prose. For readers encountering fictional narration, as Attridge points out, such identification is more resistant to the direct authorial link. Syme's words always remain the words of a fictional character, no matter how much they may resemble the discourse of *Orthodoxy*, *Heretics*, or Chesterton's many journalistic endeavors.

the bilateral deconstruction and decisive articulation that Laclau calls for in the socio-political sphere. The betrayal frees the text from the constraining fixity Chesterton imposes when he calls it an "Anti-Anarchist romance," a title that reminds us of the role generic classification plays in the fixation of literary meaning. His sense of fixed identity can be seen overflowing into other areas of perception as he uncritically twins the Kamerny theater with Bolshevism and Bolshevism with anarchism, casting all three aside as symptoms of the disease of modernism.[83] This form of essentialist classification—a tactic that has likewise rendered the complex and intellectually stimulating Chesterton into an anti-Semitic, reactionary conservative in current discourse—makes any productive articulation difficult. The displacement we find in the Kamerny staging provides the necessary enactment of destabilization that clears the way for readings that do greater justice to the text.

An attitude that welcomes such artistic borrowing across ideological lines helped bring about the revival of the post-revolutionary Russian theater of the 1920s and 30s. According to Abram Efros, Vice-Director of the Government Museums of Fine Arts in

---

[83] To refer to Tairov, or the plays produced at that the Kamerny after the October revolution, as Bolshevist is to drastically simplify a complex relationship. See Worrall for a discussion of Tairov's troubled stance toward Bolshevism: "In the immediate post-revolutionary period, despite the theatre's avant-garde status and the fact that the Kamerny can be seen to have led the way in introducing stage constructivism, the radical element among the cultural activists tended to share a common antipathy towards Tairov and his work on both artistic and political grounds. Whilst essentially apolitical, Tairov had welcomed the revolution in which he saw a parallel between the world of political action and what he was trying to achieve in the theatre. 'How did we judge matters?' Tairov asked in 1936, and answered: 'The revolution was destroying the old forms of life and we were destroying the old forms of art. It followed that we were in step with the revolution. This was, of course, an illusion but, at the same time, we sincerely believed ourselves to be revolutionaries'" (15–16). Krzhizhanovsky, who wrote the play's script, was largely antipathetic toward Lenin and the Bolshevists. According to Turnbull, "Krzhizhanovsky called himself a satirist (in the Swiftian sense) and an experimental realist. The Soviet literary establishment had little use for either. The surreal horror and black humor of a story like 'Quadraturin' … was at odds with official injunctions to portray the 'revolutionary reality' in a positive light" (9), and his stories were rejected by Maxim Gorky as "old-fashioned and irrelevant" (10).

Moscow in 1929, this attitude even threatened to betray the Russianness of the theater, a risk he viewed with ambivalence:

> Russian art has never been the victim of self-glorification. On the contrary, its tradition has been that of following, of learning from others. We have been more enthusiastic for things Western than self-assured. We are voluntary, grateful, and oftentimes even over-obedient disciples, and our indebtedness to the west is ever fresh in our memory. Our faith in the artistic importance of everything Western is so great that every "ism" makes converts in Russia. (7)

Yet he clearly did not view the effect as one-sided. In relation to Tairov's time at the Kamerny theater, and specifically contemplating a group of performances that included *Thursday*, Efros looks back with nostalgia: "I cannot forget the refreshing influence the *Kamerni* Theater had, when it so generously scattered its innovations. Many who received its gifts have since forgotten the name of their benefactor" (8). From his perspective, Tairov's penchant for staging work that came from Europe only emphasizes the director's creativity and presentation of the revolutionary spirit.[84]

In the unfixed world of *Thursday*, Tairov found material that was malleable and suggestive to the post-revolutionary Russian experience. This was the first production at

---

[84] For a list of Tairov's productions, see Worrall 1–58 and William Kuhlke's introduction to Tariov's *Notes of a Director* 3–37. His favorite Westerner was no doubt Eugene O'Neill. In the two decades following the October revolution, audiences at the Kamerny were treated to productions of *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, and *Desire Under the Elms*. O'Neill was more friendly toward these adaptations than Chesterton: after watching the production of the former, quite altered from its original storyline, he reportedly "was happy to have such a co-author as Tairov" (Worrall 51). He was even more explicit in a letter to Tairov in which he expressed hope that *Mourning Becomes Electra* might also find its way to Moscow: "Having seen your production of *Desire Under the Elms* and *All God's Chillun* I am amazed and full of heartfelt thanks. I must admit that I went to the theatre with hidden misgivings. Not because I doubted that your productions would not be magnificent in themselves, artistically conceived and executed. I know the reputation of the Kamerny too well as one of the best theatres of Europe. But the fear of the author spoke in me, that in the difficult process of translation into another language, that which is most essential and dear to an author—this spirit might, bearing in mind all the obstacles, be interpreted incorrectly or become lost altogether. How great was my excitement and thankfulness when I saw your productions which so thrilled me. They completely communicated the inner life of my work" (qtd. in Worrall 52). Of course, Chesterton had a similar "fear of the author," though he felt it was realized to the full. Nevertheless, O'Neill's conviction about the communication of "the inner life" of his plays speaks volumes to the revelatory power of the peculiar betrayal effected in dramatic adaptation, and it will be an important factor in my reading of Brian O'Nolan's translation/adaptation of the Čapek brothers' *Insect Play* in Chapter Four.

the Kamerny after Tairov and his wife, the actress Alice Koonen, returned from a tour of Europe. Kuhlke describes the motivation behind the staging as an effort to speak to the cultural moment, a necessity the director was increasingly made aware of as Bolshevist censorship became more prevalent: "In spite of the fact that it was not Soviet, Tairov had chosen the play in an effort to comply with demands that he select material more pertinent to Soviet life" (36). Maria Malikova also works to establish "the Kamerny's 'Thursday' as a product of NEP's [Lenin's New Economic Policy's] cultural sphere."[85] This story's lack of rigidity permitted the appropriation by the Russian Jewish director and a Polish Ukranian-born playwright, Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky as they worked to stage the philosophy of collectivism.

Of course in some ways, Tairov's direction could be deemed guilty of the "instrumentalism" defined by Attridge. He was certainly interested in using the work to convey a message about the industrial city, the modern predicament, and the revolutionary spirit. However, what is interesting about Tairov's approach is his willingness to admit that he is manipulating the text, that he is in fact betraying it with his adaptation. There is no confident effort to "read against the grain" in order to get past the ideological trappings to what is "really there" in the text. In *Notes of a Director* (1922), he presented his approach to the use of literature in the theater: "the theatre looks upon *literature* only as *material* necessary to it at the present stage of its development. Only such an approach to literature is genuinely theatrical, since otherwise the theatre will inevitably cease to exist as an art to be valued in and of itself, and will turn into a mere good or bad tributary of literature, a phonograph record, reproducing the ideas of the

---

[85] "описать спектакль Камерного театра 'Человек, который был Четвергом' как явление культурного поля нэпа."

author" (96–97). This admission that "the ideas of the author" are not what the play is ultimately to convey frees Tairov's production—and, arguably, any dramatic interpretation that is as self-consciously innovative—from some of the limitations of instrumental criticism.

Several times in the statement of his aesthetic philosophy, Tairov resists the tendency to view dramatic presentation as a re-presentation of literature. Often, this resistance takes the specific form of an aversion to fidelity on behalf of the director. Such is the case in Tairov's critique of Gordon Craig:

> You know it is considered the highest praise to say to a director: "How correctly you interpreted Shakespeare," or, "It is amazing how faithfully you reproduced Molière." You may think what you like, but for me such praise would sound like a funeral march. And Gordon Craig is profoundly wrong when in his first dialogue he answers a question concerning the director's role in the theatre with the following words: "What is his function? I will tell you. His job as *interpreter of the playwright's work* is something like this: He takes a copy of the play from the hands of the playwright and promises to *interpret it faithfully*, according to the instructions of the text." [emphasis is Tairov's]
>   Is this really the purpose of the theatre? Does it really consist of giving the play a "faithful interpretation"?
>   No. The theatre's mission is enormous and autonomous. In mounting a play it must, in accord with its own artistic intention, its own urge to action, create its own, new work of art to be valued in and of itself. (97)

This carefree attitude toward the notions of authorial intention and fixity of meaning make Tairov an interesting candidate for the type of ethical betrayal outlined in this chapter. His trans-genre translation of *Thursday* removes the work from the cultural context of its production and unapologetically recreates it in an entirely foreign sphere. His "reading" of the work thus exemplifies the revelatory aspect of betrayal I have been

considering, whereby elements of the work deadened by a multitude of faithful readings are reactivated.

Tairov takes a similar posture toward the work of E.T.A. Hoffmann, whose stories also provided material for his directorial betrayals. In an insightful gloss, he claims that these stories in the fantastic mode—which are, like Chesterton's, imbued with a sense of undecidability and nuance—allow him to create fresh plays that will respond to his own cultural moment:

> You see, there are no plays in existing dramatic literature answerable to the purposes of a synthetic scenic construction …. Therefore, we ourselves create them, using Hoffmann, for in his unbridled fantasy, we find rich material, rhythmically consonant with our scenic aspirations. But in "distorting" Hoffmann, i.e., in scenically transforming him, we create much ourselves, using our own creative capacity as a base, and in this way draw nearer to our final goal, the independent creation of the whole production. (99–100)

I would argue that Tairov's strategy of deliberately manipulating literary work in this way has the potential to reinvigorate its object to a greater extent than a more carefully considered approach.

His distortion of *Thursday* is no exception. Probably the most obvious betrayal of Chesterton's actual storyline—leaving aside any notion of an intended message for the work—comes in the final scene of the play, where the audience hears from the cry of a paperboy that the King of France has been murdered, and Gregory is in a position to mock the disoriented Syme: "While you bloodhounds from Scotland Yard were going round in circles dogging your own tracks and arresting one another, we anarchists calmly did our business" (Krzhizhanovsky 64–65).[86] After commenting on this divergence, and

---

[86] "Пока вы, ищейки Скотлэнд-Ярда, кружились по собственному следу и арестовывали друг друга, мы, анархисты, успели спокойно сделать свое дело."

on Chesterton's previously mentioned attitude toward the rumored production, Malikova makes a crucial gesture—one that resonates with the theme of betrayal I have been treating thus far: "Our purpose here is not to consider the accuracy of the Russian interpretations of [Chesterton's] original concept. However, it is fair to assume that in his text there are potential meanings, not part of his conscious concept, connected with the power-generating motifs of doubles and provocation, which were actualized in the twentieth century, especially in Russian history."[87] These potential meanings are recovered, brought to the surface both through the "power-generating" content of Chesterton's work and the constitutive act of betrayal on the part of the director.

Translating the story into a Russian context breathes new life into it, allows us to appreciate a fresh aspect of Chesterton's nightmare—one we could lose out of polite respect for traditional, superficial means of interpretation. Huntly Carter's *The New Spirit in the Russian Theatre* (1926) shows this aspect best. He calls the opening day of the 1924 production "a Red Letter day in more ways than one for the Kamerny theatre" as the play gave "for the first time, an interpretation of the philosophy of collectivism as drawn from a detective story written by a foreign author" (227). Carter sees the work defining a turning point in the director's career, as Tairov "evidently came to the

---

[87] "В нашу задачу не входит рассмотрение адекватности русских интерпретаций оригинальному замыслу писателя, однако можно предположить, что в тексте Честертона есть потенциальные смыслы, не входившие в сознательный замысел автора, связанные с обладающими мощной генерирующей силой мотивами двойничества и провокации, актуализировавшимися в XX веке, особенно в русской истории." A key element of this history for Malikova is the epistemological uncertainty felt in the Russian political sphere at the turn of the century following the exposure of the *agent provocateur* Yevno Azef. There was a general sense that one could no longer trust appearances. For a thorough discussion of this historical figure, see Geifman's *Entangled in Terror: The Azef Affair and the Russian Revolution*. Geifman refers to Azef as "a twentieth-century Judas" and claims that, "for the entire century his name has remained in the Russian tradition as a common noun and a synonym for shameless duplicity, unscrupulous perfidy, and criminal provocation. It entered the lexicon of every educated Russian as a symbol for falseness, corruption, and readiness to betray friends and enemies alike for personal profit" (1–2). According to Malikova, the extent to which *Thursday* resonates with the perceived threat of "Azefism" has contributed to its position as the favorite among Chesterton's works for Russian readers, having been brought into Russian by at least four translators.

conviction that the collective social life was the thing to theatricalise, that it was necessary to reflect the philosophy of the nature and value of collective service together with the ideas of the joys and heights to which it leads." He goes on to explain that Tairov was after Chesterton's "riotous, care-free, joyous spirit of implied co-operation, which made the city a sort of temple of the communal 'soul' instead of the abyss of human beings which it became under the deadly touch of the industrial revolution"; nonetheless, this spirit doesn't yield itself up easily:

> In Mr. Gilbert Chesterton's book [Tairov] seemed to find an assertion of collective philosophy which he expounded in his house journal '7 Days,' with a number of supporting quotations. That interpretation is *not for those who are of the opinion* that Mr. Chesterton is interested in restoring the ideology of the Middle Age form of Society, and thinks in terms of the sociology of that Age of democratic socialism, of groups and guilds and small communities and isolated property. Perhaps there is *unsuspected by Mr. Chesterton* a collectivism in the Middle Age guild system that is not understood by many people. (228; my emphasis)

His interpretation pushes both against the contemporary (Russian) reception of Chesterton and against Chesterton's own understanding of his work. This approach to the literary resonates with the innovation and creativity Attridge calls for in *Singularity*. While it may not serve the sort of direct political aims accomplished by more committed readings, Tairov's production reactivates the work by betraying it, by acknowledging the necessity of betrayal at the heart of any ethical approach to the work. In Attridge's words, such a reading is both responsive and responsible to the text:

> Literature—when it is responded to as literature—is not a political instrument, yet it is deeply implicated in the political. In its blocking of both the conventionally aesthetic and the instrumental, the literary work fails to answer to our habitual needs in processing language; it thus estranges itself, presents itself as simultaneously familiar and other, puts us under a certain obligation (to act scrupulously, to suspend as far as we can our usual assumptions

and practices, to translate the work into our terms while remaining aware of the necessary betrayal that this involves). To respond fully to a literary work is to be responsively and responsibly aware of that otherness, and of the demands it makes upon us. (120)

Tairov presents his audience with just this sort of translation. He employs "a set of detective-fiction characters—anarchists, criminals, detectives, secret agents—characters usually associated with the drama of an individualistic form of war on society" (Carter 229), but he presents them in such a way as to reveal the possibility, and preferability of alliance, cooperation, and a collective sense of political subjectivity.

In my view, this perspective reactivates an element of the work that is almost universally missed in the readings I have come across: namely, the existentialist despair the policemen face as the foundations of their solitude are shaken, and the decisive re-articulation that follows as those who were former enemies forge a contingent unity in order to pursue Sunday. It is a reading that is only reached when Tairov betrays both his own cultural limitations—drawing from the literature of a bourgeois west—and certain aspects of Chesterton's authorial intention. Though previously hidden from view, this alternate meaning, this textual "other" of *The Man Who Was Thursday*, is betrayed as the work's undecidability is accentuated. It is a reading the book's ambiguity facilitates, and we should hesitate before attempting to render it fully known by a mistaken valuation of literal fidelity.

CHAPTER 3

Faulkner's Taste for the Secret

I have a taste for the secret, it clearly has to do with not-belonging; I have an impulse of fear or terror in the face of a political space, for example, a public space that makes no room for the secret. For me, the demand that everything be paraded in the public square and that there be no internal forum is a glaring sign of the totalitarianization of democracy. I can rephrase this in terms of political ethics: if a right to the secret is not maintained, we are in a totalitarian space. Belonging—the fact of avowing one's belonging, of putting in common— be it family, nation, tongue—spells the loss of the secret.
— *Jacques Derrida* A Taste for the Secret *(59)*

Our very architecture itself has warned us. Time was when you could see neither from inside nor from outside through the walls of our houses. Time is when you can see from inside out though still not from outside in through the walls. Time will be when you can do both. Then privacy will indeed be gone; he who is individual enough to want it even to change his shirt or bathe in, will be cursed by one universal American voice as subversive to the American way of life and the American flag.
— *William Faulkner "On Privacy" (72–73)*

Faulkner's *tour de force*, *As I Lay Dying*, might best be described by the Spanish idiom, "un secreto a voces." It is an open secret, or perhaps more properly, a *voiced* secret. Everything is said, but at the same time meaning is somehow withheld. Like other open secrets, the truth might be generally acknowledged, but it can never be verified, never fixed or nailed down. The structure of *As I Lay Dying* seems to follow an axiom given by Jacques Derrida: "Speaking in order not to say anything is always the best technique for keeping a secret" (*Gift of Death* 60). In doing so, it remains beyond the grasp of the critical reader who would fix its signification. It refuses to belong and thus inextricably involves the reader in the creation of contingent meaning. These elements of Faulkner's writing that remain beyond the reader's grasp call to mind the notion of the secret which runs through Derrida's later work. Just as Derrida classifies a society without respect for the secret as one that is slipping toward totalitarianism, so too literary

119

reading that views comprehension and interpretive fidelity as its chief guiding principles fosters in the reader a depoliticizing sense of knowingness which, when redirected toward the socio-political sphere, can bar the increasingly necessary formation of transcultural collectivities. Instead of interpretive fidelity, then, an encounter with *As I Lay Dying* offers its reader an opportunity to discover the democratizing potential of the betrayed secret. Because it so jealously guards its privacy, the narrative calls for an active violation by the reader, forcing us into a relationship that necessarily exceeds the boundaries of our comfortable and confident comprehension.

We could say the same about the author himself—perhaps.[88] To whom does William Faulkner belong? Is he a Romantic, a modernist, a postmodernist? Whom does his work represent? What canon, if any, can lay claim to him? Taking into consideration the disparate groups of readers who have identified with his work—most notably in the past two decades—such questions yield a wider array of answers than one might expect. These readerly identifications often take an essentialist form, even when they are offered as mere provocation. Thus, while the most obvious context for classifying Faulkner's work continues to be the Deep South of the United States, the Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes is able to say to a US audience, "William Faulkner is both yours and ours, and as

---

[88] Faulkner's devotion to privacy has long been a topic of fascination, and consternation, for his readers. In addition to the inevitable anecdotes that fill his many biographies, several critics have recently contemplated the significance of Faulkner's secrecy for the reading and interpretation of his fiction. See especially Gray as well as Kartiganer's "Listening to the Voices." Zender goes one step further by linking the author's secrecy intimately with the political sphere in a chapter of *Faulkner and the Politics of Reading* devoted to the topic (32–52). He asserts, "the quest for information about Faulkner's private life is a reflex of what might be called an aesthetic of candor" (34), which he juxtaposes with "modernism's allegiance to an aesthetic of reticence and indirection." He goes on to argue that, while the affiliations are "slippery and uncertain," it could generally be said that "candor aligns itself with the democratizing tendencies of twentieth-century American culture, and reticence, with political conservatism and artistic elitism" (36). Using an inversion of Zender's slippery binary as a reference point, then, in this chapter I will posit the democratizing potential of Faulknerian reticence, thereby pushing back against scholarship on modernism that would render its affinity for the undecidable somehow (a)politically irresponsible.

such, essential to us" (119); the Peruvian Mario Vargas Llosa echoes this sentiment by claiming, "Escribía en inglés, pero era uno de los nuestros [He wrote in English, but he was one of us]" (302);[89] similarly, for a reader in Iraq interviewed for NPR in 2004, "it seemed as if Faulkner himself '*was* an Iraqi'" (Weisenburger 739). And the author's protean identity isn't limited to this sort of geographical identification. While Faulkner has often been viewed side-by-side with Hemingway as an epitome of white heterosexual masculinity, Frann Michel is led to title her study, "William Faulkner as a Lesbian Author"; and, in his recent study of whiteness in southern fiction, John N. Duvall declares, "I would, therefore, like to make a claim that … America's first black Nobel Laureate wasn't Toni Morrison—it was William Faulkner" (x).[90]

Brian Andrew McNeil contemplates this process of essentialization in which, even though "Faulkner is always 'about' a particular landscape—what he has called Yoknapatawpha County, and what critics always read figuratively as the South that Faulkner lived," the texts have a specular quality whereby they seem to merely reflect the face of the reader: "At some level, we can read Faulkner however we like; he allows us to

---

[89] See Cohn for a summary of the literary critical trend which has articulated Faulkner's fiction with that of Latin American and Caribbean writers. A sampling of such work can be found in Smith and Cohn's 2004 anthology, *Look Away!: The U.S. South in New World Studies*. See especially the essays in "Part Three: Faulkner and Latin America."

[90] Duvall's argument that Faulkner understood "his artistic identity as in some sense inescapably black" (18) provides one of the most provocative examples of the productive potential of Faulknerian secrecy. It is the fact that "Faulkner's fictional world portrays a dizzying variety of masking (whites in blackface, blacks in blackface, whites in whiteface, and blacks in whiteface)" (17) that ultimately allows Duvall to argue, "Faulkner's whiteface minstrelsy uncouples blackness and the Negro, meaning that cultural blackness may reattach itself to racial whiteness." While Duvall holds back from labeling the enigmatic Mississippian "a traitor to whiteness" (probably due to the pejorative connotations of the word), the metaphor is suggestive as this writer who "was clearly of two minds" (60) opens a breach in the rigidity of Southern racial essentialism. See Abernathy for a more thorough-going discussion of race and betrayal in Faulkner and other "Southern writers and their protagonists," who "repeatedly lay claim to a racial innocence which they do not possess, denying their own participation in the oppression of minority communities in America." Abernathy's argument demonstrates the negative impact of a misplaced zeal for racial fidelity: "Thus it is that Americans continue to express a desire for a multicultural national identity even as we continue to segregate ourselves by racial categories that have less meaning every day" (15).

do this. We can ascribe to him and locate him in a certain discourse, thereby mapping out his ideological position. But such mapping might be simply the mapping of our own ideological positions" (220–21). This self-reflective mapping on the part of the reader could hardly be called an unequivocally faithful reading of the work; in fact, McNeil speaks here to the impossibility of maintaining such consistency, or fidelity. He calls to mind the deconstructive terminology of a "necessary impossibility," in that literary works such as *As I Lay Dying* fairly cry out for interpretation even as they demonstrate the incompleteness of each critical effort. As McNeill puts it, Faulkner "allows us" such unfaithful readings, such betrayals.

In this chapter, I will evaluate the effects of this fiction's secrecy as it produces in the critical reader first an awareness of rootless contingency and then an impetus toward creative, constitutive betrayal. In his most undecidable texts—namely, those published before World War 2—Faulkner refuses to "belong," refuses to settle comfortably within a perspective and narrate from it. In this way, the Mississippian fits nicely within the traditional conceptualization of modernist writers who resist the tenets of realism and naturalism in order to present fragmentary and troubled characters. In order to propose the potential value of such non-belonging, I will consider the role of secrecy, or emptiness, in the formation of the political subject, especially as it is articulated in current discourse on democracy and democratization, and even more specifically as it relates to the totalitarian threat at the heart of democracy to which Derrida alludes in the epigraph. Reading Faulkner's early work and attempting to make sense of it can model in the reader the sort of dearticulation and careful rearticulation necessary for the ethical formation of transcultural political subjects. Though there is risk involved, since any

process of destabilization could possibly be followed by a less democratic stability, any attempt to eliminate this level of risk mirrors a deprecation of "the people" that is self-defeating in the struggle for democratization. I would argue that the stubborn reticence of *As I Lay Dying*, its determination to "keep the secret" and resist any attempt at total comprehension, calls for a particular type of readerly attention that would allow for this critical level of risk as it guards against the worst type of totalitarian closure. Reading such works can prepare the way for what Derrida refers to as "*démocratie à venir*," or democracy-to-come, in the sense that "one does not make the other come, one lets it come by preparing for its coming" (*Psyche* 45). In effect, Derrida's elevation of preparation over "making the other come" is critical for my reading of Faulkner's ethical and political value.[91] Though it could be argued that his later work, in both public and fictional discourse,[92] could in fact "make come" a type of politics reflecting a narrow,

---

[91] This question of the value of reading Faulkner has had an interesting and politically charged history. Atkinson does a thorough job of tracing the history of Faulkner's reception, especially the shift in the critical community from considering Faulkner's supposed apolitical status a liability in the 1930s to seeing it as an asset in the New Critical 1940s and 50s (see especially 16–84). Although he effectively traces this shift in traditional critical perception, Atkinson says it isn't quite so simple: "To say categorically that advocates of social realism dismissed Faulkner, while cultural conservatives recognized the value of his art, is to tell only part of the story. While this interpretation has served various purposes—foremost, perhaps, a political agenda active in the late forties and fifties and thus beyond the scope of concern here—accuracy is certainly not among them" (62). This political agenda is firmly within the scope of Moglen's argument, as he discusses the influence of politics on the favorable reception of Faulkner, and other writers of "melancholic modernism," a particular strand of modernism Moglen sees as being "characterized by a deep social melancholia": "During the cold war, American literary critics singled out one strand of experimental writing for canonization and celebrated it as the most sophisticated response to the crises of the early twentieth century" (27; see especially his discussion of *Absalom, Absalom!* in this context 31–41). Kreyling locates this history in the context of the "invention" of southern literature (126–37), while Brinkmeyer discusses it against the background of an inter-war "democratic revival" in the US.

[92] Kartiganer appears to maintain a life-long separation between Faulkner's public and fictional discourse, contrasting the "one-dimensionality" of his public statements with the multiple voices of his fiction ("Listening" 31). However, there is a certain univocity to his later fiction which causes some critics to claim Faulkner "found his voice" after World War 2. See Brinkmeyer, *Fourth Ghost* 176–88 and Atkinson for examples of this bifurcation of Faulkner's career. See also Hale 21–23, although she locates the split earlier, in effect depicting the publication of *As I Lay Dying* as the watershed moment. Weisenburger is unhappy with the voice Faulkner eventually finds, deeming it "proto-fascist" in its presentation of a univocal South (740, 765). Abernathy refers specifically to the character most commonly given authority in the later work: "Gavin Stevens, Faulkner's portrait of the southern racial liberal, emerges as the one

nativist, patronizing, and sometimes deeply racist conservatism—see for example the often cited "Go slow now" argument in "A Letter to the Leaders in the Negro Race"—the more polyvocal early literature can instead make way for the democratizing work of preparation.[93] In the case of *As I Lay Dying*, this polyvocality manifests itself most forcefully when we as readers attempt to discern the work's ethical message, its characterization of responsibility.

THE COMPANY THE BUNDRENS KEEP

> *For our purposes, all stories, even those modern novels that use elaborate distancing tricks to subvert realism and prevent identification, can be viewed not as puzzles or even as games but as companions, friends—or if that seems to push the personal metaphor too far, as* gifts *from would-be friends.*
> – *Wayne Booth* The Company We Keep *(175)*

As I Lay Dying presents the efforts and mishaps of a poor farming family of rural

Mississippi as they try to honor the mother's request to be buried near the graves of her

---

character who speaks lucidly and at length about racial conflict in the South, yet his views, like Faulkner's, consistently reassert the southern hegemony of days past. Stevens is in large part a mouthpiece for Faulkner's own views on the burgeoning civil rights movement and the resistance the movement encountered among white southerners" (69). For a discussion of common periodizations of Faulkner's work, see Dimitri, who claims the post-WW2 fiction is characterized "by the apparent need to make direct statements on social and political issues, and by the explicit explication of moral alternatives" (11). For my purposes, I would insist on maintaining this difference between the later, more univocal fiction and the earlier novels, which tend to foreground their undecidability.

[93] The polyvocality, or as Bakhtin puts it, polyphony, of Faulkner's modernist work is a key connection between them and the work of the fantastic discussed in the previous chapter. While one might be tempted to say that the polyphony of Chesterton's *Thursday* is merely achieved through performance and deceit and Faulkner's multiple voices are "really" separate, such a distinction would return us to the rigid, finalized concept of identity I am pushing against in this dissertation. I am especially intrigued by Bakhtin's description of the polyphonic text as a space where "all people and all things must know one another and know about one another, must enter into contact, come together face to face and *begin to talk* with one another" (177). This imperative for the "face to face" of interpersonal dialog, which Bakhtin sees pictured in the polyphonic novel, certainly recalls the discussion of Levinas in the introduction. I would only add that the felt necessity that "all people … must know one another" is coupled in the Bakhtin's polyphonic text with the incurable "unfinalizability" of identity (102). The "necessary but impossible" quality of community and communication resulting from this conjunction is easily recognized as one of the defining characteristics of Faulkner's fiction.

ancestors forty miles away in the town of Jefferson. Her death initiates the novel's action,

yet her presence haunts the story until its final page. While the Bundrens have evoked a

wide array of emotions from readers since its publication—from horror to laughter, from

condescending pity to outright disgust—I would suggest there are times when the

characters' passionate and troubled cooperation on behalf of the maternal absent presence

at the heart of the story calls for a sense of respectful admiration rather than the confident

scorn often heaped on the family, by those observing their trials from both within and

without the text. One such moment arises in a brief section narrated by Darl in which the

family sets the oldest brother Cash's broken leg in cement. The scene takes place on the

road between Mottson and Jefferson right before Darl sets fire to a neighbor's barn.

Consider the following exchange:

> We loosen the splints and pour cement over his leg slow.
> "Watch out for it," Cash says. "Dont get none on it if you can help."
> "Yes," I say. Dewey Dell tears a piece of paper from the package and wipes the cement from the top of it as it drips from Cash's leg.
> "How does that feel?"
> "It feels fine," he says. "It's cold. It feels fine."
> "If it'll just help you," pa says. "I asks your forgiveness. I never foreseen it no more than you."
> "It feels fine," Cash says. (208)

Certainly, this is a fairly unassuming portion of dialogue; nevertheless, it presents at least

a picture of selfless cooperation, whether or not readers agree with the rationale

governing the individuals' actions. When Dewey Dell tears a piece from the paper

covering her carefully guarded secret in order to clean the coffin (the unnamed "it" Cash

urges them to protect), she is sacrificing her self-interest in order to fulfill the demand of

another. Darl's tender deference to his older brother is highlighted throughout this

exchange as he carefully mixes the cement to Cash's specifications—"Does that look about right?... Is this too much?"—and tries to make him as comfortable as possible during the operation. Anse, the almost unbelievably selfish patriarch, is heard in this scene making statements of care such as, "It'll be easier on you … It'll keep it from rubbing together" (207) and "If it'll just help you," as he begs forgiveness for bringing on the catastrophe that has resulted in the broken limb. Faulkner is even careful to involve the youngest Bundren in this familial scene: Vardaman responds to Cash's request for sand by backtracking to the riverbank and making his own contribution to the doomed treatment. And then the section closes with what is one of the novel's most unfathomable turns of event: "Then we all turn on the wagon and watch him. He is coming up the road behind us, wooden-backed, wooden-faced, moving only from his hips down. He comes up without a word, with his pale rigid eyes in his high sullen face, and gets into the wagon" (209). This is the final member of the Bundren clan, Jewel, who has sacrificed the one thing in the world that is of value to him, his hard-earned spotted horse, so the family mission can be seen through to completion. Instead of being "half way to Texas by now," as one of the reasonable neighbors assumes (193), he rejoins the company, even as he is met by one more request from the infinitely demanding Anse: "'Here's a hill,' pa says. 'I reckon you'll have to get out and walk'" (209).

When we as readers attempt to discover the motivation behind these various decisions, indeed behind all the strange, comic, grotesque actions of this enigmatic family, we enter into the ethical sphere. When presented with the *is* of the text—the thoughts, actions, and reactions of the characters, the cultural milieu that surrounds them—our minds inevitably drift toward the *ought* of ethical judgment. Ought they to

have behaved differently? To answer such a seemingly innocent question, even concerning the most insignificant action, the reader must bring to bear some sort of ethical schema, however thoroughly reasoned it might be. To the question, "Should Anse have used every resource at his disposal to immediately have Cash's broken leg treated by a doctor?" the reader might marshal the language of parental responsibility to answer with an emphatic affirmative. Or one might be led to heed Cash's utilitarian rationale that treating the leg would only delay fulfillment of the family's mission: "'I can last it,' Cash says. 'We'll lose time stopping.'… 'I could last it,' Cash says. 'It aint but one more day. It dont bother to speak of'" (207), a rationale he'll repeat later to Peabody, the infuriated doctor. In other words, the demand of the rapidly decaying corpse and its effect on the other characters trumps the demand issued by Cash's pain.

The response only becomes more complicated if, like the neighbor Gillespie, we add an epistemological layer to our ethical judgment. When they are later forced to break the cement off the now febrile Cash's leg, he reacts in disbelief: "'It'll take the hide, too,' Mr Gillespie said. 'Why in the tarnation you put it on there. Didn't none of you think to grease his leg first?'" Like many observing faces in the story, Gillespie chastises the family for ignorance, though the reader is no doubt convinced by a superior knowledge that Gillespie's "solution" of greasing the leg would not have been much help. The irate neighbor even includes the victim in his castigation: "'Didn't none of you have more sense than that?' Mr Gillespie said. 'I'd a thought he would, anyway'" (224). The moment we say, in agreement with such judgmental evaluations, "They *should* have known better," we bring to bear an ethical system that articulates reason and cognitive ability with ethical responsibility, placing a moral premium on knowledge.

Because of the book's polyvocal structure, Faulkner never allows his reader to rest easily with a confident ethical judgment of the Bundrens. Instead, he offers several perspectives which do exude such confidence and, because of the obvious inadequacy of those perspectives, causes the reader to doubt such certainty. I would argue that, in his unwillingness to grant credence to univocal ethical evaluation, Faulkner underlines the importance of the undecidable in any truly ethical relation to the other. The story of the Bundrens' journey demonstrates the crucial role of what Derrida calls *secrecy* in the formation of any collectivity. After first considering some of the neighbors' reactions to the macabre progress toward Jefferson, I will look at the decisions made by Anse—a character Cleanth Brooks refers to as "one of Faulkner's most accomplished villains" (154)—in light of a cornerstone of postmodern ethics[94]: the testing of Abraham on Mount Moriah. Like Abraham, Anse defies societal norms and sacrifices his progeny in order to fulfill the demand of one who is, to echo Derrida's often repeated "*tout autre est tout autre*," entirely other. If, as I would suggest, *As I Lay Dying* presents a "morbid success" in answer to the "splendid failure" portrayed in *The Sound and the Fury*, then it is critical that we determine the means by which the Bundren family is able to achieve their

---

[94] I use "postmodern ethics," for lack of a better term, to refer to that strain of ethical philosophy calling for an "unconditional welcome of the other" that has descended from Levinas and from Derrida's rereading of him. Though the two thinkers differ in important details, they have both spoken of a responsibility to the other that must be unconditional and infinite. See Derrida's *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* for his own perception after Levinas's death of the correspondences and divergences in the two philosophies. The volume contains both the title eulogy, which Derrida gave at Levinas's funeral, and a longer work translated as "A Word of Welcome," which comprises his contribution one year later to a conference in honor of the deceased. Whereas Derrida uses the former to offer unqualified praise to his departed colleague—"refraining from commentaries and questions, I would simply like to give thanks to someone whose thought, friendship, trust, and 'goodness' … will have been for me, as for so many others, a living source" (5)—his treatment in the latter is more nuanced, revealing important elements of disagreement. See also Grebowicz, who argues for the importance of maintaining the distance between Derrida's deconstruction and Levinasian ethics. For the purposes of this chapter, I will be relying primarily on the Derridean contribution to this field though Levinas is certainly working in the margins.

communal goal and still remain intact.[95] Ultimately, Faulkner presents his reader with a model of contingent articulation. The general arc of success represented in the story, held in suspension with the Bundrens' many obvious failures, reveals the importance of the secret in any hegemonic articulation that still does justice to the other, or better, to the multiplicity of others.

As is the case with many previous readings of *As I Lay Dying*, inquiry into the ethical value of the novel's action can lead the reader to echo the negative perspectives of the observing figures within the text, attempting to discern what consistently causes the Bundrens to make such poor decisions. The interspersed commentary by neighbors serves as a sort of Greek chorus as they model the receptive activity of the reader who witnesses the story's action. Faulkner often employs such a tactic, though to various ends.[96] One such case of choric ethical judgment comes as the pharmacist Moseley recounts the marshal's confrontation with the family on the streets of Mottson, where they wait in their wagon with the increasingly foul corpse as Darl bargains for cement. The marshal explodes with what seems to the narrating voice, and likely to most readers, to be plain commonsense offered in the face of insanity: "'Why, you'll kill him,' the marshal said. 'You'll cause him to lose his leg. You take him on to a doctor, and you get this thing

---

[95] Bleikasten took the title for his study, *The Most Splendid Failure: Faulkner's* The Sound and the Fury, from Faulkner's response to an interviewer who asked which of his books was the best. It is an apt description of the frustration portrayed in the earlier text. *As I Lay Dying*, on the other hand, presents a picture of spatial and temporal progress, a goal (in fact, several goals) fulfilled, and a family emerging whole on the other side of a series of trials. The type of failure in the foreground of *SF* could perhaps be said to reside solely in the characters of Darl and Addie. I will return in my conclusion to the question of how the Bundren family could be considered "intact" with the mother replaced and one brother purged from their number.

[96] One example can be found in the first-person plural narration of "A Rose for Emily," where the story is told from the collective perspective of the townspeople. The reader is constantly made aware that the epistemological confidence with which the story is related is merely presenting the questionable knowledge of small town gossip: "We did not say she was crazy then. We believed she had to do that. We remembered …" (437).

buried soon as you can. Dont you know you're liable to jail for endangering the public health?'" (204). Peabody, the doctor who eventually faces the task of removing the embedded cement from Cash's bleeding leg, echoes this outrage as he explains to the seemingly reasonable young man, "I reckon a man in a tight might let Bill Varner patch him up like a damn mule, but I be damned if the man that'd let Anse Bundren treat him with raw cement aint got more spare legs than I have" (239). Like Gillespie before him, Peabody sees irresponsibility in the evident medical ignorance of the Bundrens.

The novel is veritably saturated with this sort of ethical judgment. More than any other narrative by Faulkner, this is definitively a tale of responsibility. In fact, in this particular brief speech, running only a page and a half long, Peabody manages to indict not only Anse—for the cement ordeal, for the disgraceful management of Darl's committal to the Jackson asylum, for burying his wife with a borrowed shovel—and Cash, but also the seemingly helpful and accommodating neighbor Armstid: "What in hell did Armstid mean by even letting them put you on that wagon again?" (239). His caustic remarks evoke the language of vulgar utilitarian ethics, aiming for "the greatest good for the greatest number": "why didn't Anse carry you to the nearest sawmill and stick your leg in the saw? That would have cured it. Then you all could have stuck his head into the saw and cured a whole family" (240). The treatment of Cash's leg, which, as I indicated earlier, is portrayed with a tender generosity, is once again characterized simply as an ethically reprehensible action perpetrated by the monstrous Anse and his various accomplices.

Of course, judgment is not reserved solely for this failed medical treatment. Everyone who observes the rather unorthodox family feels led to make this type of

ethical commentary. Early in the story, the pious Cora Tull bad-mouths Anse for "driving [Darl] from his mother's death bed" (21) and Jewel for neglecting his mother in her time of need:

> A Bundren through and through, loving nobody, caring for nothing except how to get something with the least amount of work…. But nothing would do but Anse and Jewel must make that three dollars. Nobody that knows Anse could have expected different, but to think of that boy, that Jewel, selling all those years of self-denial and down-right partiality … for three dollars, denying his dying mother the goodbye kiss. (22)

And her judgment is not limited to the male Bundrens. We are privy to her critical judgment of Dewey Dell's care and demeanor as she stands guard at her mother's deathbed: "You can see that girl's washing and ironing in the pillow-slip, if ironed it ever was" (8), and later, "that near-naked girl always standing over Addie with a fan so that every time a body tried to talk to her and cheer her up, would answer for her right quick, like she was trying to keep anybody from coming near her at all" (24). And even though Cora's advice to Addie is always laced with biblical qualifications such as, "It is the Lord's part to judge," and "it is not us that can judge our sins or know what is sin in the Lord's eyes" (167), she is somehow able to assert with confidence, "the only sin she ever committed was being partial to Jewel that never loved her and was its own punishment, in preference to Darl that was touched by God Himself and considered queer by us mortals and that did love her" (167–68). Here Cora assumes not only the ability to rightly judge the love of two other characters but also the insight necessary to detect the hand of "God Himself."

Perhaps more than any other character, Cora impresses the reader with the confidence she displays in her judgments. Her classificatory statements, such as "A

Bundren through and through"—disproved when we learn later that Jewel is in fact biologically unrelated to Anse— and "a woman's place is with her husband and children, alive or dead" (23), exhibit an aggressive epistemology which conforms reality to her own often theologically-shaped preconceptions. Of course, Faulkner doesn't allow her judgments to stand, and, again to a greater extent than any other character, he reveals the fallibility of her perception by juxtaposing her critiques with contradictory interior monologues and information related by the objects of her gaze. Thus her description of what she twice refers to as "the sweetest thing I ever saw" (21, 24), namely, Darl looking in on Addie before leaving the house, is bookended by two sections that reveal how inaccurate her suppositions truly are. Prior to Cora's comprehensive depiction of the reprobate Bundren family which leaves Darl positioned as the moral center, "the only one of them that had his mother's nature, had any natural affection" (21), we are given a section narrated by an apparently callous Darl who, even though he is more certain than the rest that Addie will die before they return, urges Anse to send them to town for the three dollars: "You'd better make up your mind soon, so we can get there and get a load on before dark" (17). And immediately following the sentimental caption Cora gives to the scene—"He just stood and looked at his dying mother, his heart too full for words" (25)—Dewey Dell's narration describes an unspoken conversation between her and Darl which undermines this sentimentality:

> He stands in the door, looking at her.
> "What you want, Darl?" I say.
> "She is going to die," he says. And old turkey-buzzard Tull coming to watch her die but I can fool them.
> "When is she going to die?" I say.
> "Before we get back," he says.
> "Then why are you taking Jewel?" I say.
> "I want him to help me load," he says. (27–28)

While we might disregard the "truth" of this conversation, which seems to take place on a telepathic level between the two siblings, Faulkner's narrative doesn't encourage us to.[97] These cold, calculating sentiments are given to us as the unmediated thoughts of this character whom Cora imagines being choked up with emotion. Thus we are continually alerted to her radical incapability of accurately judging the Bundrens, an ineptitude most fully manifested in her relationship with Addie.

Faulkner laces Cora's puritanical advice in the book's thirty-ninth section with enigmatic responses by Addie which will be fleshed out in the subsequent monologue devoted to the deceased. Cora's hackneyed clichés are unraveled by the secrets spoken posthumously by Addie herself. At the beginning of the section, Cora patiently explains the significance of childbirth to her rebellious listener: "God gave you children to comfort your hard human lot and for a token of His own suffering and love, for in love you conceived and bore them" (166). This leads in Addie's own section to her well-

---

[97] Christopher T. White revives the topic of the "magnetic bonds [that] seem to proliferate among the Bundrens" (93) in his recent article on the "uncanny zoology" of *As I Lay Dying*. Drawing on an earlier study by Rosemary Franklin on the metaphorical value of animal magnetism in the novel, White claims, "Far from extraordinary, wordless communication is often the norm." In addition to the interchanges between Darl and Dewey Dell, he lists communications between Addie and Cash, as well as wordless conversations between both Jewel and Vardaman and Jewel's horse (93–94). Within this "paranormal" context, according to White, "Darl is a special case… His uncanny knowledge of others' minds, his ability to predict future events, like the timing of his mother's death, and his awareness of events occurring miles away, suggest the occult" (94). On Faulkner's view of the more paranormal aspects of Darl's character, we have the following statement: "It may not be so, but it's nice to think that there is some compensation for madness. That maybe the madman does see more than the sane man. That the world is more moving to him. That he is more perceptive. He has something of clairvoyance, maybe, a capacity for telepathy. Anyway, nobody can dispute it" (*Faulkner in the University* 113). Taking into account Faulkner's views on privacy and individual secrecy, it should come as no surprise that the penetrating, all-knowing gaze is aligned with institutionally mandated insanity. While Faulkner may cast this "knowingness" as a possible compensation, the novel's action performs its necessary exclusion from the social sphere when Darl is committed at journey's end. As I will suggest in this chapter's conclusion, Darl's sensibility, and indeed the uncanny bonds among all the Bundrens, could be made to signify the sort of familial belonging grounded in the natural which Derrida deems anathema to the ethical approach to the other. The fact that Darl's "knowing" is limited to blood relatives, that there exists a stronger potential for community among those of the same blood, is one of the chief difficulties Derrida has with what he calls "fraternization," as opposed to friendship, or "*aimance*," in *The Politics of Friendship*.

known meditation on the meaning of words: "when I knew that I had Cash, I knew that living was terrible and that this was the answer to it. That was when I learned that words are no good" (171); to claim she conceived her children in love is obviously an aggressive oversimplification for someone who claims, "I knew that that word [love] was like the others: just a shape to fill a lack" (172). Likewise, Cora's assertion to Addie, "you have been a faithful wife," along with her characterization of Whitfield as "a godly man if ever one breathed God's breath" (167), will also be overturned by the next two monologues in which we learn of Addie and Whitfield's affair. Of all the observing figures in the chorus Faulkner assembles, Cora reveals most strikingly the extent to which confident comprehension limits actual interpersonal relation. Her attitude toward the other has no respect for the secret.[98]

It might be tempting to merely castigate Cora for her relatively obtuse and unaccommodating moralizing on the Bundrens' plight and thus leave an opening for an objective eye that will more successfully do justice to these characters' actions. But before making such a leap, we should pause to consider the necessary incompleteness of *any* judgment. In fact, I would argue this is precisely what Faulkner urges on his reader.

---

[98] In her brief synopsis of the novel in *The Cambridge Introduction to William Faulkner*, Towner also draws her reader's attention to Cora's questionable reliability. Interestingly for our purposes, she attributes Cora's inaccurate descriptions to deception, describing the reading process as a search for truth: "As readers, we sift through the voices to find out whom to trust, which version of narrative to believe. Obviously, we will not believe *someone who lies to us*, as neighbor Cora Tull does when she claims that Darl asked his father and brother not to leave Addie's sickbed in order to sell a load of lumber" (24; my emphasis). As it is clear from the text that this represents Cora's actual belief (based most likely on an exaggeration by her husband: "He said Darl almost begged them …" [22]), Towner's slippage into the discourse of truth and lying is worth noting. It calls to mind Derrida's provocative essay on Henri Thomas's *Le Parjure*, in which he is careful to define perjury outside of the sphere of falsity: "one must always specify *veracity* rather than *truth* [vérité]: lying or perjury does not involve saying what is false or untrue but saying something other than what one thinks; it is not making a mistake or an error, but misleading the other deliberately" (206). Towner's characterization of Cora's judgment as "a lie" therefore makes room for a perspective that would tell the absolute truth—perhaps that of Darl: "Darl, for example, seems like the sensitive member of the family, his philosophical and reflective nature appeals to likeminded readers" (25). Such a "true" perspective, one which leaves no room for the secret, is a possibility that both *As I Lay Dying* and Derrida's essay repeatedly call into question.

Because of the greater access readers have to the interiority of these characters—and to the interiority of many similarly created characters of literary modernism—they are led to hesitate before any unequivocal statement which would declare the true intention, motivation, or significance behind an action taken within the literary space. As Philip Weinstein puts it in his recent study, *Unknowing: The Work of Modernist Fiction*, writers such as Faulkner, Kafka, and Proust purposefully challenge and undermine their readers' desire to know, a desire hyperbolized in Cora Tull's prying inquisitiveness but one nonetheless present in the most conscientious of readers. Weinstein claims that, whereas "coming to know, gradually refining one's identity within orientational space and linear time, is the bread and butter of Western fiction," it is precisely this epistemological confidence that modernism brings into question: "Modernist 'unknowing' operates, precisely, as an attack on the confidence in Western norms for securing identity and funding the career of the liberal subject" (3). These works effectively tell the reader, "Awaken … from the sleep of knowing into the strangeness of unknowing" (7). This embrace of strangeness, this willingness to admit to the unknowability of the other, is a crucial interpretive strategy—whether I am encountering the other of the text or the other with whom I desire to cooperate in the ethico-political sphere.

This effect Weinstein attributes to modernist fiction makes it more open to what Paul B. Armstrong refers to as the "political work done by literature" (ix) than has generally been assumed in retrospective critical definitions of the period. Such political work is often thought to be accomplished best by more realistic texts, a critical stance which ultimately puts its faith in the emancipatory powers of increased knowledge: "If the reader only knew," this line of thinking suggests, "he would act differently, more

ethically, more humanely." However, if, as I would argue, what is truly required is a new conceptualization of the formation of collectivities, one which necessitates the articulation of subjects across party lines and across the borders erected by coherent identity, then the destabilization accomplished by the undecidability of *As I Lay Dying* can clear the way for just such a contingent affiliation. Echoing Kafka's often quoted definition of the effective literary work,[99] Weinstein eloquently describes our present need for strange literature: "If art would reach the frozen sea within its reader, it must be at first unfamiliar. It must rupture realism's standard adventure of consciousness converting its obstacles into dimensions of the same. For the sake of a deeper acknowledging, it must interrupt our apparent knowing" (256-57). Faulkner holds this "apparent knowing" up to the light in the myriad judgments rendered against his unlucky protagonists.

The gaze Faulkner ultimately seems to favor in his early writing is one that resists the urge to comprehend, one willing to let go. As Weinstein goes on to state, "If we would know, we must endure—spend some time in—the darkness of unknowing, must relinquish our canniness in order actually to see ourselves in the field of space and time and others, in 'infared.' Objects encountered in such acts of seeing escape our grasp" (257).[100] Thus he imagines a reading process less grounded in an ethics of

---

[99] In a letter to Oskar Pollak in 1904, Kafka gave one of his first poetological declarations: "I think we ought to read only the kind of books that wound and stab us…. We need the books that affect us like a disaster, that grieve us deeply, like the death of someone we loved more than ourselves, like being banished into forests far from everyone, like a suicide. A book must be the axe for the frozen sea inside us. That is my belief" (*Letters* 16).

[100] As is often the case in *Unknowing*, Weinstein's language is reminiscent of that of Derrida, who also puts a premium on the ungraspable: "The paradox cannot be grasped in time and through mediation, that is to say in language and through reason…. It belongs to an atemporal temporality, to a duration that cannot be grasped: something one can neither stabilize, establish, *grasp* [*prendre*], *apprehend*, or *comprehend*. Understanding, common sense, and reason cannot seize, conceive, understand [*begreifen*], or mediate it;

understanding—an ethics of reading such as the one outlined in Wayne Booth's *The Company We Keep*[101]—and more along the lines of Levinasian ethics, where ethical relation is erected on the impossibility of true epistemological comprehension. In response to an interviewer's question concerning the validity of scientific knowledge, Levinas counters by invoking the ethical: "The achievement of knowledge consists of grasping the object. Its strangeness is then conquered. Its newness, the opening up of its otherness, is reduced to the 'same,' to what has already been seen, already known. In the ethical relation, the other man remains other to me. Despite our exchanges, he remains that which I—closed up in myself—am not" ("In the Name" 191). In order to do justice to *As I Lay Dying*, we should read in a way that allows the characters the liberty their creator has given them rather than attempting to fix their identities using more easily managed interpretive tools, such as the search for culpability which will separate hero from villain, friend from fiend. Faulkner encourages us in this direction, since, as Charles A. Peek points out, he "seems to have wide sympathies, a deep understanding, even affection for his characters" to the extent that, during interviews, "he refused to label as villains some of the characters who seem villainous to many" (116). In a sense, we

---

neither can they negate or deny it, implicate it in the labor of the negative, make it work" (*Gift of Death* 66).

[101] The extent to which Booth's admirable and influential discussion of the ethics of reading narrative relies on the possibility of grasping, of understanding the literary object, comes out in the passage where he defines his "reluctant" neologism, "coduction" (70–77). Here he describes the role which past experience plays in being able to "judge," "weigh," or "appraise" the narrative correctly. In Booth's words, "Coduction will be what we do whenever we say to the world (or prepare ourselves to say): 'Of the works of this general kind that I have experienced, *comparing my experience with other more or less qualified observers*, this one seems to me among the better (or weaker) ones, or the best (or worst)" (72). Incidentally, his *coduction* resonates well with its etymological neighbor, *traduction*, which I employ in the introduction. Where one *traduces* the text by committing an inevitably flawed translation from one sphere to another, one *coduces* it by working "together" to draw the meaning into a presumably shared sphere of understanding. This raises the perennial question, who is the "we" in Booth's estimation? What happens when we choose to say "we"?

should view with skepticism the firm grasp of the sure reading; the creative reading will diligently work to loosen the grip, to betray such fixity.

Take the character of Anse Bundren for example, whom Cleanth Brooks calls "one of Faulkner's most accomplished villains." One might assume the father of the Bundren family would be the easiest to "know," and therefore the easiest to judge. When he describes the members of the Bundren family in his seminal study of the novel, André Bleikasten dispenses with Anse after one lengthy paragraph. Defining him as "[a] weak husband and an irresponsible father," Bleikasten agrees with Brooks's assessment of Anse as one of "Faulkner's monsters," calling him an "idle, wily, speechifying Tartuffe in Job's clothing" (84–85).[102] It would take me too far afield to discuss here the extent to which Bleikasten's facility in identifying Anse's "faults and vices" rests on his confidence in shared cultural mores typified by a reverence toward the protestant work ethic. (Does the twenty-first century American reader really recoil from Anse's aversion to sweat with as much disdain as Bleikasten displays?) However, I would like to focus for a moment on this characterization of Anse as "a weak husband." It remains unclear where exactly Bleikasten detects this weakness. A few sentences later, he will claim, "[h]is inertia is no weakness; it is a force which he manipulates cleverly to achieve his own ends and … once he's started, there's no stopping him" (84). A similar force would likely be taken to be socially responsible in Anse's role as a husband. After all, what is the

---

[102] We get a glimpse of the shifting nature of Faulkner criticism when we weigh this confident classificatory judgment against Bleikasten's own affirmation, some twenty-five years later, that "no one, in *Light in August* or any other Faulkner novel, is absolutely right. The language of Faulkner's fiction is never the exclusionary language of either/or. It keeps faith with what has been most valuable in the great tradition of the novel since Cervantes: the sense of relativity and complexity, the spirit of doubt and questioning, what [Milan] Kundera calls 'the wisdom of uncertainty'" ("Faulkner" 17). Such a sense of complexity should similarly cause readers to hesitate before describing any one of Faulkner's characters as "absolutely wrong."

difference between the inertia described here and the stubborn fidelity we might be just as likely to praise in a marital commitment?[103]

In order to trouble the ease with which we might be tempted to condemn this character, I would like to draw a tenuous line between this patriarch's response to Addie's demand to be buried with her family in Jefferson and Abraham's response to God when he commands him to sacrifice his son on Mount Moriah. Anse's actions through the course of the novel demonstrate the impossibility of responding to the infinite demand of the other; they could be said to performatively stage the Levinasian concept of infinite responsibility in the face of the other. Just as the story of Abraham's sacrifice (or at least his willingness to sacrifice) has led to numerous meditations on the relation between ethics and action, I would posit that a creative reading of Anse as a figure caught in the "madness of the decision" can demonstrate the power of Faulkner's polyvocal text to resist facile comprehension. In *Faulkner's Subject*, Weinstein differentiates between the writer's early and late work along the lines I've been discussing here. Chief among the qualities he praises in the early fiction is the opportunity for social rearticulation opened up by its undecidability:

> Unlike the later texts, however, the early Modernist ones foreground their own artifice, display the waywardness of their composition, the penetrability of their juxtaposed bodies, the

---

[103] J.M. Coetzee describes a similar sense of stubborn fidelity in William Faulkner's own biography: "There is nothing unusual in the story of Faulkner's struggles to balance his accounts…. All that is surprising is that the burdens he took on—the high-spending wife, the impecunious relatives, the disadvantageous studio contracts—should have been borne so tenaciously (though with much griping on the side), even at the cost of his art. Loyalty is as strong a theme in Faulkner's life as in his writing, but there is such a thing as mad loyalty, mad fidelity (the Confederate South was full of it)" (195–96). Though Anse might seem an unlikely avatar for the writer, Coetzee's comment hints at the polyvocality of a characteristic that might otherwise be uncritically discounted. See also Kartiganer, who links notions of promise-keeping in the novel with the author's mixed feelings toward his 1929 marriage to Estelle Oldham Franklin ("By It" 429–31).

> cacophony of their adulterate and unauthorized voices…. Insofar as "the clotting which is [us]" receives this charge and starts to unclot, we may glimpse the artifice of our own "clottedness," our unceasing and invisible alignment within the hegemonic practices of our culture. Such a (re)discovery of our constructedness—of the ways in which gender, race, and other cultural arrangements live unknowingly troped within us—is the first step toward our reconceiving (and potentially remapping) our roles within our worlds. (153)

Here Weinstein uses Darl's description of the sedimentation whereby the knowing observer becomes complacent to demonstrate the challenge addressed to the reader by the unknowable text. A reading of Anse which attempts to do justice to the complexity, indeed the undecidability, of his situation offers this same challenge.

FATHER ANSE ON MOUNT MORIAH

> *"I mislike undecision as much as ere a man."*
> *– Anse Bundren (*As I Lay Dying *17)*

The story of Abraham's faithful response to God as told in Genesis 22 is a familiar one.[104] Often referred to simply as the *akedah*—a Hebrew word meaning "binding"—it is the story of a father being asked by his God to sacrifice his son for no apparent reason beyond a grueling test of obedience. The scene is invoked by all three Abrahamic

---

[104] We know Abraham's plight was on Faulkner's mind at this point of his career from the 1926 manuscript comprising his first attempt to tell the Snopes story. He titled this brief account introducing Flem Snopes "Father Abraham" and, in a later version, "Abraham's Children." Meriwether claims we aren't given an explanation of the title until *Flags in the Dust*, and indeed Abraham isn't mentioned by name in the story. However, the connection is actually there on the first page of this early manuscript, as Faulkner invokes the *hineni* of Genesis 22: "The Lord said once to Moses: 'I am that I am' and Moses argued with the good God; but when he spoke to one of his chosen, that one replied immediately: 'Here am I, Uncle Flem.'… This is the man" (14). At this untried point of his literary career, Faulkner is clearly interested in the implications of Abrahamic fidelity.

religious traditions as a testament to the faith of this founding father.[105] It begins with a

call and response that propels the action to follow:

> After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him,
> "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Take your son,
> your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah,
> and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that
> I shall show you." (Gen. 22.1–2)

Abraham obeys the command, leading his son to the top of the appointed mountain,

binding him on top of the altar, and taking up the knife to commit the murder. At this

point, God intervenes, providing a ram as substitute for the sacrifice, and commends

Abraham for his willingness: "now I know that you fear God, since you have not

withheld your son, your only son, from me" (Gen. 22.12).

Like Abraham, whose obedience results in a three-day journey toward the

mountain of sacrifice, Faulkner's Anse responds to a command which causes him and his

family to leave their home and travel ten days to their predetermined destination. It is

important to note that the novel's action is driven solely by Anse's commitment to

Addie's plea, not, as it might at first seem, by the selfish personal obsessions of several

members of the Bundren clan. It is easy to identify the various needs that will be, or at

least could potentially be, fulfilled in Jefferson: Anse's false teeth (and new wife—but

more on this later), Dewey Dell's abortion, Cash's "graphophone," Vardaman's toy train

and exotic bananas. However, to assume these mundane cravings are the key force

---

[105] Of course, the crucial difference between the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions is that, in the latter, it is generally accepted that the older son Ishmael, and not Isaac, is offered up. In her provocatively written meditation on the elision of the Arab in Derrida's work, Norton uses Yehuda Amichai's "The Real Hero" to suggest a view of the biblical story which casts Ishmael in the sacrificial role. After quoting the first part of the poem, "The real hero of the Binding of Isaac was the ram," she goes on to improvise: "Call him Ishmael. The ram is sacrificed as Ishmael was sacrificed. He didn't know about the collusion among the others. He took Isaac's place and Isaac his. He was silent, and his silence was transformed into the calling of the others. Call him Ishmael, the man who is transformed from man into animal in the eyes of another. Call him Ishmael, the man who dies for another's calling" (164).

moving the family forward is overly simplistic.[106] Faulkner renders this assumption absurd by once again embodying such an interpretive strategy in one of the narrative's choric voices: Vernon Tull. Attempting to make sense of the incomprehensible scenario of the river crossing, where the ill-conceived attempt to ford the swollen river results in Cash's broken leg and the death of two mules, the befuddled Tull gives the family up to absurdity: "[Anse] was standing there, humped, mournful, looking at the empty road beyond the swagging and swaying bridge. And that gal, too, with the lunch basket on one arm and that package under the other. *Just going to town*. Bent on it. They would risk the fire and the earth and the water and all just to eat a sack of bananas" (140; my emphasis). His trite caption for the tableau created by this desperate family registers the relative inadequacy of such materialistic readings. For the only thing making their journey difficult is the presence of the rotting corpse. While these selfish desires might justify an everyday trip to town, they do nothing to explain the extent to which the family stubbornly persists in their doomed quest. We as readers must ask ourselves why the story does not unfold otherwise: Why doesn't the lazy, "monstrous" Anse just bury her in nearby New Hope, where we're told "his folks buries" (29)? Or, for that matter, why not in their own backyard? Why doesn't he take the easy way out?

We learn of the contract between Anse and Addie early in the novel as Anse labors to decide whether to send his sons to sell their three-dollar load of lumber: "I

---

[106] See Atkinson 243 n.1 for his discussion of the debate over the Bundrens' motivations. His own assertion that "a unifying collective purpose—or, to apply the parlance of social philosophy, a common good—is at odds with individual needs and desires that threaten to divide the family along the lines of competitive self-interest," along with his juxtaposition of "the ostensible purpose of the quest" and the "underlying personal agendas" (176) questions the reality of the performative and would seem to downplay "fidelity" as a viable driving force for the morbid journey. In contrast, Bleikasten claims, and I would concur, "it is [Addie's] presence, felt by everyone, that keeps the family together during the journey, and it is to all appearances her imperious will that makes them carry the task through to the end" (*Faulkner's* 118).

wouldn't upset her for the living world. With that family burying-ground in Jefferson and them of her blood waiting for her there, she'll be impatient. I promised my word me and the boys would get her there quick as mules could walk it, so she could rest quiet" (19). Then as the neighbors gather for the funeral in a section narrated by Vernon Tull, Anse's commitment is the object of gossip between the men:

> "What's Anse so itching to take her to Jefferson for, anyway?" Houston says.
> "He promised her," I say. "She wanted it. She come from there. Her mind was set on it."
> "And Anse is set on it, too," Quick says.
> "Ay," Uncle Billy says. "It's like a man that's let everything slide all his life to get set on something that will make the most trouble for everybody he knows." (89)

This promise to Addie proves as binding as Abraham's response to God. As Anse puts it when faced with almost certain defeat on the banks of the bridgeless river, "I give her my promised word in the presence of the Lord … I reckon it aint no need to worry" (125). It is a promise made in secret, in the intimacy of the face-to-face relationship, but the effects are felt in the family and the broader community. No one—not the neighbors, not the other members of the Bundren family, not even Anse himself—will ever know the reason for the request, will ever be able to effectively judge this decision which has such damaging effects on the family. No one, that is, except the reader.

In Addie's monologue, offered posthumously by the story's central character, we are given at least partial access to the motivation behind this spousal demand. Anse's vow is secured after the birth of Darl, the second son:

> Then I found that I had Darl. At first I would not believe it. Then I believed that I would kill Anse. It was as though he had tricked me, hidden within a word like within a paper screen and struck me in the back through it. But then I realised that I had been tricked by words older than Anse or love, and that the same word had tricked

> Anse too, and that my revenge would be that he would never know
> I was taking revenge. And when Darl was born I asked Anse to
> promise to take me back to Jefferson when I died, because I knew
> that father had been right, even when he couldn't have known he
> was right anymore than I could have known I was wrong. (172–73)

Even though she assures Anse during their courtship her folks "wont be no worry" to him since "they're in the cemetery" (171), *As I Lay Dying* makes it clear that the dead can still make their presence felt, still exert a demand on the living. Thus, once Addie finally despairs of forging a meaningful connection with an other through the legal institution of marriage, she determines to return to the father who always defined existence nihilistically: "the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time" (169). She considers this to be an act of vengeance on her part, though her tautological statement actually seems to posit her secrecy as her ultimate means of vengeance. Though he might respond with comic incredulity at first—"Nonsense … you and me aint nigh done chapping yet, with just two" (173)—the bereaved husband's behavior through the course of the novel echoes the "Here I am" (*hineni* in Hebrew) voiced three times by Abraham in Genesis 22. Whatever his faults, Anse proves ardently faithful to his wife's demand, even to the point of absurdity. In order to discern the significance of this fidelity, I will turn back to Abraham's trial, or more specifically, to Derrida's Talmudic interpretation of the biblical scene.

Derrida's *The Gift of Death* presents one of the most provocative treatments of the *akedah* in recent years.[107] Recounting the "fear and trembling" the story inspired in Kierkegaard, whose dialectical meditation on the passage is recorded in a volume of the

---

[107] This is the translation of *Donner le mort*, a paper Derrida published in the 1992 collection, *L'Éthique du don: Jacques Derrida et la pensée du don, Colloque de Royaumont, 1990*. I will be quoting from the second English edition, which was published in 2008. In addition to a thorough revision by David Wills of his own 1995 translation, the volume contains the first English translation of "La litérature au secret [Literature in Secret]," a brief essay on Kafka which also makes reference to the scene on Mount Moriah.

same name, Derrida contemplates the ethical implications of Abraham's willingness to murder his son. Like Kierkegaard, Derrida eschews knowledge of the story's outcome and locates his reading directly in the moment of decision, an instant both writers characterize as madness. Before moving beyond the interpretation found in *Fear and Trembling*, Derrida summarizes what is at stake:

> The story is no doubt monstrous, outrageous, barely conceivable: a father is ready to put to death his beloved son, his irreplaceable loved one, and that because the Other, the great Other, asks him or orders him without giving the slightest explanation. An infanticide father who hides what he is going to do, without knowing why, from his son and from his family, what could be more abominable, what mystery could be more frightful (*tremendum*) vis-á-vis love, humanity, the family, or morality? (68).

Abraham's obedience to God appears monstrous because it necessitates a betrayal of his ethical responsibilities to all the other others in his life: namely, his wife Sarah, who is completely excised from this chapter in Genesis though she plays a prominent role in Chapters 21 and 23;[108] Isaac, the object of sacrifice, to whom Abraham ironically explains, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering" (22.8)—an answer which allows him to keep the secret without keeping silent; and the general ethical system which would forbid the murder of another human being. Thus Derrida is led to what he terms "the insolence of the paradox: for Abraham, Kierkegaard declares, *the ethical is a temptation*" (62). He must resist it in order to maintain fidelity to one who is entirely Other.

Yet here Derrida pushes his reading further than that of his predecessor and where Anse's predicament begins to seem uncannily parallel. By claiming, "*tout autre est tout*

---

[108] Among other things, Chapter 21 describes Sarah's conception and naming of Isaac as well as her demand that Abraham expel Ishmael from the household. Chapter 23 details her death and the process by which Abraham obtains a burial place for her.

autre"—a phrase whose closest approximation in English is "every other is entirely other"—he insists on the impossibility of the dilemma which demands the sacrifice of one for the other.[109] In other words, if Isaac is just as radically other and ultimately unknowable as is the divine Being, then Abraham is doomed to failure no matter where his fidelity ultimately lies. In "Derrida's Singularity: Literature and Ethics," Derek Attridge refers to this shift in *The Gift of Death* as a "radical quotidianisation … of the story of Abraham and Isaac" (15), an attempt to infuse the mundane decisions we make every day with a sense of the *mysterium tremendum* we feel in the face of Abraham's impossible choice. Attridge is captivated by Derrida's dizzying question to the reader, "How would you ever justify the fact that you sacrifice all the cats in the world to the cat that you feed at home every day for years, whereas other cats die of hunger at every instant? Not to mention other people?" (71). Insisting that "[t]he difference between Kierkegaard and Derrida here is crucial" (17), he effectively articulates the everyday relevance of such philosophical theorizing:

> Although I can never begin to satisfy the demands of ethics, although my every action, indeed my very existence, breathing the air I breathe and occupying the space I occupy, is falling short of the ethical, *there is no way I can justify my failure*. Here again, the cats enforce the point. My preference for the cat I call my "own" over all the other cats in the universe is as inaccessible to the language of explanation and justification as Abraham's preference for God over Isaac (and over his own ethical obligations and paternal feelings). (18)

Being "in the right" has never seemed so difficult. Apparently, I don't need to wait for a divine encounter for my ethical subjectivity to be shaken. To return once more to

---

[109] See Chapter Four of *Gift of Death*, which bears this phrase as its title, for a discussion of its resistance to translation (82–84). Here Derrida makes it clear that he is exceeding not only Kierkegaard's interpretation but also that of Levinas, who he claims "still wants to distinguish between the infinite alterity of God and the 'same' infinite alterity of every human, or of the other in general" (84).

Derrida's own elegant phrasing: "Day and night, at every instant, on all the Mount Moriahs of this world, I am … raising my knife over what I love and must love, over the other, to this or that other to whom I owe absolute fidelity, incommensurably" (69).

When viewed through this prism of Derridean responsibility, the various ways in which the choric observers in *As I Lay Dying* confidently employ "the language of explanation and justification" to comment on the ethicality, the morality, the "rightness" of Anse's decisions appear less and less reliable. He becomes a character whose morality is undecidable. One of the neighbors who questions Anse's commitment early in their journey is Samson. The section he narrates offers several points of contact with the issues being discussed here, especially regarding interpersonal communication and the various failings and miscomprehensions it entails. Again, we are told of an inaccurate assessment of the family's movements, this time by Quick, who also attended Addie's funeral. In response to the question, "What're they doing up here, anyway?" Quick answers, "Taking a holiday since he got his wife buried, I reckon … Heading for town, I reckon" (113). And this is followed by multiple instances of ethical judgment, whereby Samson and his wife attempt to both do right by this family and at the same time assess the rightness of their behavior. By staging this evaluation of the Bundrens as a site of spousal disagreement, Faulkner is able to push to the fore the difficulty of ethical consensus.

Samson first characterizes his debate with his wife Rachel as a matter of hospitality: "I told Rachel, I says, 'Well, would you have had me turn them away at dark, eight miles from home? What else could I do,' I says" (114). Then later, when he attempts to ignore the Bundrens the next morning, he is surprised to receive a reprimand from his wife for not playing the role of host as he should have: "And then when I come

back to the house, Rachel jumped on me because I wasn't there to make them come in to breakfast. You cant tell about them. Just about when you decide they mean one thing, I be durn if you not only haven't got to change your mind, like as not you got to take a rawhiding for thinking they meant it" (118). Samson is careful to cast this miscommunication as a function of sexual difference, falling back on the old saw of the inscrutability of women: "A man cant tell nothing about them. I lived with the same one fifteen years and I be durn if I can" (117). Yet, as the section makes clear, Samson has just as much difficulty with getting into Anse's mind. Though he attempts weakly to defend the man's actions to Rachel—"'What could he a done?' I says. 'He give her his promised word'" (117)—we detect his distance from Anse by means of interior monologue as he works to convince the family to bury the body in the much more accessible town of New Hope: "Because I got just as much respect for the dead as ere a man, but you've got to respect the dead themselves, and a woman that's been dead in a box four days, the best way to respect her is to get her into the ground as quick as you can. But they wouldn't do it" (116). He is sure that, in this case, betrayal would prove more respectful to the dead wife than would Anse's quixotic adventure of faithfulness. But the question is, at this point, how sure are we? How sure does Faulkner want us to be?

Anse would likely describe his determination to fulfill Addie's request as an act of love. Continually shocked by the disrespect he sees in his children's behavior during the ordeal—Cash using the trip to drop off his tools at his next jobsite (101), Dewey Dell supposedly carrying Cora's cakes with her to sell on the way (102), Jewel insisting on riding his wild spotted horse (104), and "Darl setting on the plank seat right above her

where she was laying, laughing" (106)—Anse remains focused on the end goal throughout. When they reach the end of their quest, he responds to Jewel's coarse swearing, "Who the hell cant dig a damn hole in the ground?" by once more questioning his filial love: "It aint respectful, talking that way about her grave…. You all dont know what it is. You never pure loved her, none of you" (228). And later, when Darl is angling to take care of Cash's leg before getting to the burial, Anse can hardly believe the lack of concern the rest of the family shows toward Addie's remains. While we might be tempted to let his response be obscured by the rapidity with which he finds a new wife,[110] considered on its own, simply as a speech act, it shows a depth of intimacy and a warmth toward the departed which surpasses the attitude of every other character in the novel: "You all don't know … The somebody you was young with and you growed old in her and she growed old in you, seeing the old coming on and it was the one somebody you could hear say it dont matter and know it was the truth outen the hard world and all a man's grief and trials. You all dont know" (234–35). What gives us the confidence to refer to this as, in Bleikasten's words, "playing to perfection the role of the grief-stricken widower" (*Faulkner's* 84)? And for that matter, taking into account the power of the performative speech act, could one hope for more posthumous fidelity than such a perfect performance? Perhaps this is what it means to mourn the dead. Or perhaps the novel's outrageous action speaks to the inescapable difficulty of remaining true to one's word, the unspeakable cost of fulfilling a single infinite demand.

---

[110] In the context of this comparison of Anse with Abraham, it is worth noting that the marital relations of the latter would hardly stand up to the notions of commitment and "true love" we as readers bring to bear on the former. Thus, it is through fidelity to Sarai that the whole Hagar affair develops: "And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai" (Gen. 16.2). Likewise, we might note the somewhat anticlimactic opening of Genesis 25, just after we are told of Abraham's hard-fought, Anse-like negotiation to obtain an honorable, paid-for resting place for his wife Sarah ("We would be beholden to no man, me and her"): "Then again Abraham took a wife, and her name was Keturah" (25.1).

For there is no doubt cost involved, as can be seen in Anse's many familial betrayals. Through the course of fulfilling his obligation to Addie, he offers up his children, whether in his "appropriation" of Cash's and Dewey Dell's scarce funds, in his negligent attitude toward Vardaman (e.g. Cora's "I see the hand of the Lord upon this boy for Anse Bundren's judgment and warning" [72]), or in his trading of Jewel's prize possession. This is not to mention the fairly literal sacrificial picture of Darl as the familial scapegoat, purged from the family in order to maintain its integrity. These are often the key ingredients for readings that demonize Anse beyond recuperation. Nevertheless, if we take him at his word (and why shouldn't we?) when he declares early in the novel, "I mislike undecision as much as ere a man" (17), each point of decision, "taken too early and in the dark" as Derrida often puts it, returns us to Mount Moriah and the sacrifice of the promised son. Elsewhere, Derrida refers to a certain attitude of skepticism he bears towards anyone who, unlike Anse, moves easily from the sphere of undecision to decision, anyone who might refer to himself confidently as "the decider":

> Every time that I hear someone say that "I have taken a decision," or "I have assumed my responsibilities," I am suspicious because if there is responsibility or decision one cannot determine them as such or have certainty or good conscience with regard to them. If I conduct myself particularly well with regard to someone, I know that it is to the detriment of an other; of one nation to the detriment of another nation, of one family to the detriment of another family, of my friends to the detriment of other friends or non-friends, etc. This is the infinitude that inscribes itself within responsibility; otherwise there would be no ethical problems or decisions. And this is why undecidability is not a moment to be traversed and overcome…. I know that I have not done enough and it is in this way that morality continues, that history and politics continue. ("Remarks" 86–87)

This theme of never having done enough, an awareness of the incompleteness of one's "rightness," is found throughout Derrida's work. Commitment always leads to neglect; fidelity requires betrayal. Such is the dilemma of being responsible for the other.

The Gift of Death again offers a description that might match the complexity of Anse's position in Faulkner's narrative. He is like Derrida's Abraham, who "feels torn, he would like to console the whole world, especially Sarah, Eliezer [the servant], and Isaac; he would like to embrace them before taking the final step. But he knows that they will then say to him, 'But why are you doing that? Can't you get an exemption, find another solution, discuss, negotiate with God?' Or else they will accuse him of dissimulation and hypocrisy" (74). Indeed, hypocrisy is a word that seems to cling to Anse, even in readings which attempt to do him justice. His actions, his performance if you will (remembering the etymological roots of *hypocrisis* in the Greek theater where stage actors were referred to as *hypokrites*), are thought to conceal a true self that is unacceptable, even monstrous. And he is not only cut off from the other characters in the story but from us, from the readers who would judge him. Both men—they are almost interchangeable at times—caught in the grip of "undecision," have a strange effect on readers hungry for signification, desperate to comprehend:

> Whereas the tragic hero is great, admired, and legendary from generation to generation, Abraham, in remaining faithful to his singular love for the wholly other, is never considered a hero. He doesn't make us shed tears and doesn't inspire admiration: rather stupefied horror, a terror that is also a secret. For it is a terror that brings us close to the absolute secret, a secret that we share without sharing it, a secret between an other … and another … Abraham himself is in secret, cut off both from man and from God. (*Gift of Death* 79–80)

This terror is, in my view, the result of our awareness that the infinite demand of the entirely other, pictured in Addie's appeal to Anse, necessitates the enactment of what can only be viewed as "an abomination in the eyes of all, and it should continue to be seen for what it is—atrocious, criminal, unforgivable." At the same time, like Abraham's near-murder of his beloved son, Anse's most reprehensible atrocity—say, his willingness "to throw that poor devil [Darl] down in the public street and handcuff him like a damn murderer" (240)—speaks out of its absurdity into our everyday existence.

As Derrida goes on to ask, "is it not true that the spectacle of this murder, which seems intolerable in the denseness and rhythm of its theatricality, is at the same time the most common event in the world? Is it not inscribed in the structure of our existence to the extent of no longer constituting an event?" (85). He then clarifies this enigmatic question by demonstrating the paradoxical relation to justice of all societies. If a father were to commit a similar act in modern-day France, he points out, "[e]verything is organized to insure that this man would be condemned by any civilized society." Nevertheless, "the smooth functioning of such a society … [is] in no way perturbed by the fact that … that same 'society' *puts to* death or (but failing to help someone in distress accounts for only a minor difference) *allows to die* of hunger and disease tens of millions of children (those relatives or fellow humans that ethics or the discourse of the rights of man refer to) without any moral or legal tribunal ever being considered competent to judge such a sacrifice" (85–86). On the other hand, the "trembling" evoked by Abraham's situation effectively serves Derrida as a troubling of this "smooth functioning" society, as it calls us to acknowledge the sacrifices going on all around us, hidden, but no less unacceptable. By withholding the possibility of effectively judging the

ethics of his narrative, by maintaining a secrecy that suspends condemnation, Faulkner presents a fiction amenable to the same type of political work Derrida makes possible through his reading of the *akedah*.

In his contribution to *The Politics of Deconstruction*, Attridge describes this sort of political work as he uses Derrida's Abraham to defend deconstructive reading against the charge that its focus on discerning the aporetic impossibilities of basic experiences—like friendship, decision-making, gift-giving, etc.—produces paralysis in the socio-political sphere of action. His defense is particularly germane to the present discussion of undecidability in Faulkner, who might similarly be said to require an apologist for his lack of committed political engagement. Attridge focuses on the move of "quotidianization" mentioned earlier, where Derrida extrapolates from Abraham's dilemma "to the situation of all of us, at every moment." According to Attridge, herein lies the relevance of Derridean thought for political theory: "This is a move which could be seen as paradigmatic of the passage from deconstruction to politics (and from reading to politics), a move from a unique account of a unique event, related in a unique text of a literary type (or, more accurately, a series of such texts), to the array of quotidian realities we have to deal with here and now; from an impossible demand to the possibilities of daily existence" ("Art" 55). One might argue that Derrida does more justice to the impossible than to the possible in his work; thus Attridge usually must supply extratextual examples to bring the purported passage fully into the sphere of possible political decision. Such is the case in the conclusion to his most recent essay in which he carries forward Derrida's aporetic feline scenario into the sphere of possible action: "When my cat comes meowing to me in the morning, there is nothing automatic about

my responsibility to feed it; perhaps I have found out that the cat next door is hungry and sick, obliging me to sacrifice my own cat" ("Derrida's Singularity" 22); similarly, he asks us to imagine Abraham descending from Mount Moriah to "the public spaces" where "he has to pick up once more his familial and social existence, to move from the realm of the impossible to the possible, from, if you like, deconstruction to politics" ("Art" 58–59). In both instances, Attridge must supplement, must push the readings further than does Derrida himself, make explicit what remains implicit in the text. This raises the question, is this final movement into the possible actually present in deconstructive writing? Is it part of what the deconstructive text *does*, or does it require an accomplice?

Perhaps the various ways the reader might complete Derrida's writing are evidence of the power of the secret in his text, testimony to the potential such secrecy has for the political sphere. Perhaps the deconstructive text, like the undecidable literary work it so resembles, must be completed by the reader in order for any political work to be done. It interrupts the automatic, systematic functioning of the ethico-political sphere of action by awakening the specter of impossibility at its core. The movement into the possible only occurs when the *call* of the aporetic work is met by the *response* of the social reengagement of the reader.[111] The undecidable work of literature is like a frustrated Abraham, struggling to justify his murderous intentions, but knowing such efforts are futile—they must be:

> Were it straightforwardly *possible* for Abraham to justify his decision … we would know that he had not made a decision, in the strict sense, that it must have been a calculation, with no ethical force, no enactment of responsibility. His attempted justification

---

[111] Structurally, then, deconstructive writing would imitate the rhetorical question. Derrida uses this terminology to describe his reading of Nietzsche at the close of *Gift of Death*: "Is this a false or counterfeit question, a rhetorical question as one says in English?... As often happens, the call of or for the question, and the request that echoes through it, takes us further than the response" (116).

> will succeed only if it fails, if his account of what he has done bears a silence at its heart—one might even say *produces*, without producing, a silence at its heart. This is what Kierkegaard's account attempts to do, to testify to and thus produce without producing Abraham's secret, to bear witness to the enormity and importance of that secret. This is what Derrida's account attempts to do. This is what deconstructive writing does, testify to secrets. ("Art" 59)

Therefore, to the extent that we find ourselves unable to judge Faulkner's characters comfortably, unable to bring to bear the automatic classificatory systems of interpretation which often seem so useful in making ethical decisions, this is what reading *As I Lay Dying* does—the creative reader bears witness to the work's secrecy.

Though it might offer no "concrete political recommendations" ("Art" 56), such a literary work, or more precisely, a literary reading of such a work, prepares the way for ethico-political work of a different dye. Reading strategies whose goal would be to eliminate secrecy in the literary work—to provide definitive answers to such questions as, "Is Anse hero or villain? Which character presents Faulkner's perspective? Who or what is to blame for the Bundrens' sad state?"—certainly accomplish political work. However, such work seldom surpasses that found in the relationship between propaganda and the uncritical, mechanical implementation of a program. Reading such an undecidable work, and allowing the "fear and trembling" of its chronic *undecision* to resonate fully in our response, can prepare the way for a more ethical approach to the unknown as we then redirect our troubled gaze back onto our own socio-political sphere of action.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will consider this potential for Faulkner's undecidable literature to function in the formation of political subjectivity against the background of current discourse on totalitarianism and democracy. This most secretive

writer, whom Robert H. Brinkmeyer, Jr. describes as a "central figure … in the cultural dialogue involving democracy, fascism, and the South," offers an important voice rising from within the often extremist populism of the region. In the company of "most Southern traditionalists, who forthrightly stood by their logic that linked democracy … with fascism," Brinkmeyer sees a Faulkner who understood the "dark undercurrents" of these traditionalists' rhetoric, "undercurrents every bit as dangerous to the traditional order and every bit as potentially fascist as the abuses of democracy Faulkner recognized in the political landscape of the South and America" ("Faulkner" 92–93). This differentiation between Faulkner and other contemporary southern white writers allows us to read his work as provoking a more hesitant construction of "the people," which is necessary for the formation of any political subject, either in his time or in ours. I would suggest the call issued by Faulkner's early work evokes a response which pushes the reader away from the totalitarian end of the spectrum and towards the democratic, or perhaps more justly, the democratizing end—toward Derrida's *démocratie à venir*.

The key to such a response seems to lie in the question of risk. As I discussed in the Introduction, although the notion of carefully compartmentalized communities of belonging can provide a measure of security and what Roberto Esposito refers to as immunity for those locked within them, this safety comes at the risk of the sort of ethical engagement with alterity that is necessary in the ethico-political sphere. In contrast, irremediably undecidable political subjects, aware of their own contingency, are open to the possibility of new articulations, new alliances which have the potential to be more democratic than previous ones. Note the use of the word "potential" here. Just as there is potential for democratization, there must also be potential for totalitarian or fascist

articulation.[112] This element of risk is crucial to Derrida's conceptualization of *démocratie à venir*. In *The Politics of Friendship*, for example, he makes it clear that the relationship he is considering, the friendship which can serve as a model for the democracy-to-come, can only take place with one who might turn out to be an enemy: "Undecidability … is not a sentence that a decision can leave behind. The crucial experience of the perhaps imposed by the undecidable—that is to say, the condition of decision—is not a moment to be exceeded, forgotten, or suppressed…. Without the possibility of radical evil, of perjury, and of absolute crime, there is no responsibility, no freedom, no decision" (219). In his portrayal of an irremediably undecidable socio-political sphere, Derrida sees risk at the heart of any significant attempt at engagement.[113]

There is a parallel element of necessary risk in the reading of markedly undecidable works of literature, and Derrida's interrogation of democracy provides a paradigm from which to revaluate the political potential of such acts of reception. Pursuing this line of inquiry adds a further layer of complexity to the relationship between politics and literary modernism, one which often hinges on the effect of the latter's unrealistic, even anti-realistic elements. In particular, a change in signification for

---

[112] I use "fascist" with a lowercase "f" to differentiate from the historical Fascism or National Socialism of the 1930s and 40s. The fascism I refer to here would be similar to some other writers' "protofascism," namely, the sort of political climate that would produce a party ideology that such historical platforms enunciated. As Roger Griffin points out, "[a] growing number of historians and political scientists propose a theory of generic fascism that … acknowledges the centrality of its palingenetic thrust towards a new era of health, strength, and vitality in the life of the nation" (17). Griffin himself is probably the most prominent of these historians, and in his *The Nature of Fascism*, he provides a working definition: "Fascism is a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingentic form of populist ultra-nationalism" (26). My usage of the term is similarly generic, closer to Eco's multivalent concept of "ur-fascism" than to any historical party platform.

[113] In a similar vein, Derrida insists that hospitality which would move beyond the simple fulfillment of obligation must welcome the guest without first asking "who are you?" There must be a risk that the invited guest (*hôte*) might take advantage of the welcome and usurp the uncertain position of the receiving host (*hôte*), might in effect turn the tables (see *Adieu* 21–45). The maintenance of risk called for in these socio-political interactions is modeled in the unfaithful literary reading, the encounter which admits to its inevitable infidelity.

the necessary risk of infidelity at the heart of the creative reading would have important ramifications for the recent fascination with so-called fascist modernism.[114] Much of the work that would essentially link these two isms stems from an anxiety toward the very "risk" I am suggesting is necessary for radical democratic articulation. Of course, the question must not be ignored of what will fill the empty space of power left by the anti-foundational, deconstructive critique; however, I would argue that continual vigilance to the sort of ethical engagement modeled in the readerly attention presented here precludes the totalizing construction necessary for a democratic construction to slide toward fascism. After considering briefly the possible anti-fascist functioning of Faulkner's most innovative literature, I will push for a link between the element of secrecy in these texts and the preparation needed for *démocratie à venir*. It is his affinity for "keeping the secret" which ultimately ties Faulkner's enigmatic work to the most radical, and I would argue most emancipatory, notions of democracy.

ANTI-FASCIST PERMEABILITY

> *Ur-fascism can come back under the most innocent of disguises. Our duty is to uncover it and to point our finger at any of its new instances—every day, in every part of the world, Franklin Roosevelt's words of November 4, 1938, are*

---

[114] For some examples of recent work in this field, see the "Fascism Special Issue" of *Modernism/Modernity* (January 2008). The issue's five feature articles were presented at a 2006 conference, "Modernism—Fascism—Postmodernism," convened as a response to, among other things, "the disturbing Carl Schmitt-like recourse to 'decisionism' by the current Bush Administration as it 'justifies' its ultra-militarism and uncompromising nationalism" (Baackmann and Craven 2). By what appears to be a happy accident, one of the essays included to round out the issue is a portion of Megan Quigley's dissertation titled "Modern Novels and Vagueness," where she argues, "Rather than attempting to eliminate vagueness, modernist fiction probes vagueness as the best way to examine psychological depth, to depict sexual indeterminacy, or to register disenchantment with the capitalist, bourgeois, and symbolic status quo while still existing within those systems" (105). Though Quigley never mentions fascism, juxtaposed as it is with these various considerations of fascist modernism, her modernist vagueness resonates with, for example, Griffin's description of "the extreme syncretism, nebulousness, and contradictoriness characteristic of individual fascist ideologies" that welcomed "the unifying, ecumenical power of the leader cult" (18). Of course, in my view, the connection drawn by Griffin and others between the nebulous emptying and the "ecumenical" filling of fascist ideology is overzealous and far too sweeping.

> *worth recalling: "I venture the challenging statement, that if American democracy ceases to move forward as a living force, seeking day and night by peaceful means to better the lot of our citizens, fascism will grow in strength in our land."*
> – Umberto Eco "Ur-Fascism" (15)

In a 2006 article for *American Literary History*, Steven Weisenburger draws incriminating parallels between George W. Bush's Iraq war policy and two cultural products of the early 1950s: Faulkner's *Requiem for a Nun* and the 1952 film *High Noon*. He ties what he calls the "racist ill-logic" of Bush's public addresses on the war to the two texts, in which "race, nation, and sovereign violence assume antidemocratic and even proto-fascist guises common not only to other American 'classics' from circa 1930–80 but to contemporary expressions as well" (740). Weisenburger detects in Faulkner's late fiction the sort of "antidemocratic myths of ethno-racial identity, of homeland, and of the nation's ultimate prerogatives in regrettable but necessary violence" which comprise a hospitable environment for the fermentation of fascist ideology (765). He is certainly not the first to make such claims, and when Robert Penn Warren summed up Faulkner's critical reception during the period before World War 2, he commented that, until the publication of Malcolm Cowley's *Portable Faulkner* in 1946, the enigmatic writer had been characterized as "a combination of Thomas Nelson Page, a fascist and a psychopath, gnawing his nails. Of course, this picture is usually accompanied by a grudging remark about genius" (qtd. in Brinkmeyer *Fourth Ghost* 178). The extent and persistence of such defamatory accusations may seem extreme, and somewhat surprising when we consider the more often cited instances of Faulkner's anti-fascist public statements.[115] And

---

[115] The most commonly discussed instance is Faulkner's response to the form letter sent to several authors in 1938 by the League of American Writers, in which two questions were posed: "Are you for, or are you against Franco and fascism? Are you for, or are you against the legal government and the people of Republican Spain?" Faulkner responded, "I most sincerely wish to go on record as being unalterably

certainly, the more simplistic charges of fascist leanings leveled at Faulkner by the left in the 1930s and 40s due to his "apolitical" experimental prose appear now as mere products of their time, with Faulkner remaining definitively outside the circle of "fascist modernism" inhabited (arguably) by Pound, Eliot, Lewis, and others.[116] Nevertheless, readings like Weisenburger's do raise important questions about the subtlety of Faulkner's politics.

When an author's work, as one critic puts it, "stands by its very nature as an anti-ideological mode of cognition" (Clark 299), in what way(s) will this ideological vacuum be filled by the reader?[117] Taking Weisenberger's accusation seriously, and also taking seriously the role of the cultural product in shaping what Umberto Eco has named "ur-fascist" political subjectivity, I am arguing for a reading of the early works as performatively anti-fascist. Rather than turning to biography to detect the historical author's stance toward Franco, the Futurists, or the exhibition of the Fascist Revolution, this section will investigate the way Faulkner's most powerful texts reveal, and indeed

---

opposed to Franco and fascism, to all violations of the legal government and outrages against the people of Republican Spain" (*Essays* 198). Clark discusses the equivocality of his addition of "all violations" (298).

[116] See Hewitt for a discussion of the development of "the idea of a fascist modernism." Brinkmeyer provides a helpful description of the political environment of the "democratic revival" in 1930s and 40s America in order to better understand Faulkner's public stance toward fascism ("Faulkner"). In his most recent work, *The Fourth Ghost: White Southern Writers and European Fascism, 1930–1950*, Brinkmeyer takes a broader view, setting Faulkner in the context of writers such as Carson McCullers, Thomas Wolfe, and Katherine Anne Porter and claiming "that for at least two decades a large number of white southern writers were haunted by Fascism's long shadow over the South and that this haunting fundamentally shaped their imaginations, work, and careers" (23).

[117] Many critics share Clark's desire to classify Faulkner's work as somehow outside, beyond, or against ideology (e.g. McNeil, who titles his chapter devoted to Faulkner, "Against Ideology: Ethics in Suspension"). As Atkinson points out, reading the volume of essays, *Faulkner and Ideology*, gives one a sense of the complicated dynamics of such assertions within Faulknerian studies: "The subsequent publication of the conference proceedings enacts in its textuality the politics of this debate …. From an editorial standpoint, the method of ideological inquiry is viewed with a skeptical eye." In Atkinson's view, the essays are "bookended" by an introduction by Donald Kartiganer and essays by Bleikasten and Louis Rubin Jr. that "[call] into question the very critical practice employed by most of the featured scholars." Thus, "the form of the collection betrays what can best be called an organizational ideology, which guides the effort to discredit ideological analysis even as the text performs the presumably unintended task of confirming one of the method's basic claims: that ideology is instrumental in shaping form" (13–14).

create, an anxiety towards the type of closed, or totalized identity necessary for the spread of fascist ideology. Faulkner presents his reader with polyvocal, permeable subjects, resistant to conceptualizations of the fully realized, sutured individual. To demonstrate the potential value of such permeability, I will turn for a moment to Ernesto Laclau's theorization of hegemonic articulation in the political sphere, especially as this was developed in partnership with Chantal Mouffe. Read in this context, the seemingly apolitical nature of Faulkner's secretive, de-centered texts can actually be shown to resist the metaphorical "binding of the *fasces*" as they create in their readers an awareness of the contingency of all identity.

In his introduction to *Fascism, Aesthetics, and Culture*, Richard Golsan points to the need for, and difficulty of, a delineation of the aesthetics employed to "compensate for fascism's unstable ideological core," the contradictions inherent in any fascist articulation (xii). Pointing out the limitations of the biographical approach (which might work well when considering the work of Ezra Pound, but fails to enlighten in other cases [xiii]), Golsan argues that the careful deliberation of a fascist (and by contrast, an anti-fascist) aesthetic is crucial in light of the persisting influence of modernist art into the late twentieth century. He suggests "the possibility that the enormous influence of these figures has helped to create a 'postfascist culture,' an intellectual and artistic environment in which the insidious presence of fascism shapes us more than we realize" (xvi). This seems also to be Weisenburger's concern, as he sees a troubling trace of proto-fascism in Faulkner's post-war novels which suggests—given the author's prominence and cultural importance—a lingering ideological contradiction "deeply ingrained in the American imaginary" (740).

In order to position Faulkner as a fundamentally anti-fascist writer during the turbulent years of the Great Depression, Ted Atkinson makes the decision to focus on the aesthetic front. To do this, he makes use of an earlier formulation by Michael Denning who constructs an "aesthetic of anti-fascism as exemplified in the work of Orson Welles." For Denning and Atkinson, such an aesthetic includes the following characteristics: "1) the gangster theory of fascism; 2) the celebration of power for the sake of power; and 3) the prominent feature of characters cut from the mold of the 'great dictator' or 'gigantic hero/villians'" (117). Atkinson then goes on to highlight these traits in *Sanctuary*, *Light in August*, and especially *Absalom, Absalom!* (with Sutpen as the epitome of the "gigantic hero," or "gangster" of Denning's theory).

While this consideration might go a long way towards connecting Faulkner "to the cultural history of Depression America's encounter with the specter of fascism" (118), it is puzzlingly limited to thematic material. This approach ultimately seems to offer a mere mirror image of the "proletarian realism," from which Atkinson works so hard to distance Faulkner's work ("All of this is to say that Faulkner was indeed too much of an artist to run the risk of his fiction reading as propaganda" [8]). In other words, merely providing a clear staging of the dangers of fascism in order to manipulate the reader into condemning it would presumably take the same level of artistry as the production of the most obvious examples of proletarian propaganda. In contrast, I see the fiction of this most influential phase of Faulkner's career actually *functioning* in a manner that resists fascism. Though in his later work he might become more explicit in his positioning on race, nation, and the South—a posture which would strive to comprehend, or grasp the other with a surer hand—the novels of the thirties and early forties were

different, as Atkinson explains: "Internally contentious … Faulkner's [Depression] texts often defy the appearance of finished form, providing evidence of ideological interplay and political work in progress rather than stable, coherent positions" (11). I turn now to this interplay in order to discern the political implications of this fragmented and polyvocal literary landscape. The novel's foregrounding of troubled, de-centered individuality in *As I Lay Dying* is well documented, but I take this strategy to indicate more than the High Modernist posturing of a socially withdrawn aesthete. When readers encounter a character like Addie Bundren, they discover an unfixed subject, a negotiable identity—what Weinstein has termed "a cosmos no one owns."[118]

In their seminal study of the genealogy of hegemony and its importance for radical democracy, Laclau and Mouffe suggest the power and potential behind such unfixed social identities for authentic emancipatory political action. Tracing the progression of leftist thought from the Marxist focus on Revolution, through Gramscian hegemony, to present-day concerns, they are determined to show the importance of reconfiguring socialist strategy in light of obvious twentieth-century failures. Central to this reconfiguration is the need to dissolve the persisting essentialism of classical leftist, Jacobin thought. Revealingly, the authors see the authoritarian turn of Marxism (57) *as well as* the rise of fascism (as some traded in the myth of *class* for the myth of *nation*) as springing from an essentialist, totalized view of social identity (41). In other words, the danger does not lie in the content of one's ideology, but in the structural functioning of ideology itself. The empty site of power left by the democratic revolution faces a constant threat of being filled by ideological fiat: "Every attempt to establish a definitive suture

---

[118] The subtitle to his influential study of subjectivity in Faulkner's work, this phrase plays on Faulkner's confident claim that the textual world of his creation would be his own cosmos, of which he would be "sole owner and proprietor."

and to deny the radically open character of the social which the logic of democracy institutes," they would suggest, leads toward totalitarianism, "that is to say, to a logic of construction of the political which consists of establishing a point of departure from which society can be perfectly mastered and known" (187). But what makes their conceptualization of the dilemma so important for the present study of Faulkner's secretive literature and the political subject is their insistence on undecidability with regard to the source of this threat: "it may be the result of a politics of the 'left,' according to which every antagonism may be eliminated and society rendered completely transparent, or the result of an authoritarian fixing of the social order in hierarchies established by the state, as in the case of fascism" (187–88). According to this line of thinking, it is the actual idealization of complete transparency, the total loss of the secret, which must be resisted, not a specific political manifestation of this ideal. In order for a literary work to contribute to the radical democratic project outlined by Laclau and Mouffe, it would need to move beyond a simple presentation of anti-fascist ideology and push against the threat of closure on all fronts.

The consistent focus of Laclau and Mouffe on the potential of unfixed, or negotiable identity, a focus carried forward into Laclau's more recent work on populism, is suggestive in this evaluation of Faulkner's polyvocal secrecy. Where I would argue his post-war fiction assumes a more confident "us and them" mentality, demonizing certain positions and characters at the expense of others, the "us" is much less confident in novels like *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, and *Light in August*. Who or what is being privileged in these works? As readers weave their way through the texts, continually having their desire to definitively "know" these characters

frustrated and undermined, they become convinced of the permeability of every subject position. In Laclau and Mouffe's terminology, they reach a point where "unfixity has become the condition of every social identity" (85) and intentional articulation must take place in order to accomplish meaningful interpretation. The characters who inhabit *As I Lay Dying* point to the need for a new conceptualization of the individual. Instead of a return to a simplistic defense of individualism, "[w]hat is involved is the production of *another* individual, an individual who is no longer constructed out of the matrix of possessive individualism. The idea of 'natural' rights prior to society—and, indeed, the whole of the false dichotomy individual/society—should be abandoned, and replaced by another manner of posing the problem of rights" (184). Paradoxically, this theorization of "*another* individual" allows us to read the work of William Faulkner, the champion of individuality who once defined the American Dream as providing "a sanctuary on the earth for individual man" ("On Privacy" 62), as a challenge to the very concept of possessive, or "bourgeois" individualism.[119]

Laclau and Mouffe's modified concept of individuality acknowledges the crucial role of the social: "It is never possible for individual rights to be defined in isolation, but only in the context of social relations which define determinate subject positions." In other words, "these are rights which can only be exercised collectively" (184). In light of this revision, Faulkner's construction of the Bundren family, with all the complexity and sustained interpenetration between characters, takes on new significance. No single

---

[119] A crucial aspect of such a reading would depend on whether or not we perceive the "success" presented by the novel as positive or negative. For example, Hale describes the novel's action in terms of a particular defeat: "The death of Addie, and then the journey of her corpse to its burial in town, may be seen as the defeat of a private self that has lost its battle for self-determined and thus wholly original identity. The 'I' of the novel's title, the 'I' that lies dying, is not just Addie but the radical individualism that she embodies" (13). Here we can detect a nostalgic regret for the loss of individualism which the "historical Faulkner" would no doubt echo. On the other hand, Laclau and Mouffe offer us another way of evaluating this loss.

character's position rises from the chaos to present the story's message, whereas Faulkner's later work presents more pure, fully realized and recognizable characters, with a character such as Gavin Stevens often seeming to locate the work's ideological center. Where Faulkner obscures the purity of a character such as Anse by means of questioning the validity of external observers' ethical judgments, the idea of pure identity is further contaminated by his revelation of individual characters' self-perception. This is the very purity required for the sort of "proletarian" or social realism which would attempt to move the reader by means of a "true" or authentic representation of the social situation. Thus, readers of Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, for example, have a feeling of epistemological confidence toward Tom Joad. We know "what he is like," and are thus able to effectively judge the cultural context that has shaped him. At the same time, a dangerously similar sense of pure identity undergirds what Weisenburger has termed "proto-fascist" ideology. The permeable individual Faulkner presents to his reader is one who can play the "game" of political hegemony as defined by Laclau and Mouffe, where "the rules and the players are never fully explicit," where "'order' … exists only as a partial limiting of disorder" and where "'meaning' … is constructed only as excess and paradox in the face of meaninglessness" (192). Such a game of political articulation excludes the more explicit, pure individuals given in 1930s realism and, arguably, in the more rigid work of Faulkner's late period.

As I Lay Dying presents probably the most poignant example of Faulkner's construction of the permeable subject, the subject that resists closure and persists in a state of "unfixity," as the reader's attempts to realistically comprehend each of the doomed protagonists are repeatedly undermined. The constant intersubjective shuffling

between the characters has the potential to awaken readers to the unfixed nature of their own subjectivity. Lara Narcisi points out the importance of taking into account Faulkner's unrealistic presentation of the family. In her view, "a reading of the characters as relatively realistic, consistent narrative entities … elides the glaring inconsistencies in characters' voices and the innate anti-realism of uneducated farm-folk prone to incongruous bursts of lyric rhetoric." Such limits to the narrative's verisimilitude signal for Narcisi "a multivocality operating within the text's multivocality—a splintering of even the clearly demarcated narrative voices" (6). To borrow Laclau and Mouffe's terminology, the voices are "never fully explicit" and therefore provide the permeability and "moment of tension, of openness, which gives the social its essentially incomplete and precarious character" (190). Within this open, precarious socio-political field, ideological articulations which require closure or move toward ideals of totality can gain no foothold.

The most unrealistic moment of the novel comes as Addie herself begins to speak, recounting the family history in a more revealing way than anything encountered up to this point in the book. As readers hear her speaking long "after" she has died and her body has begun to decompose according to the temporality of the text, they are reminded of the contingent nature of all the book's "speeches," whether they are uttered aloud or simply articulated internally. As Addie recounts her experiences, intersubjectivity again plays a key role. Discussing her relationship to the students in her class, she agonizes over the inherence of difference in common notions of individuality: "And when I would have to look at them day after day, each with his or her selfish thought, and blood strange to each other blood and strange to mine … I would hate my father for having ever planted

me" (169–70). She longs, both in this scene and in her life as a Bundren, for some sense of connection, which she tries to achieve through violence: "I would look forward to the times when they faulted, so I could whip them. When the switch fell I could feel it upon my flesh; when it welted and ridged it was my blood that ran, and I would think with each blow of the switch: Now you are aware of me! Now I am something in your secret and selfish life, who have marked your blood with my own for ever and ever" (170). The sadistic violence of the scene, complete with the dream of shared blood, evokes the rhetoric of fascist identification. Addie's longing is for a totalized communal bond, a full realization of community that leaves no room for secrecy, for "each with his or her selfish thought." Throughout her monologue, readers are presented with a subjectivity in crisis, a fragmented sense of identity.

Eventually, her imperfect union of violence with the schoolchildren, her failure in achieving what she calls "the violation of my aloneness," leads Addie to "take a husband," even though she later finds, "it had been, not that my aloneness had to be violated over and over each day, but that it had never been violated until Cash came. Not even by Anse in the nights" (172). The failure of intersubjective connection typified in the marriage results in Addie's extraction of the promised burial in Jefferson from Anse, the promise made in secret which drives the novel's action. She wants to be with "her people." When she realizes individuals not joined by blood are doomed to be "like spiders dangling by their mouths from a beam, swinging and twisting and never touching, and that only through the blows of the switch could my blood and their blood flow as one stream," she falls back on the only other way she knows to share blood: a return to a racialized *patria*, the location of her father (172–73). Thus, the journey of the Bundrens

to Jefferson could in some ways be seen as Addie's reluctant regression toward racial identity, toward the blood of *Blut und Boden*, after her failed union with Anse. Her chapter presents the very real risk of proto-fascism presented by the conceptualization of contingent articulation as failure, by the impossibility of meaningful union with the "entirely other."

However, with the death of Addie, as with the expulsion of Darl, the arc of the narrative offers a different conceptualization of identity. For the story closes on a scene of troubled closure, an image of the family sitting inside their house on a cold winter night listening to the latest record on "one of them little graphophones," a machine which, providing an ironic metaphor for the Bundren family at the end of their journey, Cash describes as "all shut up as pretty as a picture" (261). This sense of closure is in fact troubled because Faulkner's Bundren family has now become a tragicomic model of permeability and contingency. In the replacement of Addie, the reader is presented with the doomed quality of any conceptualization of communal identity which would insist on sameness, purity, or epistemological certainty. In a similar manner, the all-seeing, authorial presence of Darl is sacrificed by the remaining Bundrens, leaving a loosely articulated collective, each with his or her secrecy and privacy intact. While the betrayal of Darl at the conclusion of the novel is perhaps one of Faulkner's most psychologically grotesque moments, I would suggest that this strange family unit could be translated into a prophetic picture of the need to respect secrecy and singularity in the context of any assertion of belonging.[120]

---

[120] I use "prophetic" here in the sense given to it by Philip Harold in *Prophetic Politics*, where he claims "Prophetic politics … transcends what everyone in a certain context recognizes as morally good, transcends communicable sacrifices, and ventures onto the rough ground of revealing the community to be other than its self-image: a source of ethical authority beyond interest" (xxxii). Such a politics is required because

THE BETRAYAL OF DARL; THE SECRET OF DEMOCRACY

> *Consequently, if there were a politics of this* aimance*, it would no longer imply the motifs of community, appurtenance or sharing, whatever the sign assigned to them. Affirmed, negated or neutralized, these "communitarian" or "communal" values always risk bringing a brother back.*
>   – *Jacques Derrida* The Politics of Friendship

As Cash supplies the reader with the closing image, he nostalgically laments, "What a shame Darl couldn't be to enjoy it too." But he is able to console himself with the pseudo-biblical assurance, "it is better so for him. This world is not his world; this life his life" (261). In concluding this discussion of Faulkner's taste for the secret, I would like to consider the ambivalent status of non-belonging evoked by this final scriptural commonplace. In what follows, I will read the scene not on the level of a mundane realism, with all the shame and horror called up by a family of ethically compromised, self-centered characters disowning their own brother who is "different." Instead, convinced as I am that an ethics of respect for the secret can preclude the depoliticizing suture of the political subject, I read the betrayal of Darl as a symbolic rupture of the familial and familiar community, one that renders it a potential model for the contingent formation of identity, which sacrifices fraternity on the altar of what Derrida calls "a friendship which goes beyond this proximity of the congeneric double, beyond parenthood … beyond the principle of fraternity" (*Politics of Friendship* vii).

    In the epigraph to this chapter, I quote from a series of conversations between Maurizio Ferraris, Gianni Vattimo, and Jacques Derrida, whose taste for the secret has

---

"morality serves human interests. An extant system of morality aids the functioning of human communities, *both* by protecting the legitimate interests of the community *as well as* covering over injustices that would damage the community's sense of itself" (xxxi). While this reading of Faulkner's work certainly stretches it beyond the author's intention, I would argue that the violence of the scene testifies prophetically to the truth that, to paraphrase Walter Benjamin, every establishment of civilization is an establishment of barbarism. In this case, the family is united either at the expense of Darl's personal freedom or Dewey Dell's right to guard her reproductive freedom. To propose an idyllic happy ending would not only be un-Faulknerian; it would also be to neglect the violence of full disclosure.

been varyingly interpreted by his critics and colleagues.[121] During this series of six interviews conducted between July of 1993 and January of 1995, Derrida voices his concerns about belonging and exclusion, privacy and publicity. He traces his suspicion of belonging and group mentality to his early childhood, specifically referencing the day when, at the age of eleven, "I, the little Jew from Algiers, with the onset of anti-Semitism (French, not Nazi, anti-Semitism) was expelled from school" (37). Looking back on this biographical incident, Derrida remembers, "an obscure feeling arose in me that has, I think, remained to this day—a trauma that caused me not only to cultivate a sort of not-belonging to French culture and to France in general, but also, in some way, to reject my belonging to Judaism." He would thus go on in his intellectual career to "rationalize and transform not-belonging into an ethico-political duty, saying that belonging is a non-belonging, and saying that it is on the basis of a non-belonging that faithfulness is constructed" (39). Thus this ultra-private theorist, who refused to have his photograph published until 1979 (52), allows a glimpse into a private moment which shaped his intellectual life, the point where he began to consider his singularity something to be guarded.

Consider that phrase "this world is not his world," uttered as Cash's mental justification for the expulsion of Darl from the familial sphere. What would it mean if the world *were* his? Precisely what notion of belonging is Cash freeing Darl from here? For

---

[121] See the interchange collected in *Deconstruction and Pragmatism* for a representative portion of this debate. See especially the discursive conversation among Rorty's "Remarks on Deconstruction and Pragmatism," Critchley's "Deconstruction and Pragmatism—Is Derrida a Private Ironist or a Public Liberal?" Rorty's subsequent "Response to Simon Critchley," and finally Derrida's "Remarks on Deconstruction and Pragmatism," where he claims, "one of the topics of this volume concerns the distinction between the public and the private" and confesses, "I obviously cannot accept the public/private distinction in the way [Rorty] uses it in relation to my work" (78). The variety of ways in which these philosophers misunderstand one another is evidence of the very polyvocality of Derrida's privacy.

Derrida, such questions typically lead back to language: "When I say that, basically, I write for those with whom I share a language, culture, place, home, it is not a question of 'belonging' to communities, of property or ownership …. French, for example, is 'my' language, I have no others, but at the same time it is radically foreign to me—it does not 'belong' to me, it is not my property." In other words, the possessiveness of a phrase such as "my country" or "his world" is misleading. "Place, family, language, culture, are not my own, there are no places that 'belong.'" Though Derrida might obviously seem to belong in various ways, though he might live in France, speak French, "write on the basis of my age, culture, family, language," he sees his "relation to these seemingly communal structures [as] one of expropriation, of disownership. I no more belong to these things than they belong to me; my point of departure is there where this belonging has broken" (85). As stated earlier, "belonging spells the loss of the secret," and the secret is precisely what will maintain the ethico-political potential of one's relation to language, culture, family, nation, or collectivity. This depoliticizing effect of belonging is reflected in a well-known quip by G.K. Chesterton in "A Defence of Patriotism," where he remarks, "'My country, right or wrong,' is a thing that no patriot would think of saying except in a desperate case. It is like saying, 'My mother, drunk or sober'" (73). Though Chesterton's view of patriotism is certainly not Derridean, he similarly rejects the uncritical perspective which often accompanies this particular brand of belonging.

If uncritical belonging spells the loss of the secret, then this sense of non-belonging would be tied to its maintenance. As Derrida puts it in another context, "this secret is that on the basis of which the public realm can be and remain open." Even though "there is a concept of politics and democracy as openness … which tends to deny,

efface or prohibit the secret"—which he claims "is the dominant and hegemonic tendency in the history of politics in the West"—he attempts to theorize a concept of the secret and singularity that "is not depoliticizing, it is rather the condition of politicization" ("Remarks" 80–81). For Derrida, this attitude toward secrecy is a critical aspect not only of democratic politics but also of what we generally refer to as literature, especially in the way the literary work presents an argument: "I think that literature is argumentative, in another way, with different procedures. Literature attempts to lead to conclusions, even if they are suspensive or undecidable." The element of secrecy elicits the involvement of the reader since "it is an organized discourse that exchanges with the other, needs the response of the other, is discursive" (*A Taste* 54). The parallel secrecies of democracy and literature offer calls which must be met by responsive and responsible readings.[122]

What happens when we bring this conceptualization of non-belonging to bear on Faulkner, a man whom James B. Meriwether characterizes in the introduction to his volume of public non-fiction as an "immensely dedicated, immensely complex, and deeply secretive writer" (xii)? In my view, Darl's treatment at the close of *As I Lay Dying* offers productive insight into Faulkner's affinity for privacy. For even though it might seem as though this eccentric brother is committed to the Jackson asylum because of his destruction of private property, as Cash explains and some critics would attest,[123] the

---

[122] For a more extensive interrogation of Derrida's articulation of democracy, secrecy, and literature, see Thomson's excellent study *Deconstruction and Democracy*. In addition to providing a comprehensive reading of *Politics of Friendship*, Thomson considers the implications for his other works of "Derrida's identification of deconstruction with democracy" (202). See especially the chapter titled, "Deconstruction and Liberal Democracy" (31–40). Cheah and Guerlac's collection comprises the most recent attempts to "offer a critical assessment of Derrida's later work on the political" (1), with contributors focusing especially on the topics of sovereignty, Eurocentrism, and the relationship between ethics and politics.

[123] See Atkinson who, though he shows admirable critical perception elsewhere, appears to take Cash's evaluation too much at face value: "Regardless of his motivation, Darl's act is subject to the interpretation of communal authority…. It is important to note as well Faulkner's care in situating the barn burning in the context of a dominant ideology rooted in capitalism that is articulated explicitly in the text" (184). His

truly unacceptable thing about Darl is his supernatural ability to pierce the veil of secrecy. His perception is revelatory to the point that, as Armstid puts it, he is able to divulge Anse's theft of Cash's money "just like he was reading it outen the paper" (190). He knows about Dewey Dell's pregnancy and (telepathically?) taunts her with it throughout: "and then I saw Darl and he knew. He said he knew without the words like he told me that ma is going to die without words" (27). And he inexplicably seems to know the central secret of the novel, the extramarital conception of Jewel: "*Jewel, I say, Who was your father, Jewel?*" (213). Not even the dead mother is free from his ever-open ear: "we put her under the apple tree upon the long slumbering flanks within which now and then she talks in little trickling bursts of secret and murmurous bubbling" (212). He knows all and sees all—or nearly all, since he is finally surprised by, if not the arrest itself, then at least his brother Cash's complicity: "I thought you would have told me … I never thought you wouldn't have" (237). But otherwise, his perspective is far-reaching, even allowing him to narrate action he does not actually witness. His presence suggests a level of communality in the Bundren family similar to what Roberto Esposito has written about in the traditional concept of community. Esposito contrasts this with what he calls *communitas*, in which "subjects do not find a principle of identification nor an aseptic enclosure within which they can establish transparent communication or even a content to be communicated. They don't find anything else except that void, that distance, that

---

desire to articulate the incident as somehow "a harbinger of social unrest" even leads Atkinson to read Jewel's hyperbolic warning, "do you want to wait until he sets fire to the goddamn team and wagon?" too literally: "Even within the family, Darl is perceived as a threat to this sacred principle [the ownership of private property]" (185). His elision of Dewey Dell from the discussion might explain the oversight of Darl's true crime. Here again, Atkinson seems to follow too closely the explanation given by Cash, who is caught off guard by his sister's sudden animosity toward Darl: "the curiousest thing was Dewey Dell. It surprised me" (237). See also O'Donnell, who says of the incident, "Darl is the sacrifice paid to the State so that the Bundrens can complete their epic journey and continue with business as usual" (90).

extraneousness that constitutes them as being missing from themselves" (7). The supernatural ability Darl is given to "establish transparent communication" with other family members is rejected by the story's troubling conclusion, though not without terrible cost. His authorial gaze, with an epistemological confidence that exceeds even Cora Tull's due to its unreal ability to succeed in the act of comprehension, is rejected, leaving a more open, and much more risky, familial sphere.

Darl's omniscience is what leads to his committal. As Cash describes the shameful scene, it is evident that the authority of the State plays a very minor role:

> But when we got it filled and covered and drove out the gate and turned into the lane where them fellows was waiting, when they come out and come on him and he jerked back, it was Dewey Dell that was on him before even Jewel could get at him. And then I believed I knowed how Gillespie knowed about how his barn taken fire…. [w]hen them fellows told him what they wanted and that they had come to get him and he throwed back, she jumped on him like a wild cat so that one of the fellows had to quit and hold her and her scratching and clawing at him like a wild cat, while the other one and pa and Jewel throwed Darl down and held him lying on his back, looking up at me. (237)

It is, as Cash puts it, "a shoddy job," with his sister clawing him with feral intensity and Jewel screaming, "Kill him. Kill the son of a bitch" (238). Importantly for the purposes of this discussion, it is the three family members whose secrecy has been violated who conspire against Darl. To once again read the scene in parallel with Derrida's *Politics of Friendship*, the brother is "uprooted" from the collective to leave room for the secret: "is it possible to think and to implement democracy, that which would keep the old name 'democracy,' while uprooting from it all these figures of friendship (philosophical and religious) which prescribe fraternity: the family and the androcentric ethnic group?" (306).

Darl's betrayal reveals the secret that we can never, in the last instance, have the comfortable grasp on reality we always crave so we can say with confidence who is family and who is stranger, who is friend and who is enemy. We tremble before Aristotle's apostrophe, running as a leitmotif through *Politics of Friendship*, "O my friends, there is no friend" (1), knowing that a brother may turn out to be an enemy. But this ethical trembling in the face of each alliance, each contingent articulation, opens onto the possibility that strangers will turn out to be friends. Derrida ironically refers to *Politics of Friendship* as "a book not altogether in favour of fraternity—that so very powerful motif, Christian, revolutionary, and universal all at once, which is always linked to birth, soil, blood" (*A Taste* 85). Indeed, neither is *As I Lay Dying*, this reticent work of art which, like each of the roles Faulkner himself performed, "expressed a part of his personality and kept the rest hidden: it was, simultaneously, a form of self-exposure and of concealment" (Gray 47). Darl is identified as "brother" fifteen times in the last few pages of the novel—three of these he speaks himself after he has been expelled from the family: "Darl is our brother, our brother Darl. Our brother Darl in a cage in Jackson where, his grimed hands lying light in the quiet interstices, looking out he foams" (254). The story's action closes on a betrayal of brotherhood which preserves the collective, though the attending shame that clings to the final pages do not allow the sense of triumphalism and idolatrous commitment that often can accompany the establishing of community.[124] Nevertheless, as Derrida's later work on democracy suggests, to be in

---

[124] Here Faulkner leaves us with something close to Roberto Esposito's concept of *communitas*, which is founded in a common lack, as opposed to the more familiar, and familial concept of community as grounded in the positivity of a common trait. His revised idea of community shares some similarities with the broken home at the close of *As I Lay Dying*: "*communitas* is utterly incapable of producing effects of commonality, of association, and of communion. It doesn't keep us warm, and it doesn't protect us; on the contrary, it exposes us to the most extreme of risks: that of losing, along with our individuality, the borders that guarantee its inviolability with respect to the other; of suddenly falling into the nothing of the thing

favor of fraternity, or "fraternization," is to be in a depoliticized state, unable to form the type of articulations necessary in the transnational, transcultural climate we inhabit today. Considering oneself "one of the family" always closes off more possibilities than it affirms. As Andrew Gibson puts it, "A postmodern ethics, in fact, will insist on producing or discovering rifts, gaps, distances, differences, not in order to break up all sense of community but—unendingly—in the interests of a community to come whose values are still to be formulated, a solidarity that has yet to be created" (85).While there is certainly risk involved in this "community to come," in the stance of unconditional welcome toward the other, the alternative offers a grim future of more and more rigid compartmentalization and disunity.

Engaging works like *As I Lay Dying* which are irremediably undecidable can produce the type of destabilization required to move beyond the fraternal into associations which aren't founded on full disclosure and guarantees of similitude, articulations which allow for a measure of secrecy. The call issued by Faulkner's text can be met by a critical response similar to the one Zender describes: "As we seek, as indeed we must, to discover the secrets Faulkner and his culture attempted to hide, we should not neglect the ones, so many of them quite wonderful, that he, and it, invited us to share" (52). Our reading can imitate this sharing of secrets. After all, if the Iraqi, the Mexican, and the poor white Appalachian each feels led to say "he was one of us," it is this "us" which receives the most important renovation.

[*niente della cosa*]" (140). I would argue that the arc of Faulkner's story works to maintain a similar level of risk, one that the blood-line commonality personified in Darl does not permit.

CHAPTER 4

Brian O'Nolan and the Long-Overdue Rehabilitation of Judas

It is the serious lack of commitment in any direction that limits Brian O'Nolan and ensnares him within the second rank, below Joyce and Yeats and Seán O'Casey—nor does the reader find the sort of sincere despair to which Samuel Beckett is so vitally committed that he can find no other commitment. There is little chance of discerning where O'Nolan stands in regard to the Church or to Ireland or to the social conditions in which his characters find themselves. Outside the realistic tradition of the novel, and with no directed satirical thrust to his brand of fantasy, he relies exclusively upon irony—an irony without a center of gravity—for his dominant tone. His people bear the burden of their own convictions.
– Bernard Benstock "The Three Faces of Brian O'Nolan" (54)

In Brian O'Nolan's later writing the fine balance is upset; his impetuous and somewhat intimidating commitment to ordinary virtues usurps the achievement of the earlier books and makes it of a different sort altogether.
– J.C.C. Mays "Brian O'Nolan: Literalist of the Imagination" (82)

My intention in this chapter to nominate Brian O'Nolan as the quintessential traitor is not likely to cause a great deal of controversy at this point in the early twenty-first century, more than forty years after his death on April Fools' Day, 1966. This is true not only because O'Nolan—by which name I refer to the Irish writer who was known throughout his life by this and several other pseudonyms, including Flann O'Brien and Myles na gCopaleen[125]—produced a body of work which, in the estimation of Kelly Anspaugh, "is full of betrayals" ("Flann" 11);[126] but also because the very notion of betrayal has

---

[125] Even "Brian O'Nolan" might be referred to as a pseudonym since the truest Irish form of the name would be Ó Nualláin. His father, who was born Michael Nolan, signed his name with several variations throughout his life: Michael O'Nolan, Miceál O Nualáin, and Micheál Ó Nualláin, each one gaining a certain distance from the Anglicized form (cf. Cronin 3–4). For the sake of consistency, I will refer to the author as often as possible as Brian O'Nolan, though the various practices of the critics referred to here will inevitably create a chaotic web of attribution. Such is the legacy O'Nolan left for his readers.

[126] In his list of plot-level betrayals, Anspaugh includes examples from all five of Flann O'Brien's published novels: the love triangle of Dermot, Finn, and Granya in *At Swim-Two-Birds*; John Divney's violation of the "honor among thieves" in murdering the narrator of *The Third Policeman*; Bonaparte O'Coonassa's betrayal by an unjust penal system in *An Béal Bocht*; the "Cain-like betrayal" that concludes *The Hard Life*; and Hackett's seduction of Mary in the final pages of *The Dalkey Archive*. Though he

gradually been divested of its definitively treacherous connotations by the past five decades of anti-foundationalism. In fact, when Anspaugh dubs the author "the Joking Judas of Dublin" in 1992, he does so explicitly in conjunction with O'Nolan's then emergent status as "postmodernist *extraordinaire*" ("Flann" 14).[127] After all, how we evaluate betrayal relies wholly on our estimation of the value of commitment, and in recent years commitment has been viewed from within the walls of the US academy with at best increasing skepticism and at worst unbridled animosity. While Bernard Benstock, writing in the years immediately following O'Nolan's death, would cite the jester's apolitical, non-committal stance as evidence of inferiority, already by the early seventies, J.C.C. Mays would lament the passing of the very "balance" which yielded the ambivalence Benstock finds so unacceptable.

In what follows, the characterization of O'Nolan's oeuvre as a site of multivalent betrayals will be used to further develop my theorization of the crucial role creative infidelity can play in the ethical relation to the unknown, and ultimately unknowable,

---

begins with this survey of content, Anspaugh, like most other critics of O'Nolan's fiction, is more interested in the "Judas-like betrayal of his Master, James Joyce," whom he describes later as being "himself, of course, a connoisseur of betrayal" ("Flann" 12, 13), and in his more recent contribution to the online casebook for *At Swim-Two-Birds*, Anspaugh delves deeper into the Oedipal implications of this relationship. In the context of the present discussion of the revaluation of betrayal accomplished in postmodern ethical discourse, his desire to stage a purely negative scene of the postmodern betrayal of "High Modernism, with its Holy Texts, its Saints and Sages" ("Flann" 14), a betrayal whose aim is merely rebellious anxiety-ridden dismantling, stands as a contrast to my own insistence on the ethico-political opportunities opened up by such infidelity.

[127] Just three years later, Hopper would publish his influential book-length study, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Post-modernist*, reifying O'Nolan's status as postmodernist *avant la lettre*. This label still has currency, though its reconsideration in recent works like Taaffe's (5–7) speaks largely to the weakening of the postmodern classification in general. See also Booker's classificatory effort, "Postmodern and/or Postcolonial?: The Politics of *At Swim-Two-Birds*," where he suggests, "The text has quite often been regarded as an important example of modernist or (perhaps even more often) postmodernist textual play, but few critics have taken it seriously as a political novel of the kind we have come to expect from postcolonial writers." It is just this sense of the apolitical nature of O'Nolan's "textual play"—whatever literary categorization one ultimately attaches to it—that the current discussion seeks to challenge. By including O'Nolan in my collection of "Unfaithful Readings in Modernist Undecidability," I hope to tie his playful stance toward literary infidelity to its modernist context of the 1930s and 40s rather than attributing a literary-historical prescience to O'Nolan as these critics have done.

other. For if we come to view the scene of social interaction as Judith Butler describes it in *Giving an Account of Oneself,* as one where "none of us is fully bounded, utterly separate, but, rather, we are in our skins, given over, in each other's hands, at each other's mercy" (101), then the act of "giving over"—of handing over, traducing, betraying— oneself or the other can become an act that is less treacherous than revolutionary, less reprehensible than revelatory. Whereas Anspaugh and other readers have been more concerned with the individual acts of treachery played out in O'Nolan's stories—the sort of narrative twists and turns we instinctively reject as violations of interpersonal trust— this study will focus on the betrayal in which a mask is torn away, where a telling gesture reveals a once-hidden aspect of the self. Late in his career O'Nolan made the often-quoted claim, "the compartmentation of personality for the purpose of literary utterance ensures that the fundamental individual will not be credited with a certain way of thinking, fixed attitudes, irreversable [*sic*] technique of expression" ("De Me" 41); yet, as Carol Taaffe points out, the multiple personae he created and embodied were not as nicely closed off as most critics like to claim, typically positing a gloomy Brian O'Nolan, an irascible, acidic Myles na gCopaleen, and a "playful, hyper-literary Flann O'Brien" as the dominant characters in this polyphonic cast: "If O'Nolan was hiding behind the masks of Flann and Myles, he at least ensured that the illusion was fairly transparent" (32). His body of work presents a unique field in which to examine the role betrayal plays in the cultivation of the ethical subject.

After first using Butler's comments on the divided and necessarily incomplete nature of self-knowledge to interrogate O'Nolan's notions of identity and authorship, I will turn to the most dominant theme in O'Nolan scholarship: his relationship with James

Joyce. Ever since the 1939 publication of *At Swim-Two-Birds*, two practices have remained fairly constant: no reprinting or review of that book has appeared without including the blurb by Joyce: "That's a real writer, with the true comic spirit. A really funny book"[128]; and no literary critic would turn his or her eye to the satiric O'Nolan without at least cursory mention of the towering master of Irish Modernism, or, as Anthony Cronin cryptically describes the situation, "The figure of Joyce hung over his life like a sort of cloud from which the apocalyptic vision could come or had come" (176). Certainly, one could apply Sean O'Faoláin's review of the first novel—that it had "a general odour of spilt Joyce all over it" (qtd. in Cronin 92)—to the entire career. And many critics have suggested exactly that, if not in word then in deed. Not only have his works been considered, to varying degrees, derivative Joycean imitations, but the multitude of Joyce references made both in letters and via his journalistic outlet, the *Irish Times* column *Cruiskeen Lawn*, have been mined for their significance.[129]

---

[128] This was reportedly Joyce's response (and we have no real reason to doubt it) when O'Nolan's friend Niall Sheridan presented him a copy in which O'Nolan had written, "To James Joyce from the author, Brian O'Nolan, with plenty of what's on page 305"—where he had underlined the phrase "diffidence of the author." According to Sheridan, *At Swim-Two-Birds* was the last novel Joyce read (see "Brian" 48–49; for a somewhat different account of the incident see Sheridan's 1960 letter to O'Keeffe, quoted in Clissman 79–80). For some reason, Cohen sees in this diffident gift a "personal barb for the writer-in-exile" (153). In his view, "O'Brien had issued a challenge, but Joyce's response was unabashed praise and a promise to promote the book on the Continent" (154), a response that somehow, in Cohen's estimation, led to the writer's downfall. He notes that, while Cronin attributes O'Nolan's "failure" to the onset of WWII and to alcoholism, "I believe it goes farther than that—back, in fact, to the copy of *At Swim-Two-Birds* he had Niall Sheridan deliver to James Joyce in Paris. O'Brien had wanted a confrontation with Joyce; his work begged for it. But Joyce praised it without qualification, something Joyce seldom did, especially to a contemporary book or an Irish book" (156). This sort of evaluation, though a bit extreme, is typical of the general overly Oedipal reading of the O'Nolan-Joyce relationship.

[129] While all critics treat Joycean influence to some degree, there are many studies devoted solely to that task. For a wide range of examples—some critical, some defensive—see Browne, Chace, Cohen, Dotterer, Haugen, Mays's "Brian O'Nolan and Joyce on Art and on Life," and Morash. Much of the most provocative work on O'Nolan's view of Joyce can be found in essays or chapters of book-length studies specifically treating *The Dalkey Archive*. See especially Morales Ladrón's attempt to read this work as an example of a category she refers to as "*la ficción metajoyceana.*" Also see Powell for a fairly thorough compilation of the treatment of Joyce in the *Irish Times* column.

In an attempt to move beyond a simple interrogation of Bloomian "anxiety of influence" (Deane 194), I will consider the constitutive function of betrayal in this relationship. O'Nolan's life-long reaction to his predecessor culminates in *The Dalkey Archive*, where he has Joyce living on into the 1940s in Skerries, on the outskirts of Dublin, tending bar and longing to become a Jesuit. Surprisingly enough, O'Nolan's Joyce denies having written his two final masterpieces and instead claims to have written merely a few pamphlets for the Catholic Truth Society. It is obviously no stretch then to refer to this as a betrayal of Joyce, a representation which is unfaithful to the reality of its object. Yet, as Taaffe points out, there is an element of self-betrayal to the book as well since *The Dalkey Archive* is to some extent an adaptation of an earlier unpublished manuscript: "His decision to pillage *The Third Policeman* for *The Dalkey Archive* was not only his ultimate act of literary cannibalism, but also his most brutal piece of literary revisionism. Arguably it is not Joyce who is the true victim of *The Dalkey Archive*, but Flann O'Brien" (184). If we choose to consider betrayal in light of its revelatory role rather than simply its "sinfulness," both these elements of *The Dalkey Archive* take on a more provocative aspect. Building on Jacques Derrida's concept of the messianic as an unmitigated welcome and openness to the future, I will argue that O'Nolan's treatment of Joyce continually undermines any sense of closure critics might impose on his work, opening a breach in what can often be a hermetically sealed Joyce industry. Joyce scholars can sometimes suffer from the obsession for order Derrida describes in *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, a constant need to delineate what falls within the boundaries of Joycean thought, of the Joyce archive. In a letter written to his British editor, Timothy O'Keeffe, in the early stages of composition of *The Dalkey Archive*,

O'Nolan claims, "Anything can be brought in, including the long-overdue rehabilitation of Judas Iscariot" (qtd. in Jones 374). If Derrida calls for an attitude toward the future that is "messianic without Messiah"—without, in other words, the closure that would come with the arrival of the awaited one—then perhaps O'Nolan's work suggests the "betrayal without traitor" that will infinitely facilitate its coming.

To conclude my consideration of betrayal in O'Nolan's work, I will move from the most widely discussed matter in the criticism to what is likely the least discussed: his 1943 translation/adaptation of the Čapek brothers' *Insect Play*.[130] Though O'Nolan worked in many media during his lifetime, his theatrical ambitions were largely disappointed; this play was no exception. Running a mere six nights at Dublin's Gaiety Theatre, it met with mixed reviews and then faded from memory. Nevertheless, his attempt to stage this particular play, which presents an overt commentary on the folly of war, in an officially neutral Ireland at the height of World War 2 warrants closer attention. While O'Nolan took wide liberties in his adaptation, leaving little trace of the original in certain scenes, he often referred to the performance as a "translation" of the Čapeks' play.[131] If, according to the Italian cliché, *traduttore traditore*—"translator = traitor"—then we are presented with yet another site of betrayal as O'Nolan attempts to "carry over" the 1922 Czech play into his 1940s Dublin milieu. One reviewer complained

---

[130] The play was advertised by O'Nolan's working title, *Rhapsody on Stephen's Green*, up until opening night, when it received the more commonly used English title, *The Insect Play*. The original, *Ze zivota hmyzu*—literally translated *From the Lives of Insects*—had been previously adapted into English by Owen Davis as *The World We Live In* in 1922 and, in a more literal translation, by Paul Selver as *And so ad infinitum*. See Tracy for more details of the play's production history.

[131] See, for example, the letters to *The Standard*, reprinted in Tracy 15–17, where O'Nolan refers to himself as "The Translator of the Insect Play." Mays refers to "the translations of the Čapeks' *Insect Play* and Brinsley MacNamara's *Mairéad Gillan*" as being the only things done in O'Nolan's own name ("Literalist" 113). In addition to the fact that the play was produced under the name of Myles na gCopaleen, the statement is misleading in equating O'Nolan's involvement in translating the Czech and Irish texts.

that this "serious satire on the cruelties of the world" had been basically stripped of its solemnity in order to comically portray the parochial and petty strivings of a divided Ireland (T.W.). In other words, he is unfaithful to the original text. It is then our responsibility to determine the significance of this infidelity. If, as I hope to show in the following pages, betrayal is a critical aspect of any ethical approach to the other, if one must confess to the impossibility of complete fidelity that lies at the heart of any attempt to know one who is *tout autre*, entirely other, then O'Nolan's willingness to betray these various authors, along with his traitorous stance toward Irish identity in general, could paradoxically do more justice to his objects than a seemingly more faithful approach.

THE SLIP OF THE MASK

> *I considered it desirable that he should know nothing about me but it was even*
> *better if he knew several things which were quite wrong.*
> – *Flann O'Brien* The Third Policeman *(269)*

O'Nolan's work consistently questions the concept of coherent identity, especially as that concept functions in the work of fiction. Not only does he populate his novels with characters that are fragmentary and often self-contradictory, but he has also made it nearly impossible to discern the position of the real author behind the works. His 1939 breakthrough novel, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, presents the clearest treatment of the fragmented voice of authority and authorship. Its metafictional frame, presenting the story of a novelist writing a novel about a novelist writing a novel (and so on), allows O'Nolan to satirize what he sees as the overly romanticized view of the artist and his creation in his Irish audience. O'Nolan's body of work, written in two primary languages, from the created perspectives of multiple authorial personae constantly blurring the line between the real and the fantastic, forces the undecidability of authorial identity to the

foreground. Like the "satisfactory novel" as defined by the narrator of *At Swim-Two-Birds*, all O'Nolan's writing presents the reader with "a self-evident sham to which the reader could regulate at will the degree of his credulity" (21). As Keith Donohue puts it in his introduction to the recent Everyman's Library edition of O'Nolan's *Complete Novels*, the fiction reveals the author's "disdain for certain, clear meaning and interpretation" (xiii). For some practitioners of literary criticism, who often seem to be searching for exactly this certainty of interpretation scorned by O'Nolan, his work presents an intriguing and provocative challenge. Combined with his obsessive use of pseudonyms throughout his career and his frustrating tendency to hide behind outright lies about his life, the undecidability of O'Nolan's fiction can leave the reader searching for any possible slip-up, anything that might give the writer away.

Working against such a desire for certainty in literary scholarship, Carol Taaffe has given what is probably the most evenhanded treatment of O'Nolan's oeuvre to date in *Ireland Through the Looking-Glass: Flann O'Brien, Myles na gCopaleen and Irish Cultural Debate*. Throughout this carefully researched study, she continually brings a skeptical eye to the body of O'Nolan criticism, sifting the often unchecked myths that have arisen around this enigmatic writer. Relying less on the popular reception of his work or the reputations of "failed genius" and "Joycean acolyte" literary critics have assigned to him, Taaffe is able to consider the broad aspects of this thirty-year writing career. Sensing the more profound implications of his writing, Taaffe suggests that "the strange course of O'Nolan's career reflects—even more than his acclaimed parodic novels—the challenge his work presents to customary notions of authorship, to the integrity of the work of art and to ideas of what constitutes 'literature' itself" (7). Indeed,

one might say the same about Taaffe's own effort to write about O'Nolan. Her book is filled with betrayals. This is not to say that she is necessarily preoccupied with the theme of the traitor in O'Nolan's work, as is Anspaugh, for example. Nor does she devote her critical attention to the betrayal of Joyce as others have done. Nevertheless, the word "betray," along with its various configurations, appears throughout the book, coming five times in the first ten pages alone. These instances do not refer to the more provocative, tantalizing kind of interpersonal infidelities we typically think of as being signified by the word "betrayal." Instead, they are the kind of betrayals that reveal secrets, the betrayal of intention behind the carefully worded façade, the betrayal of identity behind the carefully crafted accent or other mask. As I indicated in the Introduction, such betrayals are not as distant as they may seem from the breaches of faith and acts of treason with which they share an etymological history.

In my view, it is no accident, then, that O'Nolan's oeuvre leads Taafe to make such extensive use of the language of revelatory betrayal. According to Taafe, O'Nolan's comic version of Ireland "betrays his astute awareness of the prescriptive nature" of attempts to invent an independent nation (1); *Cruiskeen Lawn* "betrayed an entirely introverted preoccupation with language and logic" (7); *At Swim-Two-Birds* "betrays a certain adherence to the values of contemporary Ireland (aesthetic and otherwise) which worked to exclude him" (19); and so on. She sees O'Nolan mimicking revision in *The Dalkey Archive* "[a]s if betraying a bad conscience" (198), and even in the proximity of discussing the discourse on Judas in *The Dalkey Archive* her use of the word refers to its revelatory aspect rather than to acts of treachery: "It is no surprise, in a novel with confused themes of salvation and redemption, that along the way Hackett makes a case

for the rehabilitation of Judas Iscariot, *and the novel's first draft further betrays the import of Mick's actions…*" (203; my emphasis). In each instance, one gets the impression that certain forces—whether O'Nolan's own intentions, the received work of previous scholarship, or the social demands placed on Irish subjectivity—would have this revelation be kept secret. It is only through the interpretive efforts of the critic that the truth is glimpsed behind the veil. Thus, for example, O'Nolan's "entirely introverted preoccupation with language and logic" is potentially veiled by a seemingly "intimate relationship with [the] *Irish Times* readership." On a structural level, the *Cruiskeen Lawn* plays traitor to this veiling effect, betraying O'Nolan's introversion from the sphere of secrecy into the sphere of epistemological confidence.

While Taafe's unusual level of lexical repetition could simply be attributed to matters of style, I would suggest her continual return to the language of betrayal—and of similar concepts such as revelation and manifestation—speaks to the ultimately undecidable identity at the center of such literary criticism. Of course, the same might be said about any writer, or any subject whatsoever for that matter—and that is precisely the point. The reader in search of the concealed author behind the text is always waiting for him to give himself away, to leave unguarded traces of himself between the lines of the literary work. But the particular composition of O'Nolan's work pushes these difficulties to the foreground. I would argue that an encounter with fiction as a "self-evident sham," with readers striving to resist the location of a totalized, unequivocal meaning, has the potential to alert us to the extent to which we do not fully know others or ourselves. As Butler suggests in her recent work on narrativity and the limits of self-knowledge,

awareness of "the opacity of the subject to itself" (*Giving* 20) can result in the humility

and generosity necessary for a truly ethical relationship to the other.

Reading a piece of text produced by O'Nolan and attempting to discern an

authorial identity behind it can provoke an irremediable sense of anxiety. As Keith

Donohue puts it in *The Irish Anatomist,* his study of O'Nolan's journalism, "The distance

between O'Nolan and his pen names is a persistent problem" (23). As one of the few

O'Nolan scholars who have ventured into the approximately four-million-word archive of

Cruiskeen Lawn, Donohue has a keen sense of the difficulty in discerning a coherent

identity in the character of Myles na gCopaleen, as can be seen in this comment on some

of the more political entries in the column:

> Myles's political anger was always at odds with more literary
> pieces—or even simple games. The disjunction between O'Nolan's
> political views and the character of Myles the Citizen marks one of
> the central dilemmas in dealing with the juxtaposition of fact and
> fiction, irony and opinion in *Cruiskeen Lawn*. Reading it as an
> extended fictional form, as [John Wyse] Jackson and others have
> suggested, one strains to find consistency between the protean
> Myles and the invariable O'Nolan. As character and creator
> became more alike over the years, the line between fact and fiction
> blurs. (175)[132]

Here an attempt is made to exorcise the shifting nature of the author's identity into the

journalistic persona, leaving a coherent identity for the author himself. However, in the

end, Donohue is forced to admit that, by the end of his life, "Brian O'Nolan had almost

---

[132] The difficulty described by Donohue is compounded by the fact that many of the column's entries (and we will never know exactly which ones) were written by ghost writers, the most prolific being O'Nolan's University College Dublin friend and colleague, Niall Montgomery. While this acknowledgment went relatively unmentioned in O'Nolan scholarship for decades, Taaffe discusses the complexity this adds to studying *Cruiskeen Lawn*, especially citing the fact that most of the more blatant "attacks" on Joyce's character were likely written by Montgomery, not O'Nolan (15): "O'Nolan not only admitted to having substitutes but advertised the fact, since it would allow him to deny responsibility for material that offended his political masters" (126–27).

succeeded in completely effacing the man behind the writer," and, in a somewhat puzzling contrast to two of his compatriots, Donohue concludes:

> Unlike those two other giants of 20th century Irish comedy, Joyce and Beckett, Brian O'Nolan will remain something of a mystery. Questions of identity for this most un-Irish of Irish stereotypes can only be explained, as he wished, through his art. While we know a great deal about the life of Brian O'Nolan, he tended to separate his story from the stories he told. (200)

The declaration that Joyce and Beckett are somehow free of mystery seems a bit overstated, but the most provocative aspect of this assessment lies in Donohue's description of O'Nolan's evasiveness as a separation of stories. In doing so, he illustrates a role for the critic that would match the one performed by Taaffe, searching the literature for that telling betrayal that will "give us" O'Nolan in a way he refused to do during his lifetime. Such a role can only be played with scholarly humility and generosity, approaching the text with a degree of respect for uncertainty.

Probably the most well-known display of O'Nolan's penchant for misdirection came in his 1943 interview with *Time* magazine's Stanford Lee Cooper in which, among other things, he confessed that on a quick visit to Germany in 1933 he had "met and married eighteen-year-old Clara Ungerland, blonde, violin-playing daughter of a Cologne basket-weaver. She died a month later. O'Nolan returned to Eire and never mentions her" (qtd. in Cronin 67), a biographical detail that was eventually published as a "*Time*-checked fact" in August of that year.[133] Hugh Kenner sees this as an instance where O'Nolan, whom he refers to as "The Mocker" in his study of Irish writers, displays

---

[133] The title of Cooper's exposé, "Eire's Columnist," certainly catered to O'Nolan's attempt in the interview to embody elements of the stage Irishman in order to poke indirect fun at the American interviewer. See also Taaffe's discussion of the interview, where she states "it is dangerous to take any of this too seriously" (13). See also the carefully researched account in Costello and Van De Camp's biography (47–48), which Cronin mocks.

"xenophobic delight in misinforming the stranger" (*Colder Eye* 9). Yet, at the same time,

can we be so sure this is misinformation? In his literary biographical work *No Laughing*

Matter, Cronin describes the incident and, in agreement with Kenner, posits the

Ungerland affair as mere jest, though it is established that O'Nolan did spend some

length of time in Germany in 1933. But of course, like many biographical facts, the

tragically brief marriage can never be countered by more than "a considerable amount of

evidence which casts doubt on the idea of any sort of prolonged stay in Germany" (67).

Cronin proceeds to provide this evidence, stating for example, that O'Nolan rarely

discussed Nazism and, if he had spent any length of time in 1930s Germany, he would no

doubt have spoken more authoritatively on the subject (68). However, the final authority

to whom Cronin turns for clarification on the incident is, by way of a strange, circular

route, Myles na gCopaleen. His explanation is important for my discussion of slippery

identity:

> As for the attempt to make the mythical Fraulein Ungerland into
> the equivalent of Wordsworth's Annette Vallon in O'Nolan's life
> … that can *safely* be left to Myles na Gopaleen too. In 1960, he
> was to return to the *Time* article and even to add some romantic
> details, though whether these were really imparted to Stanford Lee
> Cooper in 1943 is doubtful…. As Myles was to say *with double*
> *truth*: 'I am not the worst at inventing tall and impossible stories,
> but what I produced on this occasion was a superb heap of twaddle
> that would deceive nobody of 10 years of age.'" (69–70; my
> emphasis)[134]

The confident safety Cronin finds in Myles na Gopaleen's disavowal, describing the

interview as "a superb heap of twaddle," seems to be asserted with self-conscious irony;

nonetheless, this confidence is faithfully reflected in every subsequent use of Myles's

---

[134] Cronin is quoting here from the April 13, 1960 edition of *Cruiskeen Lawn*.

words to confidently assert, as Kenner does, that O'Nolan "made misinformation into an art form" (*Colder Eye* 9).

Here is a telling instance of what Butler describes in *Giving an Account of Oneself* as society's demand for a coherent account of the individual's life. Both in the naïveté that would uncritically accept O'Nolan's claims and in the haste with which critics relish his later disavowal, we can see an impatience with mystery: "Indeed, if we require that someone be able to tell in story form the reasons why his or her life has taken the path it has, that is, to be a coherent autobiographer, we may be preferring the seamlessness of the story to something we might tentatively call the truth of the person." Importantly for the current study, Butler claims that the so-called "truth of the person … might well become more clear in moments of interruption, stoppage, open-endedness—in enigmatic articulations that cannot easily be translated into narrative form" (64). In these few phrases, Butler offers a different way of viewing O'Nolan's puckishness. "Enigmatic articulations," of the sort found in the *Time* interview, create an opportunity for the critical reader to revel in the undecidable nature of O'Nolan's identity, and, for Butler, such willingness to resist final closure on the matter has ethical valence: "if, in the name of ethics, we (violently) require that another do a certain violence to herself … by offering a narrative account or issuing a confession, then, conversely, if we permit, sustain, and accommodate the interruption, a certain practice of nonviolence may follow" (64). As the literary critic demands a pseudo-confession from the author in the form of her literary output, then, an awareness of the incomplete nature of this confession can facilitate the type of "nonviolence" Butler calls for here in relation to the other.

Her study of ethics and narrativity allows Butler to bring together certain strains of her thinking which have become increasingly prominent since her 2000 collaboration with Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*. One such strain is the reclamation of a "new universality" as integral for philosophical discourse. Even in her 1997 consideration of subjection and subjectivity, *The Psychic Life of Power*, she was already arguing for a revaluation of the cost of eschewing all claims of universality as imperialistic or necessarily oppressive. There the "new universality" begins to take shape as what remains outside any attempts at total coherence: "This raises the political question of the cost of articulating a coherent identity position by producing, excluding, and repudiating a domain of abjected specters that threaten the arbitrarily closed domain of subject positions. Perhaps only by risking the *incoherence* of identity is connection possible" (149). In the various particularisms assumed and excluded by the notion of the totalized subject position, Butler detects the danger of isolation, of a different kind of violence that would preclude any sort of collaboration between subject groups.

This concern gains strength in her work with Laclau and Žižek, where she argues that, since there is no assertion of particularity without a concomitant universal aspiration, we have an obligation to reconsider the universal rather than simply rejecting it. And any conception of universality that will lead to meaningful connection must insist on "the incompleteness of each and every identity":

> If any such particular identity seeks to universalize its own situation without recognizing that other such identities are in an identical structural situation, it will fail to achieve an alliance with other emergent identities, and will mistakenly identify the meaning and place of universality itself. The universalization of the

>particular seeks to elevate a specific content to a global condition,
>making an empire of its local meaning. (31)

This sense of properly recognizing oneself and the "other emergent identities" with whom one must interact finally receives full attention in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, where Butler takes up the task of defending the ethical responsibility of the poststructural insistence on what she calls in this work "self-unknowledge" (42), or the growing awareness of the limits of one's capacity for knowing the self and others. Here she restages the universal as "an ethics based on our shared, invariable, and partial blindness about ourselves" (41). This relatively brief essay, which began as a series of lectures given in 2002, can serve as a helpful lens through which to view the multiple voices and contradictory personae of O'Nolan's career.

Butler considers a wide range of philosophical inquiry in this text, touching on work by Adorno, Foucault, Laplanche, Levinas, Nietzsche, and Hegel, although she admits, "[n]ot all of their positions are compatible with one another." She defends her selective usage by focusing on a single point of agreement: "each theory suggests something of ethical importance that follows from the limits that condition any effort one might make to give an account of oneself" (21). She argues for an ethics that insists on incomplete knowledge, which would thus counter accusations by critics who "have claimed that the view of the subject proffered by Foucault—and other poststructuralists—undermines the capacity to conduct ethical deliberations and to ground human agency" (19). When we consider the attempts by O'Nolan to "give an account of himself" in this respect as fundamentally, even brazenly incomplete, his textual explorations could be said to be accomplishing ethical work, even at their most playful moments. If Butler is right in suggesting that "the question of ethics emerges precisely at the limits of our

schemes of intelligibility, the site where we ask ourselves what it might mean to continue in a dialogue where no common ground can be assumed, where one is, as it were, at the limits of what one knows yet still under the demand to offer and receive acknowledgment" (21–22), then our ultimate failure to fix O'Nolan's identity, or the subject position presented by his enigmatic writings, presents an exemplary literary opportunity for contemplating the formation of ethical subjectivity itself.

Of course, O'Nolan's enigmatic sense of identity extends beyond himself as author to embrace his fictional creations. Not only does the identity of Brian/Myles/Flann remain ever beyond our grasp, but his protagonists introduce yet another level of complexity to this issue. This is largely due to the fact that, on the level of character, O'Nolan is always working out his subversive purpose which, according to Neil Murphy, consists of "register[ing] new ways to discredit the vanity of human epistemological systems." For Murphy, "the most fruitful way to consider O'Brien's work [is] as a perpetual assault against all forms of human knowledge, usually by using various parodic modes within polyphonic texts that repeatedly draw attention to the obvious fact of their own construction and, by inference, to the fact of the construction of all texts, all knowledge" (8–9). In his review of the recently published volume of O'Nolan's *Complete Novels*, Murphy sums up the typical character who appears in a Flann O'Brien novel as one who comically fails to give an account of himself: "Try as they will, O'Brien's characters achieve nothing except, in many of the novels, to reveal an essentially repetitive, meaningless place of habitation, in which the major figures, often hilariously, set about constructing ever more unlikely fictions to explain their worlds and dignify their lives" (9). As this assessment makes clear, O'Nolan's fictional characters

become spokesmen for the kind of relationship between narration and identity established by Butler.[135] Since all the novels except *The Dalkey Archive* are told in the first person,[136] they can be read as various attempts by the protagonists to give an account of themselves, and in each instance the failures speak louder than could any measure of success.

The most obvious example of such an attempt can be found in *The Third Policeman*. Its opening paragraph sets the stage for the kind of confessional account referred to by Butler:

> Not everybody knows how I killed old Phillip Mathers, smashing his jaw in with my spade; but first it is better to speak of my friendship with John Divney because it was he who first knocked old Mathers down by giving him a great blow in the neck with a special bicycle-pump which he manufactured himself out of a hollow iron bar. Divney was a strong civil man but he was lazy and idle-minded. He was personally responsible for the whole idea in the first place. It was he who told me to bring my spade. He was the one who gave the orders on the occasion and also the explanations when they were called for. (223)

By thus "solving the crime" on the opening page, *The Third Policeman* subverts the detective genre and situates itself more along the lines of a Dostoevskian psychological account of motivation. Questions of personal responsibility and blame, along with the

---

[135] And they are primarily spoke*men*; the one exception being Mary in *The Dalkey Archive*, a novel in which Hopper claims, perhaps overzealously, "women have begun to emerge from the background of the text" (99). Though O'Nolan responded to his American editor Cecil Scott's criticism of her characterization by saying, "Yes, Mary is … unsatisfactory, though she had not been intended as very much more than a 'fringe benefit'" (6 January 1964; qtd. in Asbee 107), perhaps O'Nolan is also to extreme in his understatement. She is certainly granted a great deal of agency in a novel where nothing much happens, and as Asbee points out, "she is much the most attractive and dwelt on of all O'Brien's female characters" (107).

[136] This novel was also originally drafted in first person, but later converted to third, as O'Nolan explains in a letter to Scott during the early stages of writing: "I showed the MS to a friend whose opinion I value very much, and was very pleased when he suggested, among other things, a major change which I had already decided on without his knowledge: that is, the obliteration of the first person sing. narrator. This character is a conceited prig and a change to the third person would materially change, so to speak, the camera angle, and facilitate the job of making him more revolting" (qtd. in Asbee 105). The fact that Mick is anything but revolting—more pedestrian than anything—accompanied by the fact that he, more than any other protagonist, resembles the author biographically, gives one pause in detecting the true reason for this change, which gives the final novel a tone vaguely dissimilar from the rest of O'Nolan's work.

mention of Divney's explanations, comically establish the tone of the novel as a "talking cure," which would encourage a reading that juxtaposes it with Butler's work. After callously describing the violent act itself, the narrator goes on to say, "I was born a long time ago," launching into an attempt to give an account of himself to the reader, one which might serve to explain what is apparently inexplicable. Of course, by the time we come to realize the murder seems to have been committed in order to pursue the scholarly study of a scientist named de Selby, the inadequacy of the narrator's explanation has already begun to manifest itself.

In a chapter devoted to the narrator of *The Third Policeman*, "Character Building: The Role of the Self-Conscious Narrator," Keith Hopper considers first person narration to be "the key *metaleptic* (frame-breaking) strategy" of the novel (109–10). According to Hopper, this character, whom he calls Noman, "wavers between metafictional self-consciousness and 'realist' passivity; flickering between an awareness that he is a character trapped within a fictional order and his realist belief that he is a 'real-life' person" (110). These two positions, the awareness of fictiveness and a sort of naïve "realism," recall the options Butler sees made available to the ethical subject in coming to terms with the limits of her self-knowledge. While this character is finally revealed to be in a hellish cycle of repetition, where he is forever doomed unwittingly to retrace his steps, the reader is continually tempted toward a sense of realistic coherence only to have the rug pulled out from under her with an incoherent, fantastic element, such as the two-dimensional police headquarters, for example (265–66). The necessity of moving forward in the reading process under such undecidable circumstances has an uncanny similarity to the attempt made by Butler's ethical subject "to continue in a dialogue where no common

ground can be assumed, where one is, as it were, at the limits of what one knows yet still under the demand to offer and receive acknowledgment" (*Giving* 21–22). Whereas the narrator's account in *The Third Policeman* is certainly a key example of O'Nolan's relevance for Butler's theorization of ethical subjectivity, it is merely one among many. His work is rife with undecidability and, therefore, offers a provocative place to interrogate the intersection of the literary and the ethical spheres.

This over-arching quality of O'Nolan's writing is best described in one of the few early pieces on his work which tries to do justice to its ambiguity. In "Brian O'Nolan: Literalist of the Imagination," J.C.C. Mays presents a body of literature whose chronic undecidability subversively resists the type of critical "violence" rejected by Butler:

> The combination of sheer ordinariness and sheer unpredictable fantasy is a paradox protected by privacy. Each of his *personae* at different times allowed different scope to his genius, but the attraction of his writing is also founded on the sense of something withheld and quite separate. We are struck by an intrinsic fastidiousness or reticence which involves mingled pride and humility, and which has little in common with the self-indulgent blether and boisterous farce of some of his latter-day admirers. It is a quality that colours all aspects of his writing, large and small, from the characteristic form of his sentences to the way in which he manipulates plot, and that enables the writing to be at its best mocking and humane, austere and extravagant, committed and shy, compassionate and gay, all this and more at the very same time. (84–85)

What Mays values in O'Nolan is clearly in line with Butler's "opacity" of the subject, but her work allows us to see the potential value of such a quality beyond the aesthetic one attributed to O'Nolan's work by Mays. She goes on in *Giving an Account of Oneself* to suggest that "[t]o remain decentered, interestingly, means to remain implicated in the death of the other and so at a distance from the unbridled cruelty (the limit case of uncritical enthusiasm) in which the self seeks to separate from its constitutive sociality

and annihilate the other" (77). The "withholding" and "reticence" Mays senses in O'Nolan's work elicits a response by his reader that mirrors Butler's ethical approach to the other, an approach that allows us "to experience the very limits of knowing. This can, by the way, constitute a disposition of humility and generosity alike" (42)—humility because we realize the limits of our own self-knowledge, and generosity because we are able to assume the same for the many others we encounter. While the approach to the literary work would be pointless without asking the question "Who (what) are you?" Butler seems correct in requiring this Althusserian question to remain open: "So if there is, in the question, a desire for recognition, this desire will be under an obligation to keep itself alive as desire and not to resolve itself. 'Oh, now I know who you are': at this moment, I cease to address you, or to be addressed by you" (43). Both in his life and in his work, O'Nolan pushes us to suspend this assertion of confident apprehension.

This suspension is evidenced by the myriad ways he betrays himself in his writings, performing striking reversals whereby he denies a coherent understanding of his personal identity on the one hand while, on the other hand, he simultaneously reveals aspects of his character previously veiled by that semblance of understanding. According to Taaffe, "O'Nolan's various masks obscured more than simple evasiveness. And quite besides the problem of attribution, in assuming so many literary identities he risked acquiring none at all" (30). I will return to this sense of risk later, but for now it is evident that only an author who is so self-consciously a wearer of masks could provoke a critic to declare, as one of his more intimate acquaintances, Anthony Cronin, does regarding *The Dalkey Archive*,

> In this book, for the first time, aspects of the author's own personality seemed to have escaped from their compartments and

> to be hanging out all over the place…. the general tone of the book was his and it is impossible to escape the feeling that Mick and the author are very much the same person. For the first time in a long career the mask appeared to have slipped or to have been mislaid. (227)

It is to this book I now turn to continue in order to further consider the revelatory power of betrayal. If, as Cronin seems to indicate, the "real" O'Nolan is betrayed by a slip of the mask in *The Dalkey Archive*, then so is James Joyce. My goal in what follows will be to discern the significance of these two betrayals.

DALKEY ARCHIVE FEVER

> *Ignorant reviewers have messed me up with another man, to my intense embarrassment and disgust, and he will be another character. I mean James Joyce. I'm going to get my own back on that bugger.*
> *– O'Nolan in a letter to Gerald Gross, 1962*[137]

When casting about for a name for the major female character in *The Dalkey Archive*, O'Nolan turned once again to his literary *pater familias*: James Joyce. In particular, he was probably drawn to one of Joyce's more enigmatic characters, referred to in the "Nausicaa" chapter of *Ulysses* as "holy Mary" and described, like O'Nolan's character, as being a "virgin of virgins" (13.289). Later in the chapter, Joyce brings her into Gerty MacDowell's reflections as an absent guardian: "it was not recorded in any age that those who implored her powerful protection were ever abandoned by her" (13.379–80), and it is difficult to miss O'Nolan's borrowing here when we consider Mick's reliance on the largely absent Mary who, in the end, refuses to abandon him for his friend Hackett.[138] Nevertheless, while the similarities between these two characters leave little doubt as to

---

[137] This letter, along with several others in which O'Nolan refers to Joyce, are located in the Brian O'Nolan Collection at Southern Illinois University and quoted by Dotterer (55).

the source for *The Dalkey Archive*'s Mary, there is a possibility that O'Nolan could be simultaneously alluding to Joyce's mother, who shared the same name.

It probably goes without saying that the preceding paragraph is offered in the spirit of parody. No critic (at least none I am aware of) has gone so far as to claim the Virgin Mary as a Joycean character. However, the tone is certainly reminiscent of a wide swath of O'Nolan criticism that has as its goal to discern the traces of Joyce in the work of this, his most unwilling heir. The confident assertions of Joycean allusion made by such critics, whereby they attempt to firmly establish O'Nolan as once-removed from the brilliance of his predecessor, are interesting for the present study on fidelity and betrayal. While no one could debate the fact that O'Nolan refers to Joyce's work throughout his career, the image literary critics have created of a petulant and brooding successor, bitter with envy about the attention Joyce continued to receive from the literary establishment rapidly growing up around his work, conceals as much as it explains. I would argue that his many betrayals of Joyce—his various refusals to acknowledge his eminence in *Cruiskeen Lawn*, his parody and downright plagiarism of Joycean style, and especially his mocking "portrait of the artist as an old man" in *The Dalkey Archive*—can be read as being paradoxically *more* faithful to Joyce than the sort of fidelity typical of Joyce-industry criticism, which often aims for total comprehension of its subject. In the same way that thinkers such as Origen, Thomas de Quincey, and Jorge Luis Borges (not to mention O'Nolan himself) have tried to attribute a more constitutive role in humanity's salvation to Judas's betrayal of Christ, O'Nolan's work accomplishes a rehabilitation, not

---

[138] This Mary plays an even more dominant role in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, where we hear again of her "Virgin" status. When we are told of the young Stephen Dedalus, "The glories of Mary held his soul captive" (112), how can we not detect the predecessor to O'Nolan's introduction to Mick in *The Dalkey Archive*: "Mary was nudging Michael Shaughnessy. She loitered enticingly about the fringes of his mind" (612).

necessarily of the historical Judas, but of the kind of creative infidelity which infinitely resists closure.

When Mick finally meets James Joyce in *The Dalkey Archive*, he is gushing with compliments: "You are a most remarkable writer, an innovator, Dublin's incomparable archivist" (724). And of course, this reflects a fairly widespread way of reading international modernism's favorite text. Joyce's boast to a friend about *Ulysses*, "I want to give a picture of Dublin so complete that if the city one day suddenly disappeared from the earth it could be reconstructed out of my book" (Budgen 69), has been quoted so often that it bears the weight of truth. So for any author who chooses subsequently to turn his or her gaze to the Irish capital, there is a chance Joyce has been there first. As in the tongue-in-cheek allusion to Mary which opens this section, critics have sifted through the Joycean archive for O'Nolan's inspiration, often making surprisingly confident claims of intertextual borrowing. Dotterer's essay, whose stated goal is to establish "the link to Joyce … as central and persistent in Brian O'Nolan's formation of his own work" (54), contains several doubtful "sources" for O'Nolan characters and themes: in *The Dalkey Archive*, Sergeant Fottrell's "last name comes from a minor character in the Cyclops chapter of Joyce's *Ulysses*"[139] and then two of O'Nolan's minor characters, Dr. Crewett and Crabbe, are dubbed "this work's aged Buck Mulligan" and "a younger, envious version of Buck Mulligan" seemingly on the basis solely of their medical profession (61). And Dotterer's allusions are not restricted to the level of character. He claims to catch

---

[139] Minor indeed. The character is mentioned in a single sentence of the chapter describing the finding, after an earthquake, of "[a]n article of headgear since ascertained to belong to the much respected clerk of the crown and peace Mr George Fottrell" (12.1871–72), and the phrase is mentioned once more, drawn from Bloom's memory (15.895). Considering the fact that the character bears no resemblance to O'Nolan's Sergeant Fottrell, and recalling the vast number of Irish names recorded in *Ulysses*, it would certainly be no easy task to come up with a unique one for the loquacious officer.

O'Nolan "thinking again about matters Joycean" in a dinner table debate about Parnell in the 1962 television play, *The Boy from Ballytearim* (57). Needless to say, many Irish dinner tables had witnessed such debates, not only the table of Simon Dedalus in *Portrait*.

The temptation to make this sort of assertion of influence is one few critics can resist, and, once made, the resulting link can be quite recalcitrant. Such is the case with Mays's "discovery" of the source for O'Nolan's campaign for women's public restrooms in *The Hard Life*: "Mr. Collopy's lifelong project takes off from a thought of Bloom's in 'Lestrygonians,' that there 'Ought to be places for women'" (245), which has attained the level of intertextual fact, even though this was likely a topic of discussion in many Dublin pubs—or at least we know it was in the pubs O'Nolan frequented (see Cronin 62).[140] (Indeed, it is still often the topic of conversation since some pubs retain the Irish words for male [*fir*] and female [*mná*], whose abbreviations can lead to obvious confusion.) Some instances, on the other hand, are merely fleeting, and sometimes even comical, like Mays's assertion that "[t]he fondness for threes in *The Third Policeman* … as in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, recalls similar triadic motifs in Joyce" (245; yes, and in several other writers), or Booker's claim that the "suggestion of uncertain parentage" at the conclusion of *The Dalkey Archive* evokes yet "another favorite theme of both Joyce and his creation Stephen Dedalus" (119). But by far the most insulting of these procrustean assertions of

---

[140] See Booker, for example, who erects the entire argument for his chapter devoted to *The Hard Life* on this observation: "What there is of a plot is itself an extended allusion to Joyce, being based on a Mr. Collopy's dedication to his plan to institute a series of public restrooms for women in Dublin. This plan itself derives *in an obvious way* from Leopold Bloom's remark as he passes a public urinal for men in *Ulysses*" (86; my emphasis). According to Booker, "Joyce's passage concerning the urinal is much richer than it might appear," and he goes on to establish a "contrast between Joyce's mythic method (centered on an official Great Book of Western Culture) and O'Brien's (centered on a scatological joke, though one that appears in another Great Book—Joyce's) [which] creates a striking disjunction that calls into question the authority of Great Books in general" (87–88). With her usual caution, Taaffe tones down the level of certainty: "J.C.C. Mays has identified a possible source for the Collopy plot in this episode …" (187).

Joycean influence would be the mistaken identification of the source for O'Nolan's beloved column, *Cruiskeen Lawn*, which Anspaugh, among several others, have traced to "a name taken from the 'Cyclops' chapter of *Ulysses*" ("Flann" 13). Joyce the archivist has certainly succeeded beyond measure when he can lay claim to the lyrics of traditional Irish pub songs.[141]

For these critics, mistaking the Joyce archive for the world at large leads them to obsessive attempts to encompass everything within that archive. In this sense, their efforts could be said to approach a certain concept of fidelity that O'Nolan resists throughout his career. He is the disciple who betrays the master, the follower who facilitates the translation of the only partially understood "messiah" into the sphere of the qualified universal. His response to the Joyce industry, especially in the conjuring of "Dublin's incomparable archivist" in a book titled *The Dalkey Archive*, could be said to function as a case of what Derrida calls *mal d'archive*, or "fever in the archive." His work challenges the obsessive drive for order that would definitively draw the boundaries of what is inside and outside the archive.[142]

---

[141] To be fair, some critics do "get it right" in finding O'Nolan's source in the 1860 play by Dion Boucicault, *The Colleen Bawn*, where the song is sung by the stage Irishman Myles na Coppaleen. For the most extensive consideration of this play as the source of O'Nolan's journalistic persona, see Kiberd's chapter on O'Nolan's *An Béal Bocht* in *Inventing Ireland* 497–512, where he sees O'Nolan accomplishing political work with the borrowing: "The difference between Myles na gCopaleen and Myles na Coppaleen is the difference between a vehicle and a target" (498).

[142] Ostensibly a presentation of three theses on Freud's interpretation of Wilhelm Jensen's novella, *Gradiva*, Derrida's *Archive Fever* accomplishes more in its circumlocutory front matter than in its central argument. As in the case of O'Nolan's *The Dalkey Archive*, the bulk of Derrida's interest centers on a provocative betrayal: namely, the revelation by Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi of the Jewish foundations of psychoanalysis, a science which presents itself as being culturally neutral, even universal in scope. Derrida devotes the majority of his fifty-page foreword to an analysis of this betrayal accomplished in *Freud's Moses*, especially focusing on the final chapter of Yerushalmi's study, a fictive letter addressed to the phantom of Freud. Like O'Nolan's resurrection of Joyce, this filial address attempts to circumscribe the father figure within a community which he to some extent disavowed during his lifetime. For Derrida, the pivotal moment of Yerushalmi's treatment of Freud occurs when, in his monologue, Yerushalmi imposes a certain identity on his absent addressee. Derrida quotes from *Freud's Moses*: "In what is at issue here, indeed has been so all along, we both have, as Jews, an equal stake. Therefore in speaking of the Jews I

This particular mode of O'Nolan's resistance can be found in a somewhat more academic setting before this later attempt in *The Dalkey Archive* to bring Joyce back from the dead as a dutiful Irish-Catholic bartender: namely, in his introduction to the special issue of *Envoy* devoted to Joyce, "A Bash in the Tunnel," an essay which Mays claims "is revealing most of all in its evasiveness and inconclusiveness, in its tone of mingled admiration and condemnation" ("Brian O'Nolan and Joyce" 249).[143] This short, meandering piece presents the reader with thirteen aphoristic statements on Joyce and his relationship to the generic category of "Irish Artist." The longest section creates an elaborate metaphor for "the artist in Ireland" using an anecdote purportedly related to the author in Dublin's Scotch House. A stranger approaches O'Nolan and tells him of his custom of breaking into idle dining cars, locking himself in the lavatory with plenty of whiskey, and holding a private "bash" that always lasts no more than a day and a night, "for the good of me health." He goes on to complain of an occasion where he was shunted into a tunnel during the night: "Here was meself parked in the tunnel opening bottle after bottle in the dark, thinking the night was a very long one, stuck there, in the tunnel" (205), and it is from this scenario that O'Nolan draws his analogue for Joyce:

> Funny? But surely there you have the Irish artist? Sitting fully
> dressed, innerly locked in the toilet of a locked coach where he has
> no right to be, resentfully drinking somebody else's whiskey, being
> whisked hither and thither by anonymous shunters, keeping

shall not say 'they.' I shall say 'we.'" In this declaration, "I shall say 'we,'" Derrida detects a "situation of absolute dissymmetry and heteronomy" in which one is inscribed into a community without the ability to "respond, sign, or countersign." Because of his absence, Freud "can only acquiesce. He cannot refuse this community at once proposed and imposed" (41). O'Nolan's spectral treatment of Joyce in *The Dalkey Archive* shares numerous parallels with Yerushalmi's attempt to "impose a 'we'" on the father of psychoanalysis.

[143] Originally heading the 1951 issue of *Envoy*, the essay was published in book form first in a volume of essays edited by John Ryan, *A Bash in the Tunnel: James Joyce by the Irish* (1970), and later in the collection *Stories and Plays* (1973), from which I am quoting here.

> fastidiously the while on the outer face of his door the simple word, ENGAGED?
>
> I think the image fits Joyce: but particularly in his manifestation of a most Irish characteristic—the transgressor's resentment with the nongressor. (206)

Numerous elements of this anecdote call for further analysis, but for the purposes of the present argument, I will focus on O'Nolan's attempt to re-instate Joyce into the Irish community.[144] As the stranger tells his tale, O'Nolan's narrator tells the reader, "Reflect on that locking. So far as the whole world was concerned, the car was utterly empty. It was locked with special, unprecedented locks. Yet this man locked himself securely within those locks" (204). By imagining Joyce "locked" inside this quintessential pub-tale O'Nolan robs the cosmopolitan writer of his European sophistication, forcibly bringing him within his own milieu of the paralyzed Dublin Joyce had supposedly left behind.

O'Nolan questions the effect of Joyce's effort to "fly by those nets" of nationality, language, and religion, and he doesn't stop at reclaiming Joyce for Ireland but goes on to characterize him as a faithful Catholic, an aspect of his identity that is betrayed by his obsessive attempts at heresy: "It seems to me that Joyce emerges, through curtains of salacity and blasphemy, as a truly fear-shaken Irish Catholic, rebelling not so much against the Church but against its near-schism Irish eccentricities." At this point, O'Nolan spuriously takes on the role of the insider, defending "one of his own" from false accusations, and, in a telling moment of identification, he employs the collective "we" described so well by both Derrida (*Archive Fever* 40–42) and Butler (*Giving* 30–40): "His revolt, noble in itself, carried him away. He could not see the tree for the woods. But

---

[144] Though "A Bash in the Tunnel" has never received much sustained attention, see Asbee 118–20 for one of the more thorough treatments, where she claims, "The essay is a curious backhanded tribute, revealing as much about O'Brien's perceptions and reticences as it does about his subject" (120).

I think he meant well. *We all do, anyway*" (207; my emphasis). O'Nolan's comic portrayal of Joyce in "A Bash in the Tunnel" leaves no choice to the conjured phantom but to acquiesce. He claims him for Catholicism by embracing him with the first-person plural pronoun, asking his reader to consider Joyce as merely "one of the gang" of Irish Catholic writers instead of remaining comfortably outside, or above this coterie.[145] For O'Nolan, the Joyce archive cannot be interpreted without the proper respect for the general archive of Irish literature.

Derrida begins his discussion of Freud in *Archive Fever* not "at the beginning, nor even at the archive. But rather at the word 'archive'—and with the archive of so familiar a word," pointing to the inherently divided nature of its etymology, which speaks of both *commencement* and *commandment* (1). In other words, the word "archive" names the authoritative space from which things originate and from which the authorizing power of law and order emanates. According to Derrida, "[t]he concept of the archive shelters in itself, of course, this memory of the name *arkhē*" (2), and all that he will say from this point on is haunted by this bifurcated core. As he goes on to say, the desire to archive involves both a search for and an imposition of unity, which he refers to throughout the study as the principle of *consignation* essential to the archive's function: "*Consignation* aims to coordinate a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration. In an archive, there should not be any

---

[145] Much could be said about the fact that this particular communal "we" to which O'Nolan recalls Joyce bears the name of "universality." For now, I refer the reader to Hollander's work on exemplarity and chosenness, where she discusses Derrida's work on the philosophy of nationalism. Hollander uses the Yerushalmi instance in *Archive Fever* to discuss "the heteronomy of belonging" (129–32). However, she also considers a later remark by Derrida, where he claims to "tremble" before the following sentence from Yerushalmi: "only in Israel and nowhere else is the injunction to remember felt as a religious imperative to an entire people." According to Hollander, Derrida's unease comes from our paradoxical relationship to universality: "Even if we see clearly the danger of universalizing a particular, our attempts to express universal truths always also depend on particulars" (198–99). This discussion of particularity and universality could serve as a gloss on O'Nolan's ostensibly parochial consignation of Joyce to Catholicism.

absolute dissociation, any heterogeneity or *secret* which could separate (*secernere*), or partition, in an absolute manner" (3). The implications of this discussion are far-reaching for the field of literary criticism, a field that is deeply invested in the cultivation of the single and singular corpus: the author's body of work.[146] As I have argued in the previous chapter, an approach to any body of work, or to any communal body for that matter, which does not respect the secret, tends toward a totalizing vision that would both assume full comprehension of its object and decisively exclude that which does not fall within its borders. I would suggest a deep symmetry between Faulkner's love of privacy and O'Nolan's affinity for the nonsensical. Both refuse to what Derrida calls the drive for consignation, refusing to remain fixed in their proper place.

Certainly, with regard to Joyce criticism, we can see the effects on Irish writers of efforts in the 1930s and 40s to establish firmly what falls within the sphere of Joycean influence, or what might be somehow labeled "sub-Joycean" in an Ireland where, as Niall Sheridan puts it, "Joyce, of course, was in the very air we breathed" ("Brian" 39). Sheridan poses the problem another way in his review of new Irish fiction when he complains that Dublin had been so infiltrated with the Joycean presence that it was beginning to seem merely "an inferior plagiarism from *Ulysses*" ("The Joyce Country"). The question Joseph Browne considers, "Flann O'Brien: *Post* Joyce or *Propter* Joyce?" is, after all, an archival one, and it suggests the level of procrustean violence that is required to maintain the unity of the Joycean corpus. Derrida describes such violence as an inevitable effect of archival consignation:

---

[146] Refer to Bartlett for the ironic debacle that has arisen around the body of Derrida's archive. Stanford University's bringing of suit against the Derrida family is certainly a glaring instance of the dangers of the archive drive.

> The gathering into itself of the One is never without violence, nor is the self-affirmation of the Unique, the law of the archontic, the law of *consignation* which orders the archive. Consignation is never without that excessive pressure (impression, repression, suppression) of which repression (*Verdrängung* or *Urverdrängung*) and suppression (*Unterdrückung*) are at least figures. (77–78)

But he doesn't allow the notion of the archive as a "gathering into itself of the One" to stand alone. While, as he puts it earlier, "there should not be" any "heterogeneity or *secret*" within the bounds of the archive, this drive for order is always countered by what he refers to as *mal d'archive*: archive fever. Archive fever presents a constant threat to the order being established by the consignation drive, but for Derrida, the threat plays a crucial role for the concept of archive: "Such an abuse opens the ethico-political dimension of the problem" (19). Archive fever constitutes that which resists the closure of the archive. It even strives for the destruction of the general authority to which the archive attests. It is in this sense that Derrida is able to say hyperbolically, "archive fever verges on radical evil" (20).[147]

Derrida's discussion of Yerushalmi and Freud provides us with the terminology necessary to describe O'Nolan's function in the Joycean archive as remarkably *feverish*. If, as O'Nolan indicates in "A Bash in the Tunnel, "[Joyce's] works are a garden in which

---

[147] Rapaport discusses the possibility of translating *mal d'archive* as "malice in the archive" or "trauma in the archive" or even "an evil in the archive" (69) and then goes on to discuss the relevance of Derrida's work for Holocaust discourse. While his review is intriguing and especially profound in its employment of Derrida's earlier work in *The Post Card* as a "phantom limb" for the discussion in *Archive Fever*, his assertion that "*mal d'archive* also suggests the feverish hunt to find something in an archive that has presumably been lost or that has been kept secret" (69) seems to conflate what Derrida is separating here as the obsession for order and the ever-present resistance to that order. After all, the drive to reveal secrets assumes the same sense of order, the same refusal to "respect the secret" (47), as does the archive drive that had originally failed to properly consign the secret in question. Rapaport's later claim that "*mal d'archive* is, among other things, a repetition of the trauma that is repeated in such a way that the trauma can be mastered" (76) seems to similarly mistake the "feverish" activity of the ordering "archive drive" for Derrida's more parasitic, and even nihilistic "archive fever." After all, the fever is *in* the archive, not *for* the archive.

some of us may play" (208), his is a more feverish play than that of the typical Joycean scholar. Where other writers approach the archive created by Joyce with a desire to apprehend, comprehend, and order it, O'Nolan plays, always establishing a breach in the walls that would circumscribe the writer and his work. He accomplishes this work by means of the fictive "self-evident sham" to which I alluded earlier. This is why the characterization of O'Nolan's treatment of Joyce as "revenge," by himself and others, ultimately falls short. After giving a brief synopsis of Joyce's involvement in *The Dalkey Archive*, Kenner claims, "It's impossible to miss the revenge of 'Flann O'Brien.' How dare U.C.D.'s black sheep have achieved all that fame?" (*Colder Eye* 260). Yet what could possibly be the aim of such vengeance? Or indeed, as Kenner's scare quotes indicate, who exactly would be its perpetrator? O'Nolan doesn't offer his Skerries Joyce in the spirit of the elated archivist who has just discovered a previously unknown document, even though he does parody this attitude. When Mick decides to go in search of the repatriated Joyce, he aims to "strip him of all his secrets, his dreams, boasts and regrets, and present them on a tray to that unpredictable, domineering, able, fascinating girl Mary," certain that the "true story of Joyce would be ideal material for the exercise of her rich mind. She would produce her own unprecedented book" (700). Nevertheless, to attribute this desire for an *exposé* to O'Nolan seems misplaced, considering all that has been said thus far about his notion of authorship and authority. He certainly doesn't expect his readers to think less of Joyce because now they "realize" his paradoxically trenchant and servile attitude to the Catholic church. And he is far too sophisticated a writer to believe his self-consciously fictional portrayal of the "garrulous, the repatriate,

the ingenuous" Joyce would replace the popular image of him as a proponent of "silence, exile and cunning" (764). So the question of motivation remains open.

This sense of openness is key for an understanding of betrayal in *The Dalkey Archive*, as in the rest of O'Nolan's work. Concisely, in playing Judas to Joyce's Jesus, O'Nolan does not present us with a new, more accurate picture of his object, a new image to which to direct our idolatrous fidelity. Instead, he demonstrates the instability of the original conception, and indeed, of all attempts to fully "know" the Joycean corpus. We can trace this process through the most extended conversation between Mick and Joyce, their second meeting in the Skerries hotel (Ch. 18). On his train ride to Skerries, we are told Mick "was conscious of a pervasive ambiguity: sometimes he seemed to be dictating events with deific authority, at other times he saw himself the plaything of implacable forces." Thus, O'Nolan reminds us of his status as a fictional character, even as he prepares to encounter a "real" person, or at least the semblance of one. For Mick begins to have his doubts, based on the strange environment in which he originally met the esteemed author: "He could be an impostor, or a unique case of physical resemblance. Yet his appearance was authentic, and clearly he had lived on the European continent" (758). Later, he returns to this line of questioning: "Was this James Joyce, the Dublin writer of international name? Or was it somebody masquerading, possibly genuinely deranged through suffering? The old, nagging doubt was still there" (760). Still, as he approaches the appointed setting, his plan is to "await an exposition of Joyce by himself, and take him at his face value" (758). We are presented here with what some might call the pinnacle of literary research: the face-to-face interview with the author, where one can purportedly gain immediate access to the author's viewpoint rather than guessing at it

indirectly by way of a textual encounter. Yet O'Nolan is careful throughout to demonstrate the limited assurances that even this immediacy carries with it. In Mick's case, it is specifically the image of Joyce that has been created by his work and the criticism around it that serves as a barrier to "authentic" access to the man he interviews in Skerries.

The fictive interview gives O'Nolan the opportunity to put words in Joyce's mouth, to speak *for* him as much as *to* him.[148] For example, he has Joyce explain to his interlocutor the reason for his relatively friendless state: "One of the great drawbacks of Ireland, he said, is that there are too many Irish here. You understand me? I know it is natural and to be expected, like having wild animals in the zoo. But it's unnerving for one who has been away in the mishmash that is Europe today" (759). What do we as readers do with this sort of derogatory assessment of the Irish? Do we search the Joycean archive to determine whether Joyce *would* have said this or in fact *did* say something similar on occasion (such as Stephen's description of the Irish as a "race of clodhoppers" in *Portrait* [272])? Do we attribute it to O'Nolan, sifting through his own *corpus* in order to find support (as in, for example, Myles na gCopaleen's sometimes caustic caricature of the

---

[148] Derrida again: "In addition, the signatory of this monological letter all of a sudden proposes to this second person, who is at first addressed as 'you' and not 'he,' to speak in terms of 'we.' And as he recognizes that this other does not have a true right of reply, he responds for him" (*Archive Fever* 41). I also want to make note of Derrida's parenthetical aside, informing readers that "the violence of this *communal* dissymmetry remains at once extraordinary and, precisely, most *common*. It is the origin of the *common*, happening each time we address someone, each time we call them while *supposing*, that is to say while *imposing* a 'we,' and thus while inscribing the other person into this situation of an at once spectral and patriarchic nursling" (41–42). By thus freeing his commentary from the limited instance of Yerushalmi's spectral address into the realm of everyday speech, Derrida demonstrates its relevance to all suppositions of community (such as, for example, my own "Let us …" above and throughout this work). Also important in this context is Butler's discussion of pronominal choice in relational discourse (*Giving* 30–40), where she asserts parenthetically, "You can see that I resort here to the plural *we*, even though [Adriana] Cavarero advises against it, precisely because I am not convinced that we must abandon it" (33).

"Plain People of Ireland")?[149] Rather, by making use of the fictional repatriation of Joyce to his homeland, O'Nolan causes us to realize the ultimate undecidability of such questions. While his words may attest to a low view of the Irish, his actions make the statement one of a more complicated self-deprecation.

Of course, the most significant disclosure during this conversation is Joyce's disavowal of the books that bear his name. Though he admits to coauthoring *Dubliners* with Oliver Gogarty, who refused to sign his name to it—"Said it would ruin his name as a doctor" (761)—Joyce vehemently denies writing *Ulysses*, calling it "that dirty book, that collection of smut" written by "[m]uck-rakers, obscene poets, carnal pimps, sodomous sycophants, pedlars of the coloured lusts of fallen humanity" (760, 762). On the other hand, Joyce proudly claims a few other texts as his own, including a few Catholic tracts on marriage and other sacraments, humility, and the dangers of drink. While there is certainly humor in the possibility of Joyce rejecting his own literary product, perhaps like "the old sow that eats her farrow," the most important part of the conversation is Mick's reaction to these revelations.[150] On learning of the Catholic Truth Society tracts, he replies simply, "You surprise me" (761). On hearing Joyce's litany

---

[149] See Taaffe 138–49, where she points out that "the double-edged humour of *Cruiskeen Lawn*" allowed Myles to poke fun at the Plain People one minute and the "keltured idiocated" of Dublin the next, especially using his parodic writers' association, the "Myles na gCopaleen WAAMA league."

[150] This well-known quotation from *Portrait* (220) presents an example of just how domineering the Joycean archive can be. In the concluding pages of *At Swim-Two-Birds*, the narrator muses on the possibility that Trellis was mad, ultimately resigning himself to the undecidability of such questions: "Was Hamlet mad? Was Trellis mad? It is extremely hard to say. Was he a victim of hard-to-explain hallucinations? Nobody knows. Even experts do not agree on these vital points. Professor Unternehmer, the eminent German neurologist, points to Claudius as a lunatic but allows Trellis an inverted sow neurosis wherein the farrow eat their dam" (216). While many critics echo Cohen in discerning yet another Joycean allusion here: "O'Brien reversed Stephen Dedalus's condemnation of Ireland as 'the old sow who eats her farrow'" (158); it is probably more accurate to say O'Nolan and Joyce are borrowing from the same source: seventeenth-century Irish poet Seathrún Céitinn's [Geoffrey Keating's] "Óm Sceol ar Árdmhagh Fáil," where the relationship is as O'Nolan has it. Both the Gaelic original and O'Nolan's usage feature an "inversion" of the natural occurrence of cannibalistic infanticide in pigs whereas Joyce merely makes analogous reference to it. For Keating's poem as Joyce's original source, see Kiberd *Irish Writer* 61.

against the supposedly actual authors of *Ulysses*, we are told, "Mick pondered it all, in wonder" (762). And he is finally led to respond, "You're a strange man, Mr Joyce" (763). In drawing attention to these declarations of confusion, wonder, unknowing, O'Nolan reminds us of something that is lost in literary criticism which aims at a totalized interpretation of its object. By staging this elaborately fictionalized confrontation with the truth, O'Nolan opens the possibility of a more humble approach to the literary text.

In the course of this interrogation of Joyce's textual production, we also learn of the Dublin writer's one-time aspiration "to translate and decontaminate great French literature so that it could be an inspiration to the Irish" (762). Though Mick continually tries to get him to discuss *Ulysses*, Joyce evades the questions in order to discuss his true passion for translation. What is most significant about this unaccomplished desire on Joyce's part once again centers on the concept of betrayal, namely on his free interpretation of the role of translator. His goal is not simply to carry the texts faithfully over into the Irish idiom; instead, he wants to "decontaminate" the works in order to make them more palatable for the Irish reader: "I was immersed in those days in what was intrinsically good behind the bad in Scaliger, Voltaire, Montaigne, and even that queer man Villon. But how well-attuned they were, I thought, to the educated Irish mind" (762). He tells Mick that, due to what he refers to as his "French Plan" he now possesses "many notes on the *good* and *decorous* things written by those three scoundrels who otherwise dealt in blood—Marat, Robespierre and Danton. Strange … like lilies sprouting on a heap of ordure" (764). And this strategy is not limited to interlinguistic translation, as is already clear in Mick's original meeting with Joyce when the famous author cryptically describes his plan to revise the Church's position on the Holy Spirit

from within the Society of Jesuits: "The task I have set myself could probably be properly termed the translation into language of raw spiritual concepts. I stress here *translation* as distinct from *exposition*. It is a question of conveying one thing in terms of another thing which is … em … quite incongruous" (724). This notion of translation as blatant and obvious betrayal, to which I will turn shortly, only serves to underline the unreliable nature of this fictional Joyce. In making an obvious satirical allusion to the strict, puritanical censorship of de Valera Éire, O'Nolan questions the level of trust we should give to the printed word. To what extent do the words that eventually make it onto the page truly reflect the original author's intent? It is a question that also drives an earlier *tête-à-tête* in *The Dalkey Archive*: De Selby's interrogation of the phantom of Saint Augustine.[151]

Shortly after meeting the mad physicist/theologian De Selby, Mick and his friend Hackett arrange to meet him in an underwater cavern where, due to circumstances we need not go into here, they will be able to converse with people who have been long dead. It has been De Selby's recent custom to take these opportunities to interrogate the Church Fathers, and on this occasion they are graced with a figure who is, apparently, Augustine, though his "Dublin accent was unmistakable" (635). The next nine pages

---

[151] O'Nolan's betrayal of Joyce in *The Dalkey Archive* takes two additional, more subtle forms: first, in the fact that Joyce's middle name is Augustine, and second in the, by now widely established, conflation of his predecessor with the character of De Selby. Interestingly enough, this conflation is accomplished most successfully by an accidental formal element in Benstock's 1968 essay. Writing in that fleeting moment between O'Nolan's death and the proper digestion of *The Third Policeman*, certainly O'Nolan's most important work, Benstock unknowingly pays tribute to O'Nolan's treatment of de Selby there (whose name O'Nolan for some reason decided should be spelled with a lowercase "d" in the earlier work). In the course of his discussion of O'Nolan and Joyce, Benstock uses extensive footnotes referring to the Modernist Master. In fact, one of these footnotes extends to four pages, providing a surging underground stream of Joycean criticism running beneath his argument. Later readers of O'Nolan can hardly fail to recall the footnotes on de Selby's work provided by the narrator in *The Third Policeman*, probably the most comical and innovative aspect of the novel. Unwittingly, Benstock twins de Selby and Joyce more fully in this instance than would any later critic.

consist of a rapid-fire question and answer session during which De Selby attempts to glean definitive knowledge about this enigmatic saint. As O'Nolan makes clear in letters prior to and immediately following the book's publication, the prospect of betraying the real Augustine in *The Dalkey Archive* occurred to him because of the unfaithful translations of *Confessions* he had access to in Dublin's National library. In a letter on January 6, 1964 to Cecil Scott, O'Nolan claims in defense of his treatment of the saint, "Nobody can be certain whether he was a genuine holy man or a humbug, headcase. In my research I soon found that no reliance whatever was to be placed on the commonly available works of Augustine in translation (mostly by clerics) to English or French: it was the rule to dilute or deliberately mis-translate many of his robust and brave avowals and confessions" (qtd. in Jones 378).[152] The undecidability created by these "mis-translations," which were supposedly committed as acts of faith, drives De Selby's line of questioning.

This interview shares more with the conversation between Mick and Joyce than simply the theme of deliberate mistranslation. Both feature a persistent and specific line of questioning repeatedly evaded by the interviewee. For Mick, the taboo topic is the authorship of *Ulysses*, which he asks about specifically ten times in the conversation, though Joyce tries desperately to steer the conversation elsewhere: "Interesting. But *Ulysses*?" (762). For De Selby, the theme that is apparently off-limits is the present status

---

[152] See the collection of letters in Jones's introduction to *The Dalkey Archive* (374–83) for a fuller picture. In a 1966 piece in *The Manchester Guardian* called "The Saint and I"—an article he refers to as "my agony in the *Guardian*" (385)—O'Nolan returns to this topic in order to explain why Augustine seems to be out to get him—a prospect which, to all appearances, O'Nolan sincerely feared: "Augustine attracted me in particular for in the course of his extended Latin works he heaped obloquy on heresiarchs and voluptuaries, taking care to list and severely castigate his own transgressions. Those works I found inadequate in such English, French or German translations as were to be found in Dublin's National Library, usually by Franciscan or Dominican ecclesiastics, for studied suppression, distortion, periphrasis or omission" (383).

of Judas Iscariot. While he asks Augustine about several personages from biblical and church history, Judas is the one De Selby says "particularly interests me," and he proves it by asking nine direct questions, each of which receive an elliptical answer from the garrulous saint. In fact, he has to ask three times before Augustine will even acknowledge the question: "I repeat a question I've already asked: is Judas a member of your household?" (640). Augustine prevaricates, claiming the question as lying outside of his authority: "*I don't think the Polyarch would like me to say much about Judas…. Whether Judas is dead in the Lord is a question notice of which would require to be given to the Polyarch.*" And when De Selby pulls something from the Judas archive, namely Thomas de Quincey's claim "that Judas enacted his betrayal to provoke his Master into proclaiming his divinity by deed. What do you think of that?" Augustine retorts, "*De Quincey also consumed narcotics*" (640; Augustine's words are in italics in the original).

Oddly enough, this aspect of the novel is never discussed in O'Nolan criticism. This is not to say that the "rehabilitation of Judas Iscariot" is never touched on; I've already mentioned several critics who have considered it. However, such considerations always center on a later incident where Mick's friend Hackett makes explicit what De Selby tries to accomplish through dialogue. Mick finds Hackett deep in conversation with Sergeant Fottrell about Judas. Hackett refers to the most infamous traitor in Christian tradition as "a decent man that was taken in an made a gobshite out of" (663) and the verbally innovative Fottrell seems to agree, claiming the once-apostle for Ireland: "O'Scariot was a man of deciduous character inferentially" (664). Indeed, the discussion between the three of them relies heavily on the concept of the archive. In order to accomplish the rehabilitation, Hackett swears, "I will work to secure that the Bible

contains the Gospel according to Saint Judas," asking, "Who better than Judas could tell the inner truth and declare what his intentions were—his plan?" Mick counters with the naïve denial of any such thing and is quickly corrected on the matter: "There have been apocryphal Gospels according to Peter, Thomas, Barnabas, John, Judas Iscariot and many others. My task would be to retrieve, clarify and establish the Iscariot Gospel." To this, Mick can only respond, in the spirit of the archive drive at its most imposing, "Suppose you did find an historically plausible testament and then found Judas saying something you didn't expect at all, something dead contrary to your argument?" (665).

So why is it, we might ask, that this is the only section of the novel usually treated in O'Nolan criticism? Why does this section completely eclipse the role De Selby plays in the Judas rehabilitation? I would argue this is due to the ease with which we gravitate toward an understanding of Judas-like betrayal that is more fitting to Hackett's personal violation of friendship which occurs in the story's strange dénouement. As Anspaugh puts it, "It is revealed at book's end … that Hackett has betrayed his best friend, the protagonist Mick, by seducing his fiancée. Rather than rehabilitating Judas, then, Hackett takes on his character" ("Flann" 11). This is the kind of betrayal readers most readily understand. However, as I have demonstrated through the course of this dissertation, there are multiple ways to read this ambivalent word. In the context of the present chapter, betrayal plays a crucial role in resisting the drive for archival closure that would signal the death of active engagement. Perhaps what is receiving rehabilitation in *The Dalkey Archive* is closer to this sense of creative misreading than the more pedestrian associations of back-stabbing and broken promises which the word "betrayal" typically elicits.

This equivocation is at work in other treatments of Judas as well. Before leaving

behind O'Nolan's revaluation of betrayal in *The Dalkey Archive*, then, I would like to

consider two especially revealing moments in Judas scholarship. Of course, O'Nolan's

characters De Selby and Hackett are not the first to take up this revisionist task. Other

historical and literary attempts typically focus either theologically on some rejection of

the institutionalized Christian church's demonization and subsequent damnation of Judas,

or philosophically on the ramifications of the traitor's condemnation for topics such as

free will and theories of the decision.[153] One of the most memorable, and extreme,

rehabilitations was accomplished by a fictional scholar named Nils Runeberg created by

Jorge Luis Borges, who also happens to be one of the earliest literary critics to review

O'Nolan's work.[154] As I have already discussed in the Introduction, Borges shares

O'Nolan's fascination with betrayal in all its forms. Therefore, it is no surprise that we

find him ruminating on this most famous of traitors in "Tres versiones de Judas." In this

brief account—fictional in fact but, as is often the case with Borges, historical in

appearance—we are told of a scholar's attempt to correct a doctrinal mistake. In this way,

Runeberg is reminiscent of O'Nolan's Joyce, presenting as theological truth what can

only be described, from the perspective of orthodoxy, as heresy. While Joyce's concerns

are pneumatological, relating to the theology of the Spirit, Runeberg's obsession is in

Judasology. His publications begin where de Quincey leaves off, but he takes the

---

[153] Klassen's and Brown's arguments would fall within the scope of the former, the work of the Borgesian fictional scholar is concerned largely with the latter, and de Quincey straddles the two.

[154] See the review for *El Hogar* "Cuando la ficción vive en la ficción" [When Fiction Lives in Fiction], where Borges makes a cultural outsider's assessment of O'Nolan's literary heritage: "La influencia magistral de Joyce (arquitecto de laberintos, también; Proteo literario, también) es innegable, pero no abrumadora en este libro multiple [*At Swim-Two-Birds*]" [The magisterial influence of Joyce (also an architect of labyrinths; also a literary Proteus) is undeniable but not disproportionate (overwhelming) in this manifold book] (327/162).

rehabilitation much further. In stooping to become man, Runeberg argues, God had to perform a perfect sacrifice, "no invalidado o atenuado por omisiones. Limitar lo que padeció a la agonía de una tarde en la cruz es blasfematorio" [not invalidated or attenuated by omissions. To limit His suffering to the agony of one afternoon on the cross is blasphemous] (516/166). While Jesus suffered greatly for a few others, Judas could be described as suffering eternally for the salvation of man. Runeberg's conclusion effects the ultimate rehabilitation: "Para salvarnos, pudo elegir *cualquiera* de los destinos que traman la perpleja red de la historia; pudo ser Alejandro o Pitágoras o Rurik o Jesús; eligió un ínfimo destino: fue Judas" [In order to save us, He could have chosen *any* of the lives that weave the confused web of history: He could have been Alexander or Pythagoras or Rurik or Jesus; he chose an abject existence: He was Judas] (517/166). By positing the archetypal traitor as the veritable incarnation of God, Runeberg pushes the "long-overdue rehabilitation of Judas Iscariot" to its greatest extreme.

Two things stand out in Borges's portrayal of this heretical academic. First, he opens the piece by alerting us to the fluid nature of treachery with a declaration that, had Runeberg been born "in el Segundo siglo de nuestra fe" [in the second century of our faith], he would have been prosecuted as a heretic, even to the point of being consigned by Dante to a sepulcher of fire. Instead, Borges tells us, "Dios le deparó el siglo XX y la ciudad universtitaria de Lund" [God allotted him the twentieth century and the university city of Lund], a setting in which such once-damning theological propositions are simply taken in stride: "esas tesis, propuestas en un cenáculu, serían ligeros ejercicios inútiles de la negligencia o de la blasfemia" [those theses, proposed at such a *soirée*, would be slight and pointless exercises in slovenliness (nonchalance, negligence) and blasphemy]

(514/163). Before giving us Runeberg's "monstruosa" conclusion, then, Borges gives us the twentieth century, where heresy has moved from the dusty monastery library to the *soirée*, the blasphemy of the traitor progressed to the status of ineffectual spouting by academics.

The second notable aspect of Borges representation occurs at the essay's close. While Runeberg's conclusion might be monstrous, Borges's is just as provocative for my purposes here concerning the archive: "agregó al concepto del Hijo, que parecía agotado, las complejidades del mal y del infortunio" [he added to the concept of the Son, which might have been thought long spent, the complexities of misery and evil] (518/167). Here we are given an instance of *mal d'archive* in its most literal sense. In his extreme betrayal of orthodoxy, Runeberg reopens the archive, allowing the possibility for future engagement to move beyond programmatic fidelity to tradition. Although his heresy takes place in the twentieth century, a time when no one really takes such things seriously, a time, in fact, when the archive on such matters might be considered closed, Runeberg reinvests the concept of the Son with complexity—specifically, with *mal*.

This leads to a final picture of Judas, one offered more recently in William Klassen's *Judas: Betrayer or Friend of Jesus*. Klassen presents a wide range of material in this search for "the historical Judas," though much of it has been treated in earlier works.[155] But for the purposes of revaluating O'Nolan's betrayal of Joyce, and the

---

[155] In the context of the present chapter, the book offers an uncanny counterpart to Yerushalmi's *Freud's Moses* due not only to their shared passion for the archive but also to their similar eschewals of the academic persona in their final chapters. Like Yerushalmi, Klassen closes his study by allowing the specter to speak, presenting his reader with "A Suicide Note from Judas Iscariot, ca. 30c.e." which is offered in all semblance of good faith, though it is obviously a complete fiction. Klassen mirrors Borges in this final section, clarifying such textual difficulties as providing a translator and original motivation for the document: "A suicide note left behind by Judas Iscariot has recently come to light and has been sent on to John Mark in Antioch who is, we are told, writing an account of the days of Jesus. It is being shared with all the followers of the Way, for it throws some light on the role of our much-maligned associate, Judas, in

general role played by creative betrayal in ethical relation, I will focus on what reviewers of Klassen's book tend to cite as its most important contribution to the Judas archive: namely, his accusation that "betrayal" is a poor translation of the Greek, παράδωμι, or "paradidōmi" which, in his view, should be translated more faithfully as "handing over."[156]

The discussion occurs early in Klassen's book, in a chapter titled, "The Nature of Our Sources," and centers on the work of Raymond Brown, another New Testament scholar whom Klassen credits for the determination that the Greek word properly means "to give over" and not "to betray." However, in his opinion, Brown doesn't go far enough in devaluing this improper translation since he continues to identify Judas as "betraying" Christ throughout his study, claiming Judas "failed definitively" and describing him as a "mysterious, villainous character" (22). Klassen cites the negative inflections of his word choice as "[e]vidence that Brown cannot rid himself of the long and persistent tradition of Judas as a sinner in this connection" (23). And Klassen takes as his goal throughout his study to accomplish exactly this: to remove the tag of "betrayer" from Judas, proving he was actually a "friend." What he overlooks in this linguistic inquiry is a matching

---

the death of our Lord. It was written in Aramaic and is here translated into Greek for the benefit of those interested" (205). Scholer calls the verisimilar presentation "disturbing" since "[s]ome readers of the book may be led to believe this note actually existed" (767).

Like Yerushalmi, Klassen presents his reader with a "bottomless irony … during which a historian has dared to cross a limit before which 'ordinary historians' have always been intimidated" (*Archive Fever* 60). I will leave it to Derrida to prove whether "this postscript undoubtedly carries, in truth, in its very fiction, the truth of the book" (*Archive Fever* 55; cf. 52–63). But the resemblances do not stop there, since both are written around the discourse of anti-Semitism. Yerushalmi tries to see through "the strategic calculations, to the denials of the living Freud, and to the retractions of the founder of a psychoanalysis exposed to all the anti-Semitic violences" (*Archive Fever* 51); and Klassen claims his defense of Judas as a defense of "Jewry," treating at length the conflation of anti-Judas and anti-Judaic sentiment in the history of Christian discourse (31; 194–201).

[156] See Scholer: "His argument centers on the Greek verb paradidomi, which is usually translated 'betray'" (766) and Christie: "At the heart of his thesis lies the key insight that the Greek word, paradidomi, literally 'hand over,' has been deliberately mistranslated as 'betray.'"

etymological study of the English word "betray," which, as I demonstrated in the Introduction, comes to Middle English by way of the Latin *tradĕre*, which can only be translated "to give over." Klassen thus wishes on the one hand to exorcise the evil, iniquitous, and malicious connotations of Judas's action into the word "betrayal," and on the other hand to distance Judas from this damning label. Perhaps it would serve his purposes better to rehabilitate the concept itself, arguing for the inherent potential that lies in passing something (or, indeed, someone) from one sphere into the other.

In this somewhat misguided effort, I am reminded of the traditional approach to reading O'Nolan's "rehabilitation of Judas" in *The Dalkey Archive*. By focusing on Hackett's drunken attempts to proclaim the Iscariot gospel, critics are led to view this as just one more arbitrary attempt by O'Nolan to shock his reader. Hackett's willingness to "break faith" with his friend in a specifically sexual betrayal causes the reader simply to laugh off his praise of Judas as mere self-serving blather. When this simplistic picture of betrayal is then extended analogically to O'Nolan's treatment of Joyce, readers are tempted to view it with the same kind of negative connotations Klassen detects in Brown. Instead, a more careful consideration of De Selby's evocation of the classic theological conundrums created by the person of Judas, along with O'Nolan's self-evident commentary on the fluid structure of the archive, leads to a more open concept of betrayal. In fact, this might be what makes some critics writing within the Joyce industry so upset with O'Nolan. When he has his Joyce complain to Mick, "I am a man who is much misunderstood. I will say maligned, traduced, libelled and slandered" (727), the satirical target is certainly not the writer himself. If, in *The Dalkey Archive* and elsewhere, O'Nolan truly betrays Joyce "into the hands of sinners," then he is betrayed

out of the hands of the faithful. Perhaps some of the more faithful disciples are more

purposeful than they appear in tarnishing the reputation of this Joking Judas and in

presenting his treatment of the master as serious treachery.

TRADITORE TRADUTTORE—TO BETRAY IS TO TRANSLATE

> *It is curious that he seems more often able to have been himself not in Irish but in translating from it…. Only here, in translation, does his art shed the protective refractions of mockery and move through the looking glass. When one thinks about it, it is in the end not curious at all. At the service of another and momentarily, he forgets himself and reveals himself most clearly.*
> *– J.C.C. Mays "Brian O'Nolan and Joyce" (254)*

The topic of mistranslation runs as an undercurrent throughout this project. With this in

mind, for a final consideration of O'Nolan's predilection for betrayal, I will now turn to

his markedly unfaithful translation of the Čapek brothers' *Insect Play*. Throughout the

preceding chapters, I have been indirectly treating the connection between translation and

betrayal, but in this particular example the implications of this linguistic conjunction can

be more directly addressed. Eliot Weinberger, who is, among other things, a translator of

Borges,[157] refers to the old Italian adage in a talk given at the University of Iowa in 2001:

> And one can never mention the word "translation" without some wit bringing up—as though for the first time—that tedious Italian pun *traduttore traditore*, a wordplay that has difficulty traveling beyond the language of Machiavelli. The characterization of translation as betrayal or treason is based on the impossibility of exact equivalence, which is seen as a failing. (5)

The caustic sentiment here suggests Weinberger's opinion of this well-worn association

between translators and traitors. As a translator who is reprimanded by the "translation

---

[157] This label is intended with no disrespect. In "Betrayal's Felicity," Butler complains about Barbara Johnson being identified in a newspaper as "translator of the work of Jacques Derrida," insisting this reduction hides Johnson's status as "doubtless the finest literary theorist of her time." However, when the newspaper article is mentioned to Johnson herself, Butler claims she responds with jovial agreement: "I love being identified as a translator. That is the name for what I do" (87). Judging from the content of Weinberger's talk, I believe he would echo this sentiment.

police" for every failure to live up to the original—in some vague way that can never be fully articulated—Weinberger rightly rejects the derogatory spirit in which the pun is sometimes offered. Elsewhere, he similarly rejects the custom of referring to the ubiquitous "problem" of translation: "(There are never conferences on the 'pleasures of translation')" (7).

In the plaintive spirit of Weinberger, then, I would like to pose an inversion of the wordplay, a new pun to celebrate O'Nolan's playful infidelity. The two facing sides of the linguistic equation, not only in Italian, but in all the Romance languages,[158] present a positive and a negative, a good faith effort and its perverse *Doppelgänger*. The act of translating a literary work from one language into another, of granting an entire language family access to the thoughts of an author from which they had previously been barred, is usually praised uncritically in principle, though not always in deed. It is an act of service—of faithful service, one might even be tempted to say—to the original author, and therefore it is generally treated with the highest respect. The humor of the pun lies in the contiguity of this respected profession with what is commonly seen as the lowest form of criminal: the traitor, the informer, the double agent. In each instance, the measure of loathing attests to the strength of the faith he betrays. So in this section, I will reverse the poles, claiming "*traduttore traditore*"—to betray is to translate. And in this reversal, I will argue, the constitutive possibilities of Brian O'Nolan's many infidelities are made manifest.

The source text by the Čapek brothers, *Ze zivota hmyzu*, or "From the Lives of Insects," presents a psychedelic fable in which narcissistic butterflies, bourgeois beetles,

---

[158] There are similar puns in other language families as well: e.g. *fordítás: ferdítés* means "translation is distortion" in Hungarian.

and militant ants satirically play out their often petty, sometimes tragic lives before an audience who inevitably must wrestle with the extent of its identification with the insects. The action is commented on throughout by a weary, sometimes cynical traveler, who presents a typical image of the war-worn Central Europe of the 1920s from which the play emerges. Myles na gCopaleen's 1943 play, *The Insect Play*—a title that conceals O'Nolan's traitorous working title *Rhapsody in Stephen's Green* behind a façade of fidelity to the Čapek original—is one of those archival gems, which, in the words of Robert Tracy, the lucky (diligent) archaeologist who unearthed it, had been listed in the "mysterious depository of lost works" before 1993 when he happened upon the prompt copy in the Gate Theatre archive (1). Still, it would be an exaggeration to say that Tracy's find has led to a revival of study for this play, for O'Nolan, as the critics have often reminded us, "never became a really successful dramatist" (Clissmann 260), and since (financial) success is often used as a shortcut in assessing value, his plays have rarely received much attention. The year after O'Nolan's death, British critic John Wain hints at a theatrical past for this wild Irish writer: "There were also two plays at some stage, which I never saw or met anyone who had seen," and he goes on to suggest, somewhat patronizingly, "They should be put on, possibly by radio if no theatre can take on the job" (71). Yet they were not put on, and the plays would fade into the background, only to be pulled from the shelves of the archive in order to display further proof of O'Nolan's failure to live up to his potential.

Indeed, his plays did not enjoy a long life on the stage. *Faustus Kelly* ran two weeks at the Abbey theater and *The Insect Play* only lasted a week at the Gaiety.[159]

---

[159] See Clissmann 22–24, 251–65 for her discussion of O'Nolan's plays, though by necessity she focuses on *Faustus Kelly* since only Act I of *The Insect Play* was available at the time. Taaffe 174–82 gives a more

Clissmann suggests various theories for why this might have been, on the one hand claiming, "the rumour still exists in Dublin" that the two plays were "taken off because [they] satirised all the prominent government ministers" (23–24), and, on the other hand, blaming O'Nolan's "deficiencies in dialogue" for the failure of *The Insect Play* since, based on what she could learn from the first act, "as it stands, it is a good example of how O'Brien's humour could flag and his inventive powers become quite retarded" (262).[160] The few reviews of the play were mixed, ranging from guarded praise to more open disappointment. O'Nolan's own *Irish Times* complimented his ability to bring the play near to its audience, calling O'Nolan's Tramp "the Chorus who represents us for the view of ourselves that is presented through the strange behaviour of the insects" and praising the liberty he took in adapting the play: "He has taken away a good deal from the version through which we had come to know it, and added a great deal that is his own. The framework remains, however, and the force of its satire. Its stimulating quality is brought nearer to us, and he makes it rather more of an entertainment, but those who may like to look for them can still find its depths" ("The Insect Play" 3). That "the version through

---

balanced treatment, drawing on Tracy's recovered script. As a tribute to archival discrepancy, I should note that, in their discussions of O'Nolan's production history, both mistakenly claim that *The Insect Play* was produced at Dublin's large Gate Theatre (Clissmann 23; Taaffe 175), and, oddly enough, both list the correct information elsewhere (Clissmann 260; Taaffe 246 n.8). (It was, in fact, produced by Hilton Edward's Gate Theatre company at the Gaiety.)

[160] This sort of critical "educated guess" is rendered even more problematic when we read O'Nolan's diary entry for January 11, 1943: "*Ní thaithneann leo an chéad mhír (a scríobh Montgomery nach mór an t-iomlán). D'iarradh orm mír nua ar fad a scríobhadh taobh istigh de seachtain. Gheallag go ndéanfainn aimhlaidh air gan an t-am agam chuige*" [They didn't like the first act (which was mostly written by Montgomery). They asked me to write a whole new act within the week. I promised I would do it without actually having the time for it] (qtd. in Taaffe 247 n.27). So are we to believe, then, that the first act, which was to bear the academic weight of the entire play for roughly fifty years, didn't even come from O'Nolan's pen? While Hilton Edward's polite query in the letter to which O'Nolan refers, "monkeys are not insects—does it matter?" (qtd. in Taaffe 180) suggests O'Nolan did revise the act, to what extent did he alter it? To what extent does Montgomery remain the "true" author? Does it matter? As is always the case with O'Nolan, the notion of the coherent identity of the univocal author is complicated by the multiplicity of his masks, and this complexity resists the efforts of the most persistent biographer to close the archive.

which *we* had come to know it" was largely Peter Selver's translation, and not the Čapeks' original, will be important later. But others viewed as a fault the very liberty praised by this anonymous reviewer. O'Nolan's friend Anthony Cronin is one such critic, who saw more in O'Nolan's play to disparage than to commend:

> He changed Čapek's ineffectual and beautiful butterflies into drawling and effete wasps and gave the play local colour by making his crickets Cork men and his beetles Dubliners…. The thrust of the satire, if satire it was, was obscure to most, nor did he succeed in making his insects representative of the human condition in the way the original he was working from does. Even the note of despair about human existence which is undoubtedly behind it lacks theatrical resonance. The play was not a success with audiences and so the theatrical ambitions that O'Nolan certainly cherished around this time were disappointed. (136)

In Cronin's view, his compatriot's failure was a matter of mistranslation. The original, which Cronin speaks of from a position of both comprehension and reverence, has been betrayed here, but betrayed in a sense that leaves room for the possibility of fidelity. Agreeing with the reviewer in *The Evening Mail*, Cronin rejects O'Nolan's use of the Čapeks' "original framework … to 'put across' some rather banal topicalities more appropriate to the variety stage" than to the serious theatre (qtd. in Cronin 136). For my purposes, this "putting across," so reminiscent of the "giving over" considered earlier, holds the key to O'Nolan's creative betrayal. While Cronin and others like him might see failure in this blatant resistance to literal fidelity, I would argue that, in his omissions and revisions, O'Nolan liberates the play and "lets it speak" in this new setting.

This new setting is an offically neutral Ireland situated on the fringe of a world at war. Describing the intellectual environment within which O'Nolan found himself, Kiberd claims in *Inventing Ireland*, "the introversion of the forties was … provincial in tone, as the whole nation conspired in the fiction that Europe and the wider world did not

exist" (471). According to Kiberd, this sense that one was living an elaborate fiction overflowed into the cultural production of the period: "in a more cultural sense, the policy of neutrality was also very damaging, for it cut Irish intellectuals off from the wider world. A sense of unreality pervaded cultural life" (472). Writing at a time when de Valera's Fianna Fáil government had greatly extended the reach of censorship policies, O'Nolan—and other authors writing in this period of national "Underdevelopment" (cf. Kiberd 471–80)—were well aware of the effects of repression and suppression, whether externally or internally imposed.[161]

One of the most important roles Booker attributes to O'Nolan is that of a cultural double agent. As he describes in his final chapter the influence of O'Nolan's work on contemporary writers, Booker notes the "dual emphases" of critics "on O'Brien's similarities to modern continental writers and philosophers and on his dialogue with the Irish cultural tradition." In Booker's opinion, this points "toward what may perhaps be the most important feature of O'Brien's work—his ability to address many of the same issues and concerns as his contemporaries from around the world while recasting these issues and concerns in a distinctively Irish mold" (126). In light of the tightly closed-off picture of Ireland presented by Kiberd and others, Booker presents an image of O'Nolan smuggling these "issues and concerns" into his own milieu by way of his apparently provincial work. Even the fact that he revives this particular play, which most critics viewed as an anti-war satire, at this particular time can be read as a subversive decision.

---

[161] See also Pilkington's depiction of Irish theater during this time period, when "The outbreak of the Second World War and Ireland's declaration of an emergency contributed to an ideological climate in which fomenting of controversy was now dangerously inimical to the more urgent need for national unity and consensus" (112–38). Though he doesn't mention O'Nolan's plays, Act III of *The Insect Play* is certainly promoting neither national unity nor "consensus," and it is therefore not too difficult to imagine the negative effects this sense of unease, both in the government and in O'Nolan's intellectual Dublin audience, had on the play's reception.

By emphasizing the theme of diminishment in adaptation, O'Nolan's reviewers and critics echo the sentiment rejected by Weinberger. According to this perspective, he has corrupted the pure original and is therefore liable to being censured. This simplistic formula is made more complicated by its naïve assumption of original purity, as it is demonstrated in the controversy over the play's third act. O'Nolan was widely criticized for the fact that his version ignores the important connection to world war. O'Nolan's Act III consists of a war between three tribes of ants: Yellow, Red, and Green.[162] He makes much of these color divisions and leaves little to the audience's imagination in detecting the tribes' parallels with Northern Ireland, Britain, and Éire—specifically, as it was characterized by de Valera's Fianna Fáil party. Some reviewers argued that this internalization of the play's war was not true to the original. The reviewer for *The Irish Press*, for example, claimed the Čapeks "would have been surprised to find their … serious satire on the cruelties of the world," what the reviewer refers to as "their cornerstone" being used "to burlesque the divisions in this country to make a theatrical holiday" (T.W.). This reviewer's rejection perhaps speaks more to the general tendency to attribute a level of seriousness and existential weight to this area of the world than to T.W.'s correct assessment of the play. After all, the Čapeks' play is also pretty silly at times.[163]

---

[162] Taaffe mistakenly refers to this tribe as "Orange Ants" (180), betraying O'Nolan's thinly disguised allusion to Ulster's Orangemen. The Yellow Ants' slogan, "The Awnt State will feight ond the Awnt State wull be reight!" (62) parodies the phrase coined by Lord Randolph Churchill in order to "play the Orange Card" and rouse the Northern Ireland Protestants against the prospect of Irish home rule. See Tracy's excellent notes on this act for O'Nolan's various allusions to internal conflict (87–88).

[163] Ambros claims that much of the Čapek brothers' work is "positioned between high-brow literature and kitsch," whatever level of sophistication its English readers might automatically grant it (184).

As it turns out, the Čapeks also refused to establish an explicit link between the ant war and the Great War of recent memory. The confusion is evident in Taaffe's discussion of the matter. Note her ambiguous references to originality:

> Yet despite transferring the focus of the ant war to partition and Ireland's internal culture wars, there is an odd concession to the original text in maintaining the tramp as a veteran of the First World War (albeit now of the Royal Munster Fusiliers). While Selver's translation explicitly links the ant war to this conflict, O'Nolan's adaptation quietly depends on a disconnection from these larger scenes of war—most obviously from the war being conducted off-stage in Europe, Africa and Asia. (181)

In her view, while O'Nolan has obviously made the play his own by hybernicizing the war, when his tramp claims, "I fought hard enough in me own day, too. God be with the oul' Munsters and every dacent man that was in them" (76), O'Nolan is conceding to the original, paying his respects, as it were; he is performing the work of "maintenance" often attributed to the faithful translator. In actuality, this small nod to World War 1 is itself a "betrayal" of the Čapeks, occasioned by a measure of fidelity to Selver's adaptation. The original *Tulák*, or vagabond, merely hints at his own military experience once, when he responds to the ant dictator's question of his identity, "Just a voice. Yesterday perhaps a soldier in another ant-heap," as is made evident in the recent, more literal, recovery of the play by Majer and Porter (154). One could say the betrayal of the play had already occurred, twenty years prior, at London's Regent Theatre, where the felicitously named Nigel Playfair and Clifford Bax chose to "freely adapt" Selver's already free translation, tying the ants' behaviour inextricably to the European militarism of the 1910s.

In this respect, Taaffe might be right in viewing O'Nolan's free adaptation of a free adaptation as an unacknowledged success: "Though he had successfully wrested the

play from its original European context and turned its satire on contemporary Ireland, it was the Capeks' [*sic*] work which now resonated all the more strongly—even to a neutral Dublin audience—in the midst of another European war." According to this view, his betrayal "wrests" the play from its context and carries it over into Emergency Ireland. Though she admits that his contemporaries may have missed the effect, Taaffe demonstrates the importance of considering the context of O'Nolan's staging in any evaluation of success or failure: "Perhaps his ultimate achievement was to have reduced the scene of war to the utterly ridiculous, allowing no room for portentous moralising," since, "[w]atching this play in wartime, it was surely impossible to ignore its original portent. By focusing the Capeks' satire on more provincial concerns, arguably O'Nolan's *Insect Play* exploited this unspoken, ever-present backdrop to reduce the national obsessions to their proper proportion" (181). Imitating the play's original authors, O'Nolan leaves it to the audience to consider the implications of viewing the theatricality of war in the midst of the mass indulgence in fictionality that was neutral Ireland. In this way, he restores a level of interpretive responsibility to the performance.

The sustained ambiguity of the Čapeks' play is precisely the characteristic that Stephen Johnson points to as his reason for choosing it as the ideal production for his study of theatrical interpretation. As a theater historian who also directs, Johnson's goal is to teach his students the value of consulting performance history when staging a play. To do this, he requires a play that leaves adequate room for directorial liberty, a similar position to the one taken by Alexander Tairov as he describes his predilection for the fantastic that would lead him to the decision to stage Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*. Both directors search for material malleable enough to allow the theater to, "in

accord with its own artistic intention, its own urge to action, create its own, new work of art to be valued in and of itself" (Tairov 97). Johnson finally arrives at *Ze života hmyzu*, stating among his reasons for the choice, "the original English translations seemed unacceptable for contemporary production," and "the 'significance' of any production of this script must, in part, be derived from elements other than language" (191). The degree of the play's undecidability is what draws him to the scrip, and a specific discrepancy in the reviews of the 1922 New York production regarding the play's alleged nihilism amply demonstrates this quality of undecidability.

While one might gather from the reviews of O'Nolan's play quoted earlier that the original was greeted with unbridled enthusiasm, Johnson shows this would be a distortion of the truth: "because this historical context had been forgotten, the production history of this play has tended to suppress any complex reaction by emphasizing the script's simple comic satire" (194). Apparently, "the reviews were wildly mixed in their reaction, by turns praising the innovation and philosophical considerations and attacking the simple-mindedness of the allegory and the nihilism of the message." Johnson then goes on to quote complaints by New York reviewers that the play implied a "negative philosophy," that its authors "have not noticed our good points, because they have been so busy noticing our bad ones," and that "in Slav countries, one is told … books and plays that have the reputation of inspiring their readers to suicide achieve the greatest vogue" (193). Although it would take me beyond my immediate purposes to follow Johnson's interrogation of the Čapeks' ambiguity, suffice it to say that even though O'Nolan's characterization of Irish disputes is literally unfaithful to the original, it also frees the object of translation from previous attempts to comprehend it, which are just as

incomplete. Ultimately, his staging may even prove to be more faithful to the meaning or implications of the original.

Perhaps Clissmann was right to hint at external pressure as a cause for the play's financial failure. In fact, the play is just one more example of O'Nolan's traitorous stance toward the Joycean nets manifested in Irish nationalism, the Gaelic revival, and Catholicism. If one must be a friend in truly order to betray ("Jesus said to him, 'Friend, do what you are here to do' [Matt. 26.50]), then such necessary friendship may disqualify the self-exiled Joyce from accomplishing the sort of revealing work O'Nolan effects by remaining in Ireland. In all three of these fields, O'Nolan could be said to have done his betraying from within rather than attempting to critique from without. The Eastern European literary scholar Stipe Grgas writes about O'Nolan's treatment of Irish nationalism using the language of betrayal, of iniquity. Though Irish national identity was, in his view, "an enabling condition of O'Brien's work," it was not given the level of respect some of his countrymen may have thought it deserved:

> there can be no doubt that in his hands it was scrutinized, it was problematized and unraveled into opposing positions of dissent and retrieval. Reading O'Brien one senses a transgression of the exclusionary logic of identity. However, it needs to be pointed out that transgression takes place because there is a prior sense of stable conceptualizations of society and culture. To reformulate this, perception of transgression relies, necessarily and without paradox, upon the recognition of national identity; transgression would not be discernible were there no such identity to be transgressed and affirmed as "real." (152)

Here Grgas detects a constitutive productivity at the core of O'Nolan's rebellion. His betrayal opens a breach in the notion of Irish identity that enables it to move into the future rather than being rooted in the static past. I would argue O'Nolan found an especially productive means for such opening in creative betrayal. Weinberger speaks of

translation as "liberation," arguing "translation is what keeps literature alive. Translation is change and motion; literature dies when it stays the same, when it has no place to go" (7). O'Nolan's traitorous work gives Irish literature someplace to go.

When he first read *La kermesse Irlandaise*,[164] Henri Morisset's French translation of *At Swim-Two-Birds*, O'Nolan was delighted, writing to Morisset, "Your masterly translation tempts me to think it [the original novel] is not as bad as I thought." In light of the preceding discussion, the specific traits he chooses to highlight in the translator's approach speak volumes: "I found your resource, improvisation, unshakeable nerve and occasional audacity very impressive indeed" (qtd. in Asbee 49). He even entertained the idea of finding a translator for *La kermesse Irlandaise* who could carry the book back into English, thus revealing the limits—and possibilities—of the translating process.

O'Nolan considered himself the "Translator of The Insect Play," the one who, friend to both sides, hands the play over to a foreign audience. While reviewers may detect betrayal in his irreverence, such infidelity also allows for the "necessary but impossible" interchange of ideas, which so often can be squelched by ideals of fidelity. Coming at the center of his career, this play speaks to his role as Éire's joking Judas, betrayer of the Čapeks and Goethe in his plays, of both the Irish language and Irish national identity in his column, betrayer most famously of James Joyce, and finally of himself. As Mays points out in the epigraph to this section, like other creative infidels before and since, O'Nolan was found in translation.

---

[164] See Asbee 133 n.27 on the many connotations the word *kermesse* carries with it, making it somewhat difficult to translate into English.

EPILOGUE

> *Political decisions are hard, divisive, and inflict pain, and those that aren't are not political decisions. There will always be disagreements and rival interpretations. The ethical duty is to get the answer right, make the best decision possible; it is about discerning the truth of the situation.* Levinas does not help us here. *His thought cannot be used to generate norms…. There is no 'Levinassian answer' to a political question, and the attempt to produce one betrays only an egregious misunderstanding of his work, turning it to the opposite of what it intends.*
>
> – *Philip Harold* Prophetic Politics *(147)*

Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's 2006 film *Das Leben der Anderen*, features betrayal at two key moments in its narrative. The film tells a fictionalized story that takes place in the context of the monitoring of the cultural scene in East Berlin by agents of the Stasi, the German Democratic Republic's secret police. The stated goal of the Stasi, which we are told in the film's prologue was "to know everything," created one of the most literal examples in history of a community with no respect for the secret.[165] The narrative involves a Stasi agent named Captain Wiesler who is given the task of spying on Georg Dreyman, a writer who is loyal to the party but also happens to be a rival to a powerful Central Committee member for the affections of Dreyman's girlfriend, a popular actress named Christa-Maria Sieland. The most important betrayal in the film involves the gradual transformation in Wiesler as he observes the couple in their home, listening in on their most intimate moments. As he becomes more and more engaged with their lives, the Stasi agent betrays the totalitarian ideals of his organization and the trust of his superiors by intervening in various ways on behalf of Dreyman and Sieland, even to the point of saving Dreyman's reputation at the story's climax. Considered a traitor to

---

[165] I will leave it to the reader to determine to what extent Bush-era warrantless wiretapping creates a similar environment in the US. However, the fact that these new surveillance procedures were ushered in with a statute bearing the creative acronym USA PATRIOT act, demonstrates the extent to which belonging, being "one of the family," or of the *patria*, can come at a direct cost to secrecy.

his party and his country, Wiesler is demoted and banished to the mailroom for the remainder of his employment under the current repressive government.

There is, however, another powerful moment of infidelity in the film, one which seems much more ethically reprehensible: namely, the betrayal of Dreyman by Sieland, who informs the Stasi that he is responsible for the publication in the West German magazine *Der Spiegel* of an article that paints a dark and unflattering picture of life in the GDR. Sieland, who is apprehended at the request of the frustrated Central Committee member, gives up the information when she is threatened by the loss of both her acting career and her access to the illegal medications to which she has become addicted. So von Donnersmarck presents his audience with two strikingly different betrayals.[166] Both involve acts of perjury and the withholding of information, the telling of lies and the keeping of secrets. The spy's falsified report and the lover's broken promise are both breaches of faith; nevertheless, as viewers of the film, we cannot help but be struck by the ethical heroism of the first and the selfish cowardice of the second. Since I have been arguing in this dissertation for a revaluation of infidelity in the ethical approach to the other, I would like to conclude by asking whether the kind of readings I undertake here might prepare the way for the one without at the same time encouraging the other.

---

[166] In addition to these, there are at least two other ways betrayal factors into the plot of *Das Leben der Anderen*: Dreyman's (and other artists') intentionally political betrayal of his country by revealing its secrets to the outside world, and the physical, or somatic betrayal of Sieland by her body in her drug addiction. Both offer suggestive areas for further inquiry. In the case of the first, Shakira Thiranagama and Tobias Kelly's 2010 collection of essays considers political betrayal in historical context, guided by the tension between two principles stated in the introduction: on the one hand, "Treason is at the heart of the processes through which modern states are made"; and on the other hand, "state-building projects must manage multiple loyalties and allegiances and rephrase these as loyalty and belonging to the state and the new nation" (3). The relevance of such work for the present revaluation of betrayal in ethical discourse is far-reaching. In the case of somatic betrayal, in which the body betrays one's strongest intentions, similar to the example of blushing to which I allude in Chapter One, Douglas Robinson's recent use of somatic theory to analyze theoretical approaches to literature by Tolstoy, Shlovsky, and Brecht suggests the extent to which recent developments in the neurology of decision-making and emotion challenge long-held notions of the coherence of identity, notions that are at the core of our societal attitude toward betrayal and fidelity.

I am somewhat in agreement with Philip Harold when he says, in the quotation above, "*Levinas does not help us here.*" I am even tempted to extend the ramifications of such a claim by including the broader field of ethical discourse with which I have been occupied in the preceding chapters: when faced with the question of ethical socio-political action, *postmodern ethics does not help us here*. Furthermore, if we are convinced by the family resemblance Derrida sees between the ethical imperative to suspend judgment and the reading of literature, we could conclude this chain of equivalence by saying, *literature does not help us here*, or perhaps it *should* not. The instrumental approach to the literary work, which would attempt to wrest from its pages a confident program for living the good life, betrays the very singularity of literature, as Attridge has persuasively argued in *The Singularity of Literature*. To continue with the passage quoted in the epigraph, the theorization of the failure of ethics, as articulated by Levinas, Derrida, and others, "cannot be used to generate norms," does not lead to the creation of a formula that, so long as we follow it faithfully, will guarantee our ethical rightness. One of the key reasons for such a pessimistic assessment, as I hope to have shown in this project, is that the confidence of ethical judgment requires that we fully know the totality of the situation at hand. As Harold puts it, "it is about discerning the truth of the situation." If postmodern ethics *does* anything to the epistemological drive to discern the truth, it reveals the hubris involved in such a search; it provides a similar warning to that given by Paul to the knowledge-hungry Corinthians: "Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge" (1Cor. 8.2). The attempt to declare, without remainder, what would make a particular betrayal ethical rather than

abhorrent, is something that goes beyond the role of the careful encounter with the literary work.

Still, I am struck by the two-fold betrayal Harold notes in any hypothetical effort to provide a Levinasian answer to political questions: "the attempt to produce one betrays only an egregious misunderstanding of his work, turning it to the opposite of what it intends." First, such an attempt is said to provide a revelatory betrayal of the Levinasian political theorist's misreading of his work. But secondly, the misreading plays traitor to Levinas himself, unfaithfully twisting his work to mean something else. I cannot help but recall a similar formulation encountered earlier in the present project. In Chapter Two, I recounted G.K. Chesterton's attitude of disdain towards the stage adaptation of his novel *The Man Who Was Thursday* by Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky and Alexander Tairov. In Chesterton's estimation, the Russians "tried to turn this Anti-Anarchist romance into an Anarchist play. Heaven only knows what they really made of it; beyond apparently *making it mean the opposite of everything it meant*" (Gardner 272; my emphasis). As I made clear in my discussion of the play, the notion that the novel is essentially, truly anti-anarchist (and a romance!), and is subsequently betrayed by a false presentation of it in the Russian context as being more sympathetic to the rhetoric of anarchy, makes assumptions about our capacity for knowing the truth about fiction which I argue are untenable and even harmful when redirected to the socio-political sphere. Therefore, I hesitate to fully sign on to Harold's confident "*Levinas does not…*" or "There is no…" without considering what such a surety necessarily overlooks.

Perhaps there is a different way for Levinas, and for postmodern ethics, and for the ethical reading of literature to *help* in the answering of political questions, different

from the provision of a systematic formula for ethical action. For example, in the case of

von Donnersmarck's film, the two betrayals are occasioned by strikingly different

catalysts. In the case of Sieland's betrayal, one might say she is led to infidelity by

embracing an ideology that would encourage a subjectivity that "relat[es] itself

approvingly, bindingly, to the demand of its good," to take Critchley's definition of the

ethical subject somewhat out of context. By remaining true to herself—where this could

mean either true to the intense physical craving of the addict or true to her own identity as

an artist, or both—Sieland is led to betray one of her most intimate relationships, handing

Dreyman over to the corrupt State. However, in the case of the Stasi agent, his betrayal is

brought about by, as the film's title declares, his immersion in "the lives of others."

Wiesler's own sense of individual coherence, the identity provided by his most all-

encompassing sphere of belonging, is gradually experienced as contingent and flawed by

the interruption of his subjectivity by the entirely other, by the enemy. Furthermore,

Wiesler's conversion is hastened by his encounter with two works of art: he eavesdrops

as Dreyman plays a moving sonata on the piano after the suicide of a close friend, and we

later see Wiesler reading the Brecht poem "Erinnerung an die Marie A" from a volume

stolen from Dreyman's apartment.[167] The narrative of the film would seem to suggest that

such encounters have the potential to accomplish a similar ethical work in the subject to

that accomplished by a welcoming approach to the other. Perhaps the help that could be

---

[167] I hope it is not to far afield for me to draw attention to the fact that Wiesler notably is *not* led to his ethical betrayal by an encounter with Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, for example, which presents a more realistic and direct criticism of the totalitarian nature of the Stasi. This is of course not to say that reading Solzhenitsyn's work does not accomplish ethico-political work; however, I would argue that it is work of a different kind. The art that allows Wiesler to question the coherence of his position is, in the end, incurably undecidable art rather than the verisimilar work of anti-communist realism, which inevitably presents an easily recognizable cast of friends and enemies.

provided by reading the literary works considered here is similar to the troubling of conscience undergone by Wiesler in this film.

In the preceding chapters, I have been concerned with betrayal on three primary levels. First, I have sought to foreground the extent to which betrayal is an important plot-level theme in early twentieth-century literature. In each of the authors considered in this dissertation, characters betray other characters, their communities, or their own sense of the good. Chesterton's *agent provocateur*, Gabriel Syme, is a perfect example of the way such a shifting of allegiance can awaken readers to the permeability of the social sphere, where the truth is consistently different from what it appears.

Second, I have been interested in the ways literary works themselves effect a betrayal of their objects, both revealing secrets and telling lies about the material they appear to be offering their readers. This aspect is most manifest in the context of Brian O'Nolan's multitude of betrayals. In both his fundamentally Irish works of fiction and his extensive body of work published in the column *Cruiskeen Lawn*, O'Nolan betrays Ireland and the Irish, telling "true lies" about them and holding up to his readers a funhouse mirror in which to laughingly gaze at their own distorted image. His handling of James Joyce is similarly disrespectful, as is his borrowing of Czech material for a 1943 Dublin production. However, I have worked to demonstrate the way in which O'Nolan's traitorous representations of Ireland—similarly to Chesterton's betrayals of Christianity, Borges's of Argentina, Faulkner's of the troubled South—reveal truths about their objects that would be glossed over by more faithfully idolatrous treatment.

Finally, I have argued that certain texts more than others facilitate, or prepare the way for, betrayal on the part of the reader, offering texts so self-consciously undecidable

they alert readers to the extent to which any attempt to comprehend them will necessarily be unfaithful. Faulkner's early novels fit this description more than most novels. They remain vulnerably open to the reader, yet refuse to yield easily to our categorical modes of understanding. One simply cannot be faithful to works such as *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying*, *Absalom, Absalom!*. One cannot "let them speak for themselves," although we can still endeavor to do them justice. They place themselves in the trust of their readers who, try as they might, must admit in the end to only getting it partly right. In this way, such works speak to our own position as potentially betrayed, imperfectly constituted contingent subjects. Perhaps this is why such literature continues to resonate years after the works' immediate context has vanished beneath layers of cultural sedimentation. An encounter with vulnerability "can provide," as Butler puts it, "a way to understand the way in which all of us are already not precisely bounded, not precisely separate, but in our skins, given over, in each other's hands, at each other's mercy" ("Giving" 39). The condition of Butler's subject resembles that of the vulnerable, markedly undecidable literary work such as *As I Lay Dying*. It is at the reader's mercy, given over, betrayed in the process of reading and interpretation.

While I have attempted in this dissertation to offer readings that do justice to the various works of literature under my consideration, I can only submit to the knowledge that such efforts are, in the end, unfaithful. Thus I admit to being, in Socrates's terms, an "intellectual invalid." As Harold recalls the discussion in *Phaedo* about the parallels between misology and misanthropy, where one is said to reject both generalized logic and generalized humanity based on specific disappointments of his childish expectations, he suggests the importance of the maturity described by Socrates:

the mature view admits to being an intellectual invalid. But such an admission entails that we lay down our protections against violence. There is no guarantee that the other person I trust will not betray me. There is no way to guarantee that the discourse will prove what I want it to prove. In both cases I am exposed, unable to save my own preferred interpretation of events. (108)

In the context of this study, I would argue that a willingness to "lay down our arms," to remain *disarmed* before the other, as Derrida often puts it, has powerful potential in the ethical, political, and literary spheres. This kind of admission or confession is not meant as a hopeless indication of futility, for while the awareness of infidelity at the heart of fidelity can potentially result in the humiliation of getting it wrong, it also opens the possibility of humility in rightness—a fleeting and precarious position to be sure, but one that is, in my view, always worth the risk.

WORKS CITED

Abernathy, Jeff. *To Hell and Back: Race and Betrayal in the Southern Novel*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003. Print.

Alford, C. Fred. *Levinas, the Frankfurt School, and Psychoanalysis*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2002. Print. Disseminations: Psychoanalysis in Contexts.

Allitt, Patrick. *The Conservatives: Ideas and Personalities Throughout American History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. Print.

Alquist, Dale. "Dale Alquist's Response to the *New Yorker*." *The Blog of the American Chesterton Society*. American Chesterton Society. 18 July 2008. Web. 11 June 2009.

Ambros, Veronika. "Fuzzy Borderlines: The Čapeks' Robots, Insects, Women, and Men." *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe, Volume 3: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries: The Making and Remaking of Literary Institutions*. Ed. Marcel Cornis-Pope. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2007. 183–89. Print.

Anspaugh, Kelly. "Agonizing with Joyce: *At Swim-Two-Birds* as Thanatography." *A Casebook on Flann O'Brien's* At Swim-Two-Birds. Ed. Thomas C. Foster. Dalkey Archive Press Studies in Modern and Contemporary Fiction, June 2002. Web. 25 May 2009

———. "Flann O'Brien: Postmodern Judas." *Notes on Modern Irish Literature* 4 (1992): 11–16. Print.

Armstrong, Paul B. *Play and the Politics of Reading: The Social Uses of Modernist Form*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005. Print.

Asbee, Sue. *Flann O'Brien*. Boston: Twayne, 1991. Print. Twayne's English Author Series 485.

Atkinson, Ted. *Faulkner and the Great Depression: Aesthetics, Ideology, and Cultural Politics*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006. Print.

Attridge, Derek. "The Art of the Impossible?" *The Politics of Deconstruction: Jacques Derrida and the Other of Philosophy*. Ed. Martin McQuillan. London: Pluto, 2007. 54–65. Print.

———. "Derrida's Singularity: Literature and Ethics." *Derrida's Legacies: Literature and Philosophy*. Ed. Simon Glendinning and Robert Eaglestone. London: Routledge, 2008. 12–25. Print.

———. *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004. Print.

———. "On Knowing Works of Art." *Inside Knowledge: (Un)doing Ways of Knowing in the Humanities*. Ed. Carolyn Birdsall et al. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2009: 17–34. Print.

———. "Posthumous Infidelity." *Reading and Responsibility: Deconstruction's Traces*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010. Print.

———. *The Singularity of Literature*. London: Routledge, 2004. Print.

Avelar, Idelber. *The Letter of Violence: Essays on Narrative, Ethics, and Politics*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. Print.

Baackmann, Susanne, and David Craven. "An Introduction to Modernism—Fascism—Postmodernism." *Fascism*. Spec. issue of *Modernism/Modernity* 15.1 (2008): 1–8. Print.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. 1963. Trans. Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984. Print. Theory and History of Literature 8.

Bartlett, Thomas. "Archive Fever." *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 53.46 (2007): n. pag. Web. 25 May 2009.

Basil, Kriss Richard. "Narrative, Ethics, and the Cunning of Form." Diss. Harvard University, 2002. Print.

Bauman, Zygmunt. *Does Ethics Have a Chance in a World of Consumers?* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008. Print.

———. *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty*. Cambridge: Polity, 2007. Print.

———. *Postmodern Ethics*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993. Print.

Benstock, Bernard. "The Three Faces of Brian O'Nolan." *Éire-Ireland* 3.3 (1968): 51–65. Print.

Blair, Sara. "Modernism and the Politics of Culture." *The Cambridge Guide to Modernism*. Ed. Michael Levenson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. 157–73. Print.

Bleikasten, André. "Faulkner and the New Ideologues." Kartiganer and Abadie 3–21.

———. *Faulkner's* As I Lay Dying. Trans. Roger Little. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973. Print.

Bloch, Ernst, Georg Lukács, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, and Fredric Jameson. *Aesthetics and Politics*. London: New Left, 1977. Print.

Booker, M. Keith. *Flann O'Brien, Bakhtin, and Menippean Satire*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995. Print.

———. "Postmodern and/or Postcolonial?: The Politics of *At Swim-Two-Birds*" *A Casebook on Flann O'Brien's* At Swim-Two-Birds. Ed. Thomas C. Foster. Dalkey Archive Press Studies in Modern and Contemporary Fiction, June 2002. Web. 25 May 2009.

Booth, Wayne. *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989. Print.

Borges, Jorge Luis. *Borges en Sur, 1931-1980*. Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1999. Print.

———. *Borges on Writing*. Ed. Norman Thomas di Giovanni, Daniel Halpern, and Frank MacShane. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1973. Print.

———. *Collected Fictions*. Trans. Andrew Hurley. New York: Penguin, 1998. Print.

———. "Cuando la ficción vive en la ficción." *El Hogar* 2 June 1939. Rpt. in *Textos cautivos*. Barcelona: Tusquets, 1986. 325–27. Print.

———. "Definition of a Germanophile." Trans. Eliot Weinberger. *Selected Non-Fictions* 203–05.

———. "The Modesty of History." *Other Inquisitions, 1937–1952*. Trans. Ruth L. C. Simms. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965.167–70. Print

———. "The Nothingness of Personality." Trans. Esther Allen. *Selected Non-Fictions* 33–9.

———. *Obras completas*. Vol 1. Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1965. Print.

———. *Selected Non-Fictions*. Ed. Eliot Weinberger. Trans. Esther Allen, Suzanne Jill Levine, and Eliot Weinberger. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print.

———. "When Fiction Lives in Fiction." Trans. Esther Allen. *Selected Non-Fictions* 160–62.

Brinkmeyer, Robert H., Jr. "Faulkner and the Democratic Crisis." Kartiganer and Abadie 70–94.

———. *The Fourth Ghost: White Southern Writers and European Fascism, 1930–1950*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009. Print.

Brooks, Cleanth. *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963. Print.

Brown, Raymond Edward. *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave: A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels*. London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994. Print.

Browne, Joseph. "Flann O'Brien: *Post* Joyce or *Propter* Joyce?" *Joyce and His Contemporaries*. Ed. Diana A. Ben-Merre and Maureen Murphy. New York: Greenwood, 1989. 113–20. Print.

Budgen, Frank. *James Joyce and the Making of "Ulysses" and Other Writings*.1934. London: Oxford University Press, 1972. Print.

Buell, Lawrence. "Introduction in Pursuit of Ethics." *PMLA* 114.1 (1999): 7–19. *JSTOR*. Web. 6 June 2009.

Butler, Judith. "Betrayal's Felicity." *Diacritics* 34.1 (2004): 82–87. Print.

———. "A Carefully Crafted F**k You." *Guernicamag.com*. Guernica Magazine, March 2010. Web. 16 March 2010.

———. "Ethical Ambivalence." Garber, Hanssen, and Walkowitz 15–28.

———. "Giving an Account of Oneself." *Diacritics* 31.4 (2001): 22–40. *JSTOR*. Web. 12 March 2010.

———. *Giving an Account of Oneself*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005. Print.

———. "Restaging the Universal: Hegemony and the Limits of Formalism." *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*. Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek. London: Verso, 2000. 11–43. Print.

———. *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997. Print.

Butler, Judith, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek. *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*. London: Verso, 2000. Print.

Čapek, Karel, and Josef Čapek. *The Insect Play*. 1921. *Čapek: Four Plays*. Trans. Peter Majer and Cathy Porter. London: Methuen, 1999. 93–164. Print.

Carter, Huntly. *The New Spirit in the Russian Theater (1917–28)*. New York: Brentano's, 1929. Print.

Caserio, Robert L. "G.K. Chesterton and the Terrorist God outside Modernism." *Outside Modernism: In Pursuit of the English Novel, 1900–30*. Ed. Lynne Hapgood and Nancy L. Paxton. London: Macmillan, 2000. 63–82. Print.

Chace, William M. "Joyce and Flann O'Brien." *Éire-Ireland* 22.2 (1987): 140–52. Print.

Cheah, Pheng, and Suzanne Guerlac, eds. *Derrida and the Time of the Political*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009. Print.

Chesterton, G.K. *The Autobiography of G.K. Chesterton*. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1936. Print.

———. "A Defence of Patriotism." *The Defendant*. London: Dent, 1901. 73–76. *The Literature Network*. Web. 10 Dec. 2008.

———. *The Man Who Was Thursday: A Nightmare*. 1908. New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1935. Print.

———. *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*. 1904. New York: Paulist, 1978. Print.

———. *Orthodoxy*. 1908. New York: Image Books, 1990. Print.

Christie, James. Rev. of *Judas: Betrayer or Friend of Jesus*, by William Klassen. *Jewish-Christian Relations*. International Council of Christians and Jews, 1998. Web. 25 May 2009.

Clark, William Bedford. "Where Ideology Leaves Off: Cowley, Warren, and Faulkner Revisited." *Studies in the Novel* 24.3 (1992): 298–308. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 15 Nov. 2008.

Clissman, Anne. *Flann O'Brien: A Critical Introduction to His Writings: The Story-Teller's Book-Web*. Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1975. Print.

Clune, Anne, and Tess Hurson, eds. *Conjuring Complexities: Essays on Flann O'Brien*. Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, 1997. Print.

Coetzee, J.M. "William Faulkner and His Biographers." *Inner Workings: Literary Essays 2000–2005*. New York: Viking, 2007. 189–206. Print.

Cohen, David. "James Joyce and the Decline of Flann O'Brien." *Éire-Ireland* 22.2 (1987): 153–60. Print.

Cohn, Deborah N. "'He Was One of Us': The Reception of William Faulkner and the U.S. South by Latin American Authors." *Comparative Literature Studies* 34.2 (1997): 149–69. Print.

Conlon, Denis J. *G.K. Chesterton: The Critical Judgments, Part 1: 1900–1937*. Antwerp: Antwerp Studies in English Literature, 1976. Print.

———. *G.K. Chesterton: A Half Century of Views*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987. Print.

Critchley, Simon. *The Ethics of Deconstruction*. 2nd ed. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1999. Print.

———. *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity: Essays on Derrida, Levinas and Contemporary French Thought*. London: Verso, 1999. Print.

———. *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*. London: Verso, 2007. Print.

Critchley, Simon, Jacques Derrida, Ernesto Laclau, and Richard Rorty. *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*. Ed. Chantal Mouffe. London: Routledge, 1996. Print.

Cronin, Anthony. *No Laughing Matter: The Life and Times of Flann O'Brien*. 1989. New York: Fromm International, 1998. Print.

de Quincey, Thomas. "Judas Iscariot." *Judas Iscariot and Other Writings*. Adam & Charles Black, 1863. 1–34. *Google Book Search*. Web. 25 May 2009.

Deane, Seamus. *A Short History of Irish Literature*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986. Print.

Derrida, Jacques. *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*. Trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999. Print.

———. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Trans. Eric Prenowitz. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996. Print. Religion and Postmodernism.

———. "Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides. Trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*. Ed. Giovanna Borradori. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003. 85–136. Print.

———. *The Gift of Death: Second Edition & Literature in Secret*. Trans. David Wills. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008. Print.

———. "Onto-Theology of National-Humanism (Prolegomena to a Hypothesis)." *Oxford Literary Review* 14.1–2 (1992): 3–23. Print.

———. "Le Parjure,' *Perhaps*: Storytelling and Lying ('Abrupt Breaches of Syntax')." *Acts of Narrative*. Ed. Carol Jacobs and Henry Sussman. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003. 195–234. Print.

———. *The Politics of Friendship*. Trans. George Collins. London: Verso, 1997. Print.

———. *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*. Vol. 1. Ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007. Print.

———. "Remarks on Deconstruction and Pragmatism." Trans. Simon Critchley. *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*. Ed. Chantal Mouffe. London: Routledge, 1996. 79–86. Print.

———. *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. New York: Routledge, 1994. Print.

———. "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas." *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978. 79–153. Print.

Derrida, Jacques, and Maurizio Ferraris. *A Taste for the Secret*. Trans. Giacomo Donis. Ed. Giacomo Donis and David Webb. Cambridge: Polity, 2001. Print.

Derrida, Jacques, and Mustapha Tlili, eds. *For Nelson Mandela*. New York: Henry Holt, 1987. Print.

DiBattista, Maria. "Ulysses's Unanswered Questions." *Modernism/Modernity* 15.2 (2008): 265–75. Print.

Dimitri, Carl J. "*Go Down, Moses* and *Intruder in the Dust*: From Negative to Positive Liberty." *Faulkner Journal* 19 (2003): 11–26. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 15 Nov. 2008.

Donohue, Keith. Introduction. *The Complete Novels*. By Brian O'Nolan [Flann O'Brien]. New York: Knopf, 2007. ix–xix. Print.

———. *The Irish Anatomist: A Study of Flann O'Brien*. Dublin: Academica Press, 2002. Print. Irish Research Series 25.

Dotterer, Ronald L. "Flann O'Brien, James Joyce, and *The Dalkey Archive.*" *New Hibernia Review* 8.2 (2004): 54–63. *Project Muse*. Web. 10 Oct. 2009.

Douthat, Ross. "Gopnik on Chesterton (I)." *The Atlantic*. The Atlantic Monthly Group, 29 July 2008. Web. 5 June 2009.

Duvall, John. Introduction. *Faulkner and Postmodernism: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1999*. Ed. John Noel Duvall and Ann J. Abadie. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002. vii–xvi. Print.

———. *Race and White Identity in Southern Fiction: From Faulkner to Morrison*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. Print.

Eaglestone, Robert. *Ethical Criticism: Reading after Levinas*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997. Print.

Eagleton, Terry. *Trouble with Strangers: A Study of Ethics*. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. Print.

Eco, Umberto. "Ur-Fascism." *New York Review of Books* 42.11 (1995): 12–15. Print.

Efros, Abram. "The Russian Theatre and Its Artists since the Revolution." Trans. H.L. Gordon. *Parnassus* 1.2. (1929): 6–9. Print.

Esposito, Roberto. *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community*. Trans. Timothy Campbell. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010. Print.

Farmer, Ann. "Chesterton and the Jews." *Chesterton Review: The Journal of the G.K. Chesterton* Institute 31.1–2 (2005): 95–99. Print.

———. "Chesterton: Religion, Anti-Semitism and the Politics of the Underdog." *Chesterton Review: The Journal of the G.K. Chesterton Institute* 34.1–2 (2008): 163–86. Print.

Faulkner, William. *Absalom, Absalom!* 1936. New York: Vintage, 1972. Print.

———. *As I Lay Dying: The Corrected Text*. 1930. New York: Vintage International and Random House, 1990. Print.

———. *Essays, Speeches & Public Letters: Updated, with Material Never Before Collected in One Volume*. Ed. James B. Meriwether. New York: Modern Library, 2004. Print.

———. *Father Abraham*. Ed. James B. Meriwether. New York: Random House, 1983. Print.

———. *Faulkner in the University*. Ed. Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995. Print.

———. "A Letter to the Leaders in the Negro Race." *Transatlantic Review*. Spring (1961). Rpt. in *Essays, Speeches & Public Letters* 107–14.

———. "On Privacy (The American Dream: What Happened to It?)" *Harper's* July (1955). Rpt. in *Essays, Speeches & Public Letters* 62–75.

———. "A Rose for Emily." *The Portable Faulkner: Revised and Expanded Edition*. Ed. Malcolm Cowley. New York: Viking, 1967. Print.

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *This Side of Paradise*. New York: Scribner's, 1920. Print.

Franklin, Rosemary. "Animal Magnetism in *As I Lay Dying*." *American Quarterly* 18.1 (1966): 24–34. Print.

Friedrich, Carl J. *The Pathology of Politics: Violence, Betrayal, Corruption, Secrecy, and Propaganda*. New York: Harper & Row, 1972. Print.

Fry, Christopher. *The Boy With a Cart: Cuthman, Saint of Sussex*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939. Print.

Fuentes, Carlos. "Central and Eccentric Writing." *Lives on the Line*. Ed. Doris Meyer. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988. Print.

Garber, Marjorie, Beatrice Hanssen, and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, eds. *The Turn to Ethics*. New York: Routledge, 2000. Print. Culture Work.

Gardner, Martin, ed. *The Annotated Thursday: G.K. Chesterton's Masterpiece,* The Man Who Was Thursday. San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990. Print.

Geifman, Anna. *Entangled in Terror: The Azef Affair and the Russian Revolution*. Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 2000. Print.

Gibson, Andrew. *Postmodernity, Ethics and the Novel: From Leavis to Levinas*. London: Routledge, 1999. Print.

Golsan, Richard J., ed. *Fascism, Aesthetics, and Culture*. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1992. Print.

Gopnik, Adam. "The Back of the World: The Troubling Genius of G.K. Chesterton." *New Yorker* 7 July 2008: 52–59. Print.

———. "Prisoner of Narnia: How C.S. Lewis Escaped." *New Yorker* 81.36 (21 Nov.2005): 88–93. Print.

Gray, Richard. "On Privacy: William Faulkner and the Human Subject." Kartiganer and Abadie, 45–69.

Grebowicz, Margret. "'Between Betrayal and Betrayal': Epistemology and Ethics in Derrida's Debt to Levinas." *Addressing Levinas*. Ed. Sean Nelson, Antje Kapust, and Kent Still. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005. 75–85. Print.

Grgas, Stipe. "Flann O'Brien and the Question of National Identity." *Studia Romanica et Anglica Zagrabiensia* 49 (2004): 141–56. Print.

Griffin, Roger. "Modernity, Modernism, and Fascism: A 'Mazeway Resynthesis.'" *Fascism*. Spec. issue of *Modernism/Modernity* 15.1 (2008): 9–24. Print.

Guillory, John. "The Ethical Practice of Modernity: The Example of Reading." Garber, Hanssen, and Walkowitz 29–46.

Habermas, Jürgen. *Structural Transformation in the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Trans. Thomas Burger. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989. Print. Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought.

Hägglund, Martin. *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008. Print. Cultural Memory in the Present.

Hale, Dorothy J. "*As I Lay Dying*'s Heterogeneous Discourse." *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 23.1 (1989): 5–23. *JSTOR*. Web. 15 Nov. 2008.

Hammerschlag, Sarah. "Another, Other Abraham: Derrida's Figuring of Levinas's Judaism." *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 26.4 (2008): 74–96. *Project Muse*. Web. 12 June 2009.

Harold, Philip. *Prophetic Politics: Emmanuel Levinas and the Sanctification of Suffering*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009. Print.

Harpham, Geoffery Galt. *Shadows of Ethics: Criticism and the Just Society*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999. Print.

Harrison, Austin. "A Superb Paradox." Rev. of *The Man Who Was Thursday*, by G.K. Chesterton. *The Observer* 1 March 1908. Rpt. in Conlon, *Critical Judgments* 145–46.

Haugen, David M. "An Unwelcome Specter: Brian O'Nolan's Struggle with the Legacy of James Joyce. *Intersections* 2.1 (1994): 64–79. Print.

Hewitt, Andrew. "Fascist Modernism, Futurism, and Post-modernity." Golsan 38–55.

"Hitler Branded a Barbarian, 'A Menace to Europe': Mr G.K. Chesterton on Truculent Prussianism." *The Jewish Chronicle* 22 Sept. 1933: 14. Rpt. in *The Chesterton Review: The Journal of the G.K. Chesterton* Institute 31.1–2 (2005): 100–01. Print.

Hollander, Dana. *Exemplarity and Chosenness: Rosenzweig and Derrida on the Nation of Philosophy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008. Print. Cultural Memory in the Present.

Hopper, Keith. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Post-modernist*. Cork: Cork University Press, 1995. Print.

Hostert, Anna Camaiti. *Passing: A Strategy to Dissolve Identities and Remap Differences*. Trans. Christine Marciasini. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007. Print.

"The Insect Play." *The Irish Times* 23 March 1943: 3. Print.

Jackson, John Wyse. Introduction. *Flann O'Brien At War: Myles na gCopaleen 1940–1945*. London: Duckworth, 1999. 7–17. Print.

James, Clive. "Jorge Luis Borges: Can a Great Writer Be Blind to the World Around Him?" *Slate*. 7 Feb. 2007. Web. 12 Dec. 2007.

Jenckes, Kate. *Reading Borges after Benjamin: Allegory, Afterlife, and the Writing of History*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007. Print.

Johnson, Stephen. "The Integration of Theatre History and Theatre Practice in the University: A Case Study Using *Ze života hmyzu (From the Life of Insects)* by Karel and Josef Čapek." *Theatre Topics* 4.2 (1994): 189–204. Print.

Jones, Stephen, ed. *A Flann O'Brien Reader*. New York: Viking Press, 1978. Print.

Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. 1916. Ed. Seamus Deane. New York: Penguin, 2003. Print.

———. *Ulysses*. 1922. Ed. Hans Walter Gabler. New York: Vintage, 1986. Print.

Kafka, Franz. *Letters to Friends, Family, and Editors*. Trans. Richard and Clara Winston. New York: Schocken, 1977. Print.

———. *The Trial*. Trans. Willa and Edwin Muir. New York: Modern Library, 1956. Print.

Karnicky, Jeffrey. *Contemporary Fiction and the Ethics of Modern Culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Print.

Kartiganer, Donald M. "'By It I Would Stand or Fall': Life and Death in *As I Lay Dying*." *A Companion to William Faulkner*. Ed. Richard C. Moreland. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007. 429–44. Print.

———. "'Listening to the Voices': Public and Fictional Language in Faulkner." *Southern Quarterly* 45.2 (2008): 28–43. *ProQuest*. Web. 2 June 2009.

Kartiganer, Donald M., and Ann J. Abadie, eds. *Faulkner and Ideology: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1992*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995. Print.

Kaufman, Gerald. "Chesterton's Final Solution." *Times Educational Supplement* 2.1 (1998). Print.

Kenner, Hugh. *A Colder Eye: The Modern Irish Writers*. New York: Knopf, 1983. Print.

———. *Paradox in Chesterton*. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1947. Print.

Kiberd, Declan. *Inventing Ireland*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996. Print.

———. *The Irish Writer and the World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Print.

Klassen, William. *Judas: Betrayer or Friend of Jesus*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004. Print.

Knight, Mark. *Chesterton and Evil*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2004. Print.

Koonen, Alisa. Страницы из жизни [*Pages of a Life*]. Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1975. Print.

Korsgaard, Christine M. "The Right to Lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 15.4 (1986): 325–49. *JSTOR*. Web. 16 March 2010.

Kreyling, Michael. *Inventing Southern Literature*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998. Print.

Krzhizhanovsky, Sigizmund. Человек, который был Четвергом (по Д. Честертону) [*The Man Who Was Thursday: Based on the Novel by G. Chesterton*]. ts. РГАЛИ ф [State Archive of Literature and Art], Moscow. Print.

Laclau, Ernesto. *Emancipation(s)*. London: Verso, 1996. Print.

———. *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*. London: Verso, 1990. Print.

———. "On Imagined Communities." *Grounds of Comparison: Around the Work of Benedict Anderson*. Ed. Pheng Cheah and Jonathon Culler. New York: Routledge, 2003. 21–28. Print.

———. *On Populist Reason*. London: Verso, 2005. Print.

———. "Populism: What's in a Name?" *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*. Ed. Francisco Panizza. London: Verso, 2005. 32–49. Print.

Laclau, Ernesto, and Chantal Mouffe. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London: Verso, 1985. Print.

Levinas, Emmanuel. "Ethics as First Philosophy." Trans. Seán Hand and Michael Temple. *The Levinas Reader*. Ed. Seán Hand. Oxford: Blackwell, 1989. 75–87. Print.

———. "In the Name of the Other." *Is It Righteous to Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*. Ed. Jill Robbins. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001. 188–99. Print.

———. *On Escape: De l'évasion*. Trans. Bettina Bergo. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003. Print. Cultural Memory in the Present.

———. *Otherwise than Being; or, Beyond Essence*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1981. Print.

———. "Reality and Its Shadow." Trans. Alphonso Lingis. *Collected Philosophical Papers*. Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987. 1–13. Rpt. of "La réalité et son ombre." *Les Temps Modernew* 38 (1948): 771–89. Print.

———. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969. Print.

———. "The Trace of the Other." 1949. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. *Deconstruction in Context*. Ed. Mark Taylor. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986. 345–59. Print.

Lunn, Eugene. *Marxism and Modernism: An Historical Study of Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin, and Adorno*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982. Print.

Mahaffey, Vicki. *Modernist Literature: Challenging Fictions*. Malden: Blackwell, 2007. Print.

Malikova, Maria. "'Скетч по кошмару Честертона' и культурная ситуация нэпа" ["'A Sketch Based on Chesterton's Nightmare' and the Cultural Situation during NEP"]. Новое литературное обозрение [*New Literary Review*] 78 (2006). Web. 7 June 2008. <http:// magazines.russ.ru/nlo/2006/78/mm2.html>.

"Man Friday." Rev. of *The Man Who Was Thursday*, by G.K. Chesterton. *The Academy* 2 May 1908: 734–35. Rpt. in Conlon, *Critical Judgments* 155–58.

Manguel, Alberto. Introduction. *On Lying in Bed, and Other Essays by G.K. Chesterton*. Calgary: Bayeux Arts, 2000. 7–16. Print.

Marof, Joaquín. "¡Maten a Borges!" *La Jornada*. Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 16 July 2006. Web. 17 Dec. 2009.

Mays, J.C.C. "Brian O'Nolan and Joyce on Art and on Life." *James Joyce Quarterly* 11.3 (1974): 238–56. Print.

———. "Brian O'Nolan: Literalist of the Imagination." O'Keeffe 77–119.

McCleary, Joseph R. *The Historical Imagination of G.K. Chesterton: Locality, Patriotism, and Nationalism*. New York: Routledge, 2009. Print. Studies in Major Literary Authors.

McNeil, Brian Andrew. "Ethical Topographies." Diss. State University of New York at Buffalo, 2004. Print.

Mellard, James M. "Realism, Naturalism, Modernism: Residual, Dominant, and Emergent Ideologies in *As I Lay Dying*." Kartiganer and Abadie 217–37.

Michel, Frann. "William Faulkner as a Lesbian Author." *The Faulkner Journal* 4 (1989): 5–20. Print.

Moglen, Seth. *Mourning Modernity: Literary Modernism and the Injuries of American Capitalism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007. Print.

Morales Ladrón, Marisol. "Del centro literario a los márgenes: *The Dalkey Archive* de Flann O'Brien y la ficción metajoyceana" [From the Literary Center to the Margins: Flann O'Brien's *The Dalkey Archive* and Metajoycean Fiction]. *The Scallop of Saint James: An Old Pilgrim's Hoard: Reading Joyce from the Peripheries / Leyendo a Joyce desde las Periferias. Including "Two Little Clouds" by Joseph O'Connor*. Ed. Manuela Susana Domínguez Pena, Margarita Estévez Saá, and Anne MacCarthy. Weston: Netbiblio, 2006. 203–14. Print.

Morash, Chris. "Augustine … O'Brien … Vico … Joyce." Clune and Hurson 133–42. Print.

Mouffe, Chantal. "Which Ethics for Democracy? Garber, Hanssen, and Walkowitz 85–94.

Moyn, Samuel. *Origins of the Other: Emmanuel Levinas between Revelation and Ethics*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005. Print.

Murphy, Neil. "Flann O'Brien." *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 25.3 (2005): 7–41. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 12 Nov. 2009.

Narcisi, Lara. "'One Spoke for All': Unity, Individualism, and Faulkner's Voices that Just Won't Be Ignored." *Southern Studies* 12 (2005): 1–22. Print.

The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. Print.

Norton, Anne. "'Call Me Ishmael.'" Cheah and Guerlac 158–76.

O'Donnell, Patrick. "Between the Family and the State: Nomadism and Authority in *As I Lay Dying*." *Faulkner Journal* 7 (1991–92): 83–94. Print.

O'Keeffe, Timothy. *Myles: Portraits of Brian O'Nolan*. London: Martin Brian & O'Keeffe, 1973. Print.

O'Neil, Joseph. "The Last Laugh." Rev. of *Flann O'Brien: The Complete Novels*. *TheAtlantic.com*. Atlantic Monthly Group, May 2008. n. pag. Web. 24 May 2009.

O'Nolan, Brian. *At Swim-Two-Birds*. [By Flann O'Brien]. 1939. *Complete Novels* 1–217.

———. "A Bash in the Tunnel." [By Brian Nolan]. *Envoy* 5.17 (1951): 5–11. Rpt. in *Stories and Plays* [By Flann O'Brien]. London: Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, 1973. 199–208. Print.

———. *The Complete Novels*. [By Flann O'Brien]. New York: Knopf, 2007. Print. Everyman's Library.

———. *The Dalkey Archive*. [By Flann O'Brien]. 1964. *Complete Novels* 609–787.

———. "De Me." [By Myles na Gopaleen]. *New Ireland* March 1964: 41–42. Print.

———. "Joyce Re-approached." [By Myles na gCopaleen]. *Irish Writing* 10 (1950): 71–72. Print.

———. *Rhapsody in Stephen's Green: The Insect Play*. [By Flann O'Brien (Myles na gCopaleen)]. Ed. Robert Tracy. Essays and Texts in Cultural History. Dublin: Lilliput, 1994. Print.

———. "The Saint and I." *The Manchester Guardian* (19 January 1966). Rpt. as "Can a Saint Hit Back" in Jones 383–85.

———. *The Third Policeman*. [By Flann O'Brien]. 1967. *Complete Novels* 219–404.

———. "Two in One." [By Myles na Gopaleen]. *The Bell*. 19.8 (1954): 30–34. Print.

Parikh, Crystal. *An Ethics of Betrayal: The Politics of Otherness in Emergent U.S. Literatures and Culture*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2009. Print.

Pearce, Edward. "Knocking on Heavens Crystal Floor." Rev. of *Wisdom and Innocence: A Life of G.K. Chesterton*, by Joseph Pearce. *The Independent*. The Independent, 4 Jan. 1997. Web. 11 June 2009.

Peek, Charles A. "'A-Laying There, Right Up to My Door': As American As I Lay Dying." *Faulkner in American: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1998*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001. 116–35. Print.

Perpich, Diane. *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008. Print.

Pilkington, Lionel. *Theatre and the State in Twentieth-Century Ireland: Cultivating the People*. London: Routledge, 2001. Print.

Pitol, Sergio. "El infierno circular de Flann O'Brien [The Circular Hell of Flann O'Brien]." *Adicción a los ingleses. Vida y obra de diez novelistas*. México, D.F.: Lectorum, 2002. 149–62. Print.

Powell, David. "An Annotated Bibliography of Myles na Gopaleen's (Flann O'Brien's) 'Cruiskeen Lawn' Commentaries on Joyce." *James Joyce Quarterly* 9.1 (1971): 50–62. Print.

Quigley, Megan. "Modern Novels and Vagueness." *Fascism*. Spec. issue of *Modernism/ Modernity* 15.1 (2008): 101–29. Print.

Rabinowitz, Peter. "'Betraying the Sender': The Rhetoric and Ethics of Fragile Texts." *Narrative* 2.3 (1994): 201–13. *JSTOR*. Web. 13 October 2009.

Rapaport, Herman. "Archive Trama." Rev. of *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, by Jacques Derrida. *Diacritics* 28.4 (1998): 68–81. *JSTOR*. Web. 10 Sept. 2009.

Robbins, Jill. *Altered Reading: Levinas and Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1999. Print.

Robinson, Douglas. *Estrangement and the Somatics of Literature: Tolstoy, Shklovsky, Brecht*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008. Print.

Ross, Stephen David. *The Gift of Self: Shattering Emptiness, Betrayal*. New York: Global Academic, 2005. Print.

Sanders, Mark. "Ethics and Interdisciplinarity in Philosophy and Literary Theory. *Diacritics* 32.3–4 (2002): 3–16. Project Muse. Web. 25 June 2009.

Sassoon, Anne Showstack. "Gramsci and the Secret of Father Brown." *Images of Gramsci: Connections and Contentions in Political Theory and International Relations*. Ed. Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton. London: Routledge, 2006. 1–12. Print.

Scholer, David M. Rev. of *Judas: Betrayer or Friend of Jesus,* by William Klassen. *The Christian Century* 114.24 (1997): 766–67. Print.

Sheridan, Niall. "Brian, Flann and Myles (The Springtime of Genius)." O'Keeffe 32–53.

———. "The Joyce Country." *Ireland Today* 2.11 (1937): 88. Print.

Singal, Daniel J. *William Faulkner: The Making of a Modernist*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997. Print.

Smith, Jon, and Deborah Cohn, eds. *Look Away!: The U.S. South in New World Studies*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004. Print.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Ethics and Politics in Tagore, Coetzee, and Certain Scenes of Teaching." *Diacritics* 32.3–4 (2002): 17–31. *JSTOR*. Web. 25 June 2009.

———. *Death of a Discipline*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003. Print.

T.W. "The Insect Play at the Gaiety." *The Irish Press* 23 March 1943: 3. Print.

Taaffe, Carol. *Ireland Through the Looking-Glass: Flann O'Brien, Myles na gCopaleen and Irish Cultural Debate*. Cork: Cork University Press, 2008. Print.

Tadie, Andrew A., and Michael H. Macdonald, eds. *Permanent Things: Toward the Recovery of a More Human Scale at the End of the Twentieth Century*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995. Print.

Tairov, Alexander. *Notes of a Director*. 1922. Trans. William Kuhlke. Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1969. Print. Books of the Theatre 7.

Thiranagama, Sharika, and Tobias Kelley, eds. *Traitors: Suspicion, Intimacy, and the Ethics of State-Building*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010. Print.

Thomson, Alex. *Deconstruction and Democracy: Derrida's* Politics of Friendship. London: Continuum, 2005. Print.

Towner, Theresa M. *The Cambridge Introduction to William Faulkner*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Print.

Tracy, Robert. Introduction *Rhapsody in Stephen's Green: The Insect Play*. By Flann O'Brien (Myles na gCopaleen). Dublin: Lilliput, 1994. 1–17. Print.

Turnbull, Joanne. Introduction. *7 Stories*. By Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky. Chicago: Glas, 2006. Print. Glas New Russian Writing 39.

Vargas Llosa, Mario. "Faulkner en Laberinto." *Contra Viento y Marea II (1972–83)*. Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1986. Print.

Wain, John. "'To Write for My Own Race': The Fiction of Flann O'Brien." *Encounter* 22.1 (1967): 71–85. Print.

Walkowitz, Rebecca L. "Cosmopolitan Ethics: The Home and the World." Garber, Hanssen, and Walkowitz 221–30.

———. *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006. Print.

Ward, Maisie. *Gilbert Keith Chesterton*. Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward, 1943. Print.

Weinberger, Eliot. "Anonymous Sources: Transcript of a Talk Given at the 'Lost & Found' Conference on Translation." *91st Meridian* 1.1 (2002). Web. 4 June 4, 2009.

Weinstein, Philip. *Becoming Faulkner: The Art and Life of William Faulkner*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. Print.

———. *Faulkner's Subject: A Cosmos No One Owns*. Cambridge Studies in American Literature and Culture 56. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. Print.

———. *Unknowing: The Work of Modernist Fiction*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 2005. Print.

Weisenburger, Steven. "Faulkner in Baghdad, Bush in Hadleyburg: Race, Nation and Sovereign Violence." *American Literary History* 18.4 (2006): 739–71. *Project Muse*. Web. 15 Nov. 2008.

White, Christopher T. "The Modern Magnetic Animal: *As I Lay Dying* and the Uncanny Zoology of Modernism." *Journal of Modern Literature* 31.3 (2008): 81–101. *Project Muse*. Web. 2 June 2009.

Wollaeger, Mark. Rev. of *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation*, by Rebecca L. Walkowitz. *Modernism/Modernity* 14.1 (2007): 161–64. *JSTOR*. Web. 14 Sept. 2009.

Worrall, Nick. *Modernism to Realism on the Soviet Stage: Tairov—Vakhtangov—Okhlopkov*. Cambridge: Cambrige University Press, 1989. Print.

Zender, Karl E. *Faulkner and the Politics of Reading*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002. Print.

Žižek, Slavoj. *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*. Cambridge: MIT, 2003. Print.