CONCEPTS OF SELFHOOD

IN ELIAS CANETTI'S *AUTOBIOGRAPHISCHE SCHRIFTEN*

AND

SAMUEL BECKETT'S *NOHOW ON*

by

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Abstract

Is it possible to speak of a literature of self-effacement? Using such terms as self-abnegation, selflessness and self-sacrifice, what would be the conditions for understanding how a self may attempt to negate itself in writing? If I have no self, though, how can I be conscious of it, how can I write about its dissolution? These questions form the core of a philosophical and literary investigation into the relationship between self and other. The self that envisages itself and the self that effaces itself comprise two voices in dialogue with each other. By presenting the aesthetic and ethical conditions for a dialogic exchange between self-envisaging and self-effacing voices, this study compares Elias Canetti's *Autobiographischen Schriften* and Samuel Beckett's *Nowhow On* as two examples of the way the self can attempt to efface itself in writing. The aesthetic dimension of the self-envisaging voice are based on a reading of Paul Ricoeur's analysis of metaphoric language in *La métaphore vive*, while its ethical dimension is based on a reading of Martha Nussbaum's ideas on literary ethics in *Poetic Justice* and *Love's Knowledge*. The aesthetic dimension of the self-effacing voice are based on Theodor Adorno's theory of artistic value in *Aesthetische Theorie*, while its ethical dimensions are based on Emmanuel Levinas's concept of the ethics of the face-to-face encounter in *Autrement qu'être, ou au-delà de l'essence*. The encounter between self-envisaging and self-effacing voices is reflected in the literary encounter between the types of monologic or dialogic discourse described by Mikhail Bakhtin in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. By reading for the encounter that takes place between types of voices in Canetti's memoir, I will demonstrate that there is a

shift from Canetti seeing himself as a self-envisaging writer toward an ambiguous image of himself as a self-effacing man. For the type of encounters that takes place in Beckett's novel, I will show how Beckett's concept of selfhood is rendered as a series of voices for whom identity is made impossible by language, but who nonetheless finds value in failing to efface himself altogether.

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INTRODUCTION

desiderium habens dissolvi

(Philippians 1:23)

Maintenant, je m'encrapule le plus possible. Pourquoi? Je veux être poète, et je travaille à me rendre Voyant: vous ne comprendrez pas du tout, et je ne saurais presque vous expliquer. Il s'agit d'arriver à l'inconnu par le dérèglement de tous les sens. Les souffrances sont énormes, mais il faut être fort, être né poète, et je me suis reconnu poète. Ce n'est pas du tout ma faute. C'est faux de dire: Je pense: on devrait dire: On me pense. – Pardon du jeu de mots.
JE est un autre.

(Arthur Rimbaud: Letter to Georges Izambard; 13 May, 1871)

Introduction: Losing Oneself in Words

Any claim that reading a good book helps one know oneself better must surely require some measuring device if the claim is to be more than a mere conviction. Perhaps one does not think directly of Socrates's invocation to know thyself, but if the reader believes him or herself to be richer for the experience, we might presume that he or she has learned new and valuable information from it. Reading a particular novel, for instance, can be classified among those experiences in one's life, such as traveling or being sick, which continue to bear significance for the remainder of that life. If I want to know whether a friend has ever read *War and Peace*, I must ask her, "Have you read it,"

and not, "Did you read it?" In English, the present perfect tense is most often used to speak of such experiences, even if they took place long ago in the past. These types of occurrence have an importance beyond any particular temporal reference. The value we attribute to a reading experience may be relative or arbitrary, but at times the way we signify the value of a reading experience implies certain assumptions about that value. We say that a pleasurable experience can cause us to lose ourselves in it. One can lose oneself in a good book, for instance. This sense of loss may refer to the feeling of being transported to an unfamiliar setting, of taking an intellectual and emotional journey away from home. The journey may be unpredictable, unsettling, even dangerous, but one undertakes it all the same. The motives or causes for losing oneself may be varied and difficult to discern, but can it be assumed that one knows oneself better after having had the experience?

To lose oneself in someone else's writing, the type of writing involved might be fiction, or poetry, but it might just as well be a biography, or some other non-fiction work. Whatever the case, the reader must first understand the language of the text in order to form mental images of its personae, their surroundings, their actions or the psychology of their reactions, before the reader is able to lose him or herself in it. When one has immersed oneself deeply in the twists and turns of a narrative, the customary experience of time that is governed by sensory impressions and actions gives way to another time determined by the sequencing and meaning of the words in the text. If, however, the book has lost the reader somewhere along the line, it signifies a negative experience. It indicates that the book has failed to make itself understood. If I say a book has lost me,

then it is negative; whereas, saying I have lost myself in a book is positive. Why do we not simply say that we have found ourselves in the book? Would that not be a stronger expression of a positive experience? Obviously, we must assume that in order to find ourselves we must first lose ourselves, but should we assume that by losing ourselves we will automatically find ourselves? We can argue that if one does find oneself, the new-found self is no longer the same as the old one, but the question posed above remains unanswered. Is the self that is found necessarily better than the one that was lost? Perhaps it is because the old self has been lost that it is the loss as such that is valued.

Insofar as the writer is also a reader of his or her own work, it might follow that the writer is also capable of being lost in the reading of it. Certain differences between the experience of the pre-meditating writer and the unexpected reader must prevail, though. The writer tries to effect the reader's temporary loss of self by providing a pleasurable experience of the mysterious and the surprising. Is not the writer, as author and authority of the work, author and authority of the means of the reader finding him or herself? It would seem that both writer and reader need to share this assumption in order for the process to succeed. By choosing to read a book, the reader enters into an arrangement with the author that operates on a metaphysical plane of values as well as on a commercial one. Both parties agree to certain terms and conditions. An exchange of value takes place. The reader samples the wares, and, in the event he or she chooses to buy the book, pays the author in return for a beneficial experience. This is the case at least insofar as the transaction takes place within a commercial economy. If, however, the goal of the exchange is for the reader to abandon him or herself, and find a new self, how much of

the writer's self does the reader receive and how much of the old self must first be abandoned? To what extent is the new-found self sold in exchange for the old one? These questions may be at the heart of a reader's desire to know more about the personal lives of authors. After having lost ourselves in a good book, the author becomes our other, and we wish to know more about his or her experience. Do we want to be that author, to hear the author's voices when we speak, to use the author's words as if they were our own? What are the conditions for satisfying our desire to identify with a particular? And, most significantly perhaps, how much of our old selves can we lose before we are no longer ourselves at all?

In his well-known essay, "What is an Author?," Michel Foucault discusses the historical conditions under which the writer has come to adopt an authorial persona that seeks to efface itself from the work. Foucault wishes to determine the difference between the rules regulating a text with an "author function" (Foucault 101) and one without. A contract, for instance, is a text that can be written *pro forma*. Its signatories are not necessarily its authors. The value of a well-written contract rests in its ability to foresee as many contingencies as possible in the service of the transaction between the signatories. A narrative, on the other hand, is imbued with another set of values. Foucault makes the point that by the beginning of the nineteenth-century, only scientific texts remained anonymous, while narrative texts required an authorial persona as a guide to help the reader interpret them. This authorial function becomes a precept of contemporary reading practices. Since the nineteenth-century, however, a separate line of thinking has emerged to challenge the status of the author. An aesthetics of indifference in regard to the

question of who is speaking has become “one of the fundamental ethical principles of contemporary writing” (101). Typically, then, in the wake of “the author’s disappearance” (104), the object to be studied is conceived of either as an autonomous work or as the writing of the work (*écriture*). But both of these concepts conceal certain other assumptions that themselves limit the effacement of the authorial function. Foucault demonstrates that the concept of *écriture* is “a way of re-translating, in transcendental terms, both the theological affirmation of its sacred character and the critical affirmation of its creative character” (104). Readers of *écriture* argue for authorial effacement, but they do so at times according to a nineteenth-century, quasi-religious tradition that sanctifies that effacement in terms of artistic genius. Foucault is in favor of those writers whose writing practices effect a rupture with that tradition.

To that end, Foucault proposes a different set of assumptions for understanding the author function. There are two reasons why he believes it is important to re-evaluate the tradition. In the first place, there is a theoretical perspective from which the idea of the author should be analyzed as a discourse that is itself subject to “modes of circulation, valorization, attribution and appropriation of discourses” (117). Foucault acknowledges that it may be necessary to re-examine the old status of the author, which consists of elements of discursive activity such as biographical and psychological references, but he insists that the framing questions would be different. No longer an ultimate source of discourse, the authorial subject would be examined in light of how it functions in a text and how it obeys the laws of the text. Examining these assumptions would allow for “a typology of discourse” (117), whereby the defining properties of a particular discourse

would depend on the relationship between the writer and the text, rather than strictly formal or grammatical qualities; and, it would allow for “the historical analysis of discourse” (117), whereby the author function is examined according to the principles of social relations governing a culture at any given time. In the second place, there is an ideological perspective from which the status of the author must be analyzed. Foucault argues that in traditional ideas of the author, particularly notions of authorial genius, the author has come to represent “an ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning” (119). While he acknowledges it is unlikely that our culture in this era can be entirely free of the limiting figure of the author, he does believe the author will disappear at critical junctures of cultural transformation. The question of aesthetic indifference, then, assumes new ethical significance. Rather than trying to locate the properties of ethical writing in the author’s “deepest self” (120), we must try to locate it in the relationship between the author and the discourse of others, in how that author functions by having no other choice but to use others’ words.

One type of historically embedded discourse that occupies a peculiar location between the desire to view the author function in its traditional guise and the desire to break free from those views is the literary memoir. Given Foucault’s reservations about the sanctity of artistic genius, on the one side, and his encouragement of the study of the social conditions of an authorial function, on the other side, what are we to make of the literary memoir as an object of study? Is it distinct from an autobiography, which might be said to organize a series of events in a life according to a chronological narrative? The literary memoir seems more like a randomly organized collection of the writer’s

recollections. The writer describes his or her efforts, encounters and experiences on the way to becoming a writer, but these are not necessarily related to one another, either chronologically, or teleologically. Even the stated desire to become a writer is only one of many possible conditions for explaining the circumstances that led to that writer being a writer. While the author of a literary memoir is likely in a position to speak with authority, it does not necessarily follow that the memoir is designed to explain how he or she came to occupy that position. Unlike the autobiography of a politician, for example, the literary memoir may question the legitimacy of how one comes to occupy a position of authority. Indeed, the literary memoir can be a meditation on the composition of the self that would question the entire tradition of the autobiography. Where St. Augustine's *Confessions* (398-400) depict the conversion of a man of the flesh to a man of ideas, Rousseau's *Les Confessions* (1782-89) depict the conversion of a man of ideas to a man of the flesh. Each one charts the course of a man's life as he learns to submit to the power of a greater idea. Each one attempts to convince the reader of the writer's authority on the logical composition of his deepest convictions. From a mixture of apologetic self-abnegation and heroic self-aggrandizement, each one serves as a standard-bearer for the genre of autobiography through the centuries.

Classic examples of life-writing that followed St. Augustine's path of self-discovery range from Dante's *Vita Nuova* and Cellini's *Vita* to Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* and Wordsworth's *The Prelude*. Examples of life-writing that belong to Rousseau's approach might include Beaumarchais's *Mémoires*, Thomas deQuincey's *Confessions of an Opium-Eater* and Kierkegaard's *Stages on Life's*

Way or On My Work as an Author.¹ The tradition, with variations on both themes, continues into the twentieth-century with Gertrude Stein's *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and *Everybody's Autobiography*, Arthur Koestler's *The Scum of the Earth* and *Arrow in the Blue*, Michel Leiris's *La règle de jeu*, Simone de Beauvoir's *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* and *La force de l'âge*, Jean-Paul Sartre's *Les Mots*, Ernest Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast*, Heinrich Böll's *Was soll aus dem Jungen bloss werden?*, *oder, Irgendwas mit Büchern*, and, more recently, V.S. Naipaul's *Reading and Writing: A Personal Account*. But are there not studies of the self that are also autobiographical in part? Could we think of adding to the list such works of self-scrutiny as Descartes's *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*, Pascal's *Pensées*, Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra*, Husserl's *Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewußtseins*, or Martin Buber's *Ich und du*? Are these not a form of literary self-story in which a self is examined in the language of its encounters with others? Literary autobiographies continue to be written, published, read and interpreted according to the terms and conditions of the culture industry, but what compels an author to write his or her memoirs today? Is it merely the chance to benefit from the notoriety gained with previous literary works? Or are there other motives to do with the search for understanding that underlies what is considered to be among the nobler goals of serious literature? Though the answer may lie with each author somewhere on a scale between these two points, it is probable that both

¹ For a comprehensive theory of autobiography, see Lejeune. He defines the writing practice of autobiography as a "récit rétrospectif en prose que quelqu'un fait sur sa propre existence quand il met l'accent principal sur une vie individuelle, en particulier sur l'histoire de sa personnalité" (4).

material and intellectual interests are represented when a writer examines how the self emerges as a product of a life-time of encounters with others in language and in literature. Indeed, it would appear that the longer a writer writes the more compelling the desire becomes for the writer to reflect on his or her life of writing as a means of understanding what it means to be a self among other selves. The significance of the encounters that a self has with language, for instance, becomes a central theme in such reflections. Whether this self-examination takes the form of a factual narrative or a poetic fiction, when it is written near the natural end of an author's lifetime, it will come to involve fundamental aesthetic and ethical questions on the meaning of being and having been a self among others.²

To demonstrate the possible conditions for how a writer may examine himself as a self who writes, I will compare and contrast the late-life works of two authors of recognized literary stature, Elias Canetti and Samuel Beckett. Though at first glance they may have little in common, Canetti's narrative memoirs, *Die gerettete Zunge*, *Die Fackel im Ohr*, and *Das Augenspiel*, and Beckett's three poetic novels, *Company*, *Mal vu mal dit*, and *Worstward Ho*, collectively entitled *Nowhow On*, are meditations on the self. They activate an internal dialogue between voices whose function is traditionally authorial and those that would try to break free from that tradition. In a traditionally comparative, biographical study, Canetti's life as a central European, secular Jew would

² Recent attention from various academic fields to the relationship between autobiographical and fictional narratives and how they structure consciousness, both synchronically and diachronically, include Freeman; Albright; Conway; Barclay; Mason; Dollimore (249-261); and Eagleton (262-270).

contrast sharply with Beckett's life as a western European, secular Protestant, Irishman, in terms of the different values represented by the social, political, religious, and philosophical heritage of both men. Where Canetti experiences the social and political dissolution of Austro-Hungarian Empire in his early years, he spends his later years living in England. Beckett experiences the gradual dissolution of the British Empire, and spends his later years living in France. They also have differing experiences with foreign languages. Canetti is exposed as a boy to Turkish and Armenian, learns Ladino and Bulgarian, and is eventually forced by family circumstances to learn English, French and German, whereas Beckett grows up in British Ireland learning English, but escapes his family circumstances by learning Italian, German, Spanish and French. And yet, Canetti chooses to write exclusively in German, even when after the war he lives in London, and becomes a British citizen, while Beckett will later return to writing in English, even after many years of having written in French. Though they are both contemporaries – Canetti lives from 1905 to 1994 and Beckett from 1906 to 1989 – and are affected by many of the same European events and ideas, their writings respond to those events and ideas with divergent styles.

To be sure, there are common historical themes in their work, and perhaps in recognition of their response to a human condition informed by world war, genocide and nuclear destruction, the Nobel Prize for Literature was granted to both. Again, though, significant differences mark these awards. Canetti wins the prize in 1981, at the age of seventy-six, relatively unknown in Germany or abroad. His novel, *Die Blendung*, published in 1935 after several years of public readings, was favorably received by many

German literati, including Thomas Mann and Herman Hesse, but a wider public reception eluded it because of the war, and even afterward, when translated in America as *Auto-da-Fe*, in England as *The Tower of Babel*, and in France as *La Tour de Babel*, it did not gain a wide readership until the 1960s. A play that Canetti wrote in the 1930s, *Hochzeit*, prefigures elements of the theater of the absurd, though it is first performed in England in the 1950s. Two other plays, *Die Komödie der Eitelkeiten* and *Die Befristeten*, are produced in England in the 1950s, the latter being the first to have a German-language premiere in Vienna in 1967. Outside literary circles, Canetti is perhaps best known for his unorthodox, socio-anthropological treatise, entitled *Masse und Macht* (1960), which had taken thirty years to write by the time it was published in 1960. Apart from these main works, Canetti is also author of several collections of aphoristic observations and essays. Though interesting to the specialized reader for their depiction of Canetti's views on the intellectual history of Europe and the world, these works have not enjoyed the general readership that the three volumes of memoirs have, two of which had been published by the time the prize was awarded.

Beckett, on the other hand, was awarded the Nobel prize in 1969, when he was sixty-two years old and in the middle of his writing career. He, too, had been an unknown writer for twenty-five years while writing essays, such as "Dante...Bruno. Vico...Joyce" (1928) and "Proust" (1930), poems, such as *Whoroscope* (1930), short stories, such as *More Pricks than Kicks* (1931) and novels, such as *Murphy* (1934-37) and *Watt* (1943-46). He only began to gain international recognition in the 1950s as a result of the controversy and success of repeated productions of *En Attendant Godot* (1949; first

performed 1953), *Fin de partie* (1954-56; *Endgame*: first performed 1957), *Krapp's Last Tape* (1957; performed in 1958), and *Happy Days* (1960; performed 1961; in French, *Oh, les beaux jours*; 1960), and with the appearance of the novels, *Molloy* (1947-49; pub. in French 1951, in English, 1955), *Malone meurt* (1947-49; pub. 1951, in English as *Malone Dies*, 1956) and *L'innommable* (1949-50; pub. 1953; in English as *The Unnamable*, 1959), particularly when these three were published in English as a collection of three novels in 1965. While he continued to write many more plays, short novels, radio plays and television productions, the notoriety gained from winning the award helped to ensure a growing audience for the works written before he won the Nobel Prize, which are the ones that continue to be taught and read most widely. Thus, Canetti's works did not experience the widespread popularity that Beckett's did, though both enjoyed the *honneur d'estime* of the Nobel committee.

What, then, did they have in common in order for the Nobel committee to place them in the same category of writers? What qualities do their works share? As mentioned above, the answer may lie in a common response to the historical circumstances of their time. But what are the common features of that response? In citing Canetti's literary achievements, Johannes Edfelt of the Swedish Academy identifies a commonality in all Canetti's "versatile writings, which attack sick tendencies in our age [. . .] and serve the cause of humanity" (4). Edfelt addressed Canetti directly, saying, intellectual "passion is combined in you with moral responsibility that – in your own words – 'is nourished by mercy'" (4). In citing Beckett's overall literary contribution, Karl Ragnar Gierow of the Swedish Academy referred to an image from Beckett's play, *Happy Days*: "out of the

suffocating silence [. . .] there still rises the head, the voice crying in the wilderness, man's indomitable need to seek out his fellow men right to the end, speak to his peers and find in companionship solace" (21). What they have in common, then, is an abiding interest in the other and its relation to the self. They both depict this relation in service to the cause of humanity. The voice of the writer addresses his or her fellow voice in the interest of nourishing mercy, and perhaps finding solace in the companionship of that voice. In this regard, these writers share with their readers intimate process of how they came to lose themselves in the face of the other. Particularly in the late works, their investigations into their own selves is what leads to the discovery that those selves are centered somewhere in the other. In the course of the works, that discovery takes place as an on-going conversation between voices that envisage the self and voices that efface the self, both in response to encounters with the voice of the other.

The first chapter of this study will seek to determine the extent to which the self-envisaging voice operates on an aesthetic and ethical level. The self is envisaged by its voice, because the words it utters are structured to produce an identification between the voice and its words. The ensuing identity, or structure, or form, is what is deemed aesthetic in a broad sense. The identity of a voice is formed, formalized, or envisaged, in response to the need for the utterance to preserve and secure itself against the threat of being silenced by the language of the other to whom that voice addresses itself. Paul Ricoeur's *La métaphore vive* serves as a representative model of an investigation into the

aesthetic structures of self-identification.³ Apart from analyzing developments in the history of ideas about the logic and purpose of metaphor, as these pertain to communicative and literary practice, Ricoeur's study of metaphor is of particular interest, because in my reading it provides a schema for understanding how the self-envisaging voice is more inclined to be structured in language according to a logical construct based on metonymy rather than one based on metaphor. Though Ricoeur's own life-work consists of many investigations into the relationship between self and language, *La métaphore vive* provides a sound basis for discussing the self as a composite of utterances that are either metonymic or metaphoric, or both, depending on the context of the encounter with the other. In a monologic context, where the voice is speaking for itself, envisaging itself, that voice suppresses the metaphoric potential of the words it utters. Instead, the voice emphasizes the metonymic relationship between the attributes of a word's meaning, attributes that belong in a possessive relationship of parts to the whole, *pars pro toto*. An utterance in a metaphoric context tries to suppress its metonymic function. It produces contingent meaning based on diachronic usage, provisional associations and speculative etymologies. The result can be an internal, dialogic conversation that occurs between metonymic and metaphoric functions within an utterance.

The monologic, self-envisaging voice also seeks to forge an identity for itself on an ethical plane. It desires to see itself as a good self in relation to the other. Martha

³ All references in English are from the English translation, *The Rule of Metaphor*. All references in French are to *La métaphore vive*.

Nussbaum's ideas on the role played by emotional consciousness and rational choice in the formation of an ethical self, which she formulates in *Love's Knowledge* and in *Poetic Justice*, are representative of a characterization of self-other relationships, whereby the self must be a master of itself in order to achieve a just relationship with the other. To the extent that a self struggles to overcome its will to dominate others, it is self-sacrificing and, therefore, capable of achieving a good life. In this struggle, the self must maintain the integrity of its identity. It must be able to envisage itself, and should be able to see itself as an ethical being. In this regard, Nussbaum's philosophy of the self is in the tradition of Plato and Aristotle, but she attaches a higher premium to emotional knowledge, and argues that this emotional knowledge is best understood in literary narrative and characterization. In other words, good literature can teach us how certain characters come to achieve better understanding of the emotions that otherwise mystify them. Nussbaum argues that it is not a matter of negating the emotions, but rather one of applying rational principles to them in order to understand and master the uncertainty they represent. Like attributes of otherness, emotions mark the limits of understanding where the self sees the difference between itself and the other. To deal with the other ethically, the self must see the distinction. In this way, the dichotomy Nussbaum draws between a character's rational and emotional understanding parallels the dichotomy between metonymy and metaphor insofar as the uncertainty associated with the emotional pertains to the metaphorical. Likewise, the certainty provided by a rational and metonymic conceptualization of the self – by a suppression of the metaphorical and emotional – underpins both an ethics and an aesthetics of the self-envisaging voice.

In chapter two, I will discuss the aesthetics and ethics of the self-effacing voice. The self-effacing voice possesses aesthetic and ethical attributes that, when in conversation with self-envisaging attributes, transform the narrative in which they appear into an actively dialogic one. That the self can will itself to efface itself is a paradox in that a will negated can no longer will. And yet we continue at certain intervals to see the self as aesthetically self-deprecating or ethically selfless. In this way, the self-effacing self is both a metonym for a partial negation of the self, and a metaphor for an absolute abnegation. What is the underlying logic of the desire to efface oneself? Or, in slightly more idiosyncratic terms, how does one write about one's own effacement? Is there a phenomenological method for investigating this question that would avoid psychologizing the causes of such desire? Are there, for instance, answers to be found in the quasi-materiality of linguistic self-consciousness? Aesthetically, the self-effacing voice depreciates itself, either as a metonym or a metaphor or both. Whatever the case, it remains to be seen whether there is a return-value to the loss. Theodor Adorno's *Aesthetische Theorie* is an attempt to propose a meta-aesthetic theory of non-value. He argues for the significance of achieving works of art with no return-value. For a work to achieve what amounts to the status of the invaluable, its form must be abstracted in relation to other forms, thereby challenging conventional identities. An actively dialogic encounter ensues between the voice of a work's formal abstraction and the voices of all preceding formal conventions. By experiencing the work of art as art, the viewer, listener or reader encounters a voice that is trying to express or anticipate its own effacement.

What would be the necessary conditions, though, for saying that this aesthetic

effacement is also ethical? Is self-sacrifice not ethically heroic, and is this heroism not, therefore, self-envisaging? The self-envisaging voice can see itself as heroic, but how does it go about effacing its heroism without being heroic about it? The difference is in the relation between its parts. The self-envisaging voice sees its heroism metonymically, as attributes of its identity. The self-effacing voice effaces its heroic attributes metaphorically, in acknowledging the heroism of the other. Here, Emmanuel Levinas's theory that ethics is a first philosophy will provide a context for the metaphor of the face that underpins the encounter between self and other, and which will be a central object of study in the following analyses. The epiphany of the face in the face-to-face encounter is central to understanding the phenomenology of the experience of reading and writing about the self. In the meta-ethical thought of Levinas's *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence*, the face-to-face encounter that takes place in language represents the call of the other to the self, which is irreplaceably itself, to answer for itself, to be responsible for its responsibility. The self can choose not to answer, or to answer, but it cannot avoid hearing the call. In this regard, the self is infinitely responsible for the other. Before it even envisages itself, the self is effaced by its responsibility to the other. This asymmetrical relationship would appear to be contradictory. In my reading of the paradox, however, it is in metaphor that the self can be effaced by the other before it is ever able to envisage itself. In the face-to-face encounter, a dialogic exchange takes place between the finite metonymy of the self and the infinite metaphoricity of the language of the other, which is latent in the words of every conversation ever had. By recognizing the infinite metaphoricity of language, the self recognizes the heroism of the other and

effaces itself. On the other hand, it is metonymically that the self then envisages itself as having been effaced in its responsibility for the other. The self can only ever envisage its effacement in part, *pars pro toto*. This envisaging of effacement acts, then, as the loophole in the actively dialogic encounter between self-envisaging and self-effacing voices. Ethically, the self envisages itself effacing itself, but it must do so in the face of the other, responding to the call to be responsible.

Once the aesthetics and ethics of the self-envisaging and self-effacing voices have been determined, the discussion will shift to the implications of the self-envisaging and self-effacing voice for close readings of literary texts. The distinction already made between self-envisaging and self-effacing voices accords with the distinction between monologic and dialogic types of writing. In a dialogic conversation, self-envisaging and self-effacing voices speak to one another on various levels of formal complexity, depending on the situation in which they speak. Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of dialogic literary practice, formulated in *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*, provide a basis for extending his typology of discourse to aesthetic and ethical considerations that characterize the exchange between self-envisaging and self-effacing voices. Bakhtin's central distinction between monologic and dialogic types of discourse is a useful template for studying structures of inter-action between voices. Every utterance consists of a voice speaking both for itself, as a self, and to itself as an other.⁴ An utterance is monologic

⁴ My notion here is indebted to Lacan's formulation of the difference between "le sujet d'énonciation" and the "le sujet d'énoncé" (*Écrits* 32), which borrows from Benveniste's distinction between *énonciation* and *énoncé* (*Problèmes* 1:237-50); quoted in Makaryk 542.

when the voice speaking for itself is not aware that it is also speaking of itself, and dialogic when it is aware of itself as an other and responds accordingly. In a monologic utterance, the voice is predominantly self-envisaging, whereas a dialogic voice is self-effacing. Often, however, there is a hidden dialogue even between these two voices. Thus, the monologic utterance always bears the shadow of the dialogic with it. It is simply a question of whether it recognizes its own shadow or not. Likewise, the dialogic utterances of the self-effacing voice must also retain qualities of the monologic, for how can a voice know when it speaks dialogically without recognizing its own monologic utterances? Similarly, the self must recognize itself in the other before it can efface that part of itself in itself. Hence, there is an insistence here on reading literary texts as internally dialogic conversations between self and other, conversations that are subject to the contingency inherent in the language structures of the utterances spoken during an encounter.

These forms of dialogic conversation between self-envisaging and self-effacing voices, as aesthetic and ethical structures of language, will provide a theoretical basis for undertaking a close, comparative reading of the relationship between self and other in Canetti's memoirs and Beckett's three late novels. In chapter four, I will show how Canetti portrays the formation of his self as a narrative comprising of a series of self-other encounters that inevitably leads him to see himself as an aesthetic and ethical writer. After a review of critical literature relating to the memoirs, which view them for the most part as Canetti's attempt to win a moral victory against the forces of death, one will see that Canetti is paving the way for his own death of the self. A complex set of dialogic encounters internal to the narrative takes place, in which case the narrator is ultimately

unsure whether he should see himself as a heroic figure for having triumphed over the otherness of death, or for having secretly recognized a responsibility to the other that ultimately prefigures his final self-effacement.

Compared to Canetti, the outcome of Beckett's writerly exploration into the possibility of absolute self-effacement is the opposite. While trying to enact his self-effacement, he finds himself compelled to acknowledge the possibility of its impossibility. In chapter five, after reviewing the critical literature that argues for the most part that Beckett's late works are formal recapitulations of his earlier ones, I discuss the way in which Beckett's late work, while continuing to insist that the self is a fictional entity, and trying to efface it as a category of subjectivity, must acknowledge its primacy in its encounters with the other. The self is never entirely effaced in Beckett's work. Indeed, there is deep uncertainty as to the ability ever to efface the self, even in death, and it endures with an emotional intensity that belies the narrator's desire to be effaced. Perhaps, for Beckett, it is not the result, but the effort, that counts. Of course, both Beckett and Canetti realize that language limits their ability to efface themselves. Yet, they continue to write with the conviction that by writing about the language of the self they can somehow come closer to the other. They see the quest in terms of an anti-thesis to the Socratic invocation, to know yourself, and instead demand of themselves that they know their other. That is the moral of the story for both writers – to know your other you must first learn to be true to your self-effacement.

I: CONDITIONS FOR A SELF-ENVISAGING VOICE

Der Mythos ist also der Schritt, mit dem der Einzelne aus der Massenpsychologie austritt. Der erste Mythos war sicherlich der psychologische, der Heroenmythos; der erklärende Naturmythos muß weit später aufgekommen sein. Der Dichter, der diesen Schritt getan und sich so in der Phantasie von der Masse gelöst hatte, weiß nach einer weiteren Bemerkung von Rank doch in der Wirklichkeit die Rückkehr zu ihr zu finden. Denn er geht hin und erzählt dieser Masse die Taten seines Helden, die er erfunden. Dieser Held ist im Grunde kein anderer als er selbst. Er senkt sich somit zur Realität herab und hebt seine Hörer zur Phantasie empor. Die Hörer aber verstehen den Dichter, sie können sich auf Grund der nämlichen sehnsüchtigen Beziehung zum Urvater mit dem Heros identifizieren.

(Sigmund Freud: *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse*)

1. Introduction: Aesthetics and Ethics of the Self-Envisaging Voice

The aim of distinguishing between self-envisaging and self-effacing narrative discourse is immediately qualified by the significance attached to either of the terms in the self-other relationship. It is one of the main contentions of this study that self-envisaging discourse is predicated on the subordination of the other to the self, and of otherness to the self-same. Self-effacing discourse, meanwhile, is predicated on the subordination of the self to the other. In each case, the self defines itself differently. How

each of these types of subordination occurs in individual instances is one of the primary areas of investigation. That is to say that this investigation is interested first and foremost in how a self envisages or effaces itself vis-à-vis the other. In the first instance, the self identifies itself by reading the effects of its will-to-be. It is an individual among other individuals. The discursive exchange between itself and others serves as the model for how it categorizes good and bad attributes as those it accepts and those it rejects. The organizing principle around which the self envisages the attributes of its identity it derives from the other has to do with a fundamental desire to maintain the integration and integrity of those attributes it deems as positive or beneficial. In this case, the will of the individual must be seen as a mere effect of the normal encounters over a life-time that are internalized either as good or bad, valuable or worthless, desirable or undesirable encounters. The attributes a self sees in itself are what give the self a form, an image, a face. A continual dialogue involving all words ever experienced occurs at the moment of any face-to-face encounter between self and other. There is clearly an aesthetic as well as an ethical dimension to these dialogues, as the formal configurations of the face and the evaluation of face-to-face encounters would indicate. The first step, therefore, in distinguishing between self-envisaging and self-effacing discourse is to discuss two representative models for an aesthetics and, then, an ethics of the self-envisaging voice.

2. An Aesthetics of the Self-Envisaging Voice based on the Metonymy-Metaphor Model and Paul Ricoeur's *La Métaphore vive*

Paul Ricoeur's work on the phenomenology and hermeneutics of metaphor provides a theoretical vantage point from which to view self-envisaging aesthetics. In the "Appendix" to the English translation of *La Métaphore vive*, Ricoeur reflects on the investigative trajectory of his career and how it has been engaged in asking questions within "the framework of a philosophy of the will" (315). From his beginnings in the existentialism of the forties and his publication of *Philosophie de la volonté* in 1950, Ricoeur has sought to explain certain "fundamental experiences such as guilt, bondage, alienation, or, to speak in religious terms, sin" (315) as elements in a general understanding of the will. Wishing to explore the dimension of "evil into the structure of the will" (315), Ricoeur is led to analyze the role of language in determining how evil operates. From the standpoint of existential phenomenology, it was necessary to explain the role of ordinary language as expressive of certain states of "purpose, project, motive, wanting, trying, and so on" (316). It became somewhat of a puzzle for Ricoeur that while ordinary, direct language was adequate to common expressions of the will, it took a more indirect, symbolic language "to approach the problem of guilt" (316). Ricoeur discovered that "we speak of evil by means of metaphors such as estrangement, errance, burden, and bondage" (316). He also found that "these primary symbols do not occur unless they are embedded within intricate narratives of myth which tell the story of how evil began: how at the beginning of time the gods quarreled; how the soul fell into an ugly body; or how a primitive man was tempted, trespassed a prohibition, and became an exiled rebel" (316). From this point on, Ricoeur's investigation turns from existentialist phenomenology toward a hermeneutic aesthetic theory of language and narrative first developed in *La*

Métaphore vive and then in the three-volume *Temps et récit*. In the mid-eighties, Ricoeur returns in *Soi-même comme un autre* to a line of inquiry that involves questions of the will, self-formation and ethics, but the role of language continues to occupy a central position, as evidenced by his analysis of selfhood and identity in terms of *ipse* and *ipsum*.⁵ His systematic investigation in *La Métaphore vive* of theories on the structure of metaphor and of the function of metaphor in the philosophy of self-other relations will serve here as a model for defining and developing an aesthetics of the self-envisaging voice.

Ricoeur's line of argumentation in *La Métaphore vive* ultimately leads to a hermeneutics of the poetic imagination, as distinct from that of the scientific one. His main focus is on determining the parameters of applicability that pertain to any discussion of metaphor as an organizing principle of linguistic practice. Building on the foundation laid by Aristotle, Ricoeur wishes to know how it is possible to master metaphor. He begins by attempting to separate the purpose of metaphor used in poetry from that of rhetoric. The distinction is important for the next step in his argument, which establishes the necessity of regarding metaphor not simply as a phenomenon of the word, but of the sentence and the work as well. This allows him to make a claim for the importance of metaphor in understanding the creative will from an epistemological and an ontological point of view. Understanding the creative will, as such, requires us to re-think commonly

⁵ For a discussion of the etymology of words related to *self*, see Ricoeur, "Préface" 11-38 in *Soi-même*. There are several points of convergence between Ricoeur's study of selfhood and my own, in particular as he discusses the Other, though the main question for Ricoeur is how to maintain ethical integrity for the self in narrative.

held convictions about the relationship between scientific and poetic language. To this end, Ricoeur proposes a hermeneutic understanding that would resist the relativizing effect on language caused by deconstruction. By analyzing each step in Ricoeur's line of argumentation, I hope to demonstrate how his theory of metaphor is itself a model for a self-envisaging aesthetics. This, in turn, will allow me to develop a theory of metonymy and metaphor consistent with the distinction between self-envisaging and self-effacing narrative.

In the first study, "Between Rhetoric and Poetics: Aristotle," Ricoeur sets out to explicate the precepts Aristotle employs to justify classifying rhetoric and poetics as separate methods of studying distinctive speech genres. In particular, he wishes to compare the role of metaphor in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* to that of the *Poetics*. For Aristotle, metaphor operates with one common structure, but two separate functions, rhetorical and poetic. Each functions according to a separate set of intentions on the part of the speaker. The difference is that where rhetoric tries to convince one of a truth, poetry tries to provide pleasure by revealing truth. The rhetorician uses metaphors as part of "the triad *rhetoric-proof-persuasion*" (13).⁶ The poet desires to "speak the truth by means of fiction, fable, and tragic *muthos*" (13).⁷ For poetic purposes, metaphor operates in the service of "the triad *poiêsis-mimêsis-catharsis*" (13).⁸ In sections 4 and 5 of the first study, Ricoeur

⁶ Trans. of "la triade *rhétorique-preuve-persuasion*" (18).

⁷ Trans. of "son mode propre est de dire la vérité par le moyen de la fiction, de la fable, du *mythos* tragique" (18).

⁸ Trans. of "la triade *poiêsis-mimêsis-catharsis*" (*Métaphore* 18).

examines Aristotle's definition of the term *lexis*, or figural language, and its purpose in rhetoric and poetry. What persuasion is to rhetoric, mimesis is to poetry (51). For Aristotle, mimesis elevates the motives of the character (*êthe*) over the course of their actions, or the plot (*muthos*), to a higher level, and thereby gives pleasure in the same way metaphor elevates the common usage of words. Aristotle restricts his analysis of metaphor to a taxonomy of the parts of speech, and to a definition of it as a name, or noun, that deviates from common usage. Aristotle calls these deviations, figures, or "the face (*figure*),' that expresses and reveals the body" (32).⁹ They are the key components of style in rhetoric and poetry. Appropriate style in both practices is what makes one "a master of metaphor [literally: to be metaphorical, *to metaphorikon einai*] since a good metaphor [literally: to metaphorize well, *eu metaphérein*] implies an intuitive perception of the similarity [*to to homoion theôrein*] in dissimilars;' *Poetics* 1459a 3-8; see also *Rhetoric* 1412a 10" (*Metaphor* 23).¹⁰ Thus, the similarity perceived in dissimilar objects, ideas, or their attributes allows for a transferral (*epiphora*) of meaning from a proper, or common usage of the word to an uncommon, or metaphorical one (34). Though the criteria of appropriateness differ for rhetoric and poetry, standards of usage – aesthetic standards – apply to both, and they are what determine whether one is a master of either

⁹ The entire sentence reads, "Quand la persuasion s'affranchit du souci de la preuve, le désir de séduire et de plaire l'emporte, et le style lui-même n'est plus figure, au sens de visage d'un corps - mais ornement, au sens 'cosmétique' du mot" (46).

¹⁰ Trans. of "c'est d'exceller dans les métaphores [mot à mot: d'être métaphorique -*ofō metaphorikon einai*] car bien faire les métaphores [mot à mot: bien métaphoriser - *eu metaphérein*] c'est bien apercevoir les ressemblances [*to to homoion theôrein*]" (33).

genre.

Ricoeur's comparison of metaphor in rhetoric and poetry sets the stage for his argument in the next three studies that metaphor can be extended from a narrow understanding of it as a word to a broader definition of it in terms of sentences and works. This comparison raises, however, several questions as to the relationship between metaphors of persuasion and metaphors of mimesis. Originally, the distinction rested squarely on the speaker's different purposes for speaking. The orator-rhetorician uses figurative language to help persuade a listener that the proofs of an argument are compelling enough to allow a decision to be made. But does this figural persuasion also not occur to some extent in mimetic works, even if it is only simulated in poetry, fiction or drama? Are there not some metaphors in poetic works that can be analyzed in terms of syllogistic proofs and are these not necessary for understanding and enjoying the work? In defining mimesis Ricoeur quotes Aristotle as having written that literature imitates human actions "either as they were or are, or as they are said or thought to be or to have been, or as they ought to be' [*Poetics*, 1451 b 7-11]" (42).¹¹ The question of the 'ought-to-be,' however, seems more appropriate to rhetoric and persuasion than mimesis and poetry, and is obviously a point where aesthetics and ethics cross paths. It becomes important, then, to explain why persuasion is to be regarded as a defining characteristic of a self-envisaging narrative aesthetics. It is my contention that the structure of similarities

¹¹ Trans. of "ou bien telles qu'elles furent ou sont réellement, ou bien telles qu'on les dit et qu'elles semblent, ou bien telles qu'elles devraient être' [*Poétique*, 1460 b, 7-11}" (60).

seen in dissimilar objects or ideas, attributes yoked together in so-called metaphors, are subject to underlying criteria of propositional logic that are themselves metonymic, or synecdochic. Metonyms work to suppress dissimilarities and persuade us of the identities they forge. Metaphors work to emphasize, or *un-suppress* dissimilarity. Metonymic figures of speech act to convince us of our identities. Metonymy is what puts a face on, envisages, the reality of our selfhood. Hence, rhetoric is characteristic of the self-envisaging voice, while poetry is characteristic of the self-effacing voice.

Having claimed that the self envisages itself metonymically, it is necessary to test whether this claim remains consistent when the inner logic of the distinction between metaphor and metonymy is scrutinized further. For his part, Ricoeur recognizes this necessity as a consequence of the limitations imposed by Aristotle's definition of metaphor, which restricts itself to words and to their categorization as tropes. But what about the significance of the split between literal and metaphorical meaning? What are the consequences for an epistemology and aesthetics of language that attribute persuasion to rhetoric and pleasure to poetry? Ricoeur wishes to increase the scope of the analysis applied to both aspects of metaphor by arguing for a more refined understanding of the logical relation between the metaphorical meaning supplied by words and that which is supplied by sentences or even whole texts. To achieve this project, he describes in the second study the moment when, in Pierre Fontanier's *Les Figurs du discours*, rhetoric begins to search for alternatives to the rigid classification of single-word tropes. Fontanier separates tropes into three basic figures of discourse – metonymy, synecdoche and

metaphor. Metonymy signifies “*relations of correlation or correspondance*” (56),¹² and synecdoche signifies “*relations of connection*” (56),¹³ though both share common features of predication by referring to objects. Metaphor, on the other hand, is a “*figure of expression*” (59)¹⁴ and is based on “*relations by resemblance*” (56)¹⁵ between ideas, particularly as they occur in poetic language. In the third study, Ricoeur continues to examine theories of poetic language that underscore relational aspects of literal and figural signs, particularly certain Anglo-American theorists who hypothesize an “interaction theory” (66) rather than a substitution theory.¹⁶ This means that they consider metaphor to be a relation between words and context, or as Emile Benveniste later proposed, between semiotics and semantics (65-100).

Ricoeur contrasts the Anglo-American theorists with continental European theorists who are searching for a new approach to rhetoric that attempts to re-define the concept of metaphor, but which ultimately reinforces Aristotle’s old notion of *epiphora*, or the substitution of words. Structural linguistics, for example, as theorized by Ferdinand de Saussure, privileges the semiotic model of the sign (paradigmatic) over the semantic

¹² Trans. of “*les rapports de corrélation ou de correspondance*” (77).

¹³ Trans. of “*les rapports de connexion*” (77).

¹⁴ Trans. of “*figures d’expression*” (81).

¹⁵ Trans. of “*les rapports de ressemblance*” (77).

¹⁶ These theorists include those proposed separately by I. A. Richards (vehicle-tenor), Max Black (focus-frame) and Monroe Beardsley (subject-modifier).

(syntagmatic).¹⁷ Ricoeur shows in study four – entitled, “Metaphor and the Semantics of the Word” – how this privileging of the sign becomes subsequently more radical and how “the opposition at the level of metaphor, between a substitution theory and an interaction theory, reflects the deeper opposition between a semiotic monism (which rules the semantics of the word and of the sentence) and a dualism of semiotics and semantics” (103).¹⁸ After having established that semiotic monism carries with it certain drawbacks, such as the limited applicability of the distinction between metaphor and metonymy, Ricoeur concludes that the idea of “metaphor is the outcome of a debate between *predication* and *naming*” (133).¹⁹ Then, in study five – entitled, “Metaphor and the new rhetoric” – he goes on to discuss various applications of structural semantics.²⁰ Here, the debate revolves again around the distinction between types of language usage, as metaphor or stylistic deviation, and as a “degree zero of style” (140)²¹ in which polysemy is minimized as much as possible; in the case of scientific language, for instance. Roman

¹⁷ For Ricoeur’s understanding of structural analysis, see *Métaphore* 130-131, 169-171.

¹⁸ Trans. of “C’est ainsi que l’opposition au plan de la métaphore entre une théorie de la substitution et une théorie de l’interaction reflète l’opposition plus fondamentale au plan des postulats de base de la linguistique entre un monisme sémiotique auquel se subordonne la sémantique du mot et de la phrase, et un dualisme du sémiotique et du sémantique” (131).

¹⁹ Trans. of “[. . .] la métaphore est l’issue d’un débat entre *prédication* et *dénomination*” (171).

²⁰ Specifically as practiced by Groupe μ (Centre d’études poétiques, Université de Liège) and A.J. Greimas (135 ff.)

²¹ Trans. of “degré zéro du style” (181).

Jakobson (referential function/poetic function), Tzvetan Todorov (transparency/opacity), Gerard Genette (denotation/connotation), Jean Cohen (pertinence/impertinence), and Groupe μ (addition/suppression) all propose arguments in favor of substitution theory (131-172). In the last two cases, Ricoeur sees sufficient similarity with the interaction theories to maintain that both approaches have a predicative semantics in common. This commonality provides a basis for him to propose a hermeneutic theory of metaphor, which applies equally to single-word and multi-word tropes.

In terms of the relationship between word and context, though, Ricoeur does not venture far enough to explain why or how we choose to distinguish between reference and metaphor. Admittedly, this sort of explanation may be considered epistemological or psychological, and, thus, as straying from his main objective. For a theory of self-envisaging aesthetics, however, it is important to recognize that context affects an utterance by determining its metonymic or metaphoric function. I would argue that utterances are dependent on both monologic and dialogic contexts – in line with Bakhtin's definition of these terms, which will be discussed in Chapter 3 – according to the exchange of purposes that can be read into a communicative encounter between speakers and listeners. Monologic and dialogic contexts can result in two basic aesthetic models. The monologic model is self-envisaging in that it utilizes utterance and context to minimize, or suppress, any distortion of meaning that may occur at the predicative level. Every phoneme is infinitely polyvalent unless it is understood in a context whose relevancy suppresses its meaninglessness and polyvalency. Scientific language requires itself to be as monologic as possible. Yet, quotidian language can also be characterized by

the need or desire to establish verities that will persist. Referentiality is an effect of identifying objects and relations by their attributes – a metonymic function rather than a metaphoric one. As such, the suppression of metaphor leads to metonymy, and the un-suppression of metonymy leads to metaphor, depending on the context of the purposes to be established by the speakers and listeners in an encounter. It is my contention that while a self-envisaging aesthetics can be defined in terms of its propensity to suppress metaphor, a suppression that heightens the effect of metonymy, a self-effacing aesthetics can be defined as a propensity to un-suppress metonymy, which leads to a metaphorical meaning.

In “The work of resemblance,” Ricoeur critiques Jakobson’s formulation of the difference between metaphor and metonymy, together with Michel LeGuern’s reformulation of it. While generally agreeing with Jakobson’s theory, Ricoeur accuses him of over-generalizing the influence of the binary opposition on cultural production and of reducing the role of metaphor and metonymy to the operational qualities of combination and substitution. Ricoeur wishes to prove that the interaction theory is nevertheless consistent with an idea of resemblance that operates at the level of predicative logic. He argues that “in the metaphorical statement, ‘the similar’ is perceived *despite* difference, *in spite of* contradiction” (196).²² In other words, difference is

²² Trans. of “dans l’énoncé métaphorique, le ‘semblable’ est aperçu *en dépit* de la différence, *malgré* la contradiction” (250). Ricoeur goes on to say that “la métaphore montre le travail de la ressemblance, parce que, dans l’énoncé métaphorique, la contradiction littérale maintient la différence; le ‘même’ et le ‘différent’ ne sont pas simplement mêlés, mais demeurent opposés” (*Métaphore* 250).

suppressed by metaphor, in Ricoeur's view. The position taken in my analysis is the reverse. True metaphor must un-suppress difference for it to have meaning as metaphor. While I agree with Ricoeur that Jakobson's categories can be expanded to relate to a semantics of metaphor and metonymy, I do not believe they are to be subsumed into each other, with metonymy as simply a sub-category of metaphor (251). They are, instead, two modes of voices in dialogue with each other. Ricoeur himself goes on to grapple with the possibility that a strictly predicative theory of resemblance leads to a reduction of metaphor to the image, which would be as disadvantageous as reducing it to the single-word trope, and ultimately open "the gate of the semantic sheepfold to the wolf of psychologism" (208).²³ He circumvents the danger, by proposing that "similarity is what results from the experience-act of 'seeing as'" (213),²⁴ where a verbal metaphor is linked to a non-verbal image. The tension that arises between the two is analogous to that between word and its context in the interaction theory. It is this tension that supplies metaphor with new meaning. Could a self-envisaging aesthetics, then, entertain the possibility that the self, in seeing itself as a self among others, is a result not only of a metonymic operation in language, but of a metaphorical experience-act, as well? Certainly, the self can be envisaged as a metaphor, but it must first be envisaged metonymically. Metaphor is the operation best suited to un-suppressing difference, which, as we will see, is how the self is effaced.

²³ Trans. of "ouvrir la porte de la bergerie sémantique au loup du psychologisme" (264).

²⁴ Trans. of "le semblable est ce qui résulte de l'acte-expérience de 'voir-comme'" (270). Quoted from Hester 183.

In “Metaphor and Reference,” Ricoeur turns his attention to explaining how metaphor generates meaning. What does metaphor refer to? Asserting that sign “differs from sign, discourse refers to the world” (216),²⁵ Ricoeur argues for a hermeneutic aesthetics of the literary text. He invokes again the distinction made by Jakobson between the operational axes of selection and combination, and then questions Jakobson’s claim that ““The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination”” (223).²⁶ With ordinary language, “the language of prose” (223),²⁷ the principle of equivalence operates only on the selection of appropriate words. With poetic language, on the other hand, the principle of equivalence also furnishes meaning by combining words in sequences of rhythm, stress and phonic repetition. Ricoeur wishes to retain Jakobson’s conclusion that poetry offers a “*split reference*” (224)²⁸ which generates its own meaning. Drawing on the work of various authors, Ricoeur uses Jakobson’s conclusion as a premise to his argument that the poetic function of language is to suspend reference to objects, and direct it instead to other words within the literary work in order to highlight how it opens the text to interpretation. Two orders of metaphor are thus established: “a parallel between metaphorization of reference and

²⁵ Trans. of “Le signe diffère du signe, le discours se réfère au monde” (273).

²⁶ Trans. of ““La fonction poétique projette le principe d’équivalence de l’axe de la sélection sur l’axe de la combinaison”” (281). Quoted from Roman Jakobson, *VIIème Étude*, § 1.

²⁷ Trans. of “celui de la prose” (281).

²⁸ Trans. of “*référence dédoublée*” (282).

the metaphorization of meaning” (231).²⁹ Between these two poles, tensions are created that force Ricoeur, in explaining them, to account for the possibility of metaphorical truth-statements.³⁰ By doing so, he rests his case on the relational function of the copula verb. The literal meaning sought in existential predications of the copula *to be* are contradicted by the metaphorical meanings attributable to the relational function of the copula *to be as*, which highlights both identity in difference and difference in identity. This paradox, Ricoeur admits, does not prove his argument for the existence of metaphorical truth, but it does lead to further discussion of the possibility that metaphor can re-define reality.

Yet, Ricoeur’s account of metaphorical truth and the nature of poetic language raises several questions. When he speaks of the split reference characteristic of poetic language, does he regard this solely as an element of epic or lyric poetry, or could it apply equally to prose narrative? What is the status of metonymic predication in regard to similarities among dissimilarities, identity and difference, self and other? How would metonymic predication function differently as a sign of truth from that of metaphorical predication? For the purposes of this study, the relationship of the poetic to the prosaic is

²⁹ Trans. of “[. . .] à faire correspondre une métaphorisation de la référence à la métaphorisation du sens” (290).

³⁰ Ricoeur’s taxonomy of the various kinds of tension bears repeating for the purpose of looking further at certain dialogic aspects of the communicative encounter: “a) tensions dans l’énoncé: entre *tenor* et *vehicle*, entre *focus* et *frame*, entre sujet principal et sujet secondaire; b) tension entre deux interprétations: entre une interprétation littérale que l’impertinence sémantique défait, et une interprétation métaphorique qui fait sens avec le non-sens; c) tensions dans la fonction relationnelle de la copule: entre l’identité et la différence dans le jeu de la ressemblance” 311.

an important area of interest.³¹ The metonymy of self-envisaging narrative can mask, or suppress, the self-effacing metaphors of poetic language, and vice-versa. To delineate what is meant by metonymy, I would return to Ricoeur's summary of Fontanier's categories of metonymy and synecdoche,³² and subsume these under the name of metonymy. In addition, Jakobson's theory of the axes of selection and combination serve as a model for the interaction, or dialogue between, metaphor and metonymy. In the logic of self and other, metonymy works to relate a subject's predicative attributes to each other in order to give it the effect of identity. In the present formulation, the relationship between difference and identity is also metonymic. Identities are forged through metonymic relationships between attributes perceived in the first place as different. These similarities are subject to a relational, metonymic logic that can be masked by the existential copula *to be*. Metonymy would not correspond to that aspect of the relational copula *to be*, which Ricoeur holds as a signifier of *to be like/as*, other than to suppress it. The self envisages itself as a self insofar as its attributes relate to one another and are different from any other (214). A self-identical being is the sum of attributes that stand in metonymic relationship to one another. By contrast, metaphorical relations entail a self which effaces itself by having to see itself as an other to others, and ultimately to itself, as

³¹ I will argue in Chapter 3 that in narrative works a dialogic relationship can exist between poetry and prose.

³² Metonymy consists of relations of correlation or correspondence represented by relationships "of cause to effect, instrument to purpose, container to content, thing to its location, sign to signification, physical to moral, model to thing"; synecdoche consists of relations of connection represented by relationships of "part to whole, of material to thing, of one to many, of species to genus, of abstract to concrete, of species to individual" (*Metaphor* 56).

a sum of dissimilarities among similarities.

One example of the dual operations of metonymy and metaphor is in the language play of the words *visage* and *face* that is at work in the reflexive verbal adjectives *self-envisaging* and *self-effacing*. The meaning of these terms depends in large part on the context of the situation in which they are used. To envisage (in French, *envisager*) is literally to see an object, to look it in the face or “to look straight at it.” (“Envisage”). It is a metonym for imagining an object otherwise not present, for giving a formless object a form, for putting a face to a name. Homologous with *envisioning* or *imagining*, it involves the relationship between sight and image. But more specifically, envisaging denotes the image of a visage, or face. Following the etymology of the English word, *face*, to its Latin root, *facies*, we reach a divergence of scholarly opinion on its origins, according to the Oxford English Dictionary: *facies* either derives from the verb *facere*, which means to make or to form, or from the Latin root *fa-*, which means to appear or shine. In both cases, form is perceived. These definitions for face are still more general in meaning than the derivations of the word, *visage*. The Latin perfect participle passive of the verb, *videre*, or, to see, is *visus*, which is also the masculine noun for sight, as well as for that which is seen. This has an equivalent in the German nouns, *das Gesicht* and *das Antlitz*. In vulgar Latin and Old French, *vis* takes the suffix *-age*, derived from classical Latin *-aeticum* (literally, *out of*; for example, in Latin, *silvaticum*, and in Old French, *sauvage*, both mean ‘out of the woods’), in order to denote that the face is where something is seen from. In a metaphorical sense, however, the correlative to the masculine noun (second declension) of classical Latin, *vis*, is the feminine noun (fifth

declension), *vis*, which has widespread applications denoting, power, strength, violence, assault, quantity or amount, energy, meaning and, in the plural (*vires*), a military force. As in the plural denoting military force, the masculine cognate (second declension), *vir*, denotes a single soldier, in addition to its main signification of a man and the many attributes associated with masculinity. Again, depending on the context of their use, visage and face can extend metonymically to a range of purposes connected with aesthetic formation, but they can also be extended metaphorically to a range of purposes connected with power. All associations mentioned above can be considered when analysing subsequent narrative discourse relating to face-to-face encounters.

So far Ricoeur's analysis has sought to delineate the difference between metaphorical and so-called normal language usage on the basis of intentional applications, such as in poetry. Metaphor, then, involves an aesthetic intention as opposed to a scientific or philosophical one. As I have tried to demonstrate, though, there are aspects of Ricoeur's conception of metaphor that can be consistent with an aesthetics of narrative selfhood in search of a dialogic relationship between self-envisaging prose that is metonymic and a self-effacing poetics that is metaphoric. In "Metaphor and Philosophical Discourse," Ricoeur, while defending the "*discontinuity*" (258)³³ between philosophy and poetry in order to accentuate a principle of "inter-animation" (259),³⁴ compares the role of metaphor in Aristotle's conception of being to that of Heidegger and Derrida. In Aristotle's method of thinking about ontology, analogy – understood as the

³³ Trans. of "*discontinuité*" (324).

³⁴ Trans. of "d'interanimation entre modes de discours" (324).

deductive logic of resemblances between predicates whose copula produces proportional relations that are either stronger or weaker – offers a third way between the poles of univocity and equivocation. Mastery of being, in its ontological and onto-theological forms, depends on one's ability "to master the difference between transcendental analogy and poetic resemblance" (272).³⁵ Ricoeur takes up Heidegger's critique of the rhetorical tradition established by Plato at the point where Heidegger analyzes those metaphors that signify thinking, and which have provided the grounds for Western metaphysics ever since, in order to undermine their claim to scientific naturalness. Heidegger's genealogy of metaphysical metaphor is what in Ricoeur's view leads to Derrida's "unbounded 'deconstruction'" (284)³⁶ of the worn-out metaphors operative in metaphysical concepts. This binary opposition between dead and living metaphor infers "limitless metaphoricity of metaphor" (285).³⁷ Referring to the previous studies, in which he argued that metaphorical meaning is generated between word and sentence, Ricoeur contends that the context a metaphor is used in – its lexical pertinence – determines whether a word is being used literally or metaphorically, be it in poetic or philosophical discourse. He

³⁵ Trans. of "Mais le geste premier reste la conquête d'une différence entre l'analogie transcendente et la ressemblance poétique" (343).

³⁶ Trans. of "'déconstruction' sans borne" (362).

³⁷ Trans. of "la métaphoricité sans borne de la métaphore" (363). As Ricoeur notes, Derrida's reading of Hegel's definition of concept "[...] est solidaire de l'effacement du métaphorique dans la signification initiale[. . .] Là où Hegel voit une novation du sens, Derrida ne voit que l'usure de la métaphore et un mouvement d'idéalisation par dissimulation de l'origine métaphorique" (*Métaphore* 364). For my purposes, it is the resuscitation of dead metaphors that can lead to self-effacement. See Derrida, "White Mythology".

disagrees, therefore, with the extent of the applicability of the conclusions Derrida draws about the deconstruction of the metaphysics of metaphor.

In answer to the excesses posed by deconstruction, Ricoeur proposes a middle ground where the distinction between poetic and philosophical discourse is maintained while allowing a role for metaphor in both. Synthesizing concepts borrowed from linguistics and logic, along with his own ideas on the tension between terms of a statement, between literal and metaphorical, and between reference signified by *is* or *is not* (388), Ricoeur is able to read philosophical discourse metaphorically. Poetry, as opposed to scientific or philosophical discourse, is “that in which the *epoché* of ordinary reference is the negative condition allowing a second-order reference to unfold” (305).³⁸ Philosophy uses metaphors to dispel this negative condition of reference. As Ricoeur writes near the conclusion, “the philosopher’s metaphors may well resemble those of the poet [. . .] but they do not merge with the poet’s metaphors” (310).³⁹ Thus, while the poet may philosophize and the philosopher may poeticize, they use metaphors differently. And yet, could we not say with equal authority that poetry and philosophy share the same objectives when a truth claim is made in their name which either aims to persuade another person of one’s existence – when I make a statement intended to envisage myself – or to place in doubt the ability of truth claims to envisage that existence – when I make a statement intended to efface myself? Ultimately, Ricoeur’s conclusions hinge on the

³⁸ Trans. of “[. . .] dans lequel l’*epoché* de la référence ordinaire est la condition négative du déploiement d’une référence de second rang” (395).

³⁹ Trans. of “Aussi les métaphores du philosophe peuvent bien ressembler à celles du poète [. . .] mais elles ne se confondent pas avec les métaphores du poète” (395).

unstated supposition that philosophy is dependent on a weaker concept of metaphor, a concept more similar to metonymy, whereas poetry is dependent on a stronger concept of metaphor, one more appropriate to expressing emotions that result as a response to the chaos of otherness. Ricoeur's own style of philosophizing utilizes the weaker notion of metaphor. As such, his theory on the function of metaphor gives structure to a self-envisaging rather than a self-effacing aesthetics.⁴⁰

Ricoeur's analysis of philosophical and poetic metaphor does provide a basic framework with which to view an aesthetics of the self-envisaging voice. Rather than looking for a dialectic, though, between what Heidegger called the "the widely separated mountains" (313)⁴¹ of philosophy and poetry, it would be more productive to examine the dialogic relationship between metaphor and metonymy in philosophical and poetic texts. I would agree with Ricoeur insofar as weaker metaphors occur when a word's

⁴⁰ Ricoeur summarizes his position in an essay entitled "The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling," written for a conference on metaphor, and published in *On Metaphor* subsequent to *The Rule of Metaphor*. In "The Many Uses of Metaphor," appearing in the same collection, Karsten Harries examines the epistemological and ontological affinities and divergence between Ricoeur's position and that of Donald Davidson in "What Metaphors Mean," which appears in the same collection. Both make claims as to the possible truth status of metaphor. My position is closer to that of Paul de Man's, as expressed in "The Epistemology of Metaphor," also in this collection. I would go further than de Man, however, in asserting the ethical significance of metaphor and the aesthetic and epistemological significance of metonymy.

⁴¹ Trans. of "les monts les plus séparés" (*Métaphore* 398). Quoted from Martin Heidegger, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?* 50; *Was ist das - die Philosophie?* 45. As Heidegger writes elsewhere, "Poetry proper is never merely a higher mode (*melos*) of everyday language. It is rather the reverse: everyday language is a forgotten and therefore used-up poem, from which there hardly resounds a call any longer. The opposite of what is purely spoken, the opposite of the poem, is not prose. Pure prose is never 'prosaic.' It is as poetic and hence as rare as poetry" (*Poetry* 208).

metaphoricity is relatively suppressed by propositional statements whose predicates are either in a metonymic or synecdochic relation to their subject, as well as to each other, while stronger metaphors occur when a word's metaphoricity is relatively unsuppressed by placing it within a statement of predicative resemblance whose similarities are sacrificed to its dissimilarities, where, for instance, an etymological-historical similarity signifies a dissimilar relationship. The relation of suppressed and unsuppressed metaphors to self-envisaging and self-effacing narrative voices should be clear in that the former displays a preponderance of suppressed metaphors, or, properly speaking, metonyms, and the latter a preponderance of unsuppressed metonyms, or, properly speaking, metaphors.

It should also be clear that so far the voice has been the dominant metonym for an aesthetics of self-envisaging discourse, as it is the voice whose utterances are allowed to be organized metonymically in order for the voice to put a face on itself, to give itself form. But linked closely to the voice is the underlying metonymic structure of seeing and looking. In turning from the passivity of seeing to the activity of looking, there is a metonymy of values, of attributes whose value arrests the gaze of the subject. We look to others to see ourselves, but we also see others as a threat to the integrity of the self. Thus, the aesthetics of the self-envisaging voice looks at how we organize the metonyms of our self in order to secure that self against the threat of the unknown that the other may pose. As I will be discussing in the late works of Elias Canetti and Samuel Beckett, the selves that they give voice to in their writing look to others in order to view themselves. In the texts by Canetti and Beckett, the textual encounters between self and other attest to the

possibility of the self preserving, if barely, the integrity of its attributes with the relative strength of the metonyms that bind them.

3. An Ethics of the Self-Envisaging Voice based on Emotional Logic in Martha Nussbaum's *Poetic Justice* and *Love's Knowledge*

From Ricoeur's hermeneutic theory of metaphor, it should be possible to read metaphors, according to his definition of them, in poetry and philosophy with equal but different implications for revealing meaning. Ricoeur tests this hypothesis to some extent in *Soi-même comme un autre* by analyzing the narrative discourse of selfhood found in certain key philosophical discussions. After defining various principles and limits of personal and narrative selfhood, he initiates a discussion on the increased attention paid by twentieth-century literature to the crisis of identity. At the end of the chapter, "The Self and Narrative Identity," Ricoeur writes that what "is suggested by the limiting cases produced by the narrative's imagination is a dialectic of ownership and of dispossession, of care and carefreeness, of self-affirmation and self-effacement" (168).⁴² The crisis of identity that arises out of belief in the nothingness of the self, the conviction that I am nothing – expressed prominently Ricoeur says by Robert Musil's novel *Mann ohne*

⁴² Trans. of "Ce que suggèrent les cas limites engendrés par l'imagination narrative, c'est dialectique de la possession et de la dépossession, du souci et de l'insouciance, de l'affirmation de soi et de l'effacement de soi" (*Soi-même* 198).

Eigenschaften – has obvious ethical implications. Ricoeur goes on to examine thinkers, such as Emmanuel Levinas, whose ideas answer this challenge to the self by addressing the importance of the other. Ricoeur acknowledges that now “the issue here is the ethical primacy of the other than the self over the self [sic]” (168).⁴³ But he qualifies his acknowledgment with a caveat:

Even recognizing this, though, it is still necessary that the irruption of the other, breaking through the enclosure of the same, meet with the complicity of this movement of effacement by which the self makes itself available to others. For the effect of the ‘crisis’ of selfhood must not be the substitution of self-hatred for self-esteem. (168)⁴⁴

Ricoeur seems to conflate, here, self-effacement and self-hatred, but can we not also see the literature of self-effacement in a positive light, not as an existential crisis but as a *via negativa* toward self-esteem? Ricoeur does engage in a detailed discussion of the primacy of otherness in order to test its implications for an ethics of identity, an ethics that posits self-esteem as its core value. In the end, he would like to support those theories of otherness – particularly Levinas’s formulation – that allow for an integrated self to act ethically, but he continues to have reservations about such theories, and this causes him to “maintain a certain equivocalness of the status of the Other on a philosophical plane”

⁴³ Trans. of “le primat éthique de l’autre que soi sur le soi” (*Soi-même* 198).

⁴⁴ Trans. of “Encore faut-il que l’irruption de l’autre, fracturant la cœture du même, rencontre la complicité de ce mouvement d’effacement par quoi le soi se rend disponible à l’autre que soi. Car il ne faudrait pas que la ‘crise’ de l’ipséité ait pour effet de substituer la hiane de soi à l’estime de soi” (*Soi-même* 198).

(355).⁴⁵ Since Ricoeur's equivocal equivocation on the status of the other as the locus of a theory of ethics takes place only on a philosophical plane, it remains to ask if and how such a discussion might differ on a literary plane with literary models.

On the literary plane, discussions of ethics and selfhood have been numerous and intensive in recent years.⁴⁶ As Geoffrey Galt Harpham notes in his essay, "Ethics," however, the polyphony of theoretical ethics and narrative theory has assumed ideological and political over-tones both for narrower academic interests, as well as for the broad, general public. On the one hand, there are practitioners of ethical criticism such as Iris Murdoch, Wayne Booth and Martha Nussbaum, who are proponents of an approach to reading literature "as a kind of rehearsal or model of life"⁴⁷ (400), an approach that is, broadly speaking, didactic, or neo-didactic, depending on one's historical point of view. On the other hand, practitioners such as J. Hillis Miller, Jacques Derrida, or Simon Critchley are proponents of reading literature as an aid in fulfilling the ethical imperative to deconstruct theory, even ethical theory, which is in a sense an anti-didactic didactic. Without suggesting there are close parallels between their work, I would argue that the

⁴⁵ Trans. of "maintenir une certaine équivocité au plan purement philosophique du statut de l'Autre" (*Soi-même* 409).

⁴⁶ Among others, notable examples in Anglo-American critical circles include Connor 24-26; Harpham (1992); Parker; Palmer; Siebers; and Rainsford.

⁴⁷ It is interesting to note how the Anglo-American literary establishment renewed its interest in discussing ethics and literature during the latter half of the 1990s. For example, Harpham's entry, along with Barbara Hernstein Smith's "Value/Valuation," was inserted in the 1995 edition of *Critical Terms for Literary Studies*, which was originally published in 1990. Similar dictionaries of literary critical terms appearing before 1995 that do not include entries on ethics are by Cuddon; and Makaryk.

former are indicative of a self-envisaging ethics, whereas the latter approximate a self-effacing ethics. In the following section, I would like to outline how a self-envisaging ethics is aligned with a self-envisaging aesthetics in terms of literary theory and practice, and how a self-envisaging ethics such as Nussbaum's cannot be ignored in any discussion of a self-effacing ethics.

Martha Nussbaum's work on ethics in literature serves my purpose well, because it articulates most insistently the stance that literature teaches us moral values. Her first two books on the topic of ethics and literature, *The Fragility of Goodness* and *The Therapy of Desire*, underscore the relationship between the classical Greek conception of personal well-being and the role drama played in attaining it. Her third book in the field is *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*. It applies principles of ontology, epistemology and ethics, inspired for the most part by Aristotle, to the reading of prose narratives by Dickens, Austen, Henry James, Woolf, Proust and Beckett, among others. Analyses of individual works are informed by a plot and character-based aesthetics. In other words, a well-written book accurately reflects the intricate moral problems and solutions associated with achieving a good life. Nussbaum's most recent book on ethics and literature is *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life*. Here she argues for the value of the contribution literature makes to an individual's idea of civic responsibility. A good reader will become a good judge of personal motives in public affairs. *Love's Knowledge* discusses the effect of moral philosophy and literature on the individual, whereas *Poetic Justice* discusses their effect on the community. In examining first the more general claims made in *Poetic Justice*,

then the more specific ones in *Love's Knowledge*, I wish to demonstrate how Nussbaum's rendering of Aristotelian ethics as a model for didactic reading of literature articulates a self-envisaging approach to narrative ethics.

How then is Nussbaum's Aristotelian narrative ethics to be regarded as self-envisaging? In the first place, it is her conviction that literature lends itself especially well to the pursuit of the Aristotelian project of determining how to live the good life.⁴⁸ To express her point, that the goal of literature is to discover truth, she uses visual metaphors in describing the epistemological and political imperative of reading novels:

I make two claims, then, for the reader's experience: first, that it provides *insights* that should play a role (though not as uncriticized foundations) in the construction of an adequate moral and political theory; second, that it develops moral capacities without which citizens will not succeed in making reality out of the normative conclusions of any moral or political theory, however excellent. As I said in the preface, novel-reading will not give us the whole story about social justice, but it can be a bridge both to a *vision* of justice and to the social enactment of that *vision*. (*Justice* 12; emphasis mine)

In other words, the reader must be able to envisage, or identify with, the moral and political themes exemplified by the characters, or by the narrator's commentary on them. In putting a face on these themes, the reader must then accept or reject them, thus defining his or her own moral and political position vis-à-vis the novel's. Furthermore,

⁴⁸ Nussbaum's interpretation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* appears in more detail in "An Aristotelian Conception of Rationality," *Knowledge* 54-105.

the exercise of envisaging his or her own moral and political attributes will provide the reader with a greater range of vision in order to see important connections between moral opinion and moral action.

For Nussbaum, a greater range of vision means reading a novel like Dicken's *Hard Times*, and being able to discern between relatively shallow arguments for moral or political utilitarianism and deeper ones for "Kantian and Aristotelian views of the human being" (*Justice* 12). In Chapter 2, Nussbaum interprets *Hard Times* according to two conceptions of utilitarianism that are competing with each other in the novel. The classical conception "is likely to make greater demands on me for altruism and self-sacrifice than most other familiar theories" (*Justice* 15), but it is normative rather than descriptive. Descriptive, rational-choice, utilitarianism "holds that the end of individual rational choice is always the maximization of the satisfaction of individual self-interest" (*Justice* 16).⁴⁹ The various characters in *Hard Times* represent the two poles of the debate between these theories, and, "with the central importance of altruism, the novel suggests a subtle internal critique of certain species of utilitarianism, not its complete repudiation" (*Justice* 33). In Chapter 3, Nussbaum analyses Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* to arrive at her concept of the "judicious spectator" (*Justice* 74) as a type of ideal reader who allows him or herself to identify with another without becoming overly emotionally involved. In this regard, she shows how *Hard Times* works to undermine even traditional

⁴⁹ Though she does not explicitly say so here, it may be assumed that one example Nussbaum has in mind is Richard Posner's *The Economics of Justice*. See also *Justice* 54. For a summary of the long-standing polemic between Nussbaum and Posner, particularly as it relates to literature and ethics, see Stow 185 -196.

utilitarianism for its insistence on rational identification between people over emotional identification (*Justice* 66). Taken to its limits, her reader should be able to identify intimately with the emotional responses of good characters. Such a reader would be in a position to critique the novel for its insensitive treatment of workers, for example.

In Chapter 4, Nussbaum changes focus in order to interpret the poetry of Walt Whitman according to its narrative message “that the light of the poetic imagination is a crucial agent of democratic equality for these and other excluded people, since only that imagination will get the facts of their lives right, and *see in their unequal treatment a degradation of oneself*” (*Justice* 119; emphasis mine). Nussbaum is arguing for a way of reading literature, though, that would teach a reader to be more altruistic, while her means of achieving this reveal an altogether different penchant for a self-envisaging method of reading.⁵⁰ The role of realist narrative is obviously central to structuring the actions of the characters in such a way as to maximize the reader’s capacity to empathize with the moral dilemmas those characters face. In this way, the reader is able to better envisage him or herself as a moral being whose choices would have been in line with the choices made by an altruistic protagonist and not those of a selfish antagonist. Works of fiction are analogous to moral simulators in which the reader is an active participant.

The main problem with how Nussbaum arrives at her conclusion, however, is two-fold. In the first place, her definition of ‘fancy’ – the term used by Dickens in *Hard Times* – as a function of “metaphorical imagination” (*Justice* 36) that increases one’s

⁵⁰ Nussbaum’s understanding of altruism is derived largely from Williams.

ability to empathize is flawed. Nussbaum's assertion that fancy is the "ability to see one thing as another, to see one thing in another" (*Justice* 36) is Aristotelian, and under-girds an aesthetics of metaphor based on the same premises as Ricoeur's. To see one thing *as* another may be metaphorical, in my sense of the term, but to see one thing *in* another is metonymic and synecdochic. We commonly identify an image as a metaphor rather than a metonym. This is the basic structure of all identification, though, because we can always only know, or see, an image as a partial representation of another image. As Nussbaum would have it, metaphor is the basis for

a projection of our own sentiments and inner activities onto the forms we perceive about us (and a reception from this interaction of images of ourselves, our own inner world). We are all, insofar as we interact morally and politically, fanciful projectors, makers of and believers in fictions and metaphors (*Justice* 38).

Yet, this projection is necessarily metonymic, not metaphorical, and as such is the basis of our self-envisaging voices. We cannot help but see ourselves as characters in a narrative that is at least in part of our own making. Ideally, we are heroes in that narrative. We would like to see ourselves as doing good, as possessing the necessary attributes and abilities to triumph over adversity and evil. Much depends on the context and the nature of the adversity presented by the other. Yet, even in our daily encounters, we narrate our roles as metonymic attributes of the encounter with the other.

In the second place, the argument she makes for ascribing fancy to the ethics of altruism shows that Nussbaum's ideas on ethics are again based on a metonymic

understanding rather than a metaphoric one. Fancy, or the ability to see oneself as another, is what should enable one to feel sympathy for another's suffering: "Forming bonds of both sympathy and identification, [epic and tragic poets] cause the reader or spectator to experience pity and fear for the hero's plight, fear, too, for themselves, insofar as their own possibilities are seen as *similar* to those of the hero" (*Justice* 53; emphasis mine). But understanding the feelings of another person, empathizing with them to the extent that his or her feelings are similar to one's own, is best achieved by suppressing the metaphorical and emphasizing the metonymic. At the moment I am required to commiserate with a friend, or congratulate her, I must suppress any of my own feelings that might otherwise impede my empathy, or any associations that would lead me to do so. I must lose myself in the feelings of the other, as it were. Those particular emotional attributes in question at the time are what must be focused on, to the exclusion of all others, if one person is required to identify with another person's feelings. It is a question of differing degrees as to how well I can associate, for example, Bigger Thomas's experience of being victimized by prejudice with my own experience of prejudice.⁵¹ Had I never experienced prejudice as a victim, then my understanding of Bigger's experience would be metaphorical – it would only be dissimilar to some other feeling – but it is questionable then whether I could understand his experience simply on the basis of conjecture. Having experienced some degree of prejudice in my life, I can partially imagine, through a description of the extent to which Bigger suffers injustice,

⁵¹ For Nussbaum's use of Bigger Vance from Richard Wright's novel *Native Son*, see *Justice* 93.

how that must feel. For Nussbaum's argument to remain consistent, however, the emphasis must be on identification with the other and not on differentiation from it. She pre-supposes that the reader already has the emotions, if not the knowledge, that the author wishes to evoke. With this emotional pre-disposition, a reader can identify with a character's individual responses. Thus, a dialectic takes place whereby "the experience of novel-reading yields a strong commitment to regard each life as individual and separate from other lives" (*Justice* 92). It is this commitment to individuation that is supposed to help avoid "group hatred and the oppression of groups" (*Justice* 92). Yet, an other with which I identify is itself merely an aggregate of attributes, only some of which I may share and only then metonymically. The remaining, unshared, attributes are what keep us different, what are hidden, strange, unknowable and potentially harmful. In identifying with the good attributes of an other, I envisage these attributes in myself metonymically, as part of a greater whole.

For Nussbaum, then, the self sees itself in relation to one or more others whom it either identifies with or rejects, depending on the propensity of that self to judge the relative merits of the actions or words demonstrated by the other. As a social being, it is incumbent on the self to know itself first. It can achieve this, in part, through the simulated experience of facing fictional others whose actions and words would appear similar to those in a non-literary experience. By reading often we practice judging. By practicing we become more proficient. It is how we become masters of the good life. This is the ethical and political imperative at work in Nussbaum's version of the role of didactic literature in society. Not only does this imperative inform a normative aesthetics

of how good literature should be written, it informs an interpretative model of how good literature should be read. For some critics this normative approach poses grave ethical problems, as well as some aesthetic ones. I would argue that there is value in identifying with the approach for the purposes of testing its limits. Much depends on the object of study for enabling Nussbaum's approach to realize its potential. As we will see by comparing her analysis of Proust to that of Beckett, Nussbaum's ethical method is far more plausible when analyzing a self-envisaging narrative than of a self-effacing one.

In *Love's Knowledge*, Nussbaum interprets the major differences between Aristotelian and Platonic ethics in order to provide a philosophical context that lends itself to reading certain novels by Henry James, Dickens, Proust and Beckett. For her, the basis of the ethical differences between the two philosophers is epistemological. In attempting to describe a science of ethical choice, Aristotle includes emotion in his definition of rationality, while Plato excludes it. Chapter 2, "The Discernment of Perception: An Aristotelian Conception of Private and Public Rationality,"⁵² outlines Aristotle's argument for non-commensurability, whereby "there is no one standard in terms of which all goods are commensurable *qua* goods" (*Knowledge* 58). Particulars are good in and of themselves and are, therefore, privileged over universals. Because emotional responses particularize an individual's ethical choices, emotion must be

⁵² Nussbaum raises an interesting question on the function of self-deceptive rationalization in ascribing motivation to good deeds, when she writes on the differences between Aristotle's and Plato's definitions of *akrasia*: "The opposite of Platonic knowledge is ignorance; the opposite of Aristotelian perception can, in some cases, be ignorance; but it can also, in other cases, be denial or self-deceptive rationalization" (81).

considered a part of rationality and therefore within the contemplation of good. Chapter 3, “Plato on Commensurability and Desire,” outlines Plato’s version of Socrates’s argument for the logical necessity of commensurability between the particulars of an ethical choice and their relation to instances of universal applicability. In other words, a single, all-encompassing rule or principle is necessary to save us from the vagaries of indeterminate and contingent particulars. Emotional responses, such as love, fear and grief, that impede the proper functioning of reason, would be eliminated if emotions were simply seen as the product of flawed reasoning, or ignorance, dependent on a mistaken belief in some fact. Here universality is privileged, for heterogeneity is a necessary pre-condition of irrationality. In Nussbaum’s view, literature can act to test these fundamental premises by providing examples of characters who live according to one or other of the tenets. The novels she reads by James, Dickens, Proust and Beckett test and corroborate Aristotle’s privileging of ethical particularity, and test and disqualify Plato’s privileging of ethical universality.

By reading Proust’s *A la recherche du temps perdu* as an example of how emotional response invalidates Plato’s idea of rationality as the basis of all good, Nussbaum demonstrates a sound self-envisaging interpretation of a self-envisaging narrative. Her argument in chapter 10, “Fictions of the Soul,” and chapter 11, “Love’s Knowledge,” is designed primarily to persuade her reader that “the so-called literary and rhetorical elements” of fictional narrative “are not mere ornamentation or distraction, but intrinsic to the conception of the human soul” (*Knowledge* 259). Where Plato argues in *Phaedo* and *The Republic* that truth is achieved by pure reason, which negates or effaces

emotions and desires, the example of Marcel's thoughts and actions in "Sodome et Gomorrhe" and "Albertine disparue" would appear to suggest that suffering and love can rescue one from the ideal of achieving pure reason and lead one instead toward true self-knowledge. Nussbaum concludes that with Proust's novel, we

do not have a hierarchical deductive system of the sort Plato would have wanted; we do not even have a more modest and open-ended framework. And it seems to be part of the truth conveyed by the novel that this should be so. What human life, as this novel shows it, is, is a series of happenings, some more, some less, mysterious. But to dispel their mystery altogether would be to control them; and this we can never, to this extent, do. Moreover, even the aim to explain the whole world, to put it all into systematic order, may be, in the novel's terms, an inappropriate relation for a human being to have to this world in which he lives, an aim that involves him, as Marcel's scientific project of self-analysis involved him, in denial of incompleteness and vulnerability. It would be a denial of something true about the world to represent all its darkness as illuminated or even illuminable, all of its indeterminacies sorted and categorized (*Knowledge* 258).

It would appear, then, at first glance that Nussbaum's interpretation of Marcel conforms to a self-effacing aesthetic insofar as the novel's style is metaphorical, highlighting as it does emotional responses to difference and loss, and without unifying principles that might otherwise explain Marcel's emotions to himself. On the ethical plane, however, there is a redemptive element in Marcel's new-found self-knowledge. Marcel's self-

knowledge is one part of a self-envisaging narrative, which he tells himself, and in which he, the protagonist, ultimately realizes that the quest for self-knowledge is a moral quest. This realization is what enables him to undertake the artistic task of writing the novel about himself.⁵³

In a second chapter on the same incident in *A la recherche du temps perdu*, Nussbaum re-formulates her argument from the previous chapter. She re-iterates her sense of the dichotomy between scientific and emotional knowledge. This time, though, she reads Marcel's experience of gaining self-knowledge due to the loss of Albertine as an example of Zeno's stoic ideas on cataleptic knowledge.⁵⁴ Questioning whether emotional knowledge does not lead to self-deception, Nussbaum revises her attitude toward Marcel. Now she is more critical of his skepticism toward our ability to know others except as constructions of the imagination; such a "skeptical conclusion consoles more than it agonizes. It means that he is alone and self-sufficient in the world of knowledge. That love is not a source of dangerous openness, but a rather interesting

⁵³ Nussbaum's conclusion contradicts an earlier statement, where she reveals what she believes is the true ethical purpose of Proust's novel in particular, and literature in general: "as we are brought into intimate relation with our own most painful memories, we will, if we do what Proust requires, suffer violently as we suffered in some past, and feel, from the present, the power of the past upon us. This part of our psychological inquiry arrives at truth, if it does so, not by straightforwardly intellectual paths, but by way of a violent surge of recognition, in which what will be in our imagination and hearts will be *not a piece* of knowledge, but the *face* and *body* of some particular recollected internal person; and we will feel anew our deep emotions concerning that person" (*Knowledge*, 254; emphasis mine). This describes, in fact, a metonymically structured experience of reading self-envisaging narrative.

⁵⁴ For Nussbaum's sources on Zeno, see note 7, *Knowledge* 265. She argues here that cataleptic knowledge would include emotions such as love or the loss of love.

relation with oneself" (*Knowledge* 271-72). Against this solipsistic attitude, she contrasts a story by Anne Beattie to show that Beattie's is a superior example of how love can overcome skepticism (*Knowledge* 274). Nussbaum also concludes that philosophy can still be used to read literature emotionally. The self-knowledge we gain from this experience closely resembles "*eudaimonia* ('human flourishing,' or 'the good human life')" (*Knowledge* 285). Nussbaum's reading may help us interpret Marcel's various responses to others in ways previously not realized, yet it does not explain them in the context of the redemptive role art is meant to play in forming Marcel's self-image. As a key attribute of his self, how does his vision of himself in art relate to other attributes, such as his experience of other people? Does he negate, or sacrifice, certain attributes in order for other attributes to survive? At what cost, if any? These questions elude Nussbaum's approach, which seeks to envisage a character, such as Marcel, according to whether or not he achieves the good life.

In general, Nussbaum's approach is successful with psychologically realistic narratives whose characters enact difficult moral problems due to contradictory but resolvable attributes. If we are able to admire the moral and ethical heroism of people we know, then we can tell one another stories about these *exempla*. Her approach reaches its limit, however, when our stories deal with characters who themselves believe that all their attributes are indeterminate and arbitrary, and that any argument for a cohesiveness of attributes is spurious. Such a character cannot justify whatever vestiges of moral reasoning remain. In "Narrative Emotions: Beckett's Genealogy of Love," Nussbaum interprets Samuel Beckett's early trilogy as a satire on emotions in narrative. Focusing on

Molloy, she examines how the narrative structures represent the characters' emotional and ethical responses. According to Nussbaum, Beckett goes too far in denying the existence of individual will, and ascribing it to the social construction of emotional reasoning in language. We feel disgust and fear, longing and guilt in response to our bodies, Nussbaum argues, but these are not necessarily mediated by religious or ethical narratives. Nussbaum finds Beckett's claim that we are trapped in the prison-house of language over-stated. Its goal is to subvert "the storytelling life" (*Knowledge* 288). Instead, she finds a hidden message of hope in that "the silence onto which this deconstructive project opens is an opening or clearing in which human beings and animals can recognize one another without and apart from the stories and their guilt" (*Knowledge* 288).⁵⁵ Nussbaum contrasts these objectives to her own project. Beckett's has the potential to undermine hers, and she must neutralize the threat before proceeding further. His narratives are "especially subversive, dangerous, and necessary for anyone who wishes to claim that fictional narratives play a central and, so to speak, a positive role in self-understanding, a role that is not as adequately played by texts that lack narrative form" (*Knowledge* 288). Nussbaum, of course, wishes to make such claims.

Aside from the dichotomy she draws between narrative and non-narrative knowledge – a topic which I will return to in the chapter on Beckett's second trilogy – Nussbaum's ethics of self-understanding relies on presuppositions about character that

⁵⁵ For another critique of Nussbaum's argument, see Critchley 204-205, N. 85, whose discussion of "Beckett's laughter at the very least complicates Nussbaum's view" of the intentions behind the purported religious sensibility expressed by the characters.

are inapplicable to Beckett's portrayal of it in the trilogy. She maintains that in reading this narrative "we are hearing, in the end, but a single human voice, not the conversation of diverse human voices with diverse structures of feeling" (*Knowledge* 308). Nussbaum tries to prove her point by demonstrating how Beckett identifies Moran as the author of his other novels. And though she realizes that the unnamed voice of *The Unnamable* claims to be author of all the trilogy stories, she does not conclude that authorship is provisional and contingent on the relative power of a variety of discourses being able to speak en masse, as it were, at any given time. In other words, Nussbaum wishes to suppress the differences between voices spoken by a single character. While "an implicit claim is made by these voices to be the whole world" (*Knowledge* 308), she repudiates this on the grounds that it is not representative of everyone's experience of religious emotion. Moreover, she disputes Beckett's idea that the self is a "social construction" (*Knowledge* 309), concluding rather that the disgust we hear in Beckett's voices secretly masks "a longing for the pure soul, hard as a diamond, individual and indivisible, coming forth from its maker's hand with its identity already stamped upon it" (*Knowledge* 309). What is missing here is a deeper analysis of the language Beckett uses to construct selfhood. It may be that like the ideal silence which the necessity of storytelling never lets one achieve, a pure soul and the ideal of redemption is a trap from which the individual self can never escape. Even in death, our stories are told, though we no longer have the means to influence their interpretation. The various voices that speak through any given character incessantly contradict themselves while trying to persuade us of either the positive or negative truths of their existence. That is the nature of language that

Beckett's texts present metaphorically.

Though Nussbaum's readings of Proust and Beckett have some shortcomings, it should be clear that her method of analyzing the role of moral philosophy in literary works is more suggestive when dealing with narratives that share basic assumptions about the epistemological structure of selfhood. Among these assumptions is an understanding of the self that views it as having a core set of essential attributes that together form the identity and the will of the individual. As in the case of *Hard Times*, characters can stand for certain ideas, and the social interaction of these characters can come to represent those ideas as a polemic. But texts that question the conditions under which a self sees itself pose greater difficulties for ethical analyses. Nussbaum's analyses of narrative ethics are useful, though, when put into a dialogic relationship with analyses that look for the negative aspects of representations of the self. It is particularly important to retain her ideas on emotional reasoning as an integral part of how we read self-envisaging narratives. The self envisages itself in response to an other against whom similarity or difference can invoke deep feelings of security or insecurity. The way one responds in this situation is the very basis of ethical attitudes and actions.

4. Conclusion: The Voice Envisaged

The categories of aesthetic and ethics apply to the self-envisaging voice as modes of a common organizing principle whereby the self arranges its attributes in response to encounters with otherness that might possibly disrupt the integrity of those

attributes. The qualities associated with the aesthetic mode appear in the integrity of the metonymic logic of the language in which the self envisages itself. The integrity of the predicative relation to the speaking subject is fundamentally prosaic. We can see in most realist, literary personifications an inner logic or cohesion to the characters' actions and motives, which allows for an element of predictability or unpredictability that in turn heightens the dramatic interest or value of the text. How well a character is able to see his or her own cohesion, to order his or her attributes in a proper fashion, can be an aesthetic and ethical measure of that character's value in the text. In literature, as in life, a person whose actions and motives appear to cohere over time in a way that gives that person a measure of predictability and reliability will be deemed worthy of trust, friendship and love. One knows oneself in the same way. The onus, therefore, is on knowing oneself and on knowing which characters are acting most cohesively. But we must also be able to see that a character is in a position to know whether he or she has acted ethically. In other words, we must be sure that the other person has acted with good intentions, in good faith. The qualities associated with the ethical mode appear in the metonymic logic of how one evaluates one's encounters with others, particularly how one evaluates how well one has maintained the integrity of one's own positive attributes. In this mode the integrity of the self occupies a place of primacy, above that of all others. There is then a shared metonymic structure in both aesthetic and ethical modes of the self-envisaging voice. The voice identifies itself according to the organization of those attributes it can claim to be its own. It is in order to secure the integrity of its attributes that the voice sees itself as it does.

In Canetti and Beckett we will see two authors who write about, with and in self-envisaging voices. Canetti envisages the integrity of his own voice in the memoirs in terms of his emotional and intellectual development as a writer. It will become a question of how distinct his voice will be from all the other voices that supplement him in his development. Nonetheless, Canetti works hard to maintain a relatively cohesive self over the course of his early life when many indeterminate and contingent circumstances work against him. Beckett envisages the integrity of his own voice in the last three novels in terms of a theoretical self, a voice that stands for his own but also for every other voice. It is subject to its own indeterminate and contingent encounters, though it seems to suggest that it is the work of trying to maintain its integrity that is most important to it. Comparing their approach to the writing of self-envisaging voices, it becomes clear that Canetti and Beckett both view these voices in dialogue with their self-effacing ones.

II: CONDITIONS FOR A SELF-EFFACING VOICE

ANTONY: I come not, friends, to steal away your hearts;
I am no orator, as Brutus is;
But (as you know me all) a plain blunt man
That love my friend, and that they know full well
That gave me public leave to speak of him.
For I have neither writ, nor words, nor worth,
Action, nor utterance, nor the power of speech
To stir men's blood; I only speak right on.
I tell you that which you yourselves do know,
Show you sweet Caesar's wounds, poor poor dumb mouths,
And bid them speak for me.

(William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* III, ii, 215-226)

1. Introduction: An Aesthetics and Ethics of the Self-Effacing Voice

If there is a case to be made for a certain heroism of the self-envisaging voice, where such a voice overcomes obstacles assembled by the other in order to achieve an integrated identity, then can the same not be said for its opposite, the self-effacing voice? The sign of self-effacement itself belongs to a chain of homologous signifiers such as self-abnegation, self-deprecation, self-sacrifice, selflessness, and even suicide. The voice that acts to erase its identity may have its roots in the pre-history of religious observance. It could be argued that all the world's religious movements espouse to varying degrees an

ideal diminution of the individual ego's desires. In general, the positive, heroic quality of self-effacement first requires a denial of physical desires as a pre-condition to achieving freedom from all desire. Often death plays a central role as the ultimate self-effacement in which the self is either dissolved to become one with all selves, or is rewarded in an after-life for having stayed faithful to its self-effacement during its life-time. The methods of achieving these kinds of self-effacement are supported by powerfully evocative narratives of exemplary achievements. Yet, one prohibition shared by all these religions is against suicide, an act of absolute, self-serving self-effacement. To commit suicide denies the self of any and all entitlement to metaphysical freedom or reward in an after-life. On the other hand, to sacrifice one's life to a greater cause, be it the survival of the community in war or the saving of a life in peace, enhances oneself in the after-life. While there is an absolutely negative value given to suicide, there is always a remainder of self-consciousness permitted by heroic self-sacrifice in order for the self to enjoy its reward in the wake of its sacrifice. Therefore, self-effacement can only ever be partial, relative and metonymic. Absolute self-effacement can only occur in a metaphorical sense. For what good would self-effacement otherwise achieve, what benefit would there be, if there were no self left to experience the achievement? To understand the implications for an aesthetic and an ethical approach to depicting the self-effacing voice, there are two main categories of valuation available. In terms of an aesthetics of the self-effacing voice, I will first consider the ramifications of positing value to those metonymic attributes that are sacrificed in order to achieve self-effacement. There is a distinct and important

relationship between the beneficial value of sacrificing an attribute metonymically and the invaluable value of a self that is sacrificed as a metaphorical absolute. In terms of the ethics of the self-effacing voice, I will then consider the ramifications of positing one's own self-effacement as a pre-condition for being infinitely responsible to the other. Here, there is an important relationship between the metonymy of the face-to-face encounter and the metaphor of responsibility inherent in that encounter.

2. An Aesthetics of the Self-Effacing Voice based on a Model of Negative Aesthetics from Theodor Adorno's *Aesthetische Theorie*

In his *Aesthetische Theorie*, Adorno contemplates the aesthetics of writing about the individual subject in an age of immense suffering and ever-threatening annihilation. His theory of avant-garde art comprises elements of an aesthetics that, in my reading, unmask self-envisaging narratives to reveal forms of self-effacing ones. Ostensibly, Adorno's aesthetics do not operate on the fundamental structures of meaning we saw with Ricoeur's aesthetics. Instead, they seek to explain signification in terms of material values attributed to certain discursive forms, be they linguistic, artistic or both. Yet, I would argue that Adorno's understanding of avant-garde form is in line with my vision of metaphor as opposed to metonymy, described in the section on Ricoeur. Adorno distinguishes aesthetic writing from ideological writing. According to him, the theorists of ideological critique – Georg Lukács being the most prominent among them – advocate

a normative, bourgeois aesthetic that is recidivist and in bad conscience. Basing his theory, no less than Lukács did, on a Marxist, materialist critique of art, Adorno separates the content of a work, which is always ideological, from its form, which may also be ideological, unless that form is kept autonomous through avant-garde de-formation by its practitioners. In Simon Critchley's recent re-evaluation of Adorno's aesthetics, *Very Little...Almost Nothing*, Critchley observes that the idea of avant-garde art for Adorno "successfully negotiates the dialectic between the necessary autonomy of modernist art and the function of social criticism *not* by raising its voice against society or protesting against the obvious violence of the Holocaust, but rather *by elevating social criticism to the level of form*" (22). Modernist art retains its autonomy by using forms that render it useless. In this way it becomes asocial by opposing a society predicated on or determined by the economic exchange of values. For Adorno, therefore, narrative or artistic form and the study of it in aesthetics are both ethical representations.

Adorno's own writing style combines the metonymy of propositional logic with the metaphoricity of paradox and contradiction. His method of negative reflexivity, or negative dialectics, allows for a dialogue between contradictory assertions; for instance, between the aesthetics of valuation (seen in this study as one aspect of self-envisaging discourse) and the aesthetics of valuelessness (seen here as self-effacing).⁵⁶ On the one

⁵⁶ For an overview of Adorno's method of philosophical enquiry, see Bronner. Though informed with the benefit of hindsight by current trends in post-structuralist theory, Bronner's analysis integrates Adorno's aesthetics into his theory of negative dialectics.

hand, art signifies ideologically. On the other, its significance lies beyond ideology. A sample passage from Adorno shows how he recognizes that art contains the seeds of ideologies that seek both to posit and negate society, while not being able to decide for itself between the two possibilities:

Art, however, is social not only because of its mode of production, in which the dialectic of the forces and relations of production is concentrated, nor simply because of the social derivation of its thematic material. Much more importantly art becomes social by its opposition to society, and occupies this position only as autonomous art. By crystallizing in itself as something unique to itself, rather than complying with existing social norms and qualifying as *socially useful*, it criticizes society by merely existing, for which puritans of all stripes condemn it. There is nothing pure, nothing structured strictly according to its own immanent law, that does not implicitly criticize the debasement of a situation evolving in the direction of a total exchange society in which everything is heteronomously defined. Art's asociality is the determinate negation of a determinate society. Certainly through its refusal of society, which is equivalent to sublimation through the law of form, autonomous art makes itself a vehicle of ideology: The society at which it shudders is left in the distance, undisturbed. Yet this is more than ideology: Society is not only the negativity that the aesthetic law of form condemns but also, even in its most objectionable shape, the quintessence of self-producing and self-reproducing human life. Art was no more able to dispense with

this element than with critique until that moment when the social process revealed itself as one of self-annihilation; and it is not in the power of art, which does not make judgments, to separate these two elements intentionally. (225)⁵⁷

For Adorno, history has brought art to straddle these two opposing roles, as intermediary between the self both reproducing and annihilating itself. The point in history at which the social process reveals itself as one of self-annihilation is defined by the teleological force of the Enlightenment's emphasis on instrumental reason, which has led to scientific and social technologies such as the atomic bomb and Auschwitz capable of producing a form of absolute murder for all humans. Of the two elements of society which art is powerless to separate intentionally, the self-reproducing and the self-annihilating, art

⁵⁷ Trans. of "Gesellschaftlich aber ist Kunst weder nur durch den Modus ihrer Hervorbringung, in dem jeweils die Dialektik von Produktivkräften und Produktionsverhältnissen sich konzentriert, noch durch die gesellschaftliche Herkunft ihres Stoffgehalts. Vielmehr wird sie zum Gesellschaftlichen durch ihre Gegenposition zur Gesellschaft, und jene Position bezieht sie erst als autonome. Indem sie sich als Eigenes in sich kristallisiert, anstatt bestehenden gesellschaftlichen Normen zu willfahren und als *gesellschaftlich nützlich* sich zu qualifizieren, kritisiert sie die Gesellschaft, durch ihr bloßes Dasein, so wie es von Puritanern aller Bekenntnisse mißbilligt wird. Nichts reines, nach seinem immanenten Gesetz Durchgebildetes, das nicht wortlos Kritik übte, die Erniedrigung durch einen Zustand denunzierte, der auf die totale Tauschgesellschaft sich hinbewegt: in ihr ist alles nur für anderes. Das asoziale der Kunst ist bestimmte Negation der bestimmten Gesellschaft. Freilich bietet durch ihre Absage an die Gesellschaft, die der Sublimierung durchs Formgesetz gleichkommt, autonome Kunst ebenso als Vehikel der Ideologie sich an: in der Distanz läßt sie die Gesellschaft, vor der ihr schaudert, auch unbehelligt. Auch das ist mehr als nur Ideologie: Gesellschaft nicht bloß die Negativität, welche das ästhetische Formgesetz verurteilt, sondern noch in ihrer fragwürdigsten Gestalt der Inbegriff des sich produzierenden und reproduzierenden Lebens der Menschen. Von diesem Moment so wenig wie von Kritik konnte Kunst sich dispensieren, solange nicht der gesellschaftliche Prozeß als einer zur Selbstvernichtung sich offenbarte; und es ist nicht in die Macht von Kunst als einem Urteilslosen gegeben, durch Intentionen beides zu scheiden" (335).

should be obliged to represent both without privileging either one. What is important is that art itself withdraws from judgment, effaces itself by being useless, but within a formal dialogue between positive and negative assertions.

In Terry Eagleton's *The Ideology of Aesthetics*, the chapter on Adorno, entitled "Art after Auschwitz," is an attempt to redeem this politics of paradox in the wake of what is perceived as a post-structuralism misappropriation of Adorno's theory. Eagleton argues for Adorno's "profound sense of political responsibility" (363), despite Adorno's having occupied "the high ground of aesthetic theory" (361). Eagleton isolates the core of Adorno's theory in the non-identity between concept and object. The body serves as the nexus where identity-thinking does violence to it, and where the teleology of instrumental reason has led to the "absolute of suffering" (343; *Negative* 320) realized, for instance, in the death camps. As Eagleton observes, Adorno's vision of the immanently deprived body is opposite to that of Mikhail Bakhtin's playful vision of the carnivalesque body. Favouring the Bakhtinian version, Eagleton criticizes Adorno's austerity as an "overreaction to fascism" (358). For Eagleton, the result is that Adorno effects a near-complete withdrawal from responsibility into a highly ambivalent aesthetics of autonomous art:

What tattered shreds of authenticity can be preserved after Auschwitz consist in staying stubbornly impaled on the horns of an impossible dilemma, conscious that the abandonment of utopia is just as treacherous as the hope for it, that negations of the actual are as indispensable as they are ineffectual, that art is at once

precious and worthless. (357)

That such an aesthetics is ultimately untenable for Eagleton is proclaimed in his judgment on Adorno's espousal of modernism: "Just as artistic modernism figures the impossibility of art, so Adorno's modernist aesthetic marks the point at which the high aesthetic tradition is pressed to an extreme limit and begins to self-destruct" (361). Yet, Eagleton wants to salvage Adorno's theory by emphasizing the redemptive side of its ambivalence. In spite of Adorno's general theory of "difference, heterogeneity and the aporetic" (354), he is able to effect a signifying tension by seeing particular "signs of redemption [. . .] in the paranoia of identity-thinking, in the mechanisms of exchange-value, between the elliptical lines of a Beckett or in some sudden jarring of a Schoenberg violin" (363). This tension in and of itself allows Eagleton to find political value in Adorno's theory of artistic valuelessness.

But while Eagleton's reading of Adorno's ambivalence is sensitive to the problems posed by its many aporia, his ascribing political significance to them is itself suspicious in light of the programmatic aim of his argument – namely a recuperation of aesthetic theory in the name of ideological critique. The paradoxical usefulness of art's uselessness is central to Adorno's theory, but as the aesthetics of ideology, not as the ideology of aesthetics. The aesthetics of anti-aestheticism reside provisionally for Adorno in not placing value on objects, be they objects of art or theory. The true work of art seeks to transcend itself by effacing its value. It is not certain, though, whether this should be taken as the ethical conclusion of Adorno's argument. Clearly, autonomous art plays a

role in the resistance to domination, but at what cost? Adorno points out that art only escapes being a social commodity under certain, mitigating circumstances:

artworks, products of social labor that are subject to or produce their own law of form, seal themselves off from what they themselves are. To this extent, each artwork could be charged with false consciousness and chalked up to ideology. In formal terms, independent of what they say, they are ideology in that a priori they posit something spiritual as being independent from the conditions of its material production and therefore as being intrinsically superior and beyond the primordial guilt of the separation of physical and spiritual labor. (*Aesthetic* 227)⁵⁸

Adorno is here conceding that all art is subject to formal and ideological self-positing and even the autonomous, self-effacing and useless art-work is a product of social mediation – in other words, the work must be posited before it can be effaced. If, however, the transcendent, or meta-aesthetic, value that the autonomous art-work ascribes to itself is to lead to a negation of the guilt associated with the separation of physical and spiritual labor, then, what are the exact forms of labor that this value is produced from?

Peter Bürger provides a potential answer to the above question in *Theorie der Avantgarde*. Analysing Adorno's theory of the avant-garde from the view-point of the

⁵⁸ Trans. of “die Kunstwerke, Produkte gesellschaftlicher Arbeit, ihrem Formgesetz untertan oder eines erzeugend, sich abdichten gegen das, was sie selbst sind. Insofern könnte ein jedes Kunstwerk vom Verdikt falschen Bewußtseins ereilt und der Ideologie zugerechnet werden. Formal sind sie, unabhängig von dem was sie sagen, Ideologie darin, daß sie a priori Geistiges als ein von den Bedingungen seiner materiellen Produkten Unabhängiges und darum höher Geartetes setzen und über die uralte Schuld in der Trennung körperlicher und geistiger Arbeit täuschen” (*Aesthetische* 337).

means of production (the artist), the product (the art-work) and the consumption of it (the viewer/reader), Bürger pays more attention to the historical conditions of art as a social institution than Adorno does.⁵⁹ Of particular interest in the context of this thesis is the relation of the above three categories to what Bürger calls the “re-sacralization” (22) of art in the twentieth century. In line with Adorno’s theory of an economy of the non-exchange-value of the autonomous art-work, I would argue that self-effacing art in the twentieth century is re-sacralized through a dialogical encounter between self-envisaging and self-effacing discourse. It would be an over-simplification to see this encounter taking place as a master-slave dialogue, because self-effacing discourse either posits itself or is posited as self-sacrificial writing, as the discourse of the slave. At times, Adorno appears to be privileging the discourse of the slave as self-effacing discourse. As we will see, Levinas privileges the slave’s discourse in his own way. At other times, however, Adorno privileges neither, holding both binaries in a dialogue between opposite equals that is consistent with his method of negative dialectic. Bürger navigates between Adorno’s contradictions by historicizing the institutionalization of avant-garde art, so that it resides along with other institutions of art in a dialogue in which the avant-garde art-work is a sacred other to traditional art-works, a work whose value is beyond the measurable value of the work.

⁵⁹ For Bürger’s discussion of the work of art as ‘work,’ see section 1 of Chapter 4, entitled, “On the Problem of the Category of Work”. Here, Bürger historicizes the concept of the art-work in relation to Adorno’s theory of the avant-garde art-work as a commodity that resists commodification in traditional bourgeois means-end society (55-59).

The Latin word, *sacrificium*, literally means to make an object sacred; the sacred is that which is separated from quotidian, or profane, experience (“Sacrifice”).⁶⁰ An object that can be made sacred through sacrifice may be a personal possession, an attribute of one’s self, or a product of our labor. The German word *Opfer* (“sacrifice” or “offering”) can be traced to the Latin verbal noun, *opere*, meaning “work” in English. Though quotidian in its original context, the object is rendered sacred through a ritual pronouncement, or any variety of *bene-diction*, along with a concomitant negation of the object’s original purpose. Holy water, for instance, is made sacred through a blessing and is separated from its quotidian purposes of either drinking it, or washing and cooking with it. In another context, the burnt offering is a product of agricultural labor made sacred in the ritual act of burning or destroying it. Auto-referential, or reflexive, usage of the term to signify self-sacrifice begins to occur in the late Renaissance along with many other self-referential usages (“Self”). The sacrifice of self is epistemologically and ontologically more complex, though. It involves an intentional act of separating a physical or spiritual part of the self which one possesses naturally or has labored to possess. Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac is taken as an archetypal example of the ultimate value of sacrifice. That self-sacrifice cannot occur without some accompanying pain or privation is axiomatic. Yet the motives for self-sacrifice are often questioned in terms of the potential, symbolic

⁶⁰ For Bürger's discussion of the work of art as 'work,' see section 1 of Chapter 4, entitled, "On the Problem of the Category of Work". Here, Bürger historicizes the concept of the art-work in relation to Adorno's theory of the avant-garde art-work as a commodity that resists commodification in traditional bourgeois means-end society (55-59).

return-value secretly expected by the sacrificing agent at some later time; God's grace or attainment of Heaven, mortal riches or immortal fame, ego-fulfilment or social redemption. All these aspects of return-value are themselves characteristics of self-envisaging discourse. In terms of the social value of art, for example, Adorno cites how Marx could scorn "the pittance Milton received for *Paradise Lost*, a work that did not appear to the market as socially useful labor" (*Aesthetic* 227).⁶¹ For his part, Adorno can praise Milton's work, because it "is, as a denunciation of useful labor, the strongest defense of art against its bourgeois functionalization" (*Aesthetic* 227).⁶² In either case, it would appear that first negative, then positive, value is being ascribed to Milton's art-work. But what is the significance of the difference?

The value of sacrifice rests in its being separate from exchange-value. By virtue of its difference from the profanity of production, sacrifice is sacred. Though it must initially have value before being negated, the object must be sacrificed with the expectation of receiving nothing in return, which then renders the sacrificial object beyond value. There may be psychological benefits, such as consolation, relief, or feelings of security against future catastrophe, but these are ancillary – they are in no way guaranteed and must be disproportionate to the pain of loss in order for them to be considered as conventional.

⁶¹ Trans. of "Der Hohn von Marx über den Schandpreis, den Milton fürs Verlorene Paradies erhielt, das ja nicht auf dem Markt als gesellschaftlich nützliche Arbeit sich ausweist" (*Aesthetische* 337-338). Adorno is quoting from Marx, 377.

⁶² Trans. of "ist als deren Denunziation die stärkste Verteidigung der Kunst gegen ihre bürgerliche Funktionalisierung, die in ihrer undialektisch gesellschaftlichen Verdammung sich fortsetzt" (338).

sacrifices. Like the objects a subject may possess, time is an attribute that can be structured as productive, or non-productive, leisure-time. How then are we to regard the production and consumption of art-works in terms of the sacrificial order?⁶³ The art-work is first produced as labor no matter what its *face-value* may be to society. In producing it the author envisages him or herself in and as discourse. Yet, before it is given over to the re-productive technologies of the market-place, the art-object contains, as a finished product of individual labor, the possibility of being a product of unseparated, un-alienated, physical and spiritual labor. If its form is different, it has the potential to be placed beyond value. While the dissemination of art in the market-place radically jeopardizes this potential, the continuing production of avant-garde art-works that resist and are critical of the institution of art speaks for the possibility of retaining the guiltlessness of unified physical and spiritual labor on a symbolic level.⁶⁴ Not only the production, but also the consumption of such art can be seen as sacrificial in that one's future, one's being-toward-death, becomes sacrificed to an object that is devoid of function, even that of giving pleasure, as is normally the case with most cultural products in an exchange-value economy. Furthermore, the reading self becomes effaced by being

⁶³ George Bataille addresses the economy of sacrifice by distinguishing between *oeuvre* and *désœuvrement*, particularly in the context of art. Maurice Blanchot continues with Bataille's distinction in *La communauté inavouable*. For my purposes, however, the importance of viewing sacrifice as priceless work rests in the symbolic value attributable to it.

⁶⁴ For the importance of the distinction between the critical stance avant-garde takes against itself as an institution and its more traditional practice as critique of previous forms and techniques, see Bürger's "Analysis of Functions" and his reading of Marcuse.

momentarily subjected to the self-envisaged discourse of an other. Hence, both the production of the autonomous art-work, in the sense of it being written differently, and the consumption of it in the sense of new, interpretive reading can be said to signify a symbolic or metaphorical, effaced-value.

The effaced-value of avant-garde art, as opposed to the face-value of conventional self-envisaging narratives, gives it a role in society that does not function to change its formal structures to better serve society, but rather to renounce its own status as a functional, self-envisaging discourse. In his analysis of Walter Benjamin's thesis on the de-sacralization of modern art, to which Adorno's ideas on the autonomy of avant-garde art are in large part a reaction, Bürger criticizes Benjamin's periodization of pre-sacral and post-sacral art, arguing instead for the possibility of art having been re-sacralized in the process of becoming self-critical and autonomous:

For Benjamin, art with an aura and individual reception (absorption in the object) go hand-in-hand. But this characterization applies only to autonomous art, certainly not to the sacral art of the Middle Ages (the reception of the sculpture on medieval cathedrals and the mystery plays was collective). Benjamin's construction of history omits the emancipation of art from the sacral, which was the work of the bourgeoisie. One of the reasons for this omission may be that with the *l'art pour l'art* movement and aestheticism, something like a resacralization (or reritualization) of art did in fact occur. But there is no similarity between this reversion and the original sacral function of art. Art here is not an element in an

ecclesiastical ritual within which a use value is conferred on it. Instead art generates a ritual. Instead of taking its place within the sacral sphere, art supplants religion. The resacralization of art that occurred in aestheticism thus presupposes art's total emancipation from the sacral and must under no circumstances be equated with the sacral character of medieval art. (28)

The generating of ritual by art, its resacralization, places it squarely in a category of sacrificial object. Taking Bürger's argument further, I would suggest that modernist art may lay claim to a status as a self-sacrificial discourse. In other words, in its attempt to render itself beyond value, insofar as its only function is to undermine itself as an institution, art sacrifices itself to the means-end rationality of the bourgeois world. On the production side of the ledger, the artist who produces a work of art that bears little or no immediate return-value has sacrificed his or her labor in the form of that work.

There is, therefore, an effaced-value that can be attached to the work of art at a formal level, at the level of the means of production. The effect of a radical, avant-garde approach to technique and the significance of technique as a self-conscious means of envisaging the self leads paradoxically to a loss of self. In a passage situated by its editors as one of the penultimate of the "Paralipomena," Adorno makes this connection himself:

Artworks present the contradictions as a whole, the antagonistic situation as a totality. Only by mediation, not by taking sides, are artworks capable of transcending the antagonistic situation through expression. The objective contradictions fissure the subject; they are not posited by the subject or the

manufacture of his consciousness. This is the true primacy of the object in the inner composition of artworks. *The subject can be fruitfully extinguished in the aesthetic object only because the subject itself is mediated through the object and is simultaneously the suffering subject of expression.* The antagonisms are articulated technically; that is, they are articulated in the immanent composition of the work, and it is this process of composition that makes interpretation permeable to the tensions external to it. The tensions are not copied but rather form the work; this alone constitutes the aesthetic concept of form. (*Aesthetics* 323-324; emphasis mine)⁶⁵

The objective contradictions, the posited modes of discourse at odds with one another, are gathered in the work of art by the artist and interpreted by the reader. The resultant work of art, in which both the producer and the recipient are envisaged through posited discourse, through the manufacture of meaning, remains the other of both parties, above them in a relation of primacy: "With regard to the aesthetic object, the thesis of the primacy of the object means the primacy of the object itself, the artwork, over its maker

⁶⁵ "Kunstwerke stellen die Widersprüche als Ganzes, den antagonistischen Zustand als Totalität vor. Nur durch deren Vermittlung, nicht durch direkten parti pris sind sie fähig, den antagonistischen Zustand durch Ausdruck zu transzendieren. Die objektiven Widersprüche durchfurchen das Subjekt; sind nicht von diesem gesetzt, nicht aus seinem Bewußtsein hervorgebracht. Das ist der wahre Vorrang des Objekts in der inneren Zusammensetzung der Kunstwerke. *Nur darum vermag das Subjekt im ästhetischen Objekt fruchtbar zu verlöschen, weil es seinerseits durchs Objekt vermittelt ist und unmittelbar zugleich als das leitende des Ausdrucks.* Artikuliert werden die Antagonismen technisch: in der immanenten Komposition des Werkes, die der Interpretation durchlässig ist auf Spannungsverhältnisse außerhalb. Die Spannungen werden nicht abgebildet sondern formieren die Sache; das allein macht den ästhetischen Formbegriff aus" (*Aesthetische* 479; emphasis mine).

as well as over its recipients" (323).⁶⁶ This relationship simultaneously effects the effacement of maker and recipient. But Adorno's *Aesthetische Theorie* ends at this point. It does not go beyond its analysis of the subject that has been effaced by history to analyze the subject that *may desire* its own effacement. Adorno's goal is to conceive of aesthetics that resist the absolutism of self-envisaging discourse, while not allowing that resistance to become absolutist in its own right. As Critchley writes in *Very Little...Almost Nothing*, quoting Adorno, "authentic art-works must 'efface any memory-trace of reconciliation – in the interest of reconciliation'" (24). It is this effacement of reconciliation in the interest of reconciliation that constitutes the ethical element of Adorno's aesthetics.

My reading of *Aesthetische Theorie* has sought to emphasize what is ethical in its aesthetics, without imposing a programmatic reading on it. Art-works have value as social critique, but a provisional one.⁶⁷ Adorno must have realized that his own pronouncements on the art of his time were provisional and therefore subject to eventual disuse. His theory of art propounds resistance to absolutism in that it privileges art-works as maintaining the highest possible tension between opposing discourses. His own theoretical work tries to emulate this model. That part of Adorno's aesthetics which grounds itself in socio-political commentary is used to analyze the material conditions of

⁶⁶ Trans. of "Vorrang des Objekts heißt im ästhetischen Gebilde der der Sache selbst, des Kunstwerks, über den Hervorbringenden wie über den Empfangenden" (479).

⁶⁷ For a recent survey and evaluation of discussions on the possible conditions for contemporary avant-garde theory and practice that exceeds the bounds of its European history, see Kryszewski. An example of a potentially universalizing impulse of the avant-garde includes "the search for the self as one of the driving forces of poetry".

the production and consumption of art as an aesthetic product. Where I have read the inclusion of self-effacing discourse in Adorno's theory as opposing the absolutism of self-envisaging discourse, I have tried to render it accessible in materialist terms, within an economy of self-sacrifice. Through avant-garde techniques, the artist sometimes sacrifices the-will-to-meaning, heightens the tension between ambiguities, and diminishes the suppression of metaphor. It is important to understand, however, that the relationship between sacrifice and the self is itself symbolic insofar as it is based on a metonymic relationship, a synecdoche where the self is called upon to sacrifice a part of itself, but not its entirety. Otherwise, this sacrificial work would have to include suicide, the effect of an absolute negativity that is inconsistent with Adorno's philosophy. As we will see with Levinas, sacrifice is one of many metaphors attuned to the profound ambiguities of ethical language. To further understand the ethics of self-effacement, we must look to Levinas's ideas on the subject.

3. An Ethics of the Self-Effacing Voice based on the model of the Face-to-Face Encounter in Emmanuel Levinas's *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence*

Levinas is also a theorist of self-envisaging and self-effacing discourse. To an even greater extent than Adorno, Levinas seeks to go beyond the death sentences issued by the metaphysicists of authenticity from Plato to Heidegger.⁶⁸ Taking as his object of

⁶⁸ For various book-length studies in English on how Levinas departs from
(continued...)

study the entire tradition of philosophy that makes the human subject its object of study, Levinas indirectly questions whether this privileging of the self does not contribute to the “hatred of the other man” that has culminated in recurring genocides.⁶⁹ In place of the ontologies and epistemologies of the self-envisaging self, Levinas proposes in *Autrement qu’être* an ethics as first philosophy, an ethics in which one’s responsibility for the other both precedes and constitutes the self. As he realises, this impetus places his work among those of other post-World War II writers, such as Adorno, who have argued against the basic premises of humanism. Yet, Levinas draws a different conclusion:

Modern antihumanism, which denies the primacy that the human person, free and for itself, would have for the signification of being, is true over and beyond the reasons it gives itself. It clears the place for subjectivity *positing itself in abnegation, in sacrifice, in a substitution which precedes the will*. Its inspired intuition is to have abandoned the idea of person, goal and origin of itself, in which the ego is still a thing because it is still a being. Strictly speaking, the other is the end; I am a hostage, a responsibility and a substitution supporting the world in the passivity of assignation, even in an accusing persecution, which is undecidable. Humanism has to be denounced only because it is not sufficiently

⁶⁸(...continued)

Heidegger’s critique of metaphysics, his philosophy of *Dasein* and its concomitant ethics of care, see Davis; Llewelyn; and Peperzak. For a general analysis of how both Adorno and Levinas depart from Heidegger, see Critchley’s “Travels in Nihilon” in *Little*.

⁶⁹ Trans. of “la même haine de l’autre homme.” This quotation is from the Dedication.

human. (127-128; emphasis mine)⁷⁰

Levinas's ethics of abnegation attempts to theorize subject-object relations beyond the classic models of Western, humanist philosophy, which privilege ontology or epistemology as the foundation for envisaging the self. To argue for ethics as a foundation that precedes ontology or epistemology without being subject to either, Levinas creates an "ethical language" (94) constituted on what I call the metaphorical.

His thematization of subject-object relations, rendered as the dialogue between self and other, is metaphorical in that the Said, *le Dit*, while signifying the propositional logic of the self-envisaging word, also signifies the Saying, *le Dire*, the trace of another logic, a self-effacing logic. Levinas makes his arguments using propositional logic, yet, the premises of this logic are constantly qualified by being repeated in dissimilar contexts. Aware as he is of the provisional relation between meaning and time, Levinas makes us aware that nouns are derived from verbs and, therefore, subject to temporal declinations; *le visage*, *l'abnégation*, *la finitude*, *la volonté* and *la responsabilité* are some examples. In a note that begins *Autrement qu'être*, Levinas both announces his intentions and qualifies them:

⁷⁰ "L'antihumanisme moderne, niant le primat qui, pour la signification de l'être, reviendrait à la personne humaine, libre but d'elle-même, est vrai par delà les raisons qu'il se donne. Il fait place nette à la subjectivité *se posant dans l'abnégation, dans le sacrifice, dans la substitution précédant la volonté*. Son intuition géniale consiste à avoir abandonné l'idée de personne, but et origine d'elle-même, où le moi est encore chose parce qu'il est encore un être. A la rigueur autrui est 'fin' moi, je suis otage, responsabilité et substitution supportant le monde dans la passivité de l'assignation allant jusqu'à la persécution accusatrice, indéclinable. L'humanisme ne doit être dénoncé que parce qu'il n'est pas suffisamment humain." (*Autrement* 164; emphasis mine)

To see in subjectivity an exception putting out of order the conjunction of essence, entities and the ‘difference’; to catch sight, in the substantiality of the subject, in the hard core of the ‘unique’ in me, in my unparalleled identity, of a substitution for the other; to conceive of this abnegation prior to the will as a merciless exposure to the trauma of transcendence by way of a susception more, and differently, passive than receptivity, passion and finitude; to derive praxis and knowledge in the world from this non-assumable susceptibility – these are the propositions of this book which names the *beyond essence*. The notion cannot claim to be original, but the access to it is as steep as in ancient times. The difficulties of the climb, as well as its failures and renewed attempts, *are marked in the writing*, which no doubt also shows the breathlessness of the author.

(*Otherwise* xli-xlii; emphases mine)⁷¹

For it is in the writing, in the continual offering and withdrawing of propositions, where Levinas makes his mark, where he envisages himself as a writer of abnegation. But how can Levinas offer, or assert, an ethics of abnegation that withdraws itself from assertion?

⁷¹ Trans. of “Reconnaître dans la subjectivité une exception dérégulant la conjonction de *l’essence*, de *l’étant* et de la ‘*différence*’; apercevoir dans la substantialité du sujet, dans le dur noyau de ‘l’unique’ en moi, dans mon identité dépareillée, la substitution à autrui; penser cette abnégation, d’avant le vouloir, comme une exposition sans merci, au traumatisme de la transcendance selon une susception plus – et autrement – passive que la receptivité, la passion et la finitude; faire dériver de cette susceptibilité inassumable la *praxis* et le savoir intérieurs au monde - voilà les propositions de ce livre qui nomme *l’au delà de l’essence*. Notion qui ne saurait, certes, se prétendre originale, mais dont l’accès n’a rien perdu de son antique escarpment. Les difficultés de l’ascension – et ses échecs et ses reprises – *s’inscrivent dans une écriture* qui, sans doute aussi, atteste l’essoufflement du chercheur.” (*Autrement* x; final emphasis mine)

In other words, how can we "derive praxis and knowledge in the world from this non-assumable susceptibility" (xlii)?

This is, perhaps, the most difficult question for both Levinas and his readers. I would argue that the answer lies partly in his use of metaphor, particularly in the metaphor of the face-to-face encounter. For Levinas, the metonymic, self-envisaging word must be sacrificed to the metaphors of ethical language. The will, or desire, to sacrifice (literally, *to make sacred*, or more human) the meaningfulness of self-envisaging discourse – "this abnegation prior to the will" (xlii), conceived "as a merciless exposure to the trauma of transcendence by way of a susception more, and differently passive than receptivity, passion and finitude" (xlii) – is contingent upon a subjection to the other already structured in language, in the response of the self to the call of the other that emerges every time we utter utterances. Such is the relationship of self to other envisioned by Levinas in the concept of the "epiphany of the face" of the other.⁷² But how can there be a will-to-sacrifice prior to will? An answer to this is important for two reasons: first, because without a plausible explanation Levinas's theory exposes itself to Nietzsche's critique, in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, of a slave morality centred around Judeo-Christian sacrifice; secondly, because the will-to-sacrifice must presumably involve decidability if we are to derive praxis and knowledge of the world from it.⁷³

⁷² The term, "l'épiphanie du visage," first appears in *Totalité*. The phrase is repeated only once in *Otherwise*; "a face makes itself an apparition and an epiphany"(154).

⁷³ See in particular the "First Essay: 'Good and Evil,' 'Good and Bad'" in *The*
(continued...)

As an example of the Nietzschean argument against slave morality, Paul Ricoeur makes a case in *Soi-même comme un autre* for his objections to Levinas's ethics of the face. The underlying principle is derived from Nietzsche's characterization of the Judeo-Christian *ethos* as a slave-morality, where meekness is equated with goodness, and with a will-to-power that inevitably corrupts. In his investigation of the relations between self and other, Ricoeur maintains that to be consistent, Levinas's conception of the self in an other-centred ethics must recognize a way to distinguish between the good or evil intentions of the other. Ricoeur poses the question,

must we not join to this capacity of reception a capacity of discernment and recognition, taking into account the fact that the otherness of the Other cannot be summed up in what seems to be just one of the figures of the Other, that of the master who teaches, once we have to consider as well the figure of the offender in *Otherwise than Being*? And what are we to say of the Other when he is the executioner? And who will be able to distinguish the master from the executioner, the master who calls for a disciple from the master who requires a slave? As for the master who teaches, does he not ask to be recognized in his very superiority? (339)⁷⁴

⁷³(...continued)

Genealogy of Morals and in general all of *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*.

⁷⁴ Trans. of "ne faut-il pas joindre à cette capacité d'accueil une capacité de discernement et de reconnaissance, compte tenu de ce que l'alterité de l'Autre ne se laisse pas résumer dans ce qui paraît bien n'être qu'une des figures de l'Autre, celle de maître qui enseigne, dès lors que l'on doit prendre en compte celle de l'offenseur dans

(continued...)

Yet, it is not clear that Levinas would not agree at least in part with Ricoeur's allegation. On a meta-ethical, or metaphorical level, the other as master is the executioner of the self as self-same. On the level of praxis, however, Levinas does not address this issue directly in *Autrement qu'être*. One must look, perhaps, to other writings by Levinas, such as *Difficile liberté* or *Humanisme de l'autre homme* for a more extensive discussion of the proper response for the self in the face of persecution by the other. The point for Levinas, however, is that the relation of the self to the other is asymmetrical and that the self does experience suffering as part of its obligation to the other. Furthermore, this asymmetry does not invalidate what Ricoeur goes on to conclude in a rhetorical question – namely, “is it not necessary that a dialogue superpose a relation on the supposedly absolute distance between the separate I and the teaching Other?” (339) Asymmetry is essential for dialogue to occur.

The metaphor of the face, of my proximity to my neighbour, precedes any will-to-goodness, any decision to be good. It is non-deontological in that there is no primary duty or rational choice, and non-teleological in that there is no final reward. I am simply a hostage to the other, because the other exists before me and before I do. I can choose to reply to the other with silence, but because silence signifies, it is nonetheless a reply, and I can, therefore, not choose not to reply:

⁷⁴(...continued)

Autrement qu'être? Et que dire de l'Autre, quand il est le bourreau? Et qui donc distinguera le maître du bourreau? Le maître qui appelle un disciple, du maître qui requiert seulement un esclave? Quant au maître qui enseigne, ne demande-t-il pas à être reconnu, dans sa supériorité même?” (391). Ricoeur's charge against Levinas is similar to that made by Buell.

The approach to the face is the most basic mode of responsibility. As such, the face of the other is verticality and uprightness; it spells a relation of rectitude. The face is not in front of me (*en face de moi*) but above me; it is the other before death, looking through and exposing death. Secondly, the face is the other who asks me not to let him die alone, as if to do so were to become an accomplice.

Thus the face says to me: you shall not kill. In relation to the face I am exposed as a usurper of the place of the other. (*Face to Face* 23-24)⁷⁵

In the face of the other I see my own mortality, I realise my uniqueness, and I understand the infinite responsibility I bear the other. For Levinas, the work of the self, whether it is envisaging itself or effacing itself, is already done by language prior to any individual's volition, intention, or will. Yet, each individual bears a unique responsibility for the other that language embodies. Situating this responsibility before intentionality and outside the concomitant ethico-epistemological tradition of the West from Aristotle to Kant to Heidegger, Levinas proposes an ethics as first philosophy. The work of envisaging or effacing the self is carried out with every encounter, every instance of approaching the face of the other. But the relation of responsibility manifested by the face-to-face encounter exists already in language, in the structure of the response of the self to the call of the other. The self-envisaging self must choose with full consciousness and conscience a response in response to the other. The work of the self, therefore, would be the work of consciousness and choice. But what about the work of effacement? The self-effacing self

⁷⁵ "Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas" was conducted in French and translated into English by Richard Kearney. The original version in French has not been published.

can also choose not to respond, though not responding is a form of response.

Many of the attributes of the self-envisaging and self-effacing voice discussed in this study are borrowed from Levinas's concepts of self and other, and the relationship of responsibility that exists between them. What I wish to emphasise, however, is the ethical as well as the aesthetic significance of the act of envisaging and effacing the self. As I have already shown in Chapter 1, for example, to envisage (in French, *envisager*) is literally to see an object, to look it in the face or "to look straight at it;" at a metonymic remove, it is to imagine an object otherwise not present, to put a face on it. Tracing the etymology of the words *visage* and *face* to their Latin cognates, I established metonymic links to the Latin noun, *vir*. Other associated metonyms of how the self envisages and is envisaged might include signifiers of force, security, order and even violence. The effacing and effaced self, on the other hand, is susceptible to another genealogy of different meanings, a logic of negation that is in its own way a violence to pre-established forms. To efface is to erase, or destroy, an image, or form, that is already present. When we speak of effacement in the reflexive case, as in the French, *s'effacer*, we must do so in consideration of the specific attributes being referred to. As a simple transitive verb, *to efface* can possess both metonymic and metaphoric meanings. In specific usage, it could refer to the act of removing the facial features from a statue of a human, or from a coin, though the essential form of the head of the statue, or the metal shape of the coin remains. The act of effacing is homologous, therefore, with any act of erasing or rubbing out a representation of an image, be it sculpted, or painted, or described in language. In general

usage, effacing an object simply means to make it disappear from sight. In the case of the reflexive noun, however, *self-effacement* relies heavily on a metaphorical understanding of the self: *to efface oneself* is “to reduce oneself to insignificance; to abandon or forfeit one’s claim to consideration” (“Efface”). This definition raises the question, does a self that has forfeited any claim to significance or consideration remain a self? How can an effaced self be a self? Perhaps an effaced self can remain a self if this inability to signify is ascribed to it metaphorically, rather than as a metonym that refers exclusively to a partial or representative loss of self. To argue for an absolute negation of the self is self-contradictory, then, unless this absolute self-abnegation is seen as metaphorical. The self-effacing self can negate itself on a literal level, but only if it does so metonymically. Hence, the self-effacing self must be approached metaphorically, as the sign or trace of an absolutely abnegated self.

Levinas warns us against taking literally the approach to the other represented in the appearance of the face. For him, the face is a trace of itself, a metaphoric relation of an absent presence. In Chapter Three of *Autrement qu’être*, entitled “Sensibilité et Proximité,” Levinas sketches the relationship between spatio-temporal proximity and meaning. The thematization of the responsibility inherent in this relationship – in the approach of the neighbour, or in the face that is a trace of the infinite – is not to be rendered in onto-theological terms. Rather, as the self approaches the trace of infinity in the face of the other, the self exposes itself to an infinite obligation to the other:

The approach is a non-synchronizable diachrony, which representation and

thematization dissimulate by transforming the trace into a *sign* of a departure, and then reducing the ambiguity of the face either to a play of physiognomy or to the indicating of a signified [. . .].

A face is not an appearance or sign of some reality, which would be personal like it is, but dissimulated or expressed by the physiognomy, and which would present itself as an invisible theme. The essential of the thesis here expounded is that proximity is not any kind of conjunction of themes, is not a structure formed by their superposition. A face does not function in proximity as a sign of a hidden God who would impose the neighbour on me. It is a trace of itself, a trace in the trace of an abandon, where the equivocation is never dissipated. (*Otherwise* 93-94)⁷⁶

Thus, the approach of the face of the other is a metaphor, a substitution for the ethical relation between self and other in space and time, where the difference between self and other is maintained. This metaphor is itself a substitute for meaning, for what is the trace of the metonymic relation between signifier and signified. There should not be a

⁷⁶ “L’approche est dia-chronie non synchronisable, que la représentation et la thématisation dissimulent en transformant la trace en *signe* du départ et en réduisant dès lors l’ambiguïté du visage, soit à un jeu de physionomie, soit à l’indication d’un signifié [. . .].

Le visage n’est pas l’apparence ou le signe de quelque réalité – personnelle comme lui-même – mais dissimulée ou exprimée par la physionomie et qui s’offrirait comme un thème invisible. La proximité – c’est l’essentiel de la thèse ici exposée – n’est précisément pas une conjonction quelconque de thème, une structure que formerait leur superposition. Le visage n’y fonctionne pas comme signe d’un Dieu caché qui m’imposerait le prochain. Trace de lui-même, trace dans la trace d’un abandon, sans que jamais l’équivoque se lève.” (*Autrement* 119)

hermeneutics of facial expression. To literalize it casts it in the iron language of ontology. Instead, Levinas asserts that “mode in which a face indicates its own absence in my responsibility requires a description that can be formed only in ethical language” (94).⁷⁷ It is this ethical language that must form the basis for describing how the dialogue between self-envisaging and self-effacing discourse is written by Canetti and Beckett.

But what then is the nature of ethical language? It is important to keep in mind that the ethical situation expressed by the trope of the approach of the face of the other is contained in communication itself. The thematization of this ethical situation is what constitutes the Said. But from the Said we catch glimpses, or traces, of an ethical Saying that transcends the Said. The self can be said to consist of a voice that envisages itself. In thematizing itself, in seeing itself in language, the self is said. Yet within the structure of communication that this inner process presupposes, Levinas argues for another order of communication that both precedes and derives from the Said. In the infinite potentiality of language, which constitutes the Saying, there is always the trace of the responsibility to the other that the other demands during the act of communication. The immanent risk and exposure involved in responding to the other are based on the indeterminateness, uncertainty and ambiguity of language, what Levinas often refers to as “amphibology”

⁷⁷ Trans. of “Le mode selon lequel le visage indique sa propre absence sous ma responsabilité, exige une description ne se coulant que dans le langage éthique” (120). Levinas goes on to say that “The trace in which a face is ordered is not reducible to a sign” (121: “La trace où s’ordonne le visage ne se réduit pas au signe” 155). Elsewhere, Levinas specifically warns against reading a thematics of the face based on a “physiognomy” (93; “la physiognomie” 119).

(6).⁷⁸ In a stronger sense, Levinas asserts that the uncertainty expressed in language designates the complete “gratuity of sacrifice” (120),⁷⁹ which the self is subjected to in addressing itself to the other and in answering for the other. This sacrifice transcends, or is outside, the will-to-sacrifice. It is, rather, the result of the ultimate passivity of being born into language and of having to answer to the other with language.

In itself, ethical language does not “arise out of a special moral experience” (120),⁸⁰ and the “ethical situation of responsibility is not comprehensible on the basis of ethics” (120).⁸¹ Ethical language is an operation arising from “non-philosophical experiences, which are ethically independent.”⁸² Thematizing the experience of the face-to-face encounter, particularly in philosophical language, immediately exposes the self to the infinite and the uncertain, and forces the self out of the “absolute passivity of the self” (121).⁸³ Yet, despite his warning against literal interpretations of the face-to-face encounter, Levinas does allow for an ethical language conceivable in phenomenological terms:

⁷⁸ Trans. of “l’amphibologie” (7).

⁷⁹ Trans. of “gratuité du sacrifice” (154).

⁸⁰ Trans. of “Le langage éthique auquel nous avons eu recours, ne procède pas d’une expérience morale spéciale” (154).

⁸¹ Trans. of “La situation éthique de la responsabilité ne se comprend pas à partir de l’éthique” (154).

⁸² Trans. of “expériences non-philosophiques et qui sont éthiquement indépendantes” (154).

⁸³ Trans. of “la passivité absolue de soi” (155).

Phenomenology can follow out the reverting of thematization into anarchy *in the description of the approach*. Then ethical language succeeds in expressing the paradox in which phenomenology finds itself abruptly thrown. For ethics, beyond politics, is found at the level of this reverting. Starting with the approach, the description finds the neighbour bearing the trace of a withdrawal that orders it as a face. This trace is significant for behaviour, and one would be wrong to forget its anarchic insinuation by confusing it with an indication, with the monstration of the signified in the signifier (*Otherwise* 121; emphasis mine).⁸⁴

This phenomenology of the approach, albeit qualified, permits the use of an ethical language based on what I refer to as metaphor, to the signifiers of dissimilarity. In describing the approach, phenomenology must use language in such a way as to indicate its awareness of the paradox of not being able to describe the approach conclusively. Even as a descriptive language, phenomenology remains ensconced within the conditions and strictures of the Said. Phenomenological investigation must not be confused, therefore, with a propositional and prescriptive logic that is the basis of onto-theological ethics. Instead, the ethical language of phenomenology must listen for traces of the Saying that may arise in a face-to-face encounter.

⁸⁴ Trans. of “La phénoménologie peut suivre le retournement de la thématization en an-arche *dans la description de l’approche*: le langage éthique arrive à exprimer le paradoxe où se trouve brusquement jetée la phénoménologie, car l’éthique, par delà le politique, est au niveau de ce retournement. Partant de l’approche, la description trouve le prochain portant la trace d’un retrait qui l’ordonne visage. Signifiante de trace pour le comportement; signifiante dont on aurait tort d’oublier l’insinuation an-archique en la confondant avec une indication, avec la monstration du signifié dans le signifiant” (*Autrement* 155: emphasis mine).

This concept of ethical language has far-reaching implications for reading and writing philosophy. All Western philosophy – in fact, all descriptive discourse – is written as the Said insofar as the Said unconsciously attempts to suppress metaphor in the systematic pursuit of truth. Levinas's phenomenological method is to interrogate the interruptions of logic and meaning that occur in philosophical discourse. It listens for instances of ethical language that turns ethics into a first philosophy that is otherwise than Being. But what does Levinas's theory of ethical language imply for reading or writing literature? Robert Eaglestone's book, *Ethical Criticism: Reading after Levinas*, explores the ethics of reading literature in response to theories of literary ethics proposed by Martha Nussbaum, J. Hillis Miller and Levinas. Though Levinas is not interested in theorising specifically on the ethics of literature, Eaglestone argues that Levinas's concept of ethics goes farther toward achieving a useful method of reading literature than either Nussbaum's or Miller's. Eaglestone recognises that Levinas's lack of interest in theorising on literature is the result of Levinas's reluctance to impose ethical values on aesthetic objects. Eaglestone analyses the development of Levinas's ethical ideas on the face as they pertain to the aesthetics of reading literature; from Levinas's complete denial of the representational value of the face in *Totality and Infinity*, to Derrida's critique of this denial on the basis of the metaphorical essence of language in "Métaphysique et Violence;" to Levinas's revision of his ideas on the face as a metaphor in *Autrement qu'être*. Despite a shift in emphasis toward the significance of language for understanding the face, Levinas continues to hold that all art is representational, and therefore a product

of the Said. And, while criticism can describe representations of the Said, it cannot comprehend the Saying in them.

Eaglestone maintains that there are several contradictions in Levinas's position and that, in fact, literary art contains traces of the Saying no less than the "interruptions" (141) discerned in philosophy.⁸⁵ Despite Levinas's stated case against aesthetics in *Autrement qu'être*, the book's composition and the view of language it reflects signify a performative engagement with aesthetic meaning and value. For Eaglestone, literature, like all discourse, "must be comprised of the Saying and the Said" (157). Based on this conclusion, Eaglestone advances his argument to claim that literary criticism can provide readings that point toward ethics beyond Being. Where Levinas concentrates his criticism on tracing those interruptions of the Said that reveal the Saying in philosophical discourse, Eaglestone wishes to apply this approach to reading literature. At the same time, he claims that the "aim of understanding the ethics of criticism by the 'schema' (which is not a schema) of the saying and the said is not to offer a new system of ethical criticism" (168). Eaglestone himself offers no examples of how literature might be read as Saying and Said, but offers instead his argument as an opening onto the possibility of reading ethics in literature beyond a narrowly traditional didacticism.

This possibility must be able to allow for readings of narrative in which language is the hero whose voice is registered in metaphors of an absolute self-effacement. As the

⁸⁵ For Eaglestone's excellent analysis of the relationship between the Said and the Saying, see pp. 141-156, especially as it concerns the synchronic and diachronic nature of the Said.

self is approached by the neighbour who always bears a trace of the death of the self, the face-to-face encounter becomes a significant metonym in the series of metonyms that comprise the story of the life of a self-envisaging voice. Yet these encounters also figure as metaphors for one's being-toward-death, and for the infinite responsibility one has to the other who approaches and bears the trace of this death. As Levinas asserts, "A trace is sketched out and effaced in a face in the equivocation of a saying" (12).⁸⁶ In the writing of a life-story or a narrative of selfhood that a reader encounters as a face-to-face encounter with an other, it is in the manifestation of the self-effacing voice that the reader reads for signs of his or her own self-effacement. One way to interpret narratives of selfhood as ethical writing is to analyse the suppression of metaphor by the metonymic structures in the text against the ability of metaphor to free itself within that text. The reader responds to the text by hearing in the Said of self-envisaging discourse the trace of the Saying of self-effacement. If the reader engages in a virtual re-writing of his or her own narrative of selfhood, then the self-effacing voice of the literary text will have been heard, but the encounter remains purely subjective. Regardless of this subjectivity, perhaps even because of it, the effect may be that we are approaching the possibility of fulfilling Levinas's wish to move beyond humanist or anti-humanist ethics of selfhood to an other-centred ethics based in language.

⁸⁶ Trans. of "La trace se dessine et s'efface dans le visage comme l'équivoque d'un dire [. . .]" (15).

4. Conclusion: The Voice Effaced

That the self-effacing voice may appear to be posited by negative attributes in its aesthetic and ethical components is only half of the story. There is no question that the negation of the self can take place metonymically, in parts representing the whole, but in any absolute negation the self can only be effaced metaphorically, as the trace of some distant, absolute absence. Self-abnegation can only be written in the interstices of self-conceptualization. For Adorno, the formalism of avant-garde art, music, and literature heightens the ambiguity of its metonymic features, and diminishes the suppression of metaphor. The effect of this is to sacrifice the desire for absolute meaning that lies behind all conventional, metonymic discourse to the invisible, unpredictable, insecure unknown of futurity. For Levinas, the ethics of writing lies in exposing oneself to the otherness of this futurity, and responding responsibly to it. Language gives the self the capacity to analyse this otherness in terms of the full amphibology of having-been-for-the-future and being-for-the-future.

In the works of Canetti and Beckett, the envisaged self gives rise to a counter-discourse of the self-effacing voice. The selves they write about approach the unseeable future by writing themselves into it. At the same time, they write themselves away, conscious of how the future is capable of dispersing their identities beyond recognition. To understand this relationship between the self-envisaging and self-effacing voices written by Canetti and Beckett, it is first necessary to outline the terms of that

relationship. How and with what features of language do self-envisaging and self-effacing voices speak to one another? What are the necessary conditions for such conversations to occur? To obtain a literary understanding of how these voices can converse in a single utterance or in a series of utterances, I will turn in the next chapter to an analysis of Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas on the inner dialogic and its types of discourse as they relate to my ideas on self-envisaging and self-effacing voices.

III: CONDITIONS FOR A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE DIALOGIC ENCOUNTER BETWEEN SELF-ENVISAGING AND SELF-EFFACING VOICES

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith; That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again.

Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God. For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.

(Philippians 1:20-29)

1. Introduction: Self-Envisaging and Self-Effacing Voices in Literature

In order for the voices of selfhood and otherness to be able to speak to each other, it is first necessary to distinguish the features that separate them. There needs to be a mediating structure in language that allows one to delineate the identities of and differences between the speakers of words spoken in face-to-face encounters. Every

statement is in its own way a combination of vocal markers belonging to the identity of the self and to the differences posed by others. Because the face-to-face encounter takes place in language, as an event that occurs in the temporal rhythms of the monologue and the dialogue, it is important to recognize that these language encounters have their own aesthetic and ethical features that mark the identities and the differences of the encounter. In literary practice, writers like Canetti and Beckett create the conditions for such encounters. The words they use evoke the words, voices and works of others in face-to-face situations. To be able to read and understand the significance of these situations, we require a schema with which to organize the various kinds of encounter. Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogism will serve as a basic template for such a schema. His types of novelistic discourse will be shown to coincide with the aesthetic and ethical categories of self-envisaging and self-effacing narrative outlined in the previous chapters. The characteristics separating monologic and dialogic utterances are roughly analogous to those separating self-envisaging and self-effacing narrative, though certain qualifications will apply. The important point is that a literary work always maintains a dialogue between these opposing terms. The relative intensity of the dialogue is in itself meaningful. Hence, it is the nature of this meta-dialogue that is of interest here. Within the terms and conditions of this meta-dialogic approach, "the word with a loophole" (*Problems* 196) works to prevent any ultimate privileging of either self-envisaging or self-effacing words or voices.

2. Monologic and Dialogic Discourse Types

In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin sets out to analyze the innovations behind Dostoevsky's writing of psychological fiction, and to re-dress the neglect by traditional criticism of linguistic phenomena that influence Dostoevsky's narrative forms. In doing so, he proposes his own innovations to the practice of reading literature. He divides all utterances into two basic categories, monologic and dialogic. An utterance is any unit of signification. Just as a single word, a novel can be either monologic or dialogic. But even in contrasting the monologism of Tolstoy's novels to the dialogism of Dostoevsky's novels, Bakhtin does not preclude a monologic work from containing dialogic utterances (182). It is not my aim, however, to classify novels as either monologic or dialogic. It is more important to analyze the occurrences of and relationship between monologic and dialogic utterances in single works of literature, particularly as they reflect face-to-face encounters between self-envisaging and self-effacing voices. Listening for the nature of the dialogue between these types of utterance is what constitutes a meta-dialogic approach to reading novels.

Monologic and dialogic utterances are themselves subdivided into categories. In general, though, monologic utterances are primarily self-directed, in that they are oriented more toward the speaker of the utterance, whereas dialogic utterances are primarily self-directed through an other, oriented in part toward someone other than the speaker. These two groups of utterance correspond roughly to the difference between self-envisaging and

self-effacing narrative discourse. Self-envisaging discourse represents the self trying to secure its presence in the face of another. Self-effacing discourse is the self trying to abnegate itself in the face of an other. The categorization of the attributes defining Bakhtin's discourse types is of special interest in view of the distinctions made above. For him, monologic utterances are comprised of two basic types: "Direct, unmediated discourse" and "Objectified discourse" (199). Dialogic utterances, in contrast, are comprised of three basic types: "Unidirectional double-voiced discourse", "Vardirectional double-voiced discourse" and the "active type" of the reflected discourse of an other (199). In order to make these categories relevant to the distinction between self-envisaging and self-effacing voices, I will first outline their main components.

In the case of monologic types of discourse, the speaker or author forms utterances that are "referentially oriented" with the aim of establishing "ultimate semantic authority" (186-187) over the topic of discussion. Once established, that authority becomes a part of the identity of the speaker. In a monologic context, an utterance "recognizes only the direct, unmediated orientation of discourse toward its referential object, without taking into account anyone else's discourse or any second context" (186). Examples of such direct, unmediated, or "single-voiced," discourse would include "naming, informing, expressing, representing" a topic (186). Two main features of direct, unmediated discourse are summarized by Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson in their book, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*. First, the "speaker says what he wants to say as if there were no question that his way of saying it will accomplish his purpose, and

that there could be no other equally adequate way” (Morson and Emerson 148); and, secondly, “speakers of ‘direct, unmediated discourse’ also do not take into account the already-spoken-about quality of the object or, at least, not in a way that implicitly challenges the authority of their own speech” (Morson and Emerson 148). These two features are important in understanding self-envisaging discourse insofar as it is the securing of referential authority that is paramount. Another form of monologic speech occurs when an author chooses to present the unity of his or her voice through “the direct speech of characters,” in which case we would observe a “represented or objectified” discourse (Bakhtin, *Problems* 186-187). Here, the character’s voice is subordinated to the author’s voice, or style, whose object may be “cognitive, poetic” (Bakhtin, *Problems* 186-187), or otherwise, and whose task is to be “expressive, forceful, significant, elegant, etc.” (Bakhtin, *Problems* 186-187). The character’s voice, subordinated to the author’s, is then “incorporated into it as one of its components” (Bakhtin, *Problems* 187). The objectification of a character’s discourse may vary according to how directly it is able to refer on its own, but it can never fully achieve its own authority.⁸⁷

In the event that a character’s voice establishes authority of its own in relation to the author – when the author inserts an intention different from his or her own into the

⁸⁷ Morson and Emerson make the point that the “character’s speech is not shaped by his or her *awareness* of a second speech center. The hero is alive and speaking in his or her own world. ‘Discourse that has become an object is, as it were, itself unaware of the fact, like the person who goes about his business unaware that he is being watched; objectified discourse [consequently] sounds as if it were direct single-voiced’” (Morson and Emerson 149; Bakhtin, *Problems* 189). Such is the case in drama, for instance, where there may be no reference by the characters to the speech center of the author, even though his or her authority pervades all the characters’ utterances.

character's voice – the monologic context weakens and becomes double-voiced, or dialogic. There is a border area for Bakhtin, though, that is decidedly unstable. Morson and Emerson refer to this as the area of “passive double-voiced words” whose passivity resides in the “‘word of the other,’ which remains a passive tool in the author's (or speaker's) hands” (Morson and Emerson 149-150). A discourse can pass through, fall back from or cross over this border area. Whatever the case, the author remains in control of the character: “He uses the other's discourse for his own purposes, and if he allows it to be heard and sensed, that is because his purposes require it to be” (Morson and Emerson 150). Such a text teeters, therefore, between “unidirectional” and “vari-directional” double-voiced discourse, and objectified, single-voiced discourse. Bakhtin lists four kinds of unidirectional double-voiced utterances – “Stylization,” “Narrator's narration,” “Unobjectified discourse of a character who carries out (in part) the author's intention,” and “*Ich-erzählung*” – and five kinds of vari-directional – “Parody with all its nuances,” “Parodistic narration,” “Parodistic *Ich-erzählung*,” “Discourse of a character who is parodistically represented,” and “Any transmission of someone else's words with a shift in accent” (Bakhtin, *Problems* 199). With unidirectional double-voiced utterances the two voices are in accord with each other's style, whereas with vari-directional voices one is hostile toward or opposed to the other. Because of the relative control exerted by the author or speaker over words otherwise used by another, both single-voiced and passive double-voiced utterances are to be considered as characteristic of the self-envisaging voice, while actively double-voiced utterances are characteristic of the self-

effacing voice.

The difference between passive, vari-directional, double-voiced discourse and active, double-voiced discourse involves a difference in the way a speaker is oriented toward another's discourse. With vari-directional discourse, the speaker's hostility or opposition to someone else's speech can be expressed by citing and exaggerating its style. Using the idiosyncracies of another's speech against that other draws them into "an arena of battle between two voices" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 193) and two world-views, the author's and the other's, with the author's prevailing. With active double-voiced discourse, on the other hand, the other's discourse resists and competes against the author's: "In such discourse, the author's thought no longer oppressively dominates the other's thought, discourse loses its composure and confidence, becomes agitated, *internally undecided and two-faced*" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 198; emphasis mine). Bakhtin's list of five kinds of active, or "reflected discourse of another" includes "Hidden internal polemic," "Polemically colored autobiography and confession," "Any discourse with a sideward glance at someone else's word," "A rejoinder of a dialogue," and "Hidden dialogue" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 199). In each case, the reader detects in the speech of the author quotation marks around certain words or phrases that signify the presence of another's voice, quotation marks whose inflection questions the authority of the author's speech. These instances of internally dialogized words operate in a single speech, but they have a double orientation. In the case of "hidden polemic," for instance, the speaker speaks with an expectation of being challenged, and the speaker's words "take a sideward" glance at

an opposing discourse, sometimes striking “a polemical blow” (Bakhtin, *Problems* 195) against it, other times cringing in response. The reader *hears* in the “style, intonation and syntax” (Morson and Emerson 155) of a speech those particular utterances that are in virtual quotation marks. It becomes especially noticeable when a speaker is using “barbed” words that “make digs at others,” or “*self-deprecating* overblown speech that repudiates itself in advance, speech with a thousand reservations, concessions, loopholes, and the like” (Bakhtin, *Problems* 196; emphasis mine). It is this actively dialogic, self-repudiating speech and its reservations, concessions and most importantly its loopholes that are most in line with self-effacing discourse. The “word with a loophole” (*slovo s lazeikoi*; 196) is the most important device used in the various active, double-voiced discourse types. A loophole in the law of a discourse is a sign in an utterance that the voice is anticipating a response by the other, and then its own response to that response, ad infinitum. Morson and Emerson trace the origins of the concept to Bakhtin’s earlier writings on selfhood and action: “I always have an exit along the line of my inner experience of myself in the act. There is, as it were, a loophole through which I can save myself from nature’s utter givenness” (Bakhtin, *Art* 38; Morson and Emerson 160). Morson and Emerson see the word with a loophole as representative of a view of the world and an ideology. Bakhtin analyzes it in terms of its most extreme personification in the speech of the narrator of Dostoevsky’s *Notes from the Underground*. Referring to the narrator’s constant retractions, and retractions of retractions, Bakhtin writes that

a loophole is the retention for oneself of the possibility of altering the ultimate,

final meaning of one's words. If a word retains such a loophole, this must inevitably be reflected in its structure. This potential other meaning, that is, the loophole left open, accompanies the word like a shadow. *Judged by its meaning alone, the word with a loophole should be an ultimate word and does present itself as such, but in fact it is only the penultimate word and places after itself only a conditional, not a final period.* (Bakhtin, *Problems* 233; emphasis mine)⁸⁸

The underground man, for example, often speaks in tones that reveal an "exaggerated as well as an authentic self-mockery" (Morson and Emerson 161). In speeches riddled with loopholes, it becomes difficult to ascertain which tones carry more authority, so that in the end all authority is put into question. Could it not also be the case, however, that loopholes in the loopholes restore authority to meaning? This is the fundamental question in relation to self-envisaging discourse. In regards to both self-envisaging discourse that is monologic or passively dialogic and self-effacing discourse that is actively dialogic, it remains to be seen how the different types of discourse function within aesthetic and ethical categories.

3. An Aesthetics of Self-Envisaging and Self-Effacing Voices from a Dialogical Perspective

In line with the arguments proposed above, I would claim that a self-envisaging

⁸⁸ This is also quoted in Morson and Emerson 161.

aesthetics corresponds to monologic and passively dialogic discourse, while self-effacing aesthetics corresponds to actively dialogic discourse. With the former, discursive expression tends toward metonymic and synechdic language structures, as opposed to the metaphorical structures of the latter. By contrasting, briefly, Ricoeur's approach to a formal aesthetics of language use with Adorno's concept of negative aesthetics, we can see how various aspects of metonymic utterances can be classified as monologic or passively dialogic, and therefore self-envisaging, while metaphorical utterances can be classified as actively dialogic and reflective of a poetics of self-effacement. Certain ideas taken from David Lodge's interpretation of Bakhtin will help mediate between the two main vocal registers of metonymic and metaphoric discourse, and show how they converse with one another.

As we recall from Ricoeur's proposal for a hermeneutics of metaphor, the sentence, or phrase, must be regarded as a unit of metaphorical signification on an equal footing with the individual word. It is in their syntactical, predicative context that metaphors can be studied semiotically rather than semantically. To this extent, Bakhtin's notion of utterance complies with Ricoeur's, though it goes slightly further by including entire texts as utterances.⁸⁹ Furthermore, we can see in scientific writing a model for what appears as the ground of language use; namely, a monologic referentiality based on both a semantic level, where the polyvalency of words is minimized, and on a syntactic level,

⁸⁹ It should also be pointed out that metonymic and metaphorical relationships can also exist between parts of a text. This is how a meta-dialogic approach can be taken. The parts of a text can be read in relation to one another as a dialogue between monologic and dialogic passages.

where the logical relationship between subject and predicate is metonymic, and the logical relationship between sentences is also metonymic insofar as the sentences are combined to form varieties of propositional or syllogistic reasoning. In fiction, however, there can be additional levels of meaning established in the relationship between an entire text, which can consist of the most scientifically referential description possible, and a potential significance the reader attributes to the writing of that text, either in its parts or as a whole. When the metaphoricity of this relationship is suppressed, a metonymic reading takes place. This kind of reading and writing can fall into either of the three categories of self-envisaging narratives: monologic discourse, passively unidirectional discourse and passively, vari-directional discourse. In each case, the primary voices in the text – the author's, the narrator's, the protagonist's – envisage themselves in and as relatively stable, linguistic entities in the face of otherness. When the metaphoricity of the relationship between text and meaning is unsuppressed, however, the discourse enters an actively dialogic field, where the voices of the text efface their identities, and thereby their authority.

To the extent that Ricoeur's hermeneutics of metaphor views suppressed metaphor as the ground of language use, and unsuppressed metaphor as mere poetic expression, his theory supports a self-envisaging theory of literary meaning. In contrast, Adorno's negative aesthetics are closer to a self-effacing aesthetic insofar as the value of unsuppressed metaphor rests in its potential to signify both the valuable and the invaluable in the same utterance. It would be too simplistic, though, to draw a parallel

between Adorno's concept of avant-garde art and an understanding of unsuppressed metaphor restricted to a single genre such as lyric poetry. In materialist terms, the self-deprecating or self-sacrificing voice reduces a part of itself in order to reduce its value, which may or may not signify some new value. Unlike the self-envisaging voice that establishes its security zone metonymically, by appropriating predicative attributes to itself, and by relying on metonymic structures for it to envisage itself, the self-effacing self gives parts of itself away, it diminishes its partitive presence, abandoning or losing attributes and predicates of itself, and in its encounters with others acknowledges differences it cannot subsume to its identity, thus seeing itself differently; all of which are attributes unassimilable to the self, and, therefore, present in only a metaphorical sense. In the first instance, monologic and passively dialogic discourse give a formal structure to self-envisaging narrative. A self-envisaging narrative contains voices who dominate other voices by metonymically appropriating the other voices' styles or by parodying them. Either way, they lead to a sense of self-security that is expressed in how they see themselves. In the case of self-effacing narrative voices, the other is dominant by virtue of predicative differences that the self can neither appropriate nor deny. In recognizing differences it cannot assimilate – *dissimilarities in similarities* – the self subjects itself to the other. It sacrifices its meaning, significance, value and security. Textually, this occurs when a voice's discourse becomes internally dialogized by its having to respond to another voice's having assumed positions contradictory to its own. All the varieties of actively dialogic discourse come into play here. The word with a loophole, however, has a

double function. It can act as a quisling in either self-envisaging or self-effacing narrative to undermine the authority of either discourse. In this regard, the meta-dialogue between monologic and dialogic discourse replicates and goes slightly beyond the negative dialectic of Adorno's aesthetics.

David Lodge, a key practitioner of reading the relationship between poetry and prose in modern fiction, is one of the first in Anglo-American literary criticism to combine Jakobson's theory of metonymy and metaphor with Bakhtin's theory of dialogism to provide a poetics of prose fiction. Following Tzvetan Todorov's early attempts in *Poétique de la prose* to draw on, among others, Jakobson's linguistic theory and Bakhtin's theory of the novel for a conceptual framework suited to literary aesthetics, Lodge delves deeper into Jakobson's definitions of the difference between metonymy and metaphor.⁹⁰ He applies these categories to determine historical genres of literary writing in "The Language of Modernist Fiction: Metaphor and Metonymy," as well as in *The Modes of Modern Writing*.⁹¹ Lodge sees in Jakobson's opposite poles of metonymy and metaphor a poetic structure that will explain the high degree of difficulty for readers of modernist prose. Essentially, ultra-modernists like James Joyce, Gertrude Stein and Virginia Woolf write prose with an emphasis on lyrical, metaphorical signification; anti-

⁹⁰ Lodge insists, for example, on a definition of metaphor that stresses the dissimilarities that *signify* among the similarities: "Note, however, that the awareness of *difference* between ships and ploughs is not suppressed: it is indeed essential to the metaphor" (Lodge, *Modes* 75).

⁹¹ See especially "La grammaire du récit," in Todorov's *Poétique de la prose*, which has interesting implications for reading self-envisaging and self-effacing narrative as effects of grammatical structures.

modernists like George Orwell, Graham Greene and Evelyn Waugh minimize metaphor in favor of metonymic, prosaic language; and post-modernists like Samuel Beckett, Richard Brautigan and John Barth are critical of both modernist and anti-modernists, but utilize their techniques to show how each undermines the other (Lodge, *Modes* 126 - 245). For Lodge, postmodernism is a return to modernist initiatives, and demonstrates how literary history can be seen as a cyclical pattern based on a prevalence of either metaphoric or metonymic writing practices. Lodge's observations do not extend, however, to the possibility that a single utterance can be metonymic on one level and metaphoric on another.

A subsequent book by Lodge on Bakhtin's contribution to the field of prose poetics attempts to meld Lodge's insights into Jakobson's linguistic poetics with Bakhtin's poetics of ideology. In *After Bakhtin*, Lodge wishes to show how Bakhtin's ideas on the function of the novel as a form of social discourse demonstrate an ideological purpose for certain literary types. This function of the novel would seem to run counter to Adorno's idea of the negative purpose of ideological discourse. Here Bakhtin and Adorno would part ways. It is my contention, though, that a metaphor in a metonymic narrative is a word with a loophole. The dissimilar attributes a metaphor draws attention to unleashes the chain of infinite signification that radically de-stabilizes the self-certainty of a metonymic, prose narrative. No matter how Adorno may have characterized its specific manifestations at the time, avant-garde art acts to unsuppress metaphor, and to enter into a dialogue with all art, a dialogue in which it may even question its own ability to

question the other. Going beyond Lodge's use of Jakobson's theory of metaphor and metonymy to describe historical genres, and his use of Bakhtin's theory of dialogism to explain socio-political values in literary narrative, I would argue that metonymic, prosaic structures operate in monologic and passively dialogic narrative discourse, while metaphorical, poetic structures function as actively dialogical discourse. Metaphoricity in narrative prose is avant-garde when it converses dialogically with its prosaic other, when the metaphors contain loopholes that signify their own insecurity and instability in relation to the other. In effect, metaphors efface themselves in the process of destabilizing the potential for language to signify. The only value of this type of self-deprecating discourse is in its attempt to achieve valuelessness.

4. An Ethics of Self-Envisaging and Self-Effacing Voices from a Dialogical Perspective

The ethics of dialogical reading seem at first to be slightly removed from Bakhtin's attempt to solve the problems of Dostoevsky's poetics. There are ethical implications to Bakhtin's aesthetics, however, that raise interest in the current context. Dialogism provides us with a way of reading narrative fiction not only as an aesthetic structure, but as an ethical one, too. Morson and Emerson allude to these implications in their study of Bakhtin, but they do not explore them in depth, choosing instead to explicate dialogism in light of Bakhtin's earlier writings on ethics and the responsibility

of the writer (Morosn and Emerson 171). Bakhtin's concept of dialogism does have ethical implications, though, for my reading of the encounter between self-envisaging and self-effacing voices. Dialogism is ethical insofar as it replicates the exchange between self and other that can form the narrative of a self-envisaging voice – where in Nussbaum's case, for instance, the “judicious spectator” must create him or herself in the image of a fair-minded individual – and a self-effacing voice – where in Levinas's argument, the self is effaced by its encounter with the other. The former entails a subject's response to an other's discourse. The response would either be monologic (seen by Nussbaum as negative examples of objectifying an other's discourse) or passively dialogic (seen by Nussbaum as positive examples of how the self engages the other's discourse, but retaining a central image from which to judge it). The latter entails a subject's response to an other's discourse, but a response in which the self is subordinate to the other. In each case, the structure of the dialogue that takes place is marked by an ethical loophole, whereby monologic discourse can become passively or actively dialogic and vice versa.

The correspondence between Nussbaum's ethics and Bakhtin's dialogism becomes operable if we identify Nussbaum's ideas on the relationship between the reader and the text with Bakhtin's ideas on the structure of monologic and passively dialogic exchanges between self and other. In other words, if a reader over-determines a narrative with a reading that responds to that narrative by objectifying it, by making it say what the reader wants it to say, then that is a monologic reading that even Nussbaum would find

didactic and unethical, or at least, of questionable ethics. In her example of Gradgrind's recalcitrant, utilitarian response to literature in Dicken's *Hard Times*, Gradgrind's response would qualify as a monologic one insofar as it presents the literary other as useless, and is itself an authoritative pronouncement that stands for an absolute truth applicable to all similar cases. Nussbaum disputes Gradgrind's ideas and contrasts them with what Sissy Jupe or Louisa Gradgrind stand for; namely, an emotive, qualitative response to otherness, which is, Nussbaum argues, a positive model (*Knowledge* 22- 27). With each of these examples, Nussbaum's assessment underscores an open polemic with various epistemological and ethical positions that the characters stand for. In the first case, she disagrees with the position, in the second she agrees with it. As such, Nussbaum's own interpretation of Dicken's characters is passively dialogic – she allows Gradgrind to speak in order for her to refute what he stands for, while Sissy or Louisa speak in order for her to affirm what she stands for. All Nussbaum's readings fall into either of these categories. If she responds to her own readings with new ones, as with the two chapters on Proust, it is to bolster her previous argument with stronger theoretical reasons for continuing to read in the same way. For Nussbaum, then, reading ethically is first to envisage the self so that it can respond to others by refuting or affirming their discourse.

For Levinas, on the other hand, ethics as a first philosophy is structured in the face-to-face encounter between self and other, in which the self has to respond to the call of the other's discourse. Can an encounter with a text be equated to a face-to-face

encounter between human beings? It can, if we keep in mind that language is the mediating structure between self and other. In dialogical terms, self-effacement entails responding to self-envisaging discourse in such a way that the certainty of that discourse is called to answer for itself. The discursive subject effaces itself when, in encountering the face of the other, it questions the stability of meaning it has already produced in attributing meaning to itself, in envisaging itself as an other of the other. Words in a narrative that we might read as words containing a “hidden, internal polemic,” “polemically colored confessional or autobiographical words,” “rejoinders,” “words with a side-ward glance” or “loophole words” (Bakhtin, *Problems* 199) are types of a metaphorical relationship between the discourse of self and other whereby dissimilar attributes become more significant than similar ones. These are the strategies taken by self-effacing discourse to render itself in metaphor as “ethical language” (Levinas, *Otherwise* 94). They are instances where the Said gives a contour to the Saying. In effacing itself, the self sacrifices attributes of the identity it has established for itself to the other who approaches it. Rather than having to assert its identity in response to the other’s approach, the self responds by narrating itself to the other in such a way that it negates itself metaphorically, by unsuppressing the metaphors behind its metonymic, narrative identity. In doing so, it renders itself vulnerable to the other. It also acknowledges its responsibility to and for the other, a responsibility which can never be fully satisfied. When I doubt myself I am responding responsibly to the call of the other. This always unfulfilled responsibility to the other is expressed in actively dialogic discourse, which

itself replicates the relationship between the Said and the Saying, between the monologic and the dialogic, where the dialogue between self and other is asymmetrical, as it is with the face-to-face encounter between writer and text, as well as between reader and text.

Adam Zachary Newton is one critic to “braid together” (*Narrative* 12) the ethical theories of Levinas, Bakhtin and Stanley Cavell to develop a method of thematic readings that together constitute a narrative ethics.⁹² He sees their philosophical endeavors as useful in relation to opposing deconstructive ethical readings provided by J. Hillis Miller and Paul deMan, on the one hand, and the character-based ethical readings of Martha Nussbaum (“moral perfectionism” 15) and Wayne Booth on the other hand. Newton probes the relationship between how formal narrative structures signify ethically and how narrative discourse works as moral inquiry. He divides his approach into three types of narrative investigation:

- (1) a narrational ethics (in this case, signifying the exigent conditions and consequences of the narrative act itself); (2) a representational ethics (the costs incurred in fictionalizing oneself or others by exchanging ‘persons’ for ‘characters’); and (3) a hermeneutic ethics (the ethico-critical accountability

⁹² The braiding together of Levinas and Bakhtin is, to the best of my knowledge, first suggested by Todorov in a footnote in *Mikhail Bakhtine* (50), though Todorov examines the possibility nowhere else. The most thorough comparison of Bakhtin’s and Levinas’s ideas comes from Augusto Ponzio, in such works as *Signs, Dialogue and Ideology*. Of those works by Ponzio translated into French or English, however, it should be noted that Ponzio’s analyses are restricted to the epistemological and socio-political implications of Bakhtin’s and Levinas’s theories rather than the specifically novelistic ones. Caryl Emerson (138) also mentions some recent work comparing dialogism to the face-to-face encounter; see Johnson 867-78.

which acts of reading hold their readers to). (18)

The first type corresponds to Levinas's description of the Saying and the Said; the second to Bakhtin's concept of dialogism and author-character relations, and the third to Stanley Cavell's ideas on the inter-subjective claim of the other (manifested in the text) and one's duty to acknowledge it.⁹³ Unfortunately, Newton fails to elucidate patterns of formal or stylistic signification in line with the ethical content he reads in metonymic works of prose fiction from writers like Sherwood Anderson, Richard Wright, Kazuo Ishiguro, as well as Conrad, Dickens and James. Newton proposes rather weak connections between the ethics of the Saying and the Said, and the aesthetics of dialogism, primarily because he understands dialogism in the broader sense of polyphony, which is closer to the ideological attributes attached to certain genres such as the carnivalesque, rather than in the narrower aesthetic varieties of monologism and dialogism offered in Bakhtin's book on Dostoevsky.⁹⁴ It is important to emphasize intra-textual dialogism and its various discourse types, because it provides the middle ground between a text's aesthetic

⁹³ Newton's references to Cavell are mostly to Cavell's *Must We Mean What We Say?* and *The Claim to Reason*.

⁹⁴ For his definition of dialogism, Newton relies almost exclusively on the essays by Bakhtin published in English as *The Dialogic Imagination*. Todorov's *Mikhail Bakhtine*, while making ample use of Bakhtin's book on Dostoevsky, also describes dialogism in its broader social context. Holquist's *Dialogism* re-inforces this understanding of dialogism as an epistemological theory of speech genres, and the interaction between them. However, Morson and Emerson are quite specific in distinguishing between dialogism as inter-textuality, which is what Kristeva and Todorov see it as, and as intra-textuality, or the inter-play of discourse types in a novel (123-149). Emerson re-iterates the distinction in Chapter 4 of *Bakhtin* in light of recent analyses.

structures and its ethical language.

Julia Kristeva was the first to recognize the importance of the ethical content in Bakhtin's formal categories of dialogism. In the essays comprising *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, Kristeva, like Todorov, weaves together Jakobson's linguistics and Bakhtin's aesthetics, but she adds an ethical dimension to them. Primarily in "The Ethics of Linguistics," and "Word, Dialogue and Novel," she posits an ethical program for metaphorical language, whereby the poetry of dialogism, found specifically in the avant-garde novel, liberates the self from the hegemonic social structures most often expressed by monologic discourse. Kristeva thinks of dialogism in its broader inter-textual significance, though she delineates the discourse types Bakhtin proposed in his book on Dostoevsky (*Desire* 72-77).⁹⁵ She proposes a radical poetics of unsuppressed metaphor that leads to an understanding of "literary history as a principle of all upheavals and defiant productivity" (71).⁹⁶ In terms of the self, dialogism is capable of

⁹⁵ Kristeva re-states, for instance, one of the key aesthetic evaluations of the broader dialogism which metonymically characterizes Tolstoy's work as monologic and all Dostoevsky's work as dialogic. See *Desire* 70, 87.

⁹⁶ Following Jakobson, Kristeva believes that "the units of the sign's semiotic practice are articulated as a *metonymical concatenation of deviations from the norm signifying a progressive creation of metaphors*" (*Desire* 40). This accords with my own view, though Kristeva does not go so far as to attribute significance to either the conscious or the unconscious will, or desire to write and speak in a particular mode. As with Lodge, Kristeva uses these categories to analyse historical genres. She also comes close to suggesting the distinction as a possible means of reading individual texts: "'this double character of language' has even been demonstrated as syntagmatic (made manifest through extension, presence and metonymy) and systematic (manifested through association, absence and metaphor). It would be important to analyze linguistically the
(continued...)"

freeing it not only from linguistic restraints, but from sexual, political, social and moral ones, as well. Seen as a consequence of dialogism, the self becomes a “carnival participant”:

Within the carnival, the subject is reduced to nothingness, while the structure of *the author* emerges as anonymity that creates and sees itself created as self and other, as man and mask. The cynicism of this carnivalesque scene, which destroys a god in order to impose its own dialogical laws, calls to mind Nietzsche’s Dionysianism. The carnival first exteriorizes the structure of reflective literary productivity, then inevitably brings to light this structure’s underlying unconscious: sexuality and death. (78)

But the self-abnegation that Kristeva describes here can always only be partial if there is still to be a phenomenological self, capable of knowing its loss of self. Here is where closer analysis of Kristeva’s dialogical ethics shows itself to be over-zealous in the kinds of revolutionary objectives she attributes to it. There is ethical significance to be attributed to dialogism, but it must come from seeing how the face-to-face encounter between monological and dialogical discourse is written.

The various types of discourse correlate with the various types of face-to-face, narrative encounter between self and other, and between self-envisaging and self-effacing utterances. Monologic and passively dialogic types of discourse are comprised of

⁹⁶(...continued)

dialogical exchanges between these two axes of language as a basis of the novel’s ambivalence” (68).

signifying structures that inform an aesthetics of self-envisaging utterances, whereby the self sees itself metonymically – as a formal configuration – in the face of the other, and an ethics of self-envisaging discourse, whereby the self responds to the other with a will-to-self-unity over and against the uncertainty posed by that other. In this case, the other is subjected to the will of the self to envisage itself, even at the expense of the other, for it is the parts of the other that are different that must be effaced for the self to see itself as a whole. In contrast, actively dialogic types of discourse are comprised of signifying structures that inform an aesthetics of self-effacing utterances, whereby the self sees itself metaphorically in the face of the other – as a set of formal features it identifies with, only to see those identifications abnegated in favor of differences, – and that inform an ethics of self-effacing utterances, whereby the self responds to the other with a will-to-self-subjection that recognizes and submits to the other's differences. In this case, the self is subjected to the other. Ultimately, there is a meta-dialogic encounter that exists between self-envisaging and self-effacing utterances made by narrative voices that we are to listen for in any text comprised of such voices.

5. Conclusion: Dialogic Analysis as a Basis for Comparison

When we compare narratives in which the self writes about the self, it becomes all the more important to be aware of the categorization of its various voices. In Canetti's narrative about his evolution as a writerly self, the authority of the narrative voice whose

utterances are monologic and passively dialogic in speaking for that evolution is called to account for itself by those utterances that are actively dialogic. In Beckett's mimetic narrative on the purported devolution of the writerly self, the authority of the narrative voice whose utterances are monologic and passively dialogic in speaking for that devolution is also called to account for itself by those utterances that are actively dialogic. In the following two chapters, I will undertake to read how Canetti and Beckett interweave monologic or passively dialogic and self-envisaging voices with actively dialogic and self-effacing voices.

IV: ELIAS CANETTI AND *DIE AUTOBIOGRAPHISCHEN*

SCHRIFTEN

Nous tenterons plus loin de déterminer ce que peut être le but de la littérature. Mais dès à présent nous pouvons conclure que l'écrivain a choisi de dévoiler le monde et singulièrement l'homme aux autres hommes pour que ceux-ci prennent en face de l'objet ainsi mis à nu leur entière responsabilité. Nul n'est censé ignorer la loi parce qu'il y a un code et que la loi est chose écrite: après cela, libre à vous de l'enfreindre, mais vous savez les risques que vous courez. Pareillement la fonction de l'écrivain est de faire en sorte que nul ne puisse ignorer le monde et que nul ne s'en puisse dire innocent. Et comme il s'est une fois engagé dans l'univers du langage, il ne peut plus jamais feindre qu'il ne sache pas parler: si vous entrez dans l'univers des significations, il n'y a plus rien à faire pour en sortir; qu'on laisse les mots s'organiser en liberté, ils feront des phrases et chaque phrase contient le langage tout entier et renvoie à tout l'univers.

(Jean-Paul Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*)

1. Introduction: Writing for One's Others

As we have seen in the preceding chapters, the relationship between self-envisaging and self-effacing narrative voices becomes dialogical, at least in theory, depending on the relationship between the aesthetic and ethical context of the discourse. Canetti and Beckett are two writers whose works strive to achieve this dialogic in

practice. Their late-life writing combines elements of their prior writing, and enacts a series of dialogic face-to-face encounters between self and other. With Canetti, the memoir self-consciously incorporates his previous work in an effort to sustain the most intense degree of dialogue possible between the self-envisaging and self-effacing voices of the narrator and its others. The memoirs come closer than any of Canetti's previous texts to expressing a self-consciousness of the writer's responsibility to language, which must always be the language of the other. Not only do the memoirs incorporate the body of his earlier work, they supplement that body with anecdotes from Canetti's encounters with other voices, both personal and literary. On one level, Canetti gives his name to a first-person narrative voice furnishing the reader with interesting autobiographical facts, but which the reader is also entitled to suspect of being less than entirely truthful about the presentation or interpretation of those facts. On another level, Canetti sees himself as an ethical writer whose encounters in his moral development are told by a voice that claims to belong to Canetti's life, and, thus speak with authority for the authenticity, integrity, or truthfulness of that life. As we read Canetti's autobiography, we see that these self-envisaging and self-effacing voices are sometimes at variance, sometimes in concert with one another, but in the process of speaking to one another these voices form the basis of Canetti's attempt to respond to the call of the other in his writing.

2. Review of the Principal Critical Literature on Canetti's *Die autobiographischen Schriften*

As with Beckett's œuvre, I divide Canetti's body of life-work into three phases for the purpose of reviewing the critical literature on that work. The early novel, *Die Blendung*, and two early plays, *Hochzeit* and *Die Augenzeuge*, were written before World War II, but did not receive much public or critical attention at the time.⁹⁷ Canetti's mid-career works, written while in exile in England, include the anthropological treatise, *Masse und Macht*, a play entitled, *Die Befristeten*, several collections of aphoristic essays, collected as *Das Gewissen der Worte*, and a few longer essays, including an important travel-piece, *Die Stimmen von Marrakesch: Ein Reisebericht*. The late period of Canetti's productivity comes in the mid-seventies and eighties with the publication of more aphoristic essays, *Notizen aus Hampstead*, and the first, second and third volumes of the memoirs; *Die Gerettete Zunge: Geschichte einer Jugend*, *Die Fackel im Ohr: Lebensgeschichte 1921-1931*, and *Das Augenspiel: Lebensgeschichte 1931-1937*.⁹⁸ A review of the main critical literature pertaining to the memoirs will show how critics tend to view the memoirs as having value for being able to illuminate the genesis of the

⁹⁷ For a summary on the reception, or relative lack of reception of Canetti's early works in Germany, England and elsewhere, see Falk 147-159. In contrast, there were more than two hundred newspaper reviews of the three volumes of the memoirs, most of which were positive, according to Schaufler.

⁹⁸ For another instance, where at least one critic places Canetti's aphoristic essays at the center of his œuvre, see Kaszynski 205-216. This approach reads Canetti's ideas, as expressed in the series of publications of his aphorisms, dialogically. While I agree that the aphorism are of great importance for understanding Canetti's ideas, the narrative structure of the memoirs personalizes his ideas in a way that the aphorisms alone cannot.

literary genius displayed in the earlier works.⁹⁹ As a study of the literary self, however, the memoirs are valuable for how they show the stages in a literary career that have increasingly led the self to be able to write about its self-effacement in the face of the other.

The earliest book-length study of Canetti's memoirs is Friedericke Eigler's *Das autobiographische Werk von Elias Canetti: Verwandlung, Identität, Machtausübung*. Following a general examination of the role of Canetti's memoirs within the genre of autobiography, whose central organizing feature is the "Identitätsproblematik" (11), Eigler charts her own methodological position between hermeneutic and deconstructive readings. This allows her to see the identity problem in the memoirs "simultaneously as a process of displacement/destruction of the subject and its reconstruction."¹⁰⁰ In the second chapter, Eigler undertakes a structural analysis of the symbolic organization of the narrative for whatever claim the memoirs make to represent Canetti's life authentically. In particular, she is interested in testing such claims against Canetti's argument for an alternative to psychoanalytic ideas on the self, which he articulates in *Masse und Macht*. Following this negative approach, Eigler plots a course through chapters three, four and five with a "positive" hermeneutic approach to the memoirs' thematic concerns. In

⁹⁹ For an analysis of at least one critic who goes so far to claim that there is a teleological structure to the memoirs, and that that structure must be read as an "Archäologie der *Blendung*," see Scheichl 76. Though at the time only the first two volumes of the memoirs were available, Scheichl's claim is over-stated.

¹⁰⁰ My Trans. of "simultan als einen Prozeß der Deplazierung/Zerstörung des Subjekts und der Neukonstruktion" (29).

chapter three, she argues that the theme of “Verwandlung” (78), or transformation, is central to Canetti’s anthropological and poetic concept of the identity of the self.

“Verwandlung” is counter-posed to “Todes-Feindschaft” (86), which Eigler interprets literally as one’s hostility toward death. It is the duty of the poet, therefore, to resist death by becoming a guard, or protector of the transformative (“Hüter der Verwandlung” 97).

After tracing the importance of this relationship through Canetti’s prior works, Eigler concentrates in chapter four on its significance for the aesthetic representation of Canetti’s formation and transformation of his self in the memoirs. The way the theme of transformation is reflected in the aesthetic structure of the memoirs leads Eigler to formulate in chapter five the importance of analyzing how various claims-to-power come to bear on the relationship between Canetti and his others: between certain individuals and types, between Canetti and his male counter-parts, and between Canetti and his female counter-parts. Eigler concludes that Canetti’s concept of the self changes from *Die Blendung*, where Peter Kien represents the disintegration of an impossibly unified self, to the memoirs, where the narrator recognizes that the unified self is a necessary illusion. Although Eigler’s analysis is a primary source for understanding certain structural aspects of Canetti’s memoirs, it remains to be seen how a dialogic reading will question the foundation on which Canetti’s idea of the necessary illusion of the self rests.

In Youseff Ishaghpour’s *Elias Canetti: métamorphose et identité*, there is no mention of Eigler’s work, but, like Eigler, he sees a common theme in Canetti’s ideas on metamorphosis as a solution to the problem of death. Ishaghpour argues that throughout

Canetti's work, he strives to assert the poet's responsibility for language and that, "for Canetti, the primary duty of the poet is to be in opposition to power."¹⁰¹ For Ishaghpour, the clearest expression of this duty comes in Canetti's essays and aphorisms, which Ishaghpour analyses in the final chapter. For Ishaghpour, because the essays and aphorisms are commentaries on the work of others, they are of greater importance than the memoirs, which comprise a commentary on Canetti's own work. Concentrating on the work of others allows Canetti to think through his ideas about the self. According to Ishaghpour, the influence of existentialist ideas on Canetti results in him seeing in "subjectivism" comprised of "the arbitrary, the dispersion into an enclosed totality, the systematic articulation that deduces the particular from certain fundamental ideas. Subjectivity becomes knowing and breathing, not an operation of domination that destroys its substance by deducing certain relationships and functions of discursive judgment."¹⁰² With this view of subjectivity in mind, Ishaghpour traces the development of Canetti's thoughts on identity, power and metamorphosis from the early works to the later ones.

The memoirs make up one link in the chain of thoughts on the self. In explaining

¹⁰¹ My translation of "s'opposer au pouvoir [. . .] est, pour Canetti, le premier devoir du poète" (169).

¹⁰² My translation of "subjectivisme: l'arbitraire, la dispersion ou la totalité close, l'articulation systématique qui déduirait le particulier à partir de quelques idées fondamentales. La subjectivité devient connaissance et respiration, non pas l'opération dominatrice qui détruit les substances en les déduisant des relations et des fonctions du jugement discursif" (50).

Canetti's motivation for writing the memoirs, Ishaghpour maintains that the "penchant for speaking about himself is augmented with age in Canetti's work, as is his interest in the lives of others."¹⁰³ Ishaghpour shows how Canetti traces his intellectual and aesthetic growth in terms of learning to take increasing steps toward the other. He places too much emphasis, however, on how Canetti's life encounters contribute to the representation of self-dissolution in *Die Blendung* and *Masse und Macht*. Furthermore, by making the episodes with Dr. Sonne, in which Canetti is said to find his own voice, the crux of the interpretation, Ishaghpour tries to show how Canetti's self-narrative is not simply an exercise in power, but a genuine and successful attempt to emulate Dr. Sonne's example (165). Ultimately it is unconvincing, not only because there is no discussion of the authenticity or artificiality of Dr. Sonne, but because Ishaghpour goes on to argue that Canetti only fully realizes the importance of the language of the other in his essays and aphorisms. Thus, it is suggested that all Canetti's previous writing leads to the essays and aphorisms, which are the most successful expression of what Ishaghpour sees as Canetti's life-long desire to vanquish death by transforming the self into the other.

The collection of essays edited by Penka Angelova, *Autobiographie zwischen Fiktion und Wirklichkeit*, taken from a conference held in Ruse, Bulgaria, in 1992, and devoted exclusively to Canetti's memoirs, appears disconnected at first glance, but, as the title suggests, the essays are situated between two poles of a discussion that governs the

¹⁰³ My translation of "Le penchant à parler de lui-même a augmenté, chez Canetti, avec l'âge, en même temps que son intérêt pour la vie d'autrui" (125).

overall approach. In general, the essays treat the importance of differentiating between authenticity and artifice for knowing how to read the genre of literary autobiography, particularly as this relates to Canetti. The model of literary autobiography is Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, which recounts the author's early life in terms of his later development as a writer.¹⁰⁴ The responsibility of the *Dichter* in shaping social and political events becomes a key consideration in judging the author's contribution to history through his life and work. Hence, the importance of evaluating the claims to authenticity or artifice made by specific words and sentence formations in a text such as Canetti's memoirs.

In relation to recent history, the underlying responsibility of deciding to project or retract one's voice parallels the political decision-making of collective bodies, like nation-states, whose decision to project power has had devastating consequences for millions of individuals over the course of the twentieth-century. The most penetrating question of the essays may be how the third-person narrative voice of *Die Blendung*, which satirizes the paranoid ambitions of western literary cultural rationality by depicting the conflagration of Kien's library, can be reconciled with the first-person narrative voice of Canetti's "Lebensroman" (35), which ostensibly relates how valuable book-learning has been to Canetti's positive self-development as a writer. Manfred Durzak's essay,

¹⁰⁴ See Angelova, "Canetti's Autobiographische Trilogie as Bildungsroman" (53) for an affirmative view of the relationship between Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit* and Canetti's *Memoirs*. For an antithetical view of this relationship, see Durzak 29-47. For an analysis of the intertextual relationship between Canetti's *Zunge* and Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, see Gould 79-107.

“Canettis Lebensroman: Zu einigen Prinzipien seiner Darstellung,” establishes an ambiguous dichotomy whereby language and books represent in the memoirs an “outstanding medium of self-destruction and self-construction.”¹⁰⁵ Durzak then concludes that the poetics of Canetti’s memoirs re-affirm the “utopian paradigm of the self-realization of an individual.”¹⁰⁶ On different grounds, Joseph Strelka questions Canetti’s self-portrait in response to Gerald Stieg’s claim that Canetti is perhaps the “‘last humanist’” when viewed in light of Marxist, Freudian or structuralist theories that question the autonomous, unified self.¹⁰⁷ Strelka argues that Canetti’s encounters with others in the memoirs are simply “clichés of humility”¹⁰⁸ that mask a self-glorifying narrator. Yet, he continues to maintain that the memoirs are important for being examples of “linguistic mastery of literary representation.”¹⁰⁹ Such essays go a long way to challenge any notion that Canetti’s autobiographical self-effacement is entirely authentic, but as we will see that is not the argument made here.

The most recent major study of Canetti’s memoirs in the context of his entire corpus is Dagmar Barnouw’s *Elias Canetti zur Einführung*. Barnouw sees it as a central

¹⁰⁵ My trans. of “das herausragende Medium der Ich-Zerstörung bzw. das Ich-Aufbaus” (36).

¹⁰⁶ My trans. of “utopischen Paradigma einer Selbstverwirklichung des einzelnen” (42).

¹⁰⁷ My trans. of “‘letzte Humanist’” (237). Quoted from Stieg 158-171.

¹⁰⁸ My trans. of “Bescheidenheitstopoi” (246).

¹⁰⁹ My trans. of “sprachlichen Meisterschaft der literarischen Darstellung” (246).

problem in Canetti's work that the "moral squaring of the poet"¹¹⁰ has led to a loss of faith in the efficacy of cultural institutions in the wake of World War II, on the one hand, and a conviction that "the poetic dimension of literalness"¹¹¹ may still be what saves us from further catastrophe, on the other. In a defense against the power death has over us, Canetti is said to build a bulwark of self-control out of language. Situating Canetti's memoirs in the context of his other works, Barnouw draws on a common poetic denominator, the relationship between self and other;

The 'poetic' dimension of his social-psychological-socio-anthropological texts refers to more than simply an integration of fictional elements – and this applies to the auto-fictionality of his (as every) autobiography as well. He is clearly referring to himself when he quotes from Montaigne in the course of his work on the autobiography, 'I as space, not as position' (*Geheimherz* 77); his specific openness toward himself – and then toward others – as a social being transforming himself in time.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ My trans. of "moralische Quadratur des Dichters" (Canetti, *Geheimherz* 139; Barnouw 10).

¹¹¹ My trans. of "die poetische Dimension der Wörtlichkeit" (10).

¹¹² My trans. of "Die 'dichterische' Dimension seiner sozialpsychologisch-soziologisch-anthropologischen Texte betrifft mehr als die Integration fiktionaler Elemente – das gilt auch für die Autofiktionalität seiner (wie jeder) Autobiographie. Was er sich während der Arbeit an seiner Autobiographie von Montaigne notiert, 'Ich als Raum, nicht als Position' (*Geheimherz* 77), bezieht er deutlich auf sich selbst: seine spezifische Offenheit für sich selbst – und dann für andere – als soziales, sich in der Zeit wandelndes Wesen" (13-14).

Barnouw sees the substance of Canetti's concept of self in its social dimension, and specifically in Canetti's exploration of the language of selfhood.

Barnouw goes on to argue that Canetti's interest in the metamorphosis or transformation of self-consciousness also puts one in "a position of gaining control over the other, as Canetti clearly represents it in the autobiographical writings."¹¹³ For Barnouw, Canetti's exploration of the language of self-preservation situates him among the most potent of late modernist practitioners of humanism, rather than among the impotent post-modernist critics of modernity. She goes on to demonstrate her point by first examining the memoirs to show how Canetti relates language to the power of the self to change itself in the face of others. Then she uses this interpretation to demonstrate how Canetti's work from the 1950s and 1960s, *Masse und Macht*, *Die Befristeten*, and *Die Stimmen von Marrakesch*, affirms that the social substance of the self vis-à-vis the other must be developed in order to prepare the self for and armor it against death.

In my view, Canetti comes to the idea of narrating his encounters with the world from having written *Die Stimmen von Marrakesch*, which, beside being a *Reisebericht*, is also autobiographical. His encounters there with the faces and voices of an unfamiliar Muslim culture may have initiated the desire to explore the conditions for and assumptions of his own selfhood. In the memoirs, Canetti tells of the first half of his life up to the death of his mother and the outbreak of World War II. Indeed, it is only at the

¹¹³ My translation of "ein Einnehmen, Macht-über-den-anderen-Gewinnen, wie es Canetti in den autobiographischen Schriften deutlich darstellt" (14).

end of the memoir that he has his first novel published, and joins the ranks of other professional writers whom he knows. Until then, he is a literary man in the classic European sense of the phrase, a *Dichter*, but only in private, among his acquaintances, friends and family. He builds his reputation initially by giving public readings, but as a published author loses the face-to-face contact with his audience. The memoirs do not relate the latter half of his life, when his audience becomes a crowd of readers distanced by the written text, and when he has established a wider reputation. Rather, it is as a private author, writing of the self for his family and friends, that the elderly narrator of the memoirs seeks to envisage and efface himself in words.

3. *Die gerettete Zunge*: The Self-Envisaging Voices of Canetti's Youth

It may be said of the three volumes of the autobiography that they are continuous because they reflect a chronology of Canetti's life from his formative years as a youth recounted in *Die gerettete Zunge*, to his artistic and professional education as a young man in *Die Fackel im Ohr*, to his apprenticeship as a writer in *Das Augenspiel*. It may also be said, however, that they are discontinuous in the way the chronology is structured. After the first chapter, a proleptic introduction to the theme of Canetti's relationship with language, the autobiography begins with the death of his father and ends with the death of his mother. Between these two events, at the mid-point of the second book, Canetti makes the decision to become a writer. In all three volumes, he recounts his encounters with the

many voices that become attributes of his own multi-faceted voice, and which speak to one another in a self-envisaging and self-effacing dialogic.

As mentioned above, Part One of *Die gerettete Zunge* consists of Canetti's childhood memories, and serves to structure the author's subsequent relationship with language. Beginning with his earliest memory, Canetti extends its significance to all subsequent memories and establishes an aesthetic form with which his self will be envisaged metonymically. His earliest memory is as a two-year-old boy who is threatened with having his tongue cut out for reasons he does not understand. He later learns that the ritual silencing actually took place and surmises it was to keep him from speaking to anyone about an affair his nanny was having with the knife-wielding man. The threat of losing his tongue is effective, as he keeps the secret for ten years after. That the episode makes an impression on him is clear, not only because he remembers it well, but because it makes him aware that being able to speak is not to be taken for granted. The tongue, the ear, and the eye all figure in the titles of the three volumes of the autobiography and are all metonyms of the face, and of the face-to-face encounters with the other in language. In the episode with the knife-wielding man, Canetti saves his tongue by doing what he is told, by responding when the man gives him the command, "Show me your tongue" (6).¹¹⁴ Having saved it he is allowed to continue speaking and in later reflection on the

¹¹⁴ Trans. of "Zeig die Zunge!" (9) There are no pronouns present in the original, which reinforces the value of the tongue as a metonymic indicator of language. A more accurate translation might be, "Show your tongue." All page numbers for subsequent quotations in English translation are from *The Memoirs of Elias Canetti*.

episode he becomes conscious of the importance of his relationship with language for the development of his self. Rather than being what Ricoeur would call a metaphor for Canetti's relationship with language, though, this episode is linked to it metonymically by the value he attributes to all subsequent episodes involving his experiences with language.

Among the remainder of his early memories are many encounters with other Eastern European ethnicities, languages, customs and histories, which he views in the light of his own family's Sephardic Jewish past and their minority Ladino language. These encounters comprise the main features of Canetti's self-envisaged and self-envisaging voice. Growing up in the provincially cosmopolitan city of Ruschuk, Canetti learns Ladino as his first language. He specifically remembers his first encounter with certain words, but he also remembers the first fairy tales told to him in what must have been Bulgarian. Though he has forgotten that language, the fact that he recalls such stories makes him aware of being able to lose a language, and of the ephemeral reality of one's knowledge of words. Despite his recollections of the early years having been filtered over sixty years through the German language, with the exception of a few incidents involving murder and trauma that remain inscribed in Ladino, and in words too difficult to have understood as a child, Canetti does not feel that the qualities of his early memories have changed: "It is not like the literary translation of a book from one language to another, it is a translation that happened of its own accord in my unconscious, and since I ordinarily avoid this word like the plague, a word that has become

meaningless from overuse, I apologize for using it in this one and only case" (13).¹¹⁵

Canetti's reluctance to use the word, *das Unbewußte*, derives from his aversion to Freudian psychoanalysis, but it is telling that he uses it in this one and only instance, for it implies that there is an unconscious, which in Canetti's view has to do with the words of a language that continue to affect one's narratives despite their having been forgotten. This may be seen as the metaphorical content of the words that inform Canetti's narrative. Despite metonymical relationships between individual episodes, and within episodes between the words used to describe them, there is also a metaphorical context in which the words he later chooses to describe his memories are informed by the forgotten historical record of other words in other encounters, sometimes with other languages.

Envisioning the early development of his awareness of the ethical voice he possesses, Canetti describes his memories of childhood in terms of experiencing both joy and fear at learning language. As we may recall from Nussbaum's formulation of the importance of understanding narrative for an ethics of self-understanding, one must balance the capacity for thinking logically with the inevitable emotional responses that come with inter-acting with others. Though Nussbaum sees the logical response to emotion as a means to self-mastery, the will to understand our feelings is a primary structural device for organizing narratives. In Canetti's memoirs, both the idea of death

¹¹⁵ Trans. of "Es ist nicht wie die literarische Übersetzung eines Buches von einer Sprache in die andere, es ist eine Übersetzung, die sich von selbst im Unbewußten vollzogen hat, und da ich dieses durch übermäßigen Gebrauch nichtssagend gewordene Wort sonst wie die Pest meide, mag man mir seinen Gebrauch in diesem einen und einzigen Falle nachsehen" (19).

and the concatenation of emotional responses to the event of his father's death serve as fundamental principles for how his life unfolds and for how he will come to write about that life. The various metonyms that are associated with death and loss, those associated, for instance, with the threat of losing one's attributes or possessions, are themselves organizing attributes of Canetti's personal memories. Understanding the relationship between these early emotional responses to circumstances of loss and the later development of his ideas on these subjects provides the impetus for the writing of the memoirs.

The formation of Canetti's childhood identity, insofar as he has a fledgling awareness of himself as an autonomous self possessing moral values, begins in *Die gerettete Zunge* when the seven-year old boy becomes the eldest male in the family, replacing his father who has suddenly died. Consciousness of his role as a substitute for his father becomes apparent when the more aware he is that he must prevent his mother from possibly committing suicide in the immediate aftermath of the event. The responsibility he feels toward saving his mother is reciprocated in that she now teaches him the secret language of German, which she and her husband had spoken only in private. The initial pain resulting from the harshness of the lessons his mother undertakes with him is followed by great joy at finally learning German, in particular its Gothic script, for by learning to write it he learns to speak it, thereby avoiding his mother's harsh rebukes and cementing a bond of intimacy between them; "the language of our love – and

what a love it was! – became German” (77).¹¹⁶ Having taken his father’s place in the intimacy of German conversations between him and his mother, Canetti relates how his sense of possessiveness grows to include an intense jealousy for any other man who might replace him as his mother’s preferred partner. As her influence over his literary taste and opinions intensifies, his influence over her decisions regarding their lives takes on greater significance. Once he is successful in dissuading her from marrying a threatening suitor – to whom Canetti gives the derisive metonymic moniker of the Beard, “der Bart” (175) – his mother has the family move from Vienna to Zurich.¹¹⁷

The increasing independence Canetti senses as he reaches the age of twelve is finally recognized when he keeps his first secret from his mother. In defiance of her admonition against learning to speak the Swiss dialect, Canetti persists:

I practiced Zurich German for myself alone, against my mother’s will, concealing from her the progress I was making. That, so far as language went, was my first independent move from her, and although still subjugated to her in all opinions

¹¹⁶ Trans. of “die Sprache unserer Liebe – und was war es für eine Liebe! – wurde Deutsch” (103).

¹¹⁷ When Canetti reads the moral of the story in Hebel’s “Denkwürdigkeiten aus dem Morgenland,” one of the stories in *Das Schatzkästlein*, he concludes that “eine *Moral* muß in Gegensatz zu dem stehen, wie man fühlt und handelt, damit sie einem auffällt, und sie muß lange in einem liegen bleiben, bevor sie ihre Gelegenheit findet, sich plötzlich ermannt und zuschlägt” (323). But he also admits that at the time of the reading he was not prepared to practice this moral in regard to the Beard.

and influences, I began feeling like a 'man' in this one thing. (148)¹¹⁸

This first impression of himself as a man marks the beginning of a series of events that increasingly lead him to identify himself in terms of a growing independence from his mother's influence. We must recall here the importance of the word virility, and its cognates, for the identity-formation of the self-envisaging voice. His mother's voice remains the strongest among many other voices, though only provisionally so. These other voices include those of teachers and friends, all of which compete for authority over the young man's own responses. The importance of the many encounters with others manifests itself at several removes along a chain of metonymic signification. Gradually his strength in relation to his mother increases, though he remains jealously committed to protecting and pleasing her. When Canetti is fourteen, he lives alone at the Yalta Villa, while his mother lives at the Waldsanatorium. The two exchange letters almost daily, telling each other about their thoughts and experiences. Canetti writes a play, *Junius Brutus*, dedicated to his mother, which he later acknowledges as over-influenced by Schiller's iambic verse style and "dripping in ethics and nobility" (207).¹¹⁹ While he is slowly developing an independent identity as an ethical thinker, Canetti is unable to reconcile this with his sense of duty to his mother's authority. By the end of *Die gerettete*

¹¹⁸ Trans. of "Ich übte das Zürichdeutsche für mich allein, gegen den Willen der Mutter und verheimlichte vor ihr die Fortschritte, die ich darin machte. Es war, soweit es um die Sprache ging, die erste Unabhängigkeit von ihr, die ich bewies, und während ich in allen Meinungen und Einflüssen ihr noch untertan war, begann ich mich in dieser einzigen Sache als *Mann* zu fühlen". (194)

¹¹⁹ Trans. of "von Moral und Edelmut triefend" (271).

Zunge, a war of wills breaks out between the sixteen-year-old, who is content with being a student in Zurich, and his mother, who wants to cure him of his arrogant, bookish self-image by exposing him to life in post-war Frankfurt. Ultimately, he is forced to acknowledge the shameful innocence of his life at that time, but only after his mother has removed him from “the paradise in Zurich” (285).¹²⁰ Thereafter, he must accept that he no longer lacks the freedom to make choices after all. With the loss of his innocence, he discovers his responsibility to others. From the retrospective vantage point of the memoirs, an older, wiser Canetti sees that he “came into being only by an expulsion from Paradise” (285).¹²¹

4. *Die gerettete Zunge*: The Self-Effacing Voices of Canetti’s Youth

Before his expulsion from paradise, however, Canetti also undergoes an aesthetic and ethical education independent from the dominant one his mother has inculcated in him. The particulars of his aesthetic education can be interpreted in terms of Adorno’s ideas on negative aesthetics, in that an alternative aesthetic insinuates itself into his consciousness, an avant-garde form that will call into question the value of his values. This education from outside, as it were, gives Canetti a poetics that is in contrast to the privileged position prose has so far held for him, and that will lead him to explore his

¹²⁰ Trans. of “das Paradies in Zürich” (375).

¹²¹ Trans. of “durch die Vertreibung aus dem Paradies erst entstand” (375).

self-effacing voice. The way Canetti deviates from his mother's ideas on literary art will eventually have a significant influence on their relationship, but, in *Die gerettete Zunge*, he is merely recounting how the seeds of revolt were sown early on. Outside influences in terms of aesthetics and politics work to efface the youthful self-image of a writer he adopts from his mother. While his mother's literary tastes are strictly organized around her own youthful experience of the Viennese Burgtheater repertoire of the 1890s, such as the early modernist works of Schnitzler and Strindberg, they also include classical plays, Shakespeare, seventeenth-century French drama and the late eighteenth-century theatre of the German Enlightenment. In addition, she generally approves of prose narrative and directs her son to read as much of the canon of great European novels as he can. Where her opinion eventually diverges more and more from his is on the topic of verse of any form, particularly contemporary writing that tends toward verse. The only volume of poetry she reads is Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal* (277). This in itself intrigues the boy enough to start wondering about the secret power of verse.

While living at the Yalta, with his mother convalescing elsewhere, Canetti is left to read what he wants from the house library. He becomes infatuated with the verse narratives of Eduard Mörike and Conrad Ferdinand Meyer. On a visit to the Meyer's grave-site, Canetti is impressed by the simplicity of the inscription on the headstone: "Here lies Conrad Ferdinand Meyer. 1825-1898." I understood that any word would merely have diminished the name, and I realized here for the first time that the name

alone mattered, that the name alone held, and everything else paled next to it" (196).¹²² This discovery is an initial insight into the metaphoric capacity for a single set of words, even a name, to signify on multiple levels. Meyer's poetry itself evokes many images and emotional impressions in Canetti, including one poem whose voice seems to speak to him from the dead and reminds him of his father (258). Eventually he ceases reading Meyer's historical narratives, but he always remembers them in contrast to conventional histories for their evocativeness. In their place, he is taught to appreciate the contemporary, expressionist works of writers such as Robert Walser, Frank Wedekind, and Franz Werfel by his young history teacher, Friederich Witz (327-36).¹²³ Thus begins a passive resistance to his mother's opinions. The passivity of his new-found appreciation for poetry is suppressed and hidden from his mother's view, but the words of poetic discourse begin to act dialogically – as passively dialogic utterances – shadowing his

¹²² Trans. of "'Hier ruht Conrad Ferdinand Meyer. 1825-1898.' Ich begriff, daß jedes Wort den Namen nur verringert hätte, und hier wurde mir zum erstenmal bewußt, daß es auf den Namen allein ankam, daß er allein trug und neben ihm alles Übrige verblaßte" (256).

¹²³ Here the difference in translation is significant. Where the English version has one of Canetti's teachers seeing in him "a future historian" and "not a writer" (256), the German original has "und nicht einen Dichter" (336). While the translation is accurate, the German concept of the *Dichter*, or writer, is more closely tied semantically with poetry and the poet. For Canetti's views on this word, see his essay "The Writer's Profession" in *Gewissen*. And for an insightful commentary on this essay, see Falk, 121-30.

mother's affinity for prose discourse. She discovers the extent of his wayward learning when he writes her about his enthusiasm for a short story written by Gotthelf, called "Die schwarze Spinne" (268). It is partly written in the rural Swiss vernacular of an isolated valley. On a visit there Canetti learns some words of the vernacular, which he associates with Old High German verses he had learned in school. This episode awakes an incipient admiration for etymology and the history of the languages he knows. This philological awakening, as it were, is representative of the metaphorical content of all utterances. Canetti realises the potential for metaphoric distinctiveness in, for example, the democratizing effect of the peasant vernacular. His mother believes, otherwise. She thinks it would be better to translate the vernacular into a "literary German" (270)¹²⁴ so it can be more accessible to the general population. Furthermore, his enthusiasm disturbs his mother, who views his idealisation of language and literature as a threat to his character and to her plans for him.

His mother has already determined that his professional goals should be to practise medicine and writing, having modelled these goals on Dr. Wedekind, because both practises work in the service of others. Any learning seen as not related to these goals is considered a valueless deviation. It is Elias's feeling that his mother sees herself as having sacrificed her life so her eldest son might achieve the goals she has set for him, which is her justification for curtailing his Zurich education (271: 357). During the verbal exchange that takes place between mother and son in the final chapter of *Die gerettete*

¹²⁴ Trans. of "ein literarisches Deutsch" (355).

Zunge, entitled “Das verworfene Paradies,” his mother’s opposition to poetry, in general, and to Canetti’s reading of “Die schwarze Spinne,” in particular, is cited as the justification for her decision to remove him from his idealized education, or what she calls the “idyll of Lake Zurich” (278).¹²⁵ She re-iterates the line he often cites from one of Meyer’s poems, “‘I’m human with human contradiction’” (279),¹²⁶ and casts it back at him as evidence that he does not yet appreciate its meaning; that, in fact, he appears more like a “parasite” (279) and a “chatterbox” (279),¹²⁷ living on the work and struggles of others, even the peasants whom he claims to admire. She uses “the word ‘apprentice’” (284)¹²⁸ for the first time to insist that he learn a trade and earn his keep. Responding in hindsight, Canetti recalls that this “dreadful conversation” (279)¹²⁹ was the beginning of the estrangement between mother and son. Its immediate effect, however, is to escalate the tension in the discourse between them and to invoke fear in Canetti:

These leaps, these raging contradictions in her character, were not alien to me, I had often witnessed them with amazement and admiration, those very things stood for the reality which she reproached me for not knowing [. . .]. I was never

¹²⁵ Trans. of “in der Idylle vom Zürichsee” (365). This barbed reference is an ironic allusion to Klopstock’s poem “Der Zürcher See”. I am indebted to Professor Arnd Bohm for drawing my attention to this reference.

¹²⁶ Trans. of “Ein Mensch mit seinem Widerspruch” (366).

¹²⁷ Trans. of “Parasit” (366); “Schwätzer” (367).

¹²⁸ Trans. of “Das Wort *Lehrling*” (373).

¹²⁹ Trans. of “dieses furchtbare Gespräch” (366).

certain how she would react to my accounts, all initiative remained with her, I desired her contradicting me and I wanted it to be fierce [. . .]. She was a marvelously lively ultimate authority, her verdicts were so unexpected, so fantastic, and yet so detailed that they inevitably triggered counter-emotions giving one the strength to appeal them. She was a higher and higher ultimate authority, and although she seemed to lay a claim to it, it was never the final authority.

But this time I had the feeling that she wanted to annihilate me. (284)¹³⁰

In terms of the passive dialogic of this encounter, Canetti realizes he will be on the defensive from now on against the power of his mother's discursive aesthetics, and his own discourse becomes more strenuously anticipatory, reflexive and self-effacing. Canetti's use of legalistic terms such as *Widerrede* and *Appellation* underscores the increasingly hostile character of the relationship between the two parties, a relationship that will require careful negotiating. This requirement dominates the relationship between him and his mother until her death.

¹³⁰ Trans. of "Diese Sprünge, diese rasenden Widersprüche in ihrer Natur waren mir nicht fremd, ich hatte sie oft unter Staunen und Bewunderung erlebt, eben sie standen für die Wirklichkeit, deren Kenntnis sie mir absprach [. . .]. Ich war nie sicher, wie sie auf meine Berichte reagieren würde, alle Initiative blieb bei ihr, ich wünschte mir ihre Widerrede, und ich wollte sie heftig [. . .]. Sie war eine wunderbar lebendige letzte Instanz, ihre Verdikte so unerwartet, so phantastisch und dabei so ausführlich, daß sie unweigerlich Gegenregungen auslösten, die einem die Kraft zu Appellationen verliehen. Sie war eine immer höhere letzte Instanz und obwohl sie Anspruch darauf zu erheben schien, war es dann doch nie die letzte.

Diesmal aber hatte ich das Gefühl, daß sie mich vernichten wollte" (373-74).

As for his ethical development, Canetti's education is also conditioned by voices other than the dominant one belonging to his mother. In Levinas's conceptualization of ethical self-effacement that takes place at the moment of the face-to-face encounter, the self becomes aware of its unending responsibility for the other. One example of the universality of this responsibility that Levinas cites is the Fourth Commandment, Thou shalt not kill. The responsibility for the other that emanates from this Old Testament injunction is learned by Canetti as a consequence of his actions when he is very young. He also learns the lesson in connection with writing. The five-year-old boy jealously covets his cousin's newly learned ability to write, which she withholds as a secret from him in the form of her notebooks. Her refusal to teach him to write causes Canetti to try killing her with an axe. Only the intervention of his grand-father saves the girl. All the family members meet to discuss the event and pass judgment on the boy. Though he is punished, his mother agrees that he should learn to write earlier than usual: "I think they understood that the 'writing,' the 'script,' has been so important to me: they were Jews, and 'Scripture' meant a great deal to all of them, but there had to be something very bad and dangerous in me to get me to the point of wanting to murder my playmate" (34).¹³¹

¹³¹ Trans. of "Ich glaube, man begriff, daß es mir so sehr um die Schrift zu tun war, es waren Juden, und die *Schrift* bedeutete ihnen allen viel, aber es mußte etwas sehr Schlechtes und Gefährliches in mir sein, das mich dazu bringen konnte, meine Spielgefährtin ermorden zu wollen" (47). For a discussion of Canetti's sense of responsibility as a Jewish writer, see the sections in *Zunge* called "Making Oneself Hated" and "The Petition," where he writes a petition against the antisemitic treatment of the Jews at his school. Also see Bollacher, "Vom Gewissen" (327-337). The word *writing* will have ethical connotations for Canetti as he chooses to write in German despite the
(continued...)

An older Canetti views this episode as the source of the “the primal prohibition in [his] life [. . .]: the prohibition to kill” (229).¹³² It continues to act as a metonym for the origin in his consciousness of the difference between right and wrong, but, in an unsuppressed context, it will also become from that time on a double-voiced metaphor for many subsequent speech acts that take place in his writings: ultimately he is given the freedom to learn to write despite his transgression of the law.

In a later chapter, “Verbotsbereitschaft,” Canetti reflects on the feelings of guilt his Grandfather evoked in him, and the lifelong effect they have on his sense of having an ethical character:

Grandfather said there was no forgiveness for murder, for the dead person was never again in a situation to grant that forgiveness.

Thus, that was Sinai, that was my shalt-not; and my true religion thus originated in a very definite, personal, unatonable event [. . .].

I grew up under the domination of the commandment not to kill, and while no later prohibition ever attained its weight and meaning, they all did draw their

¹³¹(...continued)

Holocaust and his later residency in England. Canetti explains his reasons in *Gewissen*. Elsewhere, Bollacher writes on the tensions between Canetti’s secularism and his Jewish heritage; “Canetti und das Judentum” (38-47).

¹³² Trans. of “das Ur-Verbot in meinem Dasein [. . .]: das Verbot des Tötens” (299).

strength from it. (229)¹³³

While the punishment for murder is associated with never learning to read and write, it is never receiving forgiveness from the dead that evokes the most guilt, for Canetti also makes an association between his behaviour and the curse his Grandfather puts on the boy's father shortly before the father dies. Here Canetti learns how it is possible to efface the other, but he also learns of the guilt a survivor can feel. In Switzerland he decides that the republican values of his new country are superior to those of imperial Austria, and he believes this is borne out by the neutrality the Swiss adopted during World War I, an event his mother refers to as “the killing” (162)¹³⁴ in place of the word, war. It is perhaps the guilt of the survivor-who-effaces-others that leads Canetti to reflect at this point on his obligation to be responsible to the other and to protect the sanctity of the other's singularity.

By observing the battle of wills between his grandfather and his mother, each bearing their own portion of guilt in relation to the death of his father, Canetti sees how his mother is able to usurp ultimate authority over his grandfather and all other

¹³³ Trans. of “wie es keine Verzeihung für einen Mord gäbe, denn der Tote sei nie mehr in der Lage, sie zu gewähren.

Das also war mein Sinai, das mein Verbot, so ist meine wahre Religion aus einem ganz bestimmten, persönlichen, nie wiedergutzumachenden Ereignis entstanden [...].

Unter der Herrschaft dieses Verbots zu töten bin ich aufgewachsen, und wenn auch kein späteres je seine Wucht und Bedeutung erlangte, so bezogen sie doch alle aus ihm ihre Kraft” (300-301).

¹³⁴ Trans. of “das Morden“ (212).

influences:

Perhaps Mother wanted to be the sole authority, proclaiming shalt and shalt-nots. Having made up her mind to devote her life entirely to us and take full responsibility for us, she tolerated no other deep influence [. . .].

She wanted to safeguard me against the influences of such authorities at any cost and she failed to realize that she thereby made herself the ultimate source of all proclamations. The force of supreme prohibitions was now with her.

(231)¹³⁵

By having usurped all authority over her sixteen-year old son, the mother eventually extends her authority to proclaim a taboo “against everything connected with sexual love” (232).¹³⁶ This law or taboo stays in effect for Canetti as long as he shares her distrust of “the blank-verse poets” (232) who testify to “‘high’ love” (232),¹³⁷ but it loses its power as other voices secretly influence him. In her final attack on Canetti’s transgression of the aesthetic prohibitions, his mother also questions his claim to manhood. Ostensibly, it is to make him a man that she forces him to move to Frankfurt and live “among men who had

¹³⁵ Trans. of “Vielleicht lag der Mutter daran, zur einzigen Instanz zu werden, von der Verbote wie Gebote verkündigt wurden. Da sie sich entschlossen hatte, ihr Leben ganz uns zu widmen, die volle Verantwortung für uns zu übernehmen, litt sie keine Einwirkung von außen, die tiefer ging[. . .].

Von der Einwirkung solcher Instanzen wollte sie mich um jeden Preis bewahren und merkte nicht, daß sie dadurch selbst zur letzten Quelle aller Verkündigungen wurde. Die Kraft der höchsten Verbote war nun bei ihr” (303).

¹³⁶ Trans. of “gegen alles, was mit geschlechtlicher Liebe zusammenhing” (304).

¹³⁷ Trans. of “die Jambendichter” (305); “*hohe* Liebe” (305).

been at war and knew the worst” (285).¹³⁸ Though he attempts to fight her with the forces of all his learning, which he amasses around his will, her will is nonetheless stronger:

I began fearing her. I no longer wondered why she was saying all those things. So long as I had sought her presumable motives and retorted to them, I had felt less disconcerted, *as though we were facing each other as equals*, each leaning on his reason, two free people. Gradually this self-assurance crumbled, I found nothing more within me to use with sufficient strength, I consisted only of ruins now and I admitted defeat. (285; emphasis mine)¹³⁹

With this admission, Canetti’s self-effacing voice grows exponentially. He loses a part of his old self, though it may feel to him as if he has lost his self in its entirety. In the wake of this destruction of the self, he awakens, “and like the earliest man” (285)¹⁴⁰ came into being, he comes into being in an entirely new world of self-knowledge .

5. *Die Fackel im Ohr*: The Self-Envisaging Voices of Canetti’s Apprenticeship as a

¹³⁸ Trans. of “unter Männern, die im Krieg gewesen waren und das Schlimmste kannten” (374).

¹³⁹ Trans. of “Ich begann mich vor ihr zu fürchten. Ich fragte mich nicht mehr, warum sie das alles sage. Solange ich nach ihren vermutlichen Beweggründung gesucht und auf sie erwidert hatte, fühlte ich mich weniger befangen, *so als stünden wir uns auf gleich und gleich gegenüber*, jeder auf seinen Verstand gestützt, zwei freie Menschen. Allmählich zerbröckelte diese Sicherheit, ich fand nichts mehr in mir, das ich mit genügend Kraft hätte vorbringen können, ich bestand nur noch aus Trümmern und gab mich verloren” (374; emphasis mine).

¹⁴⁰ Trans. of “wie der früheste Mensch [. . .] erst entstand”(375).

Writer

Canetti's apprenticeship as an independent young man commences at the age of seventeen, when he is forced to move to Frankfurt am Main. This period of his life becomes what he will call his "Aristophanic apprenticeship" (330)¹⁴¹ for being the time when he develops a heightened sense of satire in response to his circumstances and to reading Aristophanes. This experience forms Part One in *Die Fackel im Ohr*. Where the significance of learning languages and dialects had been paramount in *Die gerettete Zunge*, the importance of quoting and citing from other people's utterances takes on importance in *Die Fackel im Ohr*. It is, however, on his move back to Vienna to study chemistry at the university, where he begins to re-think his cultural education while attending literary recitals given by Karl Kraus, a man whose influence eventually acts in large part as a substitute for that of his mother, as well as all previous teachers. Kraus was the pre-eminent literary voice of post-war Vienna. His reputation for integrity had been enhanced through his having opposed the war and escaped censorship during it. His public readings consisted mainly of dialogues taken from his own sprawling play, *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit*, but include readings and lectures on others, such as Aeschylus, Shakespeare, and Hugo von Hoffmannsthal. Kraus's literary journal, *Die*

¹⁴¹ Trans. of "aristophanische Lehrzeit" (64).

Fackel, contained his opinions and ideas on the gamut of European theatre and poetry.¹⁴² Having read some of the articles in it, Canetti, now twenty-one-years old, is initially unimpressed, but he is soon converted into a passionate devotee. His first attendance at a Kraus lecture coincides with the first meeting between Canetti and his future wife, Veza (341). Their two voices, Kraus's and Veza's, will vie for Canetti's loyalty over the next seven years. In the beginning, though, Kraus's literary opinions are incontrovertible for Canetti, and he cannot help but adopt Kraus's satirical style. In effect, Canetti's own voice becomes a series of synecdochic re-iterations of Kraus's utterances.

This adoption of Kraus's aesthetic voice is monologic. It occurs as the represented or objectified speech of an other. Unlike Veza, Canetti is unable to separate the voices of the literary and non-literary characters he has known from his own personal voice: "Since the age of ten, I've felt as if I consisted of many characters. But it was a vague feeling. I couldn't have said which characters were speaking out of me, or why one replaced another" (417).¹⁴³ For Canetti, the literary voices recited by Kraus flow into and become indistinguishable from the voices of these characters. Like the crowd of Viennese intellectuals also attending the lectures, Canetti is so impressed by the rigor and sophistication of Kraus's arguments that he makes a maudlin confession to Veza: he has

¹⁴² For an informative over-view of Kraus's influence on Viennese society at the time, in particular the influence of *Die Fackel*, see Falk 14-23.

¹⁴³ Trans. of "Ich hatte seit meinem zehnten Lebensjahr das Gefühl, aus vielen Figuren zu bestehen, aber es war ein vages Gefühl, ich hätte nicht sagen können, welche es eben war, die aus mir sprach, und warum eine andere ablöste" (182-83).

become “filled with [Kraus] as with a Bible” (416).¹⁴⁴ Kraus’s discourse is objectified, because Canetti’s relation to it is as to dogma. He is uncritically and emphatically convinced of its indisputability:

I did not doubt a single word he said. Never, under any circumstances, would I have acted against him. He was my conviction. He was my strength [. . .]. When he read from *The Last Days of Mankind*, he populated Vienna for me. I heard only his voices. Were there any others? It was only in him that you found justice – no, you didn’t find justice, he *was* justice. (416)¹⁴⁵

The repetition in the two sentences, *He was my conviction* and *He was my strength*, echo biblical affirmations of faith in God or Jesus. In addition, the references linking Kraus to justice echo with the significance of Mosaic law for Canetti’s Jewish identity, at least as it relates to his memory of his grandfather’s role in the episode involving the murder

¹⁴⁴ Trans. of “und war davon erfüllt wie von einer Bibel” (181).

¹⁴⁵ Trans. of “An keinem seiner Worte zweifelte ich. Nie, unter keinen Umständen, hätte ich ihm zuwidergehandelt. Er war meine Gesinnung. Er war meines Kraft [. . .]. Wenn er aus den *Letzten Tagen der Menschheit* las, bevölkerte er für mich Wien. Ich hörte nur seine Stimmen. Gab es denn andere? Nur bei ihm fand man Gerechtigkeit, nein, man fand sie nicht, er *war* sie” (181). Canetti draws parallels between Kraus’s verdicts and the practice of justice, or the law, on other occasions. Regarding Kraus’s opinions in *Die Fackel*, Canetti writes, “Darin gehe es zu wie vor Gericht. *Er* selber klage an und *er* selber richte” (78). In relation to Kraus’s style of parodic quotation, Canetti says, “weil man das Gesetz anerkannte, von dem diese Worte diktiert waren” (247). Canetti’s youthful zeal to elevate Kraus’s words to that of a god is parodied by the elder Canetti in the self-correcting syntax of the proclamation of the final sentence in the above quotation. Despite this brief turn toward a passively dialogic, parodic double-voicing, Canetti, the narrator of the memoirs, is still intent on conveying his “sklavischen Regungen” (182) in regards to Kraus’s words.

attempt. Indeed, the section that recounts Canetti's first private meeting with Veza after a lecture by Kraus on *King Lear* is entitled "Patriarchen," in part to refer to Lear, as well as to Veza's step-father, but also to signify the growing importance of Kraus for Canetti himself. Veza, however, does not agree with Canetti's ascription of biblical significance to Kraus's utterances. Holding out a copy of the Bible to him, she replies emphatically, "'This is my Bible!'" (417)¹⁴⁶

Apart from Kraus's moral judgments on literature, the style of his discourse contributes to Canetti's development of the theory of "acoustic masks" (465).¹⁴⁷ In "Die Schule des Hörens," Canetti outlines the effect Kraus's readings have on him in terms of his "learning how to *hear*" (465).¹⁴⁸ By representing other people's speech to accuse them of the wrongs committed by their words, Kraus not only quotes them, he imitates their manners of speech in order to identify the speakers with their words. Kraus's technique exploits the represented speech of others, since he is imposing his judgments on that discourse, and forging an identity between a speaker and his or her discourse:

Everything that was spoken, anywhere, at any time, by anyone at all, was offered to your hearing, a dimension of the world that I had never had any inkling of. And since the issue was the combination of all variants – of language and person, this was perhaps the most important dimension, or at least the richest. This kind of

¹⁴⁶ Trans. of "'Das ist meine Bibell!'" (182).

¹⁴⁷ Trans. of "akustischen Masken" (248).

¹⁴⁸ Trans. of "das Hören erlernte" (247).

hearing was impossible unless you excluded your own feelings. As soon as you had put into motion what was to be heard, you stepped back and only absorbed and could not be hindered by any judgment on your part, any indignation, any delight. (465)¹⁴⁹

This categorization of speech patterns and character types is intended to suppress emotional response to the discourse. The efficacy of the technique is augmented for Canetti by observations he makes on the effects of repetition. During a visit to Sankt Agatha, he notices the repetitive sounds a flock of swallows makes, along with the repetitive, vernacular call of a street vendor. Though the vendor's acoustic mask is a false mask, the repetition of the words leads Canetti to recognize the effectiveness of repetition and to search from then on for other examples of this kind of speech (466). From the standpoint of the dichotomy between metonymy and metaphor, an over-emphasis on repetition can suppress the metaphoric differences between utterances that might otherwise be construed as a historical context for each one. It will be some time before Canetti can free himself from the influence of Kraus's voice, the torch in his ear, but the theory of acoustic masks provides an aesthetic with which to organize his self-envisaging voice in some of his early works for the theatre, as well as for the memoirs.

¹⁴⁹ Trans. of "Alles, was gesprochen wurde, überall, jederzeit, von wem immer, bot sich zum Hören an, eine Dimension der Welt, von der man bis dahin nichts geahnt hatte, und da es um die Verbindung von Sprache und Menschen ging, in all ihren Varianten, war es vielleicht die bedeutendste, jedenfalls die reichste. Diese Art des Hörens war nicht möglich ohne Verzicht auf eigene Regungen. Sobald man in Gang gebracht hatte, was sich hören ließ, trat man zurück und nahm nur noch auf und durfte sich darin durch kein Urteil, keine Empörung, kein Entzücken hindern lassen" (247-48).

Insofar as Kraus's moral judgments also have an effect on the ethics of Canetti's self-envisaging voice, the responsibility of using words becomes increasingly apparent to him. His confidante, Veza, shares his admiration for Kraus's opinions, but she reserves the right to differ. Canetti, on the other hand, is less willing to criticize Kraus. What Canetti calls his "*quiet* apprenticeship of this period" (464)¹⁵⁰ has to do with polemical conversations between him and Veza, in which they treat each other's opinions with equal respect. From Veza, he learns how important it is that "one must not only hear every word, but try to understand it as well, and demonstrate this understanding by replying exactly and undistortedly. Respect for others begins with not ignoring their words" (464).¹⁵¹ From his other, "vociferous" (464)¹⁵² apprenticeship with Kraus, Canetti learns "that one can do anything with other people's words" (464).¹⁵³ Rather than the respect for others that comes from not ignoring their words, Kraus has a way of accusing others with the same words they used to commit what they are being accused of. The audience shares in the spectacle of listening to others being pilloried, and, as an individual in the audience, one "thus also gave in to [one's] proclivity for intolerance, which was naturally powerful and which now intensified legitimately, as it were, and in an almost

¹⁵⁰ Trans. of "die *stille* Lehre dieser Zeit" (247).

¹⁵¹ Trans. of "daß man jedes Wort nicht nur hört, sondern auch zu begreifen versucht und dieses Begreifen bezeugt, indem man genau und ohne Verzerrung entgegnet. Die Achtung vor Menschen beginnt damit, daß man sich nicht über ihre Worte hinwegsetzt" (247).

¹⁵² Trans. of "eklatant" (247).

¹⁵³ Trans. of "Daß man mit den Worten anderer alles machen kann" (247).

inconceivable way” (464-65).¹⁵⁴ This proclivity for intolerance results from a willingness to submit to Kraus’s judgments, even to substitute one’s own will for Kraus’s. Such a suspension of one’s feelings and judgment is not what Nussbaum advocates as a means to strengthen one’s ethical understanding. Her methods require that the reader use literature as a guide for increasing the ability to organize logically the infinite particularities underlying any need for justice.

As mentioned above, the theme of justice in Canetti’s portrayal of Karl Kraus is part of a set of metonyms that include Canetti’s Jewish heritage in the tradition of his grandfather, and in the secular tradition of his mother.¹⁵⁵ The section of *Die gerettete Zunge* called “Die Petition” relates how Canetti had used his skills as a writer to compel the administration of his school in Zurich to prevent further antisemitic attacks against its Jewish pupils. In *Die Fackel im Ohr*, he recounts how a school-mate of his in Frankfurt am Main would relay antisemitic comments and questions from an elder brother. Though Canetti finds the insults nonsensical, he is fascinated by the candour with which they are represented, because the distance created by the brother who parrots them provides a defensive barrier for their absurd, offensive power, their potential even to unleash

¹⁵⁴ Trans. of “Man frönte damit auch dem Hang zur Intoleranz, der von Haus aus stark war und sich nun sozusagen legitim auf beinah unvorstellbare Weise steigerte” (247).

¹⁵⁵ For an analysis of the relationship between aesthetics and justice that is more thorough-going than Nussbaum’s, see Scarry. Scarry’s study dovetails well with Nussbaum’s interests and analyses, but carries certain themes further, at least in regard to establishing analogies between beauty and fairness.

physical violence. In another incident, on a trip Canetti takes to Sofia, he learns a contradictory lesson about the power of Zionist rhetoric. There he meets a cousin who gives lectures to persuade the Jews to leave their comfortable existence in Bulgaria for the idea of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Canetti asks him “whether he always knew who he was, whether he didn’t fear losing himself in the enthusiastic crowd” (363).¹⁵⁶ The question is partly a search for an answer to how one knows whose oratory to identify oneself with. The orator tells him to believe the one who most fervently believes in his or her cause, but Canetti wonders about the person who believes the opposite view just as passionately. He cannot help but see the importance of maintaining rational choice despite the compulsion to submit to the will of the crowd:

I had been *moved* by the crowd, after all [. . .] whatever you felt, you didn’t feel it for yourself; it was the most selfless thing you knew; and since selfishness was shown, talked, and *threatened* on all sides, you needed the experience of thunderous unselfishness like the blast of the trumpet at the Last Judgment, and you made sure not to belittle or denigrate this experience. At the same time, however, you felt you had no control over yourself, you weren’t free, something uncanny was happening to you, it was half delirium, half paralysis. (364)¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ Trans. of “ob er dann immer wisse, wer er sei, ob er nicht fürchte, sich selbst in der begeisterten Masse zu verlieren” (108).

¹⁵⁷ Trans. of “Ich war ja von Masse *ergriffen* worden [. . .] man verlor sich selbst, man vergaß sich, man fühlte sich ungeheuer weit und zur selben Zeit erfüllt, was immer man fühlte, man fühlte es nicht für sich, es war das Selbstloseste, das man kannte, und da
(continued...)

Though Canetti is more likely to identify himself with a pro-semitic crowd rather than the antisemitic one, he qualifies, here, his support for the crowd and reserves the right of the self-envisaging voice to follow neither in the interest of maintaining the freedom to choose rationally.

Among the many sets of attributes metonymically arranged around the need to envisage one's own voice, ethnicity is one of the most important. The voice that speaks with other voices identifies itself vis-à-vis the other in the context of whether the other also shares similar ethnic traits with it or not. In either case, there are a variety of concomitant emotional responses to the other. Canetti will realize later that it is much more difficult to suppress his Jewish identity in the context of European history than he thinks. In the meantime, he is developing his understanding of the relationship between knowledge and authority, both of which are seen as necessary components to establish a balanced sense of justice between speaker and listener, and to enable the dialogue between them to continue indefinitely. While the idea of acoustic masks gives Canetti an aesthetic theory with which to envisage character types by categorizing and organizing their discursive characteristics, his understanding of justice is gradually leading him to envisage his responsibility to the words in that discourse, which he will write about later

¹⁵⁷(...continued)

einem Selbstsucht auf allen Seiten vorgemacht, vorgeredet und schließlich auch *vorgedroht* wurde, brauchte man diese Erfahrung dröhnender Selbstlosigkeit wie den Trompetenstoß des Jüngsten Gerichts und hütete sich davor, sie geringzuschätzen oder zu entwerten. Zugleich spürte man aber, daß man nicht über sich bestimmte, man war nicht frei, etwas Unheimliches geschah mit einem, halb war's Taumel, halb Lähmung" (109).

in a collection of essays entitled *Das Gewissen der Worte*.

6. *Die Fackel im Ohr: The Self-Effacing Voices of Canetti's Apprenticeship as a Writer*

Canetti's aesthetic apprenticeship in *Die Fackel im Ohr* also includes several important lessons in the gradual formation of his self-effacing voice. Living in Frankfurt am Main from 1921 to 1924, the family experiences the hyper-inflation prevalent in post-war Germany. They reside in a boarding house, where the seventeen-year-old Elias learns first-hand from the other residents about the effects of war, the value of money, and the relationship of both to his cultural education. He already feels a deep, personal aversion toward economic matters as the result of an overbearing, mercantile uncle from Manchester. This aversion is deepened further when his mother reveals that the true reason they moved to Frankfurt is because of a Herr Hungerbach. He is a successful, self-made businessman who convinces her that her son needs to abandon his education and take up a "tough apprenticeship" (302)¹⁵⁸ that would teach him a trade. In Hungerbach's hierarchy of values, everything "in books is wrong, all that counts is life, experience, and hard work" (302).¹⁵⁹ He outlines his philosophy of Darwinian-Spenglerian capitalism to

¹⁵⁸ Trans. of "eine harte Lehre" (24).

¹⁵⁹ Trans. of "Alles was in Büchern stünde, sei falsch, nur das Leben selber zähle, Erfahrung und harte Arbeit" (24).

Canetti on their first meeting:

Work till your bones ache. Nothing else deserves to be called work. Anyone who can't take it, anyone who's too weak, should perish. And good riddance. There are too many people in the world anyway. The useless ones should vanish. Besides, it's not out of the question for someone to turn out *useful* after all [. . .]. Men have to be raised by men. Women are too sentimental, they only want to dress up their little princes and keep them away from any dirt. But work is dirty more than anything else. The definition of work: something that makes you tired and dirty; but you still don't give up. (302; emphasis mine)¹⁶⁰

Canetti parodies here the clipped propositions of the simplistic argument that study is useless and work is only work if it is useful. Hungerbach's diatribe does introduce the variants of the word, *useful*, to Canetti's discourse. It is a word that will have far-reaching implications for his personal life and his aesthetic career.

The immediate effect, however, is to alienate Canetti further from his mother, for now he knows that they moved from his beloved Zurich so he could undertake this hard

¹⁶⁰ Trans. of "Arbeit, bis einem die Knochen schmerzten. Etwas anderes könne man gar nicht Arbeit nennen. Wer das nicht aushalte, wer zu schwach sei, der solle zugrundegehen. Um den sei es nicht schade. Es gebe ohnehin zu viele Menschen auf der Welt. Die Unbrauchbaren sollten verschwinden. Im übrigen sei es nicht einmal ausgeschlossen, daß man sich trotzdem als *brauchbar* erwiese [. . .]. Männer müßten von Männern erzogen werden, Frauen seien zu sentimental, die wollten nur immer ihre Prinzessöhnchen herausputzen und von jedem Schmutz fernhalten. Arbeit sei aber vor allem schmutzig. Die Definition von Arbeit: etwas was einen müd und schmutzig mache, und trotzdem gebe man nicht auf –" (24; emphasis mine).

apprenticeship, and so the family could live “*more cheaply*” (304).¹⁶¹ His mother adopts Hungerbach’s convictions in spite of Canetti’s remonstrations. Her son must throw himself into ““the thick of life”” (320).¹⁶² Canetti, on the other hand, sees only hyper-inflation and dire poverty in the thick of life. His mother’s unwillingness to acknowledge and take “responsibility for things happening around her” (322)¹⁶³ upsets him, and provokes in him a “permanent reproach” (322) that inflects every word he speaks to her. The battle of wills reaches a critical point when it is time for Canetti to decide what his profession will be. Together they had planned that he would become a doctor, but he has doubts after seeing a woman faint in the street from hunger. His deep shock at the sight leads his mother to question whether he would be able to cope with sickness and death unless “tougher and more self-controlled” (324).¹⁶⁴ Because his mother has been responsible for his education, she believes that her “self-sacrificing efforts” (370)¹⁶⁵ allow her to decide his profession for him. Canetti reports how much value she invests in the idea of sacrifice, when she is accused of it by Herr Ring. Canetti implicitly relates this value to a Jewish understanding of justice:

Self-sacrificing – that was the word he caught her with. Had he known what part

¹⁶¹ Trans. of “*billiger*” (48).

¹⁶² Trans. of “weil sie ‘im Leben standen’” (49).

¹⁶³ Trans. of “was sie hartnäckig leugnete, Verantwortung für Dinge, die um sie herum geschahen” (52); “stehenden Vorwurf” (52).

¹⁶⁴ Trans. of “[er] härter und beherrschter würde” (55).

¹⁶⁵ Trans. of “aufopfernde Mühe” (117).

the word *sacrifice*, in all its derivations, played with her, he would have used it more often. At an early time, she had already to talk about how she had sacrificed her life for us; it was the only thing she preserved from her religion. As the faith in God's presence gradually waned in her, as God was there less and less and almost disappeared, the meaning of sacrifice grew in her eyes. It was not only a duty, it was the highest achievement to sacrifice oneself; but not at God's command; he was too far away to care; it was sacrifice in and of itself, sacrifice at one's own behest, that's what mattered. Although bearing this concentrated name, sacrifice was something compounded and extensive, something stretching over hours, days, and years – life compounded of all the hours in which you had *not* lived – that was sacrifice. (370-371) ¹⁶⁶

Though she abuses the word, *sacrifice*, in order to pressure her son to conform to her will, Canetti also abuses the word by arguing that he must sacrifice his desire to become a doctor, and study chemistry instead, when in fact his intention is to continue his literary

¹⁶⁶ Trans. of “‘Aufopfernd’ – das was das Wort, mit dem er sie fing, hätte er gewußt, welche Rolle das Wort ‘Opfer’ in allen Ableitungen bei ihr spielte, er hätte es öfter gebraucht. Schon früh pflegte sie davon zu sprechen, daß sie uns ihr Leben geopfert habe, es war das einzige, was ihr von Religion geblieben war. Als der Glaube an Gottes Präsenz sich allmählich bei ihr abschwächte, als Gott weniger und weniger für sie da war und ihr beinahe entschwand, wuchs in ihren Augen die Bedeutung des Opfers. Es war nicht nur die Pflicht, es war das Höchste des Menschen, sich aufzuopfern, aber nicht auf Gottes Geheiß, der zu weit weg war, um sich darum zu kümmern, es war das Opfer an sich, das Opfer aus eigenem Antrieb, auf das es ankam. Obwohl es diesen konzentrierten Namen trug, war es etwas Zusammengesetztes und Ausgedehntes, etwas, das sich über Stunden, Tage und Jahre erstreckte – das Leben, das sich aus all den Stunden zusammensetzte, in denen man *nicht* gelebt hatte, war das Opfer (117-18).

studies.¹⁶⁷

It is this lie, though, that begins a series of lies with which he will conceal from his mother his true relationship with Veza, and his continuing studies of art. Indeed, Canetti must now sacrifice his commitment to truth and to his mother for an aesthetic ideal of which only he is certain. The aesthetic he pursues is one that ostensibly disputes the idea of usefulness. As he begins to see this negative aesthetic in practice, his earlier voice becomes more and more effaced. The process is associated with a strengthening resolve to see himself as a *Dichter*, but also with an initial impulse to identify with avant-garde ideas, to see in them a form of escape from his mother's bourgeois aesthetic. In Frankfurt, Canetti is impressed by his friend's father, who abandons a wealthy family to become a poet, and the mother, who paints "powerful impressionist portraits" (314).¹⁶⁸ In

¹⁶⁷ Canetti uses exclamation, and repetition of the word *useful*, to parody the utilitarian arguments made against him; "die Chemie war nützlich, o so nützlich, wer sich in ihrem Bereich ansiedelte, verdiente gut, sehr gut, und daß ich mich zu dieser Nützlichkeit hergab oder hergeben wollte, erschien ihr als Opfer"(127). There is also, however, a trace of active double-voicing in that the elder Canetti is parodying his own youthful prevarication. His own stance toward sacrifice is best summarized in the comparison he makes between "Abraham's sacrifice" (307: "Abrahams Opfer" *Fackel* 30), which had "aroused a skepticism toward orders" (302: "hat den Zweifel an Befehl in mir geweckt" *Fackel* 30), and that of Christ, "a sacrifice, the sacrifice of a life, which had been offered up for all mankind, of course, but also for me" (307: "eines Opfers, ein Lebensopfer, das zwar für alle, aber auch für mich dargebracht worden sei" *Fackel* 30), which arouses guilt in him, because he feels that though Christ's death was a voluntary death, he himself would be "profiting from a murder" (307: "Nutznießer eines Mordes" *Fackel* 30), from an intentionality for which "death had been employed" (307: "der Tod [. . .] eingesetzt wird" *Fackel* 31).

¹⁶⁸ Trans. of "starke impressionistische Porträts (40).

Vienna, Canetti's mother is threatened by the influence Veza's artistic ideas are having on him, which she metonymically merges with the entire city of Vienna to attack it for being full of "aesthetes" (420).¹⁶⁹ In response, she moves with his two younger brothers to Paris. Free to pursue his literary interests, he meets Ibbi Gordon, a poet whose poems he helps translate from Hungarian. Gordon meets influential literary people in Berlin and invites Canetti to join her there. In Berlin, at the height of the movement known as "*Neue Sachlichkeit*" (342),¹⁷⁰ he encounters several prominent artists and intellectuals, the two most important being Bertolt Brecht and Isaac Babel. Canetti's experience of these two writers contrast with each other, and deeply affect his perception of the importance of an aesthetics of self-effacement.¹⁷¹

When he meets Brecht, Canetti admires Brecht's collection of poems, *Hauspostille*. He has been writing his own poems, but after reading Brecht's he no longer sees his own as adequate. Nonetheless, Canetti is hostile toward the aesthetic values that Brecht articulates. Canetti does not approve that "Brecht prized nothing so much as

¹⁶⁹ Trans. of "Ästheteten" (186).

¹⁷⁰ *Neue Sachlichkeit*, or New Objectivity, was an artistic movement of the 1920s and 1930s that included painters such as Otto Dix and George Grosz, and writers such as Leon Feuchtwanger, Alfred Döblin and Bertolt Brecht. They placed much emphasis on the representing the day-to-day experience of work and pleasure in the metropolis, and on the significance of common objects, especially modern objects, encountered during these experiences.

¹⁷¹ For an in-depth analysis of Canetti's reaction to the Berlin of 1927, see Surowska 167-181. Surowska compares Canetti's views on Berlin to that of Kurt Tuchowsky. She also clarifies aspects of Canetti's relationship with Brecht, Babel and Grosz.

usefulness" (505).¹⁷² Brecht does not approve of Canetti's "demand that one could write only out of conviction and never for money" (506).¹⁷³ Brecht deems it naive, because Canetti has never published.¹⁷⁴ When Canetti attends the premiere of *Die Dreigroschenoper*, he retains a critical distance to this new "Berlin form" (532).¹⁷⁵ Though it opens to wide acclaim, he sees the response of the audience as a sign of how desperately Berliners desire to identify themselves with the incessant new forms of the avant-garde. Canetti now disapproves of the need of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* artists to objectify people as material that is useful for art. His resistance to the movement begins to take shape and organize itself. This resistance is greatly aided by the figure of Isaac Babel, whose silent observation of others teaches Canetti a new way of seeing others; it provides a passive double-voiced context that contrasts with the monological didacticism of Brecht's play. Canetti employs a neologism with the verbal phrase, "to 'learn' people"

¹⁷² Trans. of "Brecht nichts so hochhielt wie Nützlichkeit" (302).

¹⁷³ Trans. of "Forderung, daß man nur aus einer Gesinnung heraus schreiben dürfe und nie für Geld" (303).

¹⁷⁴ The polemic between Canetti and Brecht is polarized further by the force of their convictions. The pretext is the commercial advertisements Canetti sees polluting Berlin, but Canetti's claim that morality is the opposite to material possession is obviously weak: "Morality was one thing and matter was another, and when I dealt with this man, who cared only about matter, then nothing but morality counted for me" (508: "Die Moral war eines und die Sache war etwas anderes, und wenn er zugegen war, der nur auf die Sache etwas gab, zählte für mich nichts als die Moral" *Fackel* 306). Apart from the personal polemic between the men, there is an obvious dialogue here between the aesthetic and ethical considerations pre-occupying Canetti at the time.

¹⁷⁵ Trans. of "Berliner Form" (340).

(537),¹⁷⁶ in order to distinguish Babel's way of observing others in and of themselves, devoid of any requirement for "usefulness, purpose, planning" (537).¹⁷⁷ Literature is "sacrosanct" (522; emphasis mine)¹⁷⁸ to Babel, but only on the condition that it does not subject others to being material for ever new forms of satirical entertainment. In light of Canetti's "lengthy apprenticeship with *Die Fackel*" (536-537),¹⁷⁹ this lesson is an important stage in his development as a writer. It teaches him how "wretched judging and condemning are as ends in themselves" (537).¹⁸⁰ The silence in which Babel observes others, "gazing at them for a long time [. . .] without breathing a single word about what you saw" (537),¹⁸¹ offers a differentiating type of passive dialogic.¹⁸² Because anything "he found out about human beings was independent of whether it delighted him or

¹⁷⁶ Trans. of "Menschen zu erlernen" (346).

¹⁷⁷ Trans. of "einer Nützlichkeit, eines Zwecks, eines Vorhabens" (346).

¹⁷⁸ Trans. of "*heilig*" (332).

¹⁷⁹ Trans. of "Lehre der 'Fackel'" (345).

¹⁸⁰ Trans. of "wie erbärmlich nämlich Urteilerei und Verdammung als Selbstzweck waren" (345-346).

¹⁸¹ Trans. of "seine Art, auf Menschen hinzusehen: lange [. . .] ohne auch nur eine Sterbensilbe über das Gesehene zu äußern" (346).

¹⁸² Canetti goes on here to say how he comes to value "the slowness of this process, the restraint, the muteness, right next to the importance Babel placed on what could be seen" (537: "das Langsame daran, die Zurückhaltung, das Verstummen, hart neben der Bedeutung, die er dem zuschrieb, was sich zum Sehen darbot" 346).

tormented him" (537),¹⁸³ Babel's approach sacrifices the self to the other, and makes uselessness invaluable. For Canetti, this new aesthetic of the gaze is what leads him to speak more audibly with a self-effacing voice, and to put this into practice in writing, which comprises the subsequent chapters of the memoirs.¹⁸⁴

The aesthetic development of the self-effacing voice has its counterpart in an ethical development as well, but the two are becoming more intimately linked by Canetti's own desire to write. He leaves Berlin convinced that a preoccupation with the avant-garde for its own sake is irresponsible, and will lead to disaster. Part Five of *Die Fackel im Ohr* relates how, in Vienna, having completed his studies in chemistry, and secured an income by translating two of Upton Sinclair's novels, Canetti begins working on a novel. In the beginning, it is conceived as a cycle of novels that he names a "*Human Comedy of Madmen*" (546).¹⁸⁵ Based on eight characters, each to have its own novel, which Canetti outlines in a series of note-books, the *Human Comedy of Madmen* provides him with the challenge of writing about characters whose characteristics of speech are not

¹⁸³ Trans. of "Was er über Menschen erfuhr, war unabhängig davon, ob es ihn freute, ob es ihn quälte, ob es ihn niederwarf" (346).

¹⁸⁴ For an interesting analysis of the public polemic between Canetti and Thomas Bernhard that revolved around the responsibility of the avant-garde writer, and in which Canetti takes Bernhard to task for wanting to destroy literature with his avant-garde practices, see Przybecki 24-35.

¹⁸⁵ Trans. of "*Comédie Humaine an Irren*" (355). Canetti's title is a clear reference to Balzac's *La comédie humaine*, but the English translation reads *Human Comedy of Madmen* rather than *Human Comedy to Madmen* as may be inferred from the ambiguous German preposition in the original title.

only an impediment to communication, but the basis for their self-destructive subjectivities. As each character evolves according to their dominant feature, reduced to the initials of the name given that feature – such as “S, *der Sammler* [Collector],” T, the “*Tod-feind* [Enemy of Death],” B, the “*Büchermensch* [Book Man]” (545: *Fackel* 354) – they develop individualized speech patterns, or acoustic masks. Over the months that Canetti is writing these characters, he often meets with a philosophy student, Thomas Marek, whose own distinct voice mediates between those of the characters, and re-affirms or casts doubt on their tenability in Canetti’s mind. In the end, one character remains, the “Book-Man” (581), and he becomes the protagonist for what is first called, *Kant fängt Feuer*, and, finally, *Die Blendung*. His fate is linked in a metaphoric relation to his name; the book-man becomes, *Brand*, or *fire*, then Kant, and finally, *Kien*, a resinous, flammable pine-wood, all of which connect arbitrarily with Canetti’s experience of the burning of the Palace of Justice in Vienna in 1925 (580: *Fackel* 406). Hence, in the narrative of the self-destruction of the Book-Man, Canetti unsuppresses the metonymic link between the inexorable fate of the Book-Man, and the fate of world culture, an end to the novel that occurs to some extent against the will of the writer.

The theme of self-dissolution first appears in regard to Canetti’s experience of and participation in the mob of protesters who set fire to the Palace of Justice. This experience leads him to spend the next thirty years reflecting on the power of the crowd to dissolve individual selves in it, and eventually to write about his ideas in *Masse und Macht*. His feelings toward death have already been conditioned by his experience of personal loss,

but as he begins to formulate his ideas on it he searches for cultural comparisons, antecedents, and similarities. He identifies with Gilgamesh mourning the death of his friend Enkidu, and undertaking an “enterprise against death” (328).¹⁸⁶ Canetti’s own struggle against death is contrasted with his experience of self-loss within the crowd, a source of enigma for which he can find no explanations. Fredl Waldinger introduces him to Buddhism, whose moral compass is “the *worthlessness* of a life that doesn’t free itself from its involvements” (354: emphasis mine).¹⁸⁷ At first, Canetti is repelled by the possibility that the goal of Buddhism is to extinguish life, and by the conviction that Nirvana and death are identical, despite Waldinger’s arguments to the contrary. Later, though, Canetti admits that “Buddha’s starting point, the phenomena of illness, old age, and death, had a meaningful impact” (566-67)¹⁸⁸ on him. This pre-occupation with death and its artistic representation reaches an apex, recounted in “Unter Totenmasken,” when

¹⁸⁶ Trans. of “Unternehmung gegen den Tod” (60). Canetti echoes Levinas to an extent when he writes that the myth of Gilgamesh “concerned the fate of the individual human being, separated from all other human beings, in his own way of being alone: the fact that he must die, and whether he should put up with the fact that death is *imminent* for him” (331: “betraf das Shicksal des einzelnen, von allen anderen abgesonderten Menschen, wie er für sich allein war: daß er sterben müsse und ob er es hinnehmen dürfe, daß ihm ein Tod *bevorstehe*” *Fackel* 65; emphasis mine).

¹⁸⁷ Trans. of “die Wertlosigkeit eines Lebens [. . .] das sich von seinen Verwicklungen nicht freimacht” (94).

¹⁸⁸ Trans. of “der Ausgangspunkt Buddhas, waren es die Phänomene Krankheit, Alter und Tod, deren Bedeutung mir einging, alles was mit dem Tod zusammenhing, war mir schon damals wichtiger als Masse” (384).

Canetti is given a photo-collection of death masks¹⁸⁹ of artists and philosophers, called “*Das ewige Antlitz*” (*Fackel* 271), or “*The Eternal Countenance*” (482).

The images contained therein crystallize for Canetti the significance of death for individuating every subject as an other, in particular as the memory of all one’s face-to-face encounters with others: “I had always been fascinated by the variety among human beings; but I had never expected this variety to intensify into the moment of death” (483).¹⁹⁰ From his personal encounters, Canetti has experienced the loss of access to the living face of an other:

Since childhood, I had suffered from the disappearance of the dead. Preserving a name or one’s works did not suffice for me. I cared about their physicality, too, every feature, every twitching of their faces. When I heard a voice that lodged in my mind, I futilely looked for the face; it appeared in dreams, when I did not wish for it; but I could not evoke it by will. If ever I did see the face (seldom enough), it had become different, subject to its own laws of decomposition. (482-83)¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ Elsewhere in the memoirs, masks act as a metaphor for the trace of the face of the other. Canetti describes how during the Jewish festival of Purim the adults would come home wearing masks, which he enjoyed seeing as they took them off and revealed themselves. He also recalls how his father once came into his room wearing a wolf’s mask, which Elias mistook for a “werewolf” (20).

¹⁹⁰ Trans. of “Von der Verschiedenartigkeit der Menschen war ich immer fasziniert, aber ich hatte nie erwartet, daß diese Verschiedenartigkeit sich bis in den Augenblick des Todes steigert” (271).

¹⁹¹ Trans. of “Unter dem Schwinden der Toten hatte ich von klein auf gelitten. Die Bewahrung des Namens, der Werke genügte mir nicht. Es war mir auch um ihre
(continued...)

The death-masks represent the trace of an individual's life-work, suffering, and struggles against death and self-dissolution. For Levinas, suffering is a trace of one's infinite responsibility to the other, and Canetti appears to recognize this in his own observations on the faces of individual writers. On seeing the death-masks of writers he has read and yearned to communicate with, Canetti experiences a form of ethical recognition which he interprets in light of the struggle against death. He reads each facial expression as a text of the final moment of self-dissolution, and poses a crucial question:

And now I saw the people with whose thoughts and works I lived, whom I loved for their deeds, hated for their misdeeds; they were before me, unchangeable, their eyes closed – as if these eyes could still open, as if nothing irreparable had happened. Were these people still in control of themselves? (482-83)¹⁹²

This new way of reading into the life a writer whom one has read and thought about presents Canetti with the necessity of having to re-think the relationship between death and one's responsibility to art. Canetti begins to see new meaning in the horror of the loss associated with death. The struggle against death, and the duty of the writer to give voice

¹⁹¹(...continued)

Körperlichkeit zu tun, um jeden Zug und jedes Zucken auf ihrem Gesicht. Wenn ich die Stimme dessen hörte, der mir immer im Ohre blieb, suchte ich vergebens nach seinem Gesicht; im Traum erschien es, wenn ich es nicht herbeigewünscht hatte, aber willentlich zu beschwören war es nicht. Auch wenn ich es – selten genug – sah, war es ein anderes geworden, eigenen Gesetzen der Auflösung unterworfen" (271-272).

¹⁹² Trans. of "Und nun sah ich die, mit deren Gedanken und Werken ich lebte, die ich für ihre Taten liebte, für ihre Untaten haßte, unveränderlich vor mir, ihre Augen geschlossen – als wären sie noch zu öffnen gewesen, als wäre noch nichts Irreparables geschehen – , *hatten* sie sich noch [. . .]?" (272)

to this struggle, are exemplified for Canetti in one death-mask in particular.

Blaise Pascal's death mask acts as the metaphor of a double-voiced discourse of self-dissolution, because Canetti believes that Pascal's facial expression on the death-mask, a fixture of eternal suffering, read together with the aphoristic ethics of his *Pensées*, combine to form an image of Pascal transcending death:

Here, pain achieved its perfection; here, it found its long-sought meaning. Pain that means to remain thought is not capable of anything more. If there is a dying beyond lament, then this is where we are confronted with it. A gradually acquired nearness to death, in ineffably tiny, minute steps, borne by the wish to cross the threshold of death, in order to gain unknown things beyond it. One can read a great deal about believers and martyrs who, for the sake of the afterlife, wish to be saved from this life. But here, we have the picture of one of them in the moment of achieving his wish – a man who did know how to castigate himself. Thus, everything he did against his life was reflected in his thought. *His* countenance can be called an eternal one, for it expresses the eternity that he was after. He *rests* in his pain, which he does not wish to abandon. He wants as much pain as eternity is willing to absorb; and when he has reached the full measure permitted by eternity, he will present that full measure to eternity and enter eternity. (483-84)¹⁹³

¹⁹³ Trans. of "Hier hat der Schmerz seine Vollendung erreicht, hier hat er seinen langgesuchten Sinn gefunden. Schmerz, der Gedanke bleiben soll, ist zu mehr nicht imstande. Wenn es ein Sterben jenseits der Klage gibt, so ist man hier mit ihm konfrontiert. Eine allmählich erworbene Nähe zum Tod, in unsäglich kleinen, in winzigen (continued...)"

Pascal's martyrdom becomes, then, an exemplum for Canetti's own secular experience of writing.¹⁹⁴ Experiencing the pain of self-loss to the degree that is evident in Pascal's death-mask and in his writing gives Canetti a model of the limits of self-effacement. At the same time, Pascal's example offers Canetti a model of responsibility. When he later writes of the self-dissolution of Peter Kien – in many ways the anti-thesis of Pascal – the entire library of Western and Eastern culture will be metonymically destroyed in the process. The theme of the writer's ethical responsibility to the other, to his own self-effacement in words, grows in significance with Canetti's work on *Die Blendung*. The conflagration is prophetic in hindsight, but, at the time, Canetti allows the end to write itself, despite his grave misgivings about its potential significance for history, and the possibility that it will play into the hands of the enemy, the friends of death. Canetti effaces himself in the writing, and like Pascal, accepts the responsibility of writing for the other. As we will see in the *Das Augenspiel*, Canetti will apply this lesson by forsaking

¹⁹³(...continued)

Schritten, vom Wunsch nach Überschreitung seiner Schwelle getragen, um hinter ihm Unbekanntes zu gewinnen. Man kann viel von Gläubigen und Märtyrern lesen, die um des jenseitigen Lebens willen von diesem erlöst sein wollen, aber hier hat man das Bild eines von ihnen vor sich, im Augenblick, da er es erlangt, und es ist einer, der sich zwar auch zu kasteien verstand, aber noch unendlich viel mehr gedacht als sich kasteit hat. So hat alles, was er gegen dieses Leben getan hat, sich in seinem Denken gespiegelt. *Sein* Antlitz darf man ein ewiges nennen, denn es drückt eben die Ewigkeit aus, um die es ihm zu tun war. *Er ruht* in seinem Schmerze, den er nicht verlassen will. Er will so viel Schmerz, als die Ewigkeit aufzunehmen bereit ist, und wenn er das volle Maß erlangt hat, das sie ihm erlaubt, bringt er ihn ihr dar und betritt sie" (273).

¹⁹⁴ For an analysis of what Canetti's opinion of Pascal's writing in relation to the death-mask, as Canetti expresses these opinion in his own aphorisms, see Puff-Trojan 193-205.

his own desire to struggle against death, particularly in the face of the pain he feels at the death of his mother, and by writing in recognition of his brother's act of self-abnegation toward their mother.

7. *Das Augenspiel*: The Self-Envisaging Voices of Canetti, the Public Writer

In the third volume of the memoirs, *Das Augenspiel: Lebensgeschichte 1931-1937*, Canetti no longer divides the events of his life into parts named according to the years and places in which those events occurred. Having completed *Die Blendung* in August, 1931, he now regards himself as a writer. Furthermore, elections in Germany in September, 1930, and again in July, 1932, have displayed the growing power of the National Socialists in the Reichstag. The Nazis' strident antisemitism has already caught the attention of Canetti, who worries that his character, Fischerle, in *Die Blendung* will be seen as an affirmation of Jewish stereotypes, and, therefore, of Nazi propaganda. In light of these events, Canetti narrates his memories of life in Vienna from August, 1931, to June, 1937, when he leaves first for France and then eventually England. They are mainly comprised of a series of encounters with artists, intellectuals and friends. Though a vague chronology connects these encounters, it is no longer a teleological one leading Canetti to begin writing. Likewise, political events in Vienna and elsewhere are mentioned in passing during *Das Augenspiel*, if at all, although their effect on the remainder of Canetti's life is to be profound. Indeed, they are to re-shape Canetti's views on writing

about the aesthetics and ethics of self-other relations, for now Canetti speaks with an altered self-envisaging voice, that of a writer formulated metonymically from the attributes of a public persona whose utterances must be answered for before others.

Immediately on finishing the writing of *Die Blendung*, Canetti becomes aware of how his voice has become attenuated from a private to a public one. He has not yet published the novel, but he realises that others will read it, and that he will have to answer for what he has written. The attenuation of his public voice takes place metonymically during the course of various public readings and in response to commentaries on his novel made by various friends. To some extent, he has now joined the ranks of other writers, like those in Berlin mentioned at the end of *Die Fackel im Ohr*, whose “shrieks of self-assertion” (578)¹⁹⁵ had alienated him from them. Canetti’s aesthetic response is to focus on representing the acoustic masks of non-writers. He finds aesthetic value “in the poverty, banality, the misuse of words, not in the braggadocio and bumptiousness of the writers” (579).¹⁹⁶ With *Die Blendung*, his answer to the stylised language of literature is to set fire to Kien’s library of world literature, a metonym for the negation of culture on a grand scale. Personally, Canetti feels as if he has freed himself from a self-destructive reliance on book culture, though he continues to question whether the price has been too high:

¹⁹⁵ Trans. of “Selbstbehauptungsgeschrei” (387).

¹⁹⁶ Trans. of “in der Armut, der Banalität, der Mißbrauchtheit der Worte, nicht in der Großsprecherei und Aufgeblasenheit der Dichter” (399).

But the books had been sacrificed to this liberation, and when *they* went up in flames, I felt that the same thing had happened to me. I felt that I had sacrificed not only my own books but also those of the whole world, for the sinologist's library included everything that was of importance to the world, the books of all religions, all thinkers, all Eastern literatures, and those of the Western literatures that were still in any sense alive. All that had burned, I had let it happen, I had made no attempt to save any part of it; what remained was a desert, and I myself was to blame. For what happens in that kind of book is not just a game, it is reality; *one has to justify it*, not only against criticism from outside but in one's own eyes as well. Even if an immense fear has compelled one to write such things, one must still ask oneself whether in so doing one has not helped to bring about what one so vastly fears. (589: second emphasis mine)¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁷ Trans. of "Aber für diese Befreiung waren die Bücher eingesetzt worden und daß *sie* in Flammen aufgingen, empfand ich so, als wäre es mir selbst geschehen. Mir war zumute, nicht nur als hätte ich meine eigenen Bücher geopfert, sondern auch die der ganzen Welt, denn in der Bibliothek des Sinologen war alles enthalten, was für die Welt von Bedeutung war, die Bücher aller Religionen, die aller Denker, die der östlichen Literaturen insgesamt, die der westlichen, soweit sie auch nur das geringste ihres Lebens bewahrt hatten. Das alles war niedergebrannt, ich hatte es geschehen lassen, ohne auch nur einen Versuch zu machen, etwas davon zu retten, und zurück blieb eine Wüste, es gab nun nichts mehr als Wüste und ich selbst war an ihr schuld. Denn es ist kein bloßes Spiel, was in einem solchen Buch geschieht, es ist eine Wirklichkeit, *für die man einzustehen hat*, viel mehr als jeder Kritik von außen, sich selbst gegenüber und wenn es auch eine Angst sehr großen Ausmaßes ist, die einen zwingt, solche Dinge niederzuschreiben, so bleibt immer noch zu bedenken, ob man nicht durch sie eben das mit herbeiführt, was man so sehr fürchtet" (*Augenspiel* 9; second emphasis mine).

By having destroyed literature, as it were, Canetti must denounce himself as a writer.¹⁹⁸

Thus, from an aesthetic conviction concerning his resistance to the stylization of language in writing, Canetti succeeds in exposing himself to a moral dilemma in response to which he can no longer be sure whether to continue writing.

Canetti's despondency at what he has written is interrupted by a chance encounter with a writer he has never read, and who does not belong, therefore, to the canon of world literature that has been destroyed. This writer is Georg Büchner and the two works Canetti reads are the dramatic fragment, *Woyzeck*, and the novelle, *Lenz*.¹⁹⁹ Canetti only later finds a word for the quality that strikes him most about the characters portrayed in *Woyzeck*, their "*self-denunciation*" (598), or self-castigation.²⁰⁰ The self-castigation of the characters other than *Woyzeck*, a discourse of self-pillory in which "there is more vainglory than condemnation" (599),²⁰¹ is paradoxical. To use Bakhtin's terms, it is indicative of a passively dialogic form of moral confession whose irony lies in the

¹⁹⁸ Earlier, Canetti writes about his response to Kien's death in terms of a conditional analogy that leaves him a loophole with which to reconstruct a new aesthetics of the self-envisaging voice: "In autumn 1931, Kant set fire to his library and burned up with his books. His death affected me as deeply *as if* I had gone through it myself" (584: "Im Herbst 1931 legte Kant Feuer an seine Bibliothek und verbrannte mit seinem Büchern. Sein Untergang ging mir so nahe, *wie wenn* es mir selber geschehen wäre" *Fackel* 408; emphasis mine).

¹⁹⁹ Canetti uses the old spelling, *Woyzeck*, for what is today *Woyzeck*.

²⁰⁰ Trans. of "*Selbstanprangerung*" (22). The translation of this term into English poses some difficulty, as the German word includes an etymological and possibly metaphoric signified. *Anprangern* also means *to pillory* and, thus, opens a semantic field related to punitive discourse.

²⁰¹ Trans. of "es ist mehr von Gepränge darin als von Strafe" (23).

innocence with which the characters denounce themselves. These characters and the words they use to attack Wozzeck “are present before any moral statement has been made about them” (599).²⁰² Wozzeck remains apart from their form of self-denunciation. The reader may “think of them with horror, but our horror is mixed with approval, because in presenting themselves they are unaware of the horror they arouse” (599).²⁰³ Canetti compares and contrasts this approach to that of the satirist who judges everyone except him or herself. The paradox lies in the representation of self-castigation. The author, as in Büchner’s case, allows the character to denounce him or herself in that character’s denunciation of others.

What Canetti is describing here is an example of a passively double-voiced dialogue in which the irony of the satirist is put into question by the authority of the author. In *Wozzeck*, the more emphatically a character pillories another, the more likely that character is actually pillorying himself or herself. The discovery leads Canetti to reflect on the authority of our words in relation to what we perceive to be our own identities:

Another reason for the strength of these characters is no doubt that they are given the full value of the word ‘I,’ which a pure satirist grants to no one except himself.

There is enormous vitality in this direct and by no means parenthetical ‘I.’ It has

²⁰² Trans. of “sind, wie immer sie sind, da, bevor ein moralischer Spruch über sie gefällt wurde” (23).

²⁰³ Trans. of “denkt mit Abscheu an sie, aber er ist mit Wohlgefallen verquickt, weil sie sich vorführen, ohne zu ahnen, welchen Abscheu sie erregen” (23).

more to say about itself than has any judge. A judge speaks largely in the third person; even the direct address in which the judge says his worst is usurped. Only when the judge relapses into his 'I' is he present in the full horror of his function, but then he himself has become a character who unsuspectingly presents himself, the giver of judgement, in *his* self-denunciation. (599)²⁰⁴

As this passage suggests, the voice of self-castigation has an immediacy and a power that can usurp even the pronouncements of a moral authority. The writer is always in danger of becoming caught in the aesthetic trap of allowing a character's moralising judgments to stand as a metonym for the identity of that character, and possibly the author as well. Such is the case of the satirist – Karl Kraus, for example – who manipulates his kind of acoustic masks for moralistic purposes. The satirist expresses his or her expectation that these characters can be different than what they already are. Canetti asks the rhetorical question, "Should the play be a mission school, which such characters should attend until they can be written *differently*" (599)?²⁰⁵ By searching for an answer, he begins to distance himself further from the example of Kraus, and re-affirms his vision by writing

²⁰⁴ Trans. of "Es gehört wohl dazu, daß man ihnen das volle Wort *Ich* ernsthaft gönnt, das der pure Satiriker niemandem wirklich zubilligt, außer sich selbst. Die Vitalität dieses unmittelbaren und uneingeklammerten *Ich* ist ungeheuer. Es sagt mehr über sich als jeder Richter. Für den Urteilenden liegt das meiste in der dritten Person, selbst die direkte Anrede, in der das Schlimmste gesagt wird, ist usurpiert. Erst wenn der Richter in sein *Ich* verfällt, ist er in der vollen Schrecklichkeit dessen, was er verübt, da, aber dann ist er selbst zur Figur geworden und führt sich, er der Urteilende, ahnungslos in *seiner* Selbst-anprangerung vor" (23).

²⁰⁵ Trans. of "Soll das Drama eine Missionsschule sein, in die solche Figuren so lange gehen, bis sie sich *anders* schreiben lassen" (24).

the novel.

Indirectly, what Canetti sees in his method is an opportunity to minimize the metonymic strength of the author's monologic, self-envisaging voice as much as possible. Unlike a writer, such as the satirist, who acts as a proxy for God, a different attitude pervades the kind of writing Canetti has in mind. The writer's attitude toward the authority of his or her characters's voices must be one

which sides with the creature and not with God, which defends the creature against Him and may even go so far as to disregard God altogether and concentrate on humankind. One who takes the attitude that human beings cannot be changed, though he would like to see them different. Human beings cannot be changed by hatred or punishment. They accuse themselves by representing themselves as they are, and this is self-indictment, it does not come from someone else. A writer's justice cannot consist in condemning them. He can invent their victim and show the marks they make on him as if they were fingerprints. (600)²⁰⁶

This is not a secularist manifesto, but rather a realisation that the authority inherent in the writer's words must always turn back on itself and question that authority. Seeing these qualities in Büchner's *Wozzeck*, Canetti is suggesting that he has also achieved a similar

²⁰⁶ Trans. of "die den Kreaturen und nicht Gott verfallen ist, die sich ihrer gegen ihn annimt, die vielleicht so weit geht, ganz von ihm abzusehen und nur von Kreaturen handelt. Sie geht ihre Unabänderlichkeit, obwohl sie sie anders haben möchte. Mit Haß wie mit Strafen ist den Menschen nicht beizukommen. Sie klagen sich an, indem sie sich darstellen, wie sie sind, aber es ist ihre Selbstanklage, nicht die eines anderen. Die Gerechtigkeit des Dichters kann nicht darin bestehen, sie zu verdammen. Er kann den erfinden, der ihr Opfer ist und alle ihre Spuren wie Fingerabdrücke auf ihn zeigen" (24).

measure of success with his characters in *Die Blendung*. The comparison restores Canetti's confidence in himself, and he begins writing two plays, *Hochzeit* and *Komödie der Eitelkeit*. Here too, though, he will be forced to acknowledge both his own limitations as a *Dichter*, and those limitations imposed by the genres of narrative and drama. He will eventually turn, instead, to writing non-fiction, including essays, aphorisms and a poetic work of social anthropology.

As I discussed in the preceding section, the relationship between aesthetics and ethics is becoming increasingly important for Canetti's ideas on the value of writing. The series of verbal exchanges between Canetti and his artistic acquaintances, friends and intimates allow him to test the theories he is now putting into practice. When he meets the Austrian sculptor, Fritz Wotruba, for instance, the two men form an artistic brotherhood out of their respect and admiration for each other's work. Even though they differ on some aesthetic principles, each has reasons for excusing the other's deficiency. For Wotruba, Canetti's aesthetic flaw is his morality. But according to Canetti, Wotruba "interpreted my 'morality' as my need to safeguard the purity of my artistic purpose" (668).²⁰⁷ Canetti neither denies nor refutes Wotruba's criticism. His silence can be read as tacit acknowledgement, if not approval, of his own moral-artistic purpose. But what are we to understand by Canetti's idea of the purity of artistic purpose? Is it comparable to Nussbaum's concept of art as a source of emotional knowledge in the service of

²⁰⁷ Trans. of "deutete meine *Moral* als die Reinheit einer künstlerischen Absicht" (122).

determining justice? Indeed, Canetti envisages himself in his memoirs as having been an artist in search of ethical authority.

To test the success of his artistic purpose, Canetti re-enacts a passively dialogic polemic with his friend, the writer, Hermann Broch.²⁰⁸ Broch's demeanour and his ideas present to Canetti a certain model of self-effacement that Canetti resists. The relationship between the young Canetti and the older Broch is at times strained: "My *positive* manner of speaking irritated him, but he was too kind to show it [. . .]. He would have liked to teach me self-doubt, perhaps he was making cautious attempts at just that, but if so he did not succeed" (605).²⁰⁹ Canetti's first encounter with Broch occurs while Canetti is reciting from *Die Blendung*. He becomes aware of Broch's reaction to it from Broch's facial expressions. Canetti interprets Broch's initial silence as disapproving, an attitude which Canetti respects, and which forms the ethical foundation of their friendship. To Broch, "*nothing* was beyond good and evil, and one thing I liked about him from the start was that in speaking he took a responsible attitude from first to last and was not ashamed of

²⁰⁸ Hermann Broch (1886-1951) is a Jewish-Austrian novelist, poet, essayist and philosopher who was a candidate for the Nobel Prize in 1950. His novel trilogy, *Die Schlafwandler* (1931-32), which had been favourably reviewed by Herman Hesse and Thomas Mann, is known to Canetti when they meet in 1933. Broch undertook a comprehensive study of mass psychology later in his career while living in the United States, but it was not published until after Broch's death, as volume 12 of *Kommentierte Werkausgabe: Massenwahntheorie; Beiträge zu Einer Psychologie der Politik* (1979). In 1936, Canetti delivered a public address in homage to Broch on the occasion of Broch's 50th birthday. This was published as "Rede auf Hermann Broch" in *Gewissen*.

²⁰⁹ Trans. of "Meine *bestimmte* Art zu sprechen irritierte ihn, doch war er zu menschenfreundlich, es zu zeigen [. . .]. Er hätte mich gern zum Selbstzweifler gemacht, vielleicht wollte er mich vorsichtig dazu erziehen, aber das gelang ihm gar nicht" (31).

it” (606).²¹⁰ However, one effect that Broch has on Canetti during their conversation is due to Broch’s silent listening. This unnerves Canetti and compels him to speak more and more about himself:

He induced me to speak of myself, to talk myself into a lather and go on and on [. . .]. One expanded in his silence, one encountered no obstacles. There was nothing one could not have said, he rejected nothing. One felt ill at ease only as long as one had not expressed oneself fully. While in other such conversations there comes a point where one suddenly says to oneself: ‘Stop. This far and no further,’ where one senses the danger of relinquishing too much – for how does one find the way back to oneself, and how after that can one bear to be alone – with Broch there was never such a point or such a moment, one never came up against warning signs, one staggered on, faster and faster, as though drunk. It is devastating to discover how much one has to say about oneself. (608)²¹¹

²¹⁰ Trans. of “Jenseits von Gut und Böse war für ihn *nichts* und daß er sich sofort, vom ersten Satz an, zu einer verantwortlichen Haltung bekannte und sich nicht für sie schämte, nahm mich für ihn ein” (32).

²¹¹ Trans. of “Er brachte es dazu, daß man über sich sprach, in Rage geriet und nicht mehr aufhören mochte [. . .]. Man breitete sich in seiner Stille aus, nirgends stieß man auf Hindernisse. Man hätte alles sagen können, er wies nichts zurück, Scheu empfand man nur, solange man etwas nicht ganz und gar gesagt hatte. Während man sonst in solchen Gesprächen an eine Stelle gelangt, wo man sich mit einem plötzlichen Ruck ‘Halt!’ sagt, ‘Bis hierher und nicht weiter!’, da die Preisgabe, die man sich gewünscht hat, gefährlich wird – denn wie findet man wieder zurück zu sich und wie soll man danach wieder allein sein? –, gab es diesen Ort und diesen Augenblick bei Broch nie, nichts rief Halt, nirgends stieß man auf Warntafeln oder Markierungen, man stolperte weiter, rascher, und war wie betrunken. Es ist überwältigend zu erleben, *wieviel* man über
(continued...)

That Broch has such an effect on Canetti, and that Canetti is aware of it, demonstrates a new development in Canetti's self-consciousness, though he uses the impersonal third-person pronoun to identify his own experience. Broch has *induced* him to see himself differently. In this way, Canetti resists Broch's self-effacing influence by envisaging himself to Broch in ever more insistent terms, but there is also an insecurity and loss of self-control that Canetti is confessing to here.

In the chapters "Auge und Atem" and "Beginn eines Gegensatzes," a series of philosophical and literary conversations ensues, thus providing Canetti with a format to articulate and justify his own ethical, artistic purpose. Broch expresses disapproval of *Die Blendung* and Canetti's drama, *Hochzeit*. According to Canetti, this disapproval stems from Broch's ideas on modern writing. To Broch's proposition that the modern novel must contain psychologically realistic characterization in order to express such new discoveries as Freudian analysis, Canetti replies,

I too believe that the novel must be *different*, but not because we are living in the age of Freud and Joyce. The *substance* of our time is different, and that can be shown only through characters. The more they differ from one another, the more extreme their characters, the greater will be the tensions between them. The nature of these tensions is all-important. They frighten us, and we recognize this fear as our own. They help us *rehearse* our fear. In psychological investigation we also

²¹¹(...continued)
sich zu sagen hat" (36).

encounter fear and take note of it. Then new methods, or methods which at least seem new to us, are devised to liberate us from it. (615)²¹²

This statement can be seen as Canetti's response to the aesthetic manifestos underpinning certain modernist developments in the novel, such as the emphasis on psychological realism, but it is a negative manifesto, a partial repudiation of the prevailing trends. For Canetti, his new way of writing differently is exemplified by the fearful, acoustic masks he has created in *Hochzeit*. Broch, on the other hand, opposes this approach, arguing that Canetti is creating that which is to be feared.

In Canetti's memoirs, Broch's voice, like all the other voices, is an acoustic mask that Canetti creates to accuse himself with accusations he respects and takes seriously. In Broch's critique of Canetti's artistic purpose, we hear the echoes of Canetti's self-justification. The word, *fear*, is seized on as an important psychological effect of writing. What is the ethical justification for creating fear with one's writing? Broch calls on Canetti to answer for himself:

What can liberate us from fear? Maybe it can be diminished, but no more. What you have done in your novel and in *The Wedding* as well is to *heighten* fear. You

²¹² Trans. of "Ich glaube auch, daß der Roman heute *anders* sein muß, aber nicht weil wir im Zeitalter von Freud und von Joyce leben. Die *Substanz* der Zeit ist eine andere, das läßt sich in neuen Figuren zeigen. Je mehr sie sich voneinander unterscheiden, je extremer sie angelegt sind, umso größer sind die Spannungen zwischen ihnen. Auf die Art dieser Spannungen kommt es an. Sie machen uns Angst, die Angst, die wir als unsere erkennen. Sie dienen der *Einübung* dieser Angst. In der psychologischen Ergründung geraten wir ja auch an die Angst und stellen sie fest. Dann werden neu oder wenigstens neu erscheinende Mittel eingesetzt, die uns von ihr befreien sollen" (45).

rub people's noses in their wickedness, as though to punish them for it. I know your underlying purpose is to make them repent. You make me think of a Lenten sermon. But you don't threaten people with hell, you paint a picture of hell in this life. You don't picture it objectively, so as to give people a clearer consciousness of it; you picture it in such a way as to make people feel they are in it and scare them out of their wits. Is it the writer's function to bring more fear into the world? Is that a worthy intention?(615)²¹³

Broch's direct accusations force Canetti to answer for himself. Canetti is, of course, re-creating the conversation from memory, and perhaps with the hidden agenda of suggesting that the debate between him and Broch presaged to an extent the answerability of art in light of the war-time events to come. On the surface, Canetti stands firm in justifying his techniques and beliefs.

Here begin both an overt and a hidden polemic regarding the psychological sources of fear and its relation to power. Canetti rejects Broch's assertion that Freudian psychology is the path to such knowledge as would free them from fear and the abuse of power. In rejecting Freud, Canetti proposes another direction for understanding a self-

²¹³ Trans. of "Was könnte uns von der Angst befreien? Sie läßt sich vielleicht verringern, das ist alles. Was Sie in Ihrem Roman und auch in der *Hochzeit* getan haben, ist eine *Steigerung* der Angst. Sie stoßen den Menschen auf seine Schlechtigkeit, so als ob sie ihn dafür bestrafen wollten. Ich weiß, Ihre tiefere Absicht ist, ihn zur Umkehr zu zwingen. Man denkt an eine Bußpredigt. Sie drohen aber nicht mit der Hölle, Sie führen sie vor, und zwar in diesem Leben. Sie führen sie nicht objektiv vor, damit man ihrer genauer gewahr wird, damit man sie wirklich kennt, sondern Sie führen sie so vor, daß man sich in ihr fühlt und sich vor ihr ängstigt. Ist es aber die Aufgabe des Dichters, *mehr* Angst in die Welt zu bringen? Ist das eine menschenwürdige Absicht?" (45).

envisaging voice and its relationship with other voices:

This modern psychology strikes me as totally inadequate. It deals with the individual, and in that sphere it has undoubtedly made certain discoveries. But where the masses are concerned, it can't do a thing, and that's where knowledge would be most important, for all the new powers that are coming into existence *today* draw their strength from crowds, from the masses. Nearly all those who are out for political power know how to operate with the masses. But the men who see that such operations are leading straight to another world war don't know how to influence the masses, how to stop them from being misled to the ruin of us all.

The laws of mass behaviour can be discovered. (616)²¹⁴

For the time being, discovering these laws remains in the future. In Canetti's later theorization of them, the individual voice loses itself in the mob of other voices, and no longer takes responsibility for the actions of the crowd. This is a negative type of self-effacement. Individuals in such crowds allow themselves to be manipulated metonymically by a dominant voice that imposes its will on the crowd, and leads the crowd to act contrary to the conscience of individuals in it. Psychoanalysis is insufficient

²¹⁴ Trans. of "“Mir scheint eben diese Psychologie völlig unzulänglich. Sie befaßt sich mit dem einzelnen, da ist sie wohl auf einiges gekommen, womit sie aber nichts anfangen kann ist die Masse, und das ist das Wichtigste, worüber man etwas wissen müßte, denn alle neue Macht, die *heute* entsteht, speist sich bewußt aus der Masse. Praktisch weiß jeder, der auf politische Macht aus ist, wie er mit der Masse operieren muß. Nur die, die sehen, daß diese Operationen stracks in den neuen Weltkrieg führen, wissen nicht, wie sie auf die Masse einwirken sollen, damit sie nicht zu unser aller Unglück mißbraucht wird. Die Gesetze des Massenverhaltens wären zu finden” (46-47).

to account for mass psychosis, such as the public book-burnings taking place across Germany in May, 1933. In what Canetti hopes is an “an appropriate answer to the burning of the books” (673),²¹⁵ he writes *Komödie der Eitelkeit*, a narrative drama comprising thirty characters whose acoustic masks give voice to their reactions to a prohibition against owning or using mirrors. The inspiration for this premise derives from Canetti noticing the faces of men at the barbershop, and how they were all “sunk in self-worship” (654).²¹⁶ The prohibition of mirrors is a sardonic commentary on how social regulations act as organising principles for crowd behaviour. All the same, Broch does not agree that Canetti’s writing provides any kind of antidote to the threat against the self that derives from the will-to-power of others.

In an attempt to reconcile their differences, the two writers involve themselves in a contest against each other. In the course of their discussions, Canetti and Broch raise the question: Was “there such a thing as a *good* man?” (681).²¹⁷ Assuming there is, they wonder what qualities such a person might possess in order to qualify: “Would he lack certain drives that motivate others? Would he be reclusive or would it be possible for him to associate with people, react to their challenges and nevertheless be ‘good’?” (681)²¹⁸ It

²¹⁵ Trans. of “eine legitime Entgegnung auf die Bücherverbrennung” (127).

²¹⁶ Trans. of “jeder war in Andacht vor sich selber, vor seinem eigenen Bilde versunken” (100).

²¹⁷ Trans. of “gab es einen *guten* Menschen?” (138).

²¹⁸ Trans. of “Wie müßte er sein, wenn es ihn gäbe? *Fehlten* ihm gewisse Eigenschaften, von denen andere sich treiben ließen? War es jemand, der abseits stand
(continued...)

is as if the two men are searching not only for a set of metonymic character traits organized to represent goodness, but rather a metaphorical quality of goodness that underlies the language with which such a man is given voice. Canetti and Broch challenge each other to find a person among their acquaintances who might embody the characteristics of what they consider to be a good person. When Broch finally introduces Canetti to a man he believes qualifies, it turns out to be Dr. Sonne, whom Canetti knows from having observed him in the Café Museum due to the striking resemblance between Sonne's face and Karl Kraus's. The goodness that Sonne represents is contingent on his ability to separate himself from a crowd ethic. As we will see in the next section, the example of Sonne provides Canetti with the image of a voice that he can seek to emulate. This is important, because in seeking to anticipate in the discourse of the other a goodness that the self can emulate, there is hope that the self can better anticipate the threat posed by its having to encounter the other. By way of the acoustic masks Canetti portrays for artists such as Wotruba and Broch, Scherchen and Werfel, Musil and Joyce, those voices that oppose or question his own artistic purpose are allowed to engage in a polemic with that purpose, and it is left to the reader to judge by the historical context the relative success of Canetti's search for an ethically motivated artistic vision.

8. *Das Augenspiel*: The Self-Effacing Voices of Canetti's Career as a Public Writer

²¹⁸(...continued)

oder konnte er sich frei unter anderen bewegen, auf ihre Herausforderungen reagieren und trotzdem *gut* sein?" (138-139).

The friendship between Canetti and Dr. Sonne becomes the most important of all Canetti's intellectual relationships. Sonne supplants Karl Kraus as Canetti's moral exemplum, though an exemplum of the self-effacing voice rather than a self-envisaging one. Nonetheless, Canetti will continue to struggle to eliminate the traces of Kraus's satirical discourse from his own. Because of the uncanny similarity between Kraus's and Sonne's faces, Canetti compares their qualities as men. Also, on seeing Karl Kraus's death mask, he is reminded of the suffering he had observed in Pascal's death mask. But there is a significant difference beneath "the amalgamation of these two faces" (696).²¹⁹ Where Kraus had shown the face "of the prophetic zealot" (696), Pascal's shows that of a "sufferer, who was able without presumption to discourse on everything accessible to the human mind" (696).²²⁰ Canetti sees in these two faces how for him Kraus's anger had turned into Pascal's suffering.²²¹ It helps him to understand Kraus, and, thus, to distance himself from Kraus's discourse. This process is furthered by Sonne, whose depth of learning speaks for Pascal. Pascal's patience, which Canetti had regarded as unattainable, is achieved by Sonne: "Pascal had given me an intimation of it, in Dr. Sonne I had it

²¹⁹ Trans. of "die Verquickung dieser beiden Antlitze" (160).

²²⁰ Trans. of "des prophetischen Eiferers" (160): "des Dulders, der die Kraft hat, sich über alles, was einem Geiste möglich ist, zu verbreiten, ohne daran überheblich zu werden" (160).

²²¹ An insightful analysis of the relationship between the death-masks of Pascal and Kraus, vis-à-vis Canetti's impression of Dr. Sonne's face, is provided by Stieg 268-279. Stieg refers to Canetti's long-standing attempt to distance himself from Kraus as a "process of release from enslavement" ("Prozeß der *Entsklavung*" 273).

before me” (696).²²² But there is also an important aesthetic dimension to the example of Sonne. Sonne demonstrates a level of artistic consciousness and regard for the other that Canetti has never before experienced: “For one thing, he was so utterly impersonal. He never talked about himself. He never made use of the first person. And seldom addressed me directly. By speaking in the third person, he distanced himself from his surroundings” (686).²²³ This is all the more significant for Canetti, because of how it contrasts with the majority of artists in a Vienna. Though he is both fascinated and repelled by them, he views most artists as “bursting with self-pity and self-importance” (686).²²⁴ Their conversations are marked by “floods of I-talk, protestation, confession and self-assertion” (686).²²⁵ Conversely, Canetti sees Sonne as the only person in the Vienna of those years who was totally devoid of all such desires. In his relations with others, Sonne displays exemplary sensitivity toward everyone. He sees the differences between people and respects the integrity of those differences: “He was never lacking in respect for the dividing lines between individuals. I called this his *ahimsa*, the Indian word for the

²²² Trans. of “in Pascal hatte ich es geahnt, in Sonne hatte ich es vor mir” (160).

²²³ Trans. of “Da war zuerst einmal das Fehlen alles Persönlichen. Er sprach nie von sich. Er sagte nie etwas in der ersten Person. Er sprach einen aber auch kaum direkt an. Alles wurde in der dritten Person gesagt und dadurch distanziert” (145).

²²⁴ Trans. of “floß über vor Mitleid mit sich und von seiner eigenen Bedeutung” (145).

²²⁵ Trans. of “Schwemme von Ich-Reden, Beteuerung, Bekenntnis und Selbstbehauptung” (145).

inviolability of all life" (689).²²⁶ This inviolability of all life is a universal principle that recognizes that identity lies in difference. As a result of the ensuing "four-year apprenticeship with Dr. Sonne" (689),²²⁷ Canetti learns how naive he was to think that he was entitled to use the voices of other people indiscriminately in his literature. Moreover, any attempt to explain these people "*ought* to fail" (689).²²⁸ The lessons Canetti learns from Sonne resonate years later. Even as he writes the memoirs, he finds it difficult to describe the special qualities of Sonne's humility, in particular his ability to practice a "*vigilant* humility" (689).²²⁹

Moreover, the fact that Sonne wrote as a young man, and then stopped writing both mystifies and humbles Canetti.²³⁰ In terms of Adorno's aesthetic theory, Sonne's gesture and his continued commitment to art may be seen as the ultimate form of self-sacrifice for a writer. When he was fifteen Sonne published several poems in Hebrew under the pen-name, Abraham ben Yitzhak; poems which were compared in some circles to those of Hölderlin. Though Sonne no longer writes, Canetti feels that his verbal discourse belongs to a special category of writing: "Dr. Sonne *spoke* as Musil *wrote*"

²²⁶ Trans. of "Sein Respekt für die Grenzen jedes anderen war unabänderlich. Ich nannte es sein *Ahimsa*, das indische Wort für Schonung jedes Lebens" (151).

²²⁷ Trans. of "vierjährige Lehrzeit bei Dr. Sonne" (151).

²²⁸ Trans. of "*soll* müßig bleiben" (151).

²²⁹ Trans. of "eine *wache* Demut" (150).

²³⁰ On Avraham Sonne's influence on Canetti and the intellectual life of both Vienna and Palestine, see Moses 297-306.

(688).²³¹ The impact of Sonne's speech is described by Canetti in terms of the effect it had on him at the time of hearing Sonne speak, and at the time of writing about the memory of those impressions. Either way, it is recalled as the discourse of a writer. Thus, Canetti begins writing for Sonne – that is, Canetti's words begin to be directed toward Sonne in anticipation of Sonne's possible critique of them. Canetti asks himself, "Did he disapprove of me for attaching so much importance to writing" (697),²³² a question he does not seem to have an answer for even many years later. Later, when Sonne attends one of Canetti's public readings, every word of Canetti's recitation is directed at Sonne. Sonne's critique of *Die Blendung* gives what Canetti feels is the definitive reading of the theme of evil in the novel, though Canetti does not divulge the particulars of that analysis (697).

Throughout his transition from a reader who is responsible to others to a writer who is responsible for others, Canetti cites several models that were crucial to that transition. Whether people or texts, they are imbued with a face that obliges him to respond to the challenge of being as good as they are. Sonne represents for Canetti a paragon of self-effacement. He speaks for all the great prophets of the Jewish tradition without limiting himself to that tradition. His predictions of the carnage of World War II accompany Canetti through the years in which they come true. In this sense, Sonne's

²³¹ Trans. of "Dr. Sonne *sprach* so, wie Musil *schrieb*" (149).

²³² Trans. of "Mißbilligte er mich, weil für mich das Schreiben so sehr zählte?" (162).

discourse is avant-garde. It represents an artistic purpose that Canetti, the *Dichter*, seeks to emulate. The two men never meet again, nor do they write to each other. In summation, Canetti says of him: "In many ways he was a model. Once I had known him no one else could become a model for me. He was a model in the only way that can make a model effective. Then, fifty years ago, he seemed unequalable, and unequalable he has remained for me" (699).²³³

The aesthetic model of the self-effacing voice that Canetti finds in Sonne is replicated on the ethical plane by the figure of Canetti's brother, George. Though not a prominent character in the memoirs, George becomes the vital interlocutor between Elias's private voice and the voice he gives to his estrangement from their mother. The complex relationship that develops between a younger Elias and his mother is written in ethical terms as the older Canetti answers for the final face-to-face encounters he has with her at her death. In Levinas's terms, these final encounters bear all the significance of the traces of all their prior encounters. As we have already seen, much of *Die gerette Zunge* describes in detail Canetti's precocious, literary education, and it lends context to Canetti's growing resistance to his mother. The death of his father sets in motion the series of events that has Mathilde move the family first to Lausanne and then to Vienna. Almost immediately, she begins teaching her son German in a highly regimented and emotionally

²³³ Trans. of "Er war in vielem ein Vorbild, seit ich ihn gekannt habe, konnte mir niemand mehr zum Vorbild werden. Er war es auf die Art, die Vorbilder haben müssen, wenn sie ihre Wirkung tun sollen. Er erschien mir damals, vor 50 Jahren, unerreichbar und unerreichbar ist er mir geblieben" (165).

strained fashion. German is the secret language she and her husband had shared since meeting in Vienna while at university. It is associated for them with nineteenth-century Austrian theatre and literature. Within months Canetti is able to enter into protracted discussions with his mother on German literary works she has given him to read, thereby replacing his father's voice metonymically. He learns to speak for the father, but in the process becomes responsible to the mother for his opinions and attitudes. Being put in this position, Canetti also makes demands on his mother, jealously forbidding her to develop any relationships with other men. In addition, he develops an inordinate desire for book-knowledge, which his mother eventually condemns when Elias is a teenager and she attempts to suppress his literary interests. She forces him to study in a practical field in order to become a doctor or to take over the family business. Canetti succumbs by agreeing to study chemistry at the university in Vienna, but carries on a secret relationship with Veza, the discovery of which compels his mother to move to Paris. From here their estrangement grows until mother and son no longer communicate with each other.

Ultimately, Canetti's feelings of responsibility to his mother cause him to lie to her. Her taboo against him developing intimate, personal relationships with women forces Canetti to resist further by secretly meeting with Veza and telling his mother stories about other women who do not exist. Having to use his skills as a story-teller to deceive his mother creates an intolerable tension for him. This tension is to lead to years of estrangement and bitterness for both of them. When Canetti writes *Die Blendung*, his mother grants him a temporary reprieve and summons him to Paris to account for himself.

This meeting is described in Part Four of *Das Augenspiel*, in “Die letzte Version.”

Discovering that Elias has secretly written a novel and has continued his relationship with Veza, she momentarily acknowledges her son's independence and authority. But though she sanctions him giving up a career in chemistry, she does so by taking credit herself for the novel: “In her high-handed way she had shown me recognition. The book, she said, was just as if she had written it, it could have been by her, I had made no mistake in wanting to write, I had done right to put everything else. What could chemistry mean to a writer?” (754).²³⁴ The syntax of this description – the repetition of his mother’s sudden sanctioning of his actions – indicates a double-voiced masking, or parody, of the high-handed way in which she reminds him of his continuing obligation to her.

This double-voicing provides further context to the revelation that follows, in which the mother rewards her son for his accomplishment by telling him the final version of the story of his father’s death. In the months preceding the tragic event, the mother had been intellectually seduced by a doctor who courted her while she was convalescing on the continent. He had introduced her to the writings of Strindberg. That the doctor and Canetti's mother carry on their discussions of literature in German – the secret language of the married couple's courtship – is tantamount to an unbearable act of betrayal in the view of Elias’s father, Jacques: “He died with the conviction that she had been unfaithful

²³⁴ Trans. of “Auf ihre hochfahrende Weise hatte sie mich anerkannt, das Buch sei so, wie sie selber geschrieben hätte, es sei wie von ihr, ich hätte recht daran getan, schreiben zu wollen, ich hätte recht daran getan, alles andere beiseite zu schieben, was sei schon für ein Dichter die Chemie!” (240)

to him.”²³⁵ The voice of Canetti, the narrator, merges with that of Canetti, the protagonist, when in response to his mother’s question of whether or not she was wrong to confess to her husband, he lies to her. As he writes years later, “I hadn’t the heart to tell her that she was guilty in spite of her innocence, because she had listened to words she should never have allowed, spoken in this language” (756).²³⁶ However, by defending her actions against the moral judgement implicit in her son’s subsequent line of questioning, by anticipating his ethical position in her own words, and by continuing to deny her guilt while confessing it, Mathilde continues to exert a powerful influence over her son’s aesthetic and ethical discourse by claiming it as her own:

Do you think I’d have come to Strindberg otherwise? I’d be a different woman, you wouldn’t have written your book. You’d never have gone beyond your wretched poems. You’d never have amounted to anything. Strindberg is your father. You’re my son by Strindberg. I’ve made you into his son. If I had disowned Reichenhall, you’d never have amounted to anything. You write German because I took you away from England. You’ve become Vienna even more than I have. It’s in Vienna that you found your Karl Kraus, whom I couldn’t bear. You’ve married a Viennese woman. And now you’re even living in the midst of Viennese vineyards. You seem to like it. As soon as I’m feeling better,

²³⁵ My Trans. of “Er starb in der Überzeugung, daß sie ihn betrogen habe” (242).

²³⁶ Trans. of “Ich hatte nicht das Herz, ihr zu sagen, daß sie ihrer Unschuld zum trotz schuldig war, denn sie hatte Worte in *dieser Sprache* erlaubt, die sie nie hätte erlauben dürfen” (243).

I'll come and see you. Tell Veza she needn't be afraid of me. You'll leave her just as you left me. The stories you made up for me will come true. You *have* to make up stories, you're a writer. That's why I believed you. Whom is one to believe if not writers? Businessmen? Politicians? I only believe writers. But they have to be distrustful like Strindberg, they have to see through women. One can't think ill enough of people. And yet I wouldn't give up a single hour of my life. Let them be bad! It's wonderful to be alive. It's wonderful to see through all their villainy and yet go on living. (757)²³⁷

His mother's deeply negative vision of the role of the writer does exercise its control over Canetti's ideas, but he is beginning to see the limitations of such negative self-effacement, as well. We can assume, for instance, that Canetti would have rather had his father present than all the attributes of himself that his mother is taking credit for. Her

²³⁷ Trans. of "Glaubst du, ich wäre sonst je auf Strindberg gekommen? Ich wäre ein anderer Mensch, du hättest dein Buch nicht geschrieben. Du wärst bei deinen kläglichen Gedichten geblieben. Kein Hahn hätte je nach dir gekräht. Dein Vater ist Strindberg. Du bist mein Sohn von Strindberg. Zu seinem Sohn habe ich dich gemacht. Hätte ich Reichenhall verleugnet, es wäre nichts aus dir geworden. Du schreibst Deutsch, weil ich dich von England fortgenommen habe. Du bist noch mehr zu Wien geworden als ich. Deinen Karl Kraus, den ich nicht leiden konnte, hast du in Wien gefunden. Eine Wienerin hast du geheiratet. Jetzt lebst du sogar unter Heurigen. Es scheint dir nicht schlecht zu gefallen. Sobald es mir besser geht, komme ich euch besuchen. Sag der Veza, sie braucht sich nicht vor mir zu fürchten. Du wirst sie verlassen, wie du mich verlassen hast. Die Geschichten, die du für mich erfunden hast, werden wahr werden. Du mußt erfinden, du bist ein Dichter. Drum habe ich dir geglaubt. Wem soll man glauben, wenn nicht Dichtern? Den Geschäftemachern vielleicht? Den Politikern? Ich glaube nur Dichtern. Aber sie müssen mißtrauisch sein wie Strindberg und Frauen durchschauen. Und trotzdem möchte ich nicht eine Stunde weniger leben. Sollen sie schlecht sein! Es ist wunderbar zu leben! Es ist wunderbar, alle Schlechtigkeiten zu durchschauen und trotzdem zu leben!" (244-245)

claim of being responsible for Canetti's writing, for his public voice, in particular for the misogynistic and misanthropic attitudes she sees expressed in *Die Blendung*, and which she approves of, run counter to Canetti's aesthetic and ethical intentions, though he cannot admit that to her.

Despite Canetti leaving his mother with the feeling that they have provisionally reconciled themselves, he soon learns he has underestimated her resolve to condemn him unconditionally. In the last line of "Die letzte Version," he recalls how, before "the year was out, her feelings against me hardened and without denigrating or accusing Veza, as she had done in the past, she wrote that she never wanted to see me again" (759).²³⁸ The next time Canetti does see his mother, she is on her death-bed. His recollection of this event comprises the final section of the entire autobiography, and is entitled "Tod der Mutter." It is the apotheosis of his experience of death, because it is the most personal. Called by his brother, George, to attend to her last days, Canetti continues to fear her condemnation and rejection of him. By now he has married Veza. On seeing his mother asleep, he reads in her face the hostile pride that has kept them apart, diminished only somewhat by approaching death. In an attempt to breach the impasse, and to provide her with a fond memory, he gives what he falsely tells her are roses from a bower in the garden of the family estate in Ruschuk: "She held the flowers over her face like a mask, and I had the impression that her features grew larger and stronger. She trusted me as

²³⁸ Trans. of "Noch im selben Jahr verhärtete sie sich wieder gegen mich, und ohne Veza wie in der Vergangenheit herabzusetzen oder zu beschuldigen, erklärte sie, sie wolle mich nie mehr sehen" (248).

before, she had dismissed her doubts, she knew who I was, but not a hostile word crossed her lips" (828).²³⁹ While Canetti is comforted by her positive response to his gift, and to the sudden memory that the smell of the roses in the garden had comforted his mother when she used to read horror stories while hiding in a laurel tree, he also recalls his vituperative criticism of those readings when he was a young man, and in that moment his mother directs him to sit away from her, far back in the corner of the room. A metonym for the death-mask, the roses act as an ethical loophole, an image of the son's deception of the mother, a deception that consoles, a consolation that seen in her face reverts itself to accusation, but an accusation that in turn consoles.

In the following days, the mother accepts his presence only to penalize him for the wrongs she feels he has done to her in the past. Canetti accepts this as his responsibility and reflects on it in light of his impending failure to prevent his mother from dying:

Such is the power of the dying who defend themselves against survivors, and it is well that the right of the weaker should be vindicated. Those whom we have not been able to protect are entitled to blame us for doing nothing to save them. Their reproach incorporates defiance which they pass on to us: the divine illusion that we may succeed in defeating death. He who sent out the serpent, the tempter, calls them back. There has been punishment enough. The tree of life is yours. Ye shall

²³⁹ Trans. of "Sie hielt die Blumen wie eine Maske übers Gesicht und mir war, als ob ihre Züge sich weiteten und kräftigten. Sie glaubte mir wie früher und hatte ihre Zweifel verstoßen, sie wußte, wer ich war, aber kein Wort der Feindschaft kam über ihre Lippen" (344).

not die. (832)²⁴⁰

This theme of the ignominiousness of surviving the death of the other – prevalent in *Masse und Macht* – is signified here in the dying person's reproach. It is what leads to the divine illusion of defeating death. Canetti deflates this illusion in a passively double-voiced parody that reverses the outcome of original sin as intoned in the Book of Genesis. He wishes to efface himself in the face of his mother's immanent death. They re-enact the ritual of banishment from the Garden of Eden every time she commands him to leave the room. His submission to her will is a continual reminder that he is still answerable to her.

The rage he feels in the wake of her death turns to defiance during the funeral procession, when he sees that his willing humiliation and self-abasement are not recognised or shared by others:

Among the others in the cortege I don't see a single face. I don't know who was there. In the apartment I looked on with hatred as the coffin lid was screwed on. As long as she was in the apartment, I felt that violence was being done her. On the long way to the cemetery, I felt none of this; now the coffin was she, and nothing came between me and my admiration for her. That's how a person like

²⁴⁰ Trans. of "Das ist die Kraft eines Sterbenden, der sich gegen den Überlebenden wehrt, und es ist gut so, daß das Recht des Schwächeren sich behauptet. Die wir nicht zu bewahren vermögen, sollen uns vorhalten dürfen, daß wir zu ihrer Rettung nichts getan haben. In ihrem Vorwurf ist der Trotz enthalten, den sie an uns weitergeben, der göttliche Wahn, daß es uns gelingen könnte, den Tod zu bezwingen. Der die Schlange geschickt hat, den Versucher, ruft sie zurück. Es ist der Strafe genug. Der Baum des Lebens ist euer. Ihr sollt nicht sterben" (350).

her must be carried to the grave if one's admiration for her is to be free of dross.

That feeling lasted, losing none of its intensity for two or three hours. There wasn't a trace of resignation in it, perhaps not even grief, for how could grief have been reconciled with my raging defiance? I could have fought for her, could have killed. I was ready for anything. Far from feeling numb, I challenged the world.

With her forehead I plowed a way for her through the city – people were reeling on all sides – waiting for the insult that would oblige me to fight. (833)²⁴¹

In his overwhelming anger, Canetti effaces all others around him. The emotions that take hold of Canetti force himself outside of himself. Unable to reconcile the strength of competing voices, he fantasizes about his own potential for self-preserving violence. This desire contravenes the strongest precept of his ethical being, and contravenes a direct imperative from his grandfather to his mother to him never to kill. But, of course, Canetti does not act on his desire. He effaces himself in this instant and remains true to his mother's expectations.

²⁴¹ Trans. of "Ich sehe auf diesem Weg kein einziges Gesicht der anderen und weiß nicht, wer dabei war. Mit Haß hatte ich in der Wohnung mitangesehen, wie der Sarg zugeschraubt wurde und solange sie in der Wohnung blieb, war es, als hätte man ihr Gewalt angetan. Während des langen Zuges fühlte ich davon nichts, der Sarg war zu ihr selbst geworden, nichts trennte mich von der Bewunderung für sie und so muß ein Mensch wie sie zu Grabe getragen werden, damit man ihn schlackenlos bewundert. Es war dasselbe Gefühl, das nicht nachließ, es war von immer gleicher Kraft, es muß zwei oder drei Stunden angehalten haben. Es war keine Spur von Ergebenheit darin, vielleicht nicht einmal von Trauer, denn wie wäre sie mit diesem rasenden Trotz zu vereinbaren gewesen. Ich hätte mich für sie schlagen, ich hätte töten können. Ich war zu allem bereit. Es war keine Lähmung, es war Herausforderung. Mit ihrer Stirn bahnte ich ihr den Weg durch die Stadt, torkelnde Menschen auf allen Seiten, und wartete der Beleidigung, die mich zwingen würde, für sie in die Schranken zu treten" (351).

Coming as it does late in Canetti's life as a writer, the death of his mother is an event that is written so as to express his responsibility for the other. In writing about his memories of and feelings for his mother, of the circumstances surrounding her death, he fulfills a part of his obligation to her. Furthermore, Canetti dedicates his memoir to his brother, George. Not until after his mother's death does Canetti come to realise that George had sacrificed far more for her than Elias ever had. In the final pages of the memoir, he describes George's reaction to her dying:

He wanted to be alone so he could speak to her [. . .]. As long as he was saying the old words, she was alive for him. He wouldn't admit to himself that she couldn't hear him [. . .]. He didn't feel guilt about making things up for her, for all his invention was a lament, a soft, monotonous, long-lasting lament, because soon she might cease to hear him. He wanted nothing to end; his ministrations continued in words. His words awakened her, and she who had suffocated breathed again [. . .]. I hear him speaking softly to the dead woman whom he will never leave until it comes time to follow her; to whom he speaks as if he still had the power to hold her, and this power belongs to her, he gives it to her and she must feel it. It sounds as if he were singing softly to her, not about himself, no complaint, only of her, she alone has suffered, she alone has the right to complain, but he comforts her and entreats her, and assures her that she is there . . . and although she is in her grave, there she lies where she lay ill, and in words he seizes hold of her, so that

she cannot leave him.²⁴²

George's dialogue with the dead is reported by Canetti as a lament for their mother. It is also Elias's lament to his brother who died before the memoir was completed. Beside being a lament, it is an homage to his brother who had given up his pursuit of a career in philosophy and dedicated himself to medicine in order to help treat his mother's ailments. George is the one who has been truly responsible for the mother, Elias having forsaken that obligation in order to pursue his writing career. George's grief resounds with a mixture of Elias's guilt over his own literary ambitions and his admiration for his brother's choices. The hero's *words* become the narrator's. But by writing about George's act of mourning, about his responsibility for the living and the dead, Canetti assumes

²⁴² Trans. of "Er wollte allein sein, um mit ihr zu sprechen [. . .] Er saß auf dem Stuhl, auf dem er abends neben ihrem Bett gesessen war und sprach immer weiter. Solange er die alten Worte sagte, war sie für ihn am Leben. Er gab sich nicht zu, daß sie ihn nicht mehr hörte [. . .] Er warf sich nicht vor, daß er für sie erfand, denn alle Erfindung war Klage, eine leise, gleichmäßige, anhaltende Klage, weil sie es vielleicht bald nicht hören würde. Er wollte, daß nichts ende, alle Verrichtungen gingen in Worten weiter. Seine Worte weckten sie und sie, die erstickt war, hatte wieder Atem [. . .] ich hörte diese Stimme, die ich nicht gekannt hatte, rein und hoch, wie die eines Evangelisten, ich sollte sie nicht hören, denn er wollte allein sein, aber ich hörte sie, aus Sorge, ob ich ihn allein lassen dürfe, wie er sich's wünschte, und ich prüfte die Stimme lange, bevor ich mich entschied, sie ist mir im Ohr geblieben alle Jahre. *Wie prüft man eine Stimme, was mißt man, was flößt einem Vertrauen ein.* Man hört die leise Rede an die Tote, die er nie verlassen wird, ohne ihr zu folgen; zu der er spricht, als hätte er noch alle Kraft in sich, sie zu halten, und diese Kraft gehört ihr und er gibt sie ihr, sie muß es fühlen. Es hört sich an, als ob er leise zu ihr singen würde, nicht von sich, keine Klage, nur von ihr, nur sie hat gelitten, nur sie darf klagen, er aber tröstet sie und beschwört sie und verspricht ihr immer wieder, daß sie da ist, sie allein, mit ihm allein, niemand sonst, jeder stört sie, darum will er, daß ich ihn mit ihr allein lasse, zwei oder drei Tage, und obwohl sie begraben ist, liegt sie da, wo sie krank immer war und in Worten holt er sie und sie kann ihn nicht verlassen" (352-53).

responsibility for George and for the memory of George's sacrifice. Canetti's sacrificial gesture has been to write a death-mask for his brother's self-effacing voice.

9. Conclusion: Writing for and to One's Others

In the end, Canetti realizes it is in voicing his responsibility to his writing that he comes most closely to voicing his infinite responsibility to others. The dialogic conversation that takes place over the course of the memoirs between his self-envisaging and self-effacing voices affirms this responsibility to his writing. It is a conversation that takes place inside the words of the memoirs, a narrative in which Canetti's voice recounts the process of how his voice was formed by others, and how he attempted to separate his voice from others. While on one level we do not choose the voices we are given by others, on another level we become more adept in the course of identifying these voices at choosing to differentiate them from one another. On the monologic level, the voices of one's early life are assembled together to provide a sense of who one is. For Canetti, the childhood experience of literally having to protect his language against the threats of others, crystallizes through the metonym of the tongue into a deep-seated desire to protect language, in which the individual voice is envisaged, by writing. This desire is the central organizing principle of Canetti's life. Each face-to-face encounter in language is a step along the way to becoming a writer. The first volume recounts his apprenticeship in language itself. The second volume narrates an apprenticeship with literature in such a

way that literature begins a dialogue with Canetti's emotional and intellectual responses to events he is a part of. The third volume articulates Canetti's apprenticeship as a public writer, and explores the complexities of having to account for one's words in the world at large.

In the process of writing his memoirs, however, the identity of these voices comes to disassemble itself on a dialogic level. Depending on the context in which one reads these memoirs, certain utterances reverberate with the metaphoric significance of their use in other encounters. From the point of view of an elderly man writing his memoirs, Canetti gives voice to the utterances that have comprised him. In so doing, he repudiates any claim which might be made on his behalf that he possesses a systematic self organized by and subordinate to the purpose of achieving and ensuring the integrity of that self. As the novelist, Claudio Magris, writes in an essay on Canetti's work, "Canetti is the great poet of a dilemma that, still unresolved, has grabbed our century by the throat: the inter-changeability and deadly symbiosis of self-preservation and self-destruction." (265).²⁴³ The question remains, however, what is the nature of the relationship between these two poles? Are they static and fixed, or do they enagage in dialogue with each other? Commenting on Canetti's autobiography, Magris writes:

In the autobiography, written in a familiar crystalline stylistic clarity that conceals a certain secret, you feel European culture explode formally and a centuries-old

²⁴³ My Trans. of "Canetti ist der große Dichter eines Dilemmas, das, nach wie vor ungelöst, unser Jahrhundert an der Kehle gepackt hält: die Austauschbarkeit und tödliche Symbiose von Selbstverteidigung und Selbstzerstörung" (265).

order collapse: the love of life and the rejection of death allow Canetti to depict the inextinguishable intensity of experience, the unique and irretrievable meaning in every face, every gesture that memory and words solidify in order to save them from time, from history, and from death. Yet this autobiography, which appears to say everything, is hiding an absence, a kind of black hole, that seems to devour the essential truth of every life. (272)²⁴⁴

Magris also notices the importance of the encounter with faces that runs through Canetti's memoirs. Reading the autobiography allows us to see the possible conditions for finding ourselves in words, but in successively differentiating himself from his earlier identity, in finding the loopholes in the law of his self-envisaging voice, and in exposing or sacrificing invaluable portions of his voice to the judgement of posterity, Canetti also gives voice to a certain self-effacement. Magris concludes that behind the obvious pleasure that comes from reading the memoirs, there is a deep well of reserve that veils "an unsuspected otherness, an imperceptible and unimaginable identity" (273).²⁴⁵ In this

²⁴⁴ My Trans. of "In der Autobiographie, geschrieben mit der gewohnten kristallinen stilistischen Klarheit, die ein unbestimmtes Geheimnis verhüllt, fühlt man die europäische Kultur förmlich explodieren und eine jahrhundertalte Ordnung zusammenstürzen; die Liebe zum Leben und die Verweigerung des Todes erlauben Canetti, die unauslöschliche Intensität der Erfahrung wiederzugeben, den einzigen und unwiederholbaren Sinn jedes Gesichts, jeder Geste, die das Gedächtnis und das Wort für immer fixieren, um sie vor der Zeit, vor der Geschichte und vor dem Tod zu retten. Doch diese Autobiographie, die alles zu sagen scheint, verbirgt eine Abwesenheit, eine Art schwarzes Loch, das die essentielle Wahrheit jenes Lebens zu verschlingen scheint" (272).

²⁴⁵ "Hinter der entgegenkommenden und eingängigen Geschmeidigkeit dieser
(continued...)

regard, Canetti's identity as a writer of the dialogic exchange between self-envisaging and self-effacing voices resonates with a strong sense of responsibility toward the other, because he recognizes that even though one cannot ever entirely efface oneself in words, it is for the sake of the other that he must continue trying.

²⁴⁵(...continued)

Autobiographie [. . .] steht eine Zurückhaltung, die, sich windend und tarnend, ein ungeahntes Anderssein verbirgt, eine nicht greifbare und nicht vorstellbare Identität" (273).

V: SAMUEL BECKETT AND *NOHOW ON*

Adventure most unto itself
The Soul condemned to be;
Attended by a Single Hound---
Its own Identity.

(Emily Dickinson, "Adventure most
unto itself")

1. Introduction: Writing about One's Other Selves

As we have seen with Canetti, there was a need to assess near the end of his life the effect writing has had on the development of his selfhood, and the effect the development of his selfhood has had on his writing. Similarly, the end of Samuel Beckett's writing life is marked by reflection on certain spots of time from that life. Some are derived from personal experience, some from his experience as a writer. In both cases, his memory of the events cannot escape the mediating structures of the language with which they are remembered. For those who have written on Beckett's art, such reflections serve as a form of invitation to speculate on their significance for the writer, or for his body of work. To whichever invitation the critics reply, there should be some agreement that the significance of these memories lies in how, by extension, all his writing is an intensely personal exploration of what it means to be a self. Whether in prose, drama or poetry, Beckett attempts to re-draw the map we follow in order to lose ourselves. Though

the drama has received the largest share of the critical attention over the decades, the prose has begun to receive closer scrutiny, and perhaps the most innovative readings have yet to be done of the poetry.

Studies of the significance of the self in Beckett's work have traversed all genres, at times comparing or synthesizing them. Such studies, however, tend to give one-sided accounts of the relationship between the aesthetics and ethics of Beckett's life work on the self. In other words, they will often favor aesthetics over ethics or vice-versa. In order to gain an overview of the significance of the self in Beckett's late work, I would argue that the prose fiction is an echo chamber in which the distinct voices of drama, poetry and prose engage one another in aleatoric conversations, the meaning of which is to be determined in the reading of them. In *Nohow On*, we have a collection of three novels, *Company*, *Mal vu mal dit* and *Worstward Ho*, that represent the culmination of Beckett's life-long study of the self. The novels are especially well-suited to allow for a variety of dialogically charged utterances. In turn, these utterances are what characterize the interaction between the aesthetics and the ethics of self-envisaging and self-effacing discourse. In *Company*, a solitary male voice that is only barely aware of itself attempts to identify whether the other voices it hears belong to him, to his past, or to someone else altogether. In *Mal vu mal dit*, an elderly female figure is in mourning for the irrevocable losses of her former selves, her husband, her youth and the past. And in *Worstward Ho*, an unidentified narrative voice searches the scope of its experience in order to finally be done with having to identify itself. For the narrative voices in *Nohow On*, the self is a seemingly arbitrary

compilation of other people's utterances. This painful realization causes the self to seek continually to be dissolved by contact with the other. The poetry of *Nohow On* underscores the arduous journey of one's attempt to negate oneself, but it also gives positive affirmation to the failure of the endeavour.

2. Review of the Principal Critical Literature on *Nohow On*

To remain consistent with the two main categories of inquiry undertaken so far, the body of Beckett criticism can be divided into aesthetic and ethical criticism.²⁴⁶ Aesthetic criticism has developed over the years in response to Beckett's experiments with literary form. It bases its interpretations of the texts on aesthetic premises. From early attempts to place Beckett's experiments within the historical context of modernism, aesthetic criticism developed into various branches. It tried to explain Beckett's experiments either in strictly literary terms – enumerating rhetorical or stylistic devices – or in terms of their intertextual relationship with other literary works and other genres. Eventually, aesthetic criticism concentrated on the importance of viewing Beckett's formal experiments as self-reflexive commentaries on the writing itself. Aspects of all these branches merge to varying degrees, even in aesthetic criticism that reads Beckett's

²⁴⁶ For the most recent, comprehensive overview of Beckett criticism, see Murphy, *Critique*. While this guide does not include critical studies after 1994, it offers a chronological analysis that separates modernist critical assumptions up to the mid-seventies from some of the postmodernist assumptions adopted since.

body of work as a culmination of or development in his ideas on aesthetics.

Typical of one strand of criticism that interprets Beckett's oeuvre as an aesthetic development is Rubin Rabinovitz's *Innovation in Samuel Beckett's Fiction*.²⁴⁷ It analyzes "repetition, allusion, unreliable narrative, unrealistic settings and inter-connected metaphors" (7) in order to explain the work's themes. He argues that there is a difference between Beckett's early and late work, but apart from observing a higher frequency of figurative language in the latter, he can only conclude that this leads to "a more introspective type of characterization" (205). In the chapters, "Beckett's New Figurative Language" and "The Self Contained," Rabinovitz develops an explanatory schema for Beckett's extended metaphors. Like Ricoeur, Rabinovitz operates on the premise that metaphor, or figurative language, opposes literal reference. He states that "ordinary language tends to simplify what it represents by suggesting that descriptions of things can reveal something about their essential qualities" (130). Contrary to ordinary language, Beckett organizes metaphors in strings of association, which allow for many levels of

²⁴⁷ For an earlier example of this trend, see Rabinovitz, *Development*. For a critique of how Rabinovitz over-simplifies the concept of repetition, see Connor *Beckett* 11-12. Yet another, earlier, example of monologic aesthetic criticism that sees a diminution of Beckett's art after the first trilogy, so that all his subsequent prose is called "Residual Fiction," see Dearlove. Another work of language interpretation is in Fitch, *Beckett and Babel*. This approach explicates Beckett's texts according to patterns of anomaly that are found when comparing English and French versions written by the same author. Fitch applies a sophisticated semiotic model of translation theory that seeks to interpret various patterns of meaning from the anomalies and differences between them.

interpretation.²⁴⁸ Because “the lack of rigidly fixed meanings in this language invites readers to fill in areas that may seem empty or ambiguous” (103), it is the duty of the critic to accept the invitation and diminish that ambiguity. This kind of criticism produces a works toward a suppression of metaphor, or at least a substitution of metonymy for metaphor, and leads the critic to an interpretation that projects his or her own judgment on the character, or the text. For Rabinovitz, Beckett’s characters strive successfully against established characterization, but, at the same time, all their quests end in failure. Without acknowledging the contradiction that Beckett’s characters succeed at failure, Rabinovitch concludes that Beckett’s writing is ultimately redemptive, because it “leaves his readers with insights about the nature of the unknown and the courage of those who confront it” (208-209).

Another form of aesthetic criticism that involves some movement toward a more dialogic discursive awareness is Christopher Ricks’s *Beckett’s Dying Words: The*

²⁴⁸ The kinds of associations are never distinguished, though. See, for example, Rabinovitz’s interpretation of “dens” and “ruins” from Beckett’s “The Calmative” (124). The transitional idea, or what Rabinovitz sees as the link between the metaphors – here the idea of refuge – is in my definition a metonym; in this case, an abstract representation of a concrete noun. As Rabinovitz acknowledges, the connection is made explicit in the Beckett’s text. However, Rabinovitz’s failure to differentiate metaphor from metonymy leads him to overlook certain relationships even in the sentence he quotes, such as the causal one between the character’s frequent change of refuge and his inability to “tell between dens and ruins” (Beckett, *Stories* [27-28]). Similar claims are made for interpreting other images, such as light and darkness, in *Company*, *Mal vu mal dit*, and *Worstward Ho*; Rabinovitch, *Development* (118-120).

Clarendon Lectures, 1990.²⁴⁹ Ricks's readings use other voices in the text to propose a unified theory on Beckett's aesthetics and its relation to other philosophical themes. In the chapters, "Death," "Words that Went Dead," and "Languages, Living and Dead," Ricks argues that all Beckett's works contain a vision of "positive annihilation" (15), a privileging of death over life. For the most part, Ricks's methodology displays a positive understanding of Beckett's unsuppressed metonymic. He draws our attention to Beckett's use of intertextual allusions, puns, obsolete words, or what he calls dead words, neologisms, and tautological formulations, or Irish bulls (cf. the Chapter, "The Irish Bull"), and Ricks interprets them as part of a larger thematic concern in Beckett; namely, "making friends with the necessity of dying" (202). These stylistic devices consistently relate to one another as parts of a unified reading. Ricks does occasionally draw our attention to Beckett's use of etymology to create full-fledged metaphors that suggest buried relations between utterances which highlight dissimilarity rather than similarity. In one example, Ricks's reads the obsolete verb, "to corpse," appearing in *Endgame*, in its vulgar denotation, meaning "to kill," then, as an instance of theatre slang, meaning to commit a blunder that causes a stoppage of dialogue on stage (60-61). Thus, he brings the metonymic and metaphoric elements of his analyses into a provisional dialogue with one another, but only insofar as they work to persuade the reader that his interpretation was

²⁴⁹ In a similar vein, see Brienza for close readings of the prose fiction written after the first trilogy. She concludes that, as a self-reflexive, postmodernist writer, Beckett has taught us to approach "prose as if it were poetry" (262), though there is no systematic explanation of their differences.

also Beckett's originally intended one.²⁵⁰

One critical work that represents a more supple aesthetic criticism is Enoch Brater's *The Drama in the Text: Beckett's Late Fiction*.²⁵¹ This analysis becomes actively dialogic primarily when it shows how the poetic is pitted against the dramatic in Beckett's prose fiction. Brater argues that based on the experimental prose-poetics of James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, Beckett develops a form of fiction which enacts an intensely dramatic dialogue between poetry and prose: "Embracing language as his one true persona, Beckett turns his 'wordy-gurdy' into a dynamic force that everywhere insinuates itself *per sona*, through sound" (5).²⁵² He argues that Beckett's decision to write in French eventually allowed the English voice of sentimentality, present even in the prose poems after the first

²⁵⁰ This aspect of Ricks's argumentation corresponds to the sub-category of passively dialogic discourse that Bakhtin refers to as the "unobjectified discourse of a character who carries out (in part) the author's intention" (74). Here Beckett's *œuvre* is the character and Ricks is the author.

²⁵¹ See Locatelli for another example of active dialogic, self-effacing criticism. She argues for the "literalization of figurality" (266) in Beckett's late prose. The second trilogy, in particular, is representative of a post-structuralist aesthetics that negates the stability of the ontological status of the self. Though she does not refer to Adorno's work on negative aesthetics, she does cite from Levinas in order to draw a parallel between his differentiation of the "said" and the "saying" and Beckett's formal practices. While this parallel is meant to describe a common style in regards to philosophical discourse, Locatelli limits that discourse to the ontological and the epistemological, without taking into consideration the ethical. She also invokes Bakhtin's concept of parody in relation to Beckett's earlier prose, but only to demonstrate how that prose was concerned with subverting established literary genres. A similar argument from a different standpoint is made in Clément. Clément attempts to demonstrate how Beckett's subversion of traditional rhetorical categories affects a subversion of categories pertaining to the self.

²⁵² Beckett, *Unnamable* 157.

trilogy, to be upstaged by the performative voice of drama. For Brater, Beckett's artistic achievement begins with *The Unnamable* and reaches its highest level with the second trilogy. Though Brater bases his analysis on weak premises – arguing that poetry is defined by reference solely to its auditory qualities and that drama is reflected in the prose by dramatic imagery or language – his interpretations of the second trilogy benefit from his reading of the aesthetic and philosophical significance of a hidden polemic between discursive styles. Brater concludes by analyzing the convergence of verse and drama in Beckett's last piece of writing, the poem, "what is the word." He claims that, when recited, the various voices in the poem are audible: "As the piece continues to announce how to hear the equal power and authority of its several keys, the split personality of its multiple selves, major and minor, flat and sharp, alternate and change position" (171). I would argue that the reverse is true. Beckett wrote a lyric poem whose meaning depends on it not being recited. Recitation allows the listener to hear only one voice imposing its intonations and accents on the words spoken (as Bakhtin recognized), while the silent reading of the poem allows for multiple intonations and accents to occur. Beckett wanted to heighten this effect in his poetry, maximizing the ambiguity between the declarative and interrogative intoned simultaneously with the same words and cast in an active dialogue with one another. As with the poetry, Beckett's late prose is informed by this aesthetic: a silent reading whereby the various voices are allowed to act as unsuppressed metaphors in dialogue with suppressed metaphors, or metonyms, ultimately effecting the self-effacement of the authorial and the narrative voice.

Aside from any desire on the part of the aesthetic criticism to be authoritative, attempts at providing an ethical criticism are similarly uneven. H. Porter Abbott's *Beckett Writing Beckett: The Author in the Autograph* is a rather monologic theory of the status of the self in Beckett's writings.²⁵³ Abbott wishes to situate the authorial self in a genre he calls "self-writing" or "autography" (2-4). Beckett's allusions to an autobiographical self in all his work up to *Company* seeks to question "the narrative character and the historical accuracy of autobiography" (11). Abbott sees Beckett's fiction as becoming increasingly autobiographical and compares it to that of Augustine's *Confessions* and Wordsworth's *Prelude*, because, like those two models, the autobiographical voice is addressed to an other, God and Coleridge, respectively. Furthermore, these "autobiographical texts, by creating the possibility of contact, create the possibility of company" (22). It is in this envisaging of oneself for another that Abbott reads an ethical agenda. In the chapter, "Political Beckett," Abbott invokes Adorno's aesthetic theory to claim that Beckett's sabotage of autobiographical form subverts the political content of an individualizing, utopian ideology.²⁵⁴ He concludes that from "beginning to end, Beckett's art is one long protest. It is written out of a horror of human wretchedness and a yearning that this

²⁵³ Other examples include Harrington, and the biographies that try to analyze Beckett's work in the context of events in his life; the most notable of these Knowlson; Gordon; Cronin; and Bair. In each case, the tendency is to see the author as an ethical hero whose concerns are reflected in the literature he writes.

²⁵⁴ Abbott quotes, for example, from Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* that "The determinate negation of content becomes its principle of form. What is more, it negates content as such" (129; cf. Adorno, *Aesthetic* 354).

wretchedness be lessened" (147). But for this human wretchedness to be lessened, must it not also be represented as a part of the content of Beckett's work? Abbott's readings are more in line with the kind of self-envisaging ethical agenda articulated by Nussbaum, where the purpose of literature is to envisage and affect the moral amelioration of individuals.²⁵⁵

Where criticism begins to take an approach that recognizes more subtle ethical elements in Beckett's fiction is in such studies as Sylvie Dubuc Henning's *Beckett's Critical Complicity: Carnival, Contestation, and Tradition*.²⁵⁶ Henning argues that there is a direct correlation between Beckett's own critical theories and his art. She sees a progression over the course of Beckett's writing from a focus on Menippean satire to more subtle aesthetic strategies. She interprets the tension between a need for order and a need to negate in terms of a reformulated version of Bakhtin's "carnavalesque

²⁵⁵ Other critical works that argue for a metaphysical foundation and from a humanist point of view, though with less emphasis on ethics, are Murphy *Reconstructing*; Amiran; and Davies.

²⁵⁶ The first full-length study to concentrate on Beckett's ideas on the self is Hoffman's. Though limited to specific readings of *Waiting for Godot* and the early novels, Hoffman provides an insightful discussion in Chapter 2, "Literary Techniques and the Vanishing Self," on the contemporaneous literary context in which "the disappearance of the author" (58; quoted from Friedman 1162) is a major development and for which "self-effacement is considered a great aesthetic achievement" (58). Working from the Existentialist point of view that proof for the existence of the self must be sought in epistemological terms, Hoffman sees in Beckett's work characters who either find such proof in the "painful responsibility" (80) they embrace, or else submit to absurdity. While this discussion comes very close to my own, it lacks a more precise model of how language effects the epistemological status of the self and the ethical foundation of it.

dialogization" (28). This version sees in all dialogic relations a war of words between ordering and disordering discourse. The underlying assumption of Henning's use of Bakhtinian theory is that ordering discourse is monologic, or totalitarian, and, therefore, evil, while disordering discourse, or the carnivalesque is seen as liberating, and, therefore, good. She states that, though carnivalized dialogism eschews final resolutions, "it continues to be painfully creative because it does not fear to remain fertilely destructive" (28). Thus, Beckett's destructive art becomes qualified by the obligation to be fertile. From the point of view of a literary ethics, Henning compares Sartre's, Lukács's and Cavell's views on Beckett's work, and concludes that ultimately they are overly concerned with the "irrational indeterminacy" (197) it represents. For Henning, the most important contribution Beckett's indeterminate dialogism makes is in how it obligates the reader to re-think traditional philosophical positions. A problem arises, however, when linking this effect to "larger processes of sociocultural transformation" (199), because it is unclear how Henning is able to find a determinate end in an indeterminate means. By attaching carnivalesque ethics to dialogism, Henning imposes an agenda that leaves her methodology with a model of ethics that is unable to account for the ethical dilemmas posed by the status of the self in the texts.²⁵⁷

Ethical criticism can also become more attuned to an active dialogic, as in David Watson's *Paradox and Desire in Samuel Beckett's Fiction*. Working from the post-structuralist theories of Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, and Deleuze and Guattari, Watson

²⁵⁷ Other critical works in this category include Hill; Bryden; and Katz.

draws a thematic arc through Beckett's life-work. In the earlier novels, the self is constricted by the laws of knowledge and social, institutional order; in the middle novels of the first trilogy – the highlight of Beckett's creativity – the self is constrained by the laws of language and narrative, but must continue to narrate in spite of this fact. In the later novels, the theme of an impossible self-annihilation derived from the middle novels is repeated, but with an idiosyncratic, minimalist style, the obligation of which Watson ultimately fails to account for. For Watson, the ethics of Beckett's writing is illustrated by "the obligation to express" (*Three Dialogues*, 62) in the face of a lack of any reason to express. Taking the post-structuralist position that the self is eclipsed, or de-centered, Watson looks for patterns of paradox that result from positing and negating the idea of a real self, and that ultimately create the obligation to express. Though he recognizes that "the self can only appear as a figment of its own (the Other's) imagination, as [. . .] the discourse of the Other" (146), he does not recognize the self-effacing ethics of the asymmetrical relationship between self and other in the way that Levinas does, for example. Nor does he see the fading self as the result of a process of unsuppressing metaphors in the face-to-face encounter with the other. Instead, he sees the fading self solely as a result of the will to self-abnegation. Watson does interpret *Nohow On* as an autobiographical "ghost story" (148), a metonymically episodic narrative of Beckett's life from birth to old age. Consequently, his criticism approaches a dialogic understanding of these narratives as polemically-coloured autobiography whose ghosts give voice to the other and challenge the voice of the narrator. Watson does not read closely enough,

however, to see the fading of the self as part and parcel of an ethical encounter with metaphorical language. Rather, the “fragmentary *lyrical* episodes” of *Nohow On* “come as a surprise to anyone acquainted with the complex *dehumanized prose* of Beckett’s late fiction” (147; emphasis mine).²⁵⁸

It is this surprise that should in fact catch the reader’s attention, and lead to a critical engagement with any idea of the relationship between self and other, which must take place in order to effect an active dialogue between all elements of a text, metonymic and metaphoric, monologic and dialogic, aesthetic and ethical, self-envisaging and self-effacing. What all the critical studies discussed above share is a reluctance to engage opposing discourses. It is the goal of the interpretive effort that follows to effect a recognition of opposing discourses, thereby allowing a dialogue to occur in which neither voice is sacrificed to the other. From *Company* to *Mal vu mal dit* to *Worstward Ho*, Beckett portrays the self in increasingly metaphorical terms, thrusting it more and more actively into a face-to-face dialogue with its own self-envisaging and self-effacing voices.

²⁵⁸ There are several critical works that could also be placed in this category of readings that offer what I consider to be similar to a dialogic approach. Connor’s *Beckett* sees relationships of power as effects of repeated discursive patterns in Beckett’s novels; Butler’s *Rethinking Beckett* offers several essays that inquire into correspondences between Beckett’s fiction and recent ideas in post-structuralist epistemology; Trezise’s *Into the Breach* deals with the potential for a dialogue between Bataille, Levinas and Beckett in terms of Beckett’s articulation of the “obligation to express” (*Three Dialogues* [62]), but looks exclusively at the first triptych; and Uhlmann’s *Beckett and Poststructuralism* reads Beckett in light of Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida and Levinas, but limits discussion of the latter to *Totality and Infinity*, which primarily investigates self-other relations as ontological phenomena.

3. *Company*: A Self-Envisaging Voice Alone with Itself

Though *Company* is the first novel to appear in the *Nohow On* triptych, it is likely that *Mal vu mal dit* and *Worstward Ho* had their genesis in short abandoned works from the early 1970s and were written prior to *Company*. In his variorum edition, *Company/Compagnie*, Charles Krance outlines the development of the various versions. The core of *Company* first appears in manuscript form in sheets and a notebook dating from January, 1976, to January, 1977, and is titled, "The Voice VERBATIM" (xiii-xix). Later in 1977, a typescript with the title, "Gone," appears. This is translated into French and given the title "Solo." "Solo" is then adapted and re-translated into English as "A Piece of Monologue." All these versions were intended as dramatic monologues for either stage or radio. As Krance points out, Beckett is experimenting with the voice for his persona; a second typescript of "Gone," written after "Solo," contains the opening line, "Birth was the death of you," which is later substituted by "Birth was the death of him," effectively changing the emphasis on the voice from second person to third person, and creating the persona that will come to inhabit the prose narrative, *Company*. A manuscript for *Company* exists from 1978, but Beckett translates first into French for publication; *Compagnie* appears in 1980. Later that year, Beckett revises the text and re-translates it for publication in English.²⁵⁹ That *Company* is the first of the three novels in *Nohow On* is fitting, however,

²⁵⁹ All references in English to *Company*, *Ill Seen Ill Said*, and *Worstward Ho* are from *Nohow On* unless otherwise indicated.

because it begins to develop several themes that are continued in the other novels, and that involve a self at the end of itself.

One such theme is representative of what I have termed the aesthetics of the self-envisaging voice. In *Company*, this theme is explored in a narrative monologue that contains a dialogic relationship between a voice and a listener in the dark. With regards to Ricoeur's theory of metaphor, it was my argument that the self-envisaging voice is primarily metonymic in that it suppresses the metaphoric in order to structure reality with a predicative logic. In the manuscript outline notes to *Company*, Beckett lists the cast of characters as "A Hearer, B inventor, V voice" (Krance, 113). As intermediary between hearer and inventor, the voice speaks to both entities, but it is also an entity in its own right. Each self is related to the other metonymically, as entities who share certain attributes with the others, each one being the other *pars pro toto*. The narrator speaks of the hearer, the inventor and the voice in the third person. Like the narrator, the inventor is "Deviser of the voice, the hearer and himself. Deviser of himself for company [. . .]. He speaks of himself *as of another*" (*Nohow* 18).²⁶⁰ The hearer, too, thinks of the inventor in

²⁶⁰ This underscores my view that Ricoeur's *as if*, like Beckett's *as of*, is metonymic rather than metaphoric. A relation of similarity is maintained in speaking of oneself as another, whereby the possessive-partitive *of* signifies mutual possession of attributes. Furthermore, the appearance of "device" (4) in a rhetorical context and the repetition of the verb *devise* at points throughout the text: for instance, "Devised deviser devising it all for company" (33) is a pun on the Latin participial stem *divisus*, derived from *dividere*; literally, to see in two. The inventor invents by using reason to separate parts, while imagination or fancy (a reference to Coleridge's familiar distinction) embodies the desire, or will, to see parts as a whole. The translation of *devise* into French is *imaginer*; this remains consistent with the pun on vision attached to both verb.

the third person. Is the narrator a part of the inventor, the hearer, or both? The voice speaks to the hearer in second person about the hearer's past. It may be his past or it may be one invented by the inventor. Does the voice belong to the inventor, then, or to the hearer? Furthermore, the hearer tries to envision the source of the voice because he desires company, so as not to be "Alone" (46). He wishes to determine, to invent if need be, the inventor of the voice. Is the hearer, then, also not an inventor? Each of these entities attempts to define itself in terms of the other's relation to it, seen as the sum of attributes that bind them. Though the pronouns shift voice from entity to entity, the identity of each self is retained in the pronoun attached to it by the other and in sum of the attributes attached to that pronoun. The only possibility that is rejected by the voice is that the hearer will speak with its own voice in the first person singular: "The unthinkable last of all. Unnamable. Last person. I. Quick leave him" (17). Even this rejection is qualified, however, by the desire to achieve a self, even an idealized one. As the voice tells the hearer, "You are on your back in the dark and one day you will utter again. One day! In the end. In the end you will utter again. Yes I remember. That was I. That was I then" (14). But how is this to be accomplished? In the desire to speak as an *I*, we can see a self-envisaging aesthetics whereby one's identity is established as a pattern of assertions, claims or determinations ultimately based on a metonymic ordering of attributes, derived from the language of the other, in a complete picture of oneself. But the hearer does not speak. He may not and cannot use the first person singular pronoun (4), which becomes the main suppressed metaphor of the narrative; in its place are the metonymic

designations of the second and third person pronouns.

To establish his identity vis-à-vis the other, the hearer struggles “with what reason remains” (6), or “with what feeling remains” (15), or with “reason-ridden” (24) imagination to envisage himself as a product of his inventor. A “certain activity of mind however slight is a necessary adjunct of company” (5) and allows the hearer to reason, feel and imagine. Indeed, there are numerous examples in the text of the hearer’s penchant for reasoning analytically both in the past and the present. The hearer reasons that the voice is not talking of another in the dark, otherwise it would speak of that other in the third person. He also imagines certain traits belonging to the voice, such as its changing volume, its “long silences,” its “repetitiousness” (9-10), and its “Same flat tone at all times” (13). On another level, the descriptions of the hearer’s past are also what comprise his (auto)biographical identity. The hearer comes to see himself in the way the voice tells him of his past, in the connection of the parts to the whole. Linda Ben-Zvi has shown how the fifteen memory-narratives are structured not only by the movement from childhood to old age but by a corresponding set of binary oppositions that include the figure in motion and at rest, or moving from east to west, or from incline to decline, and a corresponding transition of the imagery from past light to present darkness.²⁶¹ As the end approaches, the old hearer listens to the last of the stories until past and present have merged and the voice tells him this:

²⁶¹ See Ben-Zvi for her argument that these structures underpin the “failure to find surety” (67).

You do not murmur in so many words, *I know this doomed to fail and yet persist.*

No. For the first person singular and a fortiori plural pronoun had never any place in your vocabulary. But without a word *you view yourself* to this effect *as you would a stranger* suffering from Hodgkin's disease or if you prefer Percival Pott's surprised at prayer. From time to time with unexpected grace you lie.

Simultaneously the various parts set out. (45; emphases mine)²⁶²

As such, the identity of the self is established as a compilation of attributes arranged, more or less aesthetically, in metonymic structures that reflect the self's desire to envisage itself.

In a similar vein, the ethics of the self-envisaging voice are based on various pre-suppositions regarding the role of the will in effecting a perception of one's goodness, and to an extent in measuring that goodness. As discussed in the section on Nussbaum's approach to literary ethics, a metonymic structuring of the self in response to others is what forms the basis for a discourse on ethics. While Nussbaum's methods of reading ethics may not allow for an analysis that would go beyond a passively double-voiced discourse, we can still see that this level of discourse is also "a necessary adjunct to company." Critics have remarked from the outset that *Company* displays an emotional

²⁶² Beckett is referring here to Pott's paraplegia, a condition of spinal tuberculosis, which Percival Pott (1714-1788) discovered was related to "strumous disorders" (Brakoulis) in the lungs rather than by spinal compression. With these images of a person suffering from such diseases, and being taken by surprise while at prayer, Beckett may be conveying a tragi-comic vision of oneself as a stranger, as someone suddenly discovering he or she is a convulsive inhabiting a foreign body.

longing, or nostalgia not seen before in Beckett's works.²⁶³ This is ascribed to the so-called autobiographical elements and the sonorous, lyrical descriptions of them, reminiscent of the romantic poets. In effect, an identification is made here between the narrative voice and the author. Despite this, it is still permissible to ask how a narrative voice at the end of its life faces and responds to its past? How, "with what judgment remains" (11), does it judge its prior selves? The response of the hearer to his present predicament is central to the way he envisages himself in light of the voice that envisages him: "Pangs of faint light and stirrings still" (16). What is most notable is the contradictory nature of that response. On the one hand, the hearer longs to be a unified whole, all one and alone. On the other hand, the hearer longs for company. Ultimately, the freedom to decide is illusory. This contradictoriness, in part the result of an inability to decide which one he wants, is satirized by the narrator:

Might not the hearer be improved? Made more companionable if not downright human. Mentally perhaps there is room for enlivenment. An attempt at reflexion at least. At recall. At speech even. Conation of some kind however feeble. A trace of emotion. Signs of distress. A sense of failure. Without loss of character. (19)

In turn, the hearer wonders if the voice might not be improved in order to make it more "likely to achieve its object. To have the hearer have a past and acknowledge it (24).

Presumably, improvement would lead to a moral self whose will would be better able to control the contingency presented by others past and the present.

²⁶³ For a critique of Bair's biographical reading of *Company*, see Zurbrugg 1-9.

But the hearer's response to his past is contradictory. He longs for a past to keep him company. On the other hand, the memory-narratives represent a journey into the heart of darkness, marking the passages in his life from innocence to experience, from a basic belief in goodness to a growing skepticism toward it. The early memories are of the pain of loss caused by others (his mother's "cutting retort," his father's emotional distance) or the guilt of causing pain to others (being a "naughty boy," his lover's pregnancy out of wedlock). As a boy, he puts a hedgehog in a shoe-box to protect it from contingency. At first, he basks in the glow of this "good deed" (20), but as doubt sets in he thinks he had "better let good alone" (21), and does not return to it until weeks later when he discovers the unforgettable image of "The mush. The stench" (22). Over time, as his doubts increase, his sense of goodness decreases. He withdraws from the company of others until his walks in the countryside are only with his "father's shade [. . .] and then for long years alone" (45). He rejects any claim to "Pure reason" or the assertion that "God is love" (38). And yet, though "Hope and despair and suchlike" (32-33) are barely felt, he still "wonders in the back of his mind if the woes of the world are all they used to be" (32). With old age having forced him to give up his physical quests, he cannot help but feel the need for companionship: "For little by little as he lies the craving for company revives. In which to escape from his own. The need to hear that voice again" (40). The incessant reversal of positions, physical and intellectual, hints at an actively dialogic, internal polemic. It reverts, however, to a uni-directional, passive-voiced discourse, when, for example, the narrator declares that the hearer-inventor shall "with

face upturned *for good* labour in vain at your fable” (46).²⁶⁴ To narrate, then, is the imperative position finally taken; to narrate for company, the only ethical position for one before death.

4. *Company*: The Self-Effacing Voice Alone with its Other

With an aesthetics of the self-effacing voice, we read for a set of metaphors that converse with the metonyms of the self-envisaging voice. Adorno’s ideas on the formal significance of avant-garde art conform with the proposition made here that metaphor activates the history of an utterance’s usage in such a way that its metonymic signification is called into question. The metaphoricity of narrative is what constitutes the avant-garde element of a text. In a metaphorical utterance, the voice of the envisaged self has its identity effaced. As a function of the logic of self-sacrifice, or self-deprecation, however, only parts of the envisaged voice can be effaced. Herein lies the reason for the dialogue and the tension between self-envisaging and self-effacing voices. As discussed above, the

²⁶⁴ For the best example of a reading of the ethical content of *Company* that seems to accord with Nussbaum’s understanding of ethics, see Murphy 148-169. While Murphy does not define his understanding of moral obligation, his examination of allusions to *As You Like It*, *Othello*, *Measure for Measure*, *The Tempest* and *Love’s Labour’s Lost* provides a comparative template based on the moral dilemmas faced and solved by the characters in those plays. Beckett’s aesthetic stipulates that “the artist-creator’s responsibilities entail making sense of the connections between light and darkness, above and below, art and life [. . .]” (152). In Murphy’s view, *Company* critiques the hearer for refusing his identity as an I, thereby shirking “the full responsibility of artistic creation” (152).

formal organization of *Company* leads the reader to envisage the fragmentary parts as the story of an elderly man, perhaps Beckett himself, trying to explain how he has come to his current position, alone in the dark at the end of his life. But the continuous search for unified form leads the reader of *Company* to envisage the constituent components of the novel as a metonymic patterning so that some of the parts stand out in a metaphoric relationship to one another. The narrator imagines the inventor-voice imagining the hearer: "Let the hearer be named H. Aspirate. Haitch. You Haitch are on your back in the dark. And let him know his name [. . .]. Would he gain then in companionability? No. Then let him not be H. Let him be again as he was. The hearer. Unnamable. You" (22-23). The final word here implicates the anonymous reader, along with the author-narrator-hearer, in the arbitrariness of the naming process. The reader is envisaged as another of the author-narrator's creatures, invented for company. By extension, the reference to the arbitrariness of the naming process is also an allusion to Beckett's authoring of inventor-voices in earlier novels, such as *L'Innommable* (1953).²⁶⁵ This then draws an inevitable identification between narrator and author. Does this not invite us to conclude that the narrator is speaking with Beckett's voice, autobiographically?

With an eye to such over-identifications on the part of his readers, though, the narrator says of the inventor-voice, "Wearied by such stretch of imagining he ceases and all ceases. Till feeling the need for company again he tells himself to call the hearer M at

²⁶⁵ See, for example, the sections of *The Unnamable* on Mahood and Worm (392-405) and references *hors texte* to Murphy, Malone, Moran and Mercier (403).

least. For readier reference. Himself some other character. W. Devising it all *himself included* for company” (31; emphasis mine). This ironic confession as to the *mis-en-abîme* nature of authoring life-stories on the part of the narrator reflects on Beckett, the writer, as well.²⁶⁶ The irony makes the dialogue between the self-envisaging and self-effacing voices a polemically colored autobiography or confession. As Gary Handwerk has effectively argued in “Alone with Beckett’s *Company*,” there is a discontinuity between Beckett’s previous works and those of *Nohow On*.²⁶⁷ Where, for example, the narrator of *L’Innomable* incessantly searches for the truth of a stable identity through the naming-narrating process, the later works repudiate the search, because such “monologic self-pursuit would risk becoming the endless reiteration of its own paradoxical incapacity and slipping into solipsism, narcissism, and aestheticism” (66). The author-narrator of *Company* anticipates the reader’s identification of author with narrator, and qualifies his assertions that either author or narrator or inventor or creature can be identified by name: “Is there anything to add to this esquisse? His unnamability. Even M must go. So W

²⁶⁶ Memory narratives and imaginary narratives are both told in the same voice, the voice of the other. See, for example, the ironic merging of narratives types when the events of his own birth are recounted to him, with the focus on his father’s activities (7-9), or when he is in the crib with mother and father hovering over him (34-35).

²⁶⁷ Handwerk’s essay is the best analysis so far of the inter-discursive subtleties of voice and personification in *Company*. His reading of the discontinuity between earlier and later work and of the strict separation between voice and hearer in terms of Lacanian psychoanalysis offers many insights into the sub-conscious formation of both the self-envisaging and self-effacing voices, though I disagree with his conclusion that the ending of *Company* lapses into a “relatively traditional form of closure” (77) for reasons that will become clear.

reminds himself of his creature as so far created. W? But W too is creature. Figment” (33). This anticipation preempts the reader’s propensity for identifying author and narrator too closely. The author has envisaged himself by linking past and present work in inter-textual metonyms. These metonyms of naming become unsuppressed metaphors because of the contextual emphasis placed on their differences. Like the author, the reader can identify with the narrator of the text, but in envisaging oneself as such one must also efface oneself, for any identification of author and narrator, self and other, reader and writer is merely a fragmentary figment of the imagination. The radical, self-effacing aesthetics of *Company* lie in how Beckett deprecates, or renounces his autobiography.

To analyze the self-effacing voice in *Company* from an ethical perspective, is it permissible to consider the unsuppressed metaphors of the face? Despite Levinas’s cautionary note not to interpret the physiognomy of the face literally, we must nonetheless consider the nature of the face-to-face contact that takes place in the language of the text. As a metonym, the face can be related to its other within the structure of the encounter, but there can also be a metonym-with-a-loophole that allows it to become unsuppressed, as a metaphor. At first glance, there appears to be face-to-face contact between hearer and voice, because the voice comes to one in the dark. But in the second sentence of the text, the narrator enjoins the reader to form a mental picture of it: “Imagine” (4). While the hearer tries to imagine the characteristics of the voice, and the inventor tries to invent characteristics for the hearer, neither parties of the narrative present can envisage the face of the other. On his back in the dark, the hearer tries to determine where the voice comes

from; as when it says “for example clear from above his upturned face, You first saw the light at Easter and now. Then a murmur in his ear, You are on your back in the dark. Or of course vice versa” (9-10).²⁶⁸ The only characteristic of the face at this point is that it is either upturned or not. Whichever is true, it is the communicative act that embodies the face-to-face encounter between voice and hearer. This is the basis for company. Even in silence, the hearer hears himself wondering in vain, if silence signifies the end of the voice, and thus his own death (10, 11). But of course it does not, as the hearer cannot efface himself completely while continuing to envisage that effacement.

In the narrative past, however, a slightly different pattern of face-to-face encounters takes shape. These accounts contain frequent descriptions of the asymmetry of the approach of the self and the other, the basis of one’s infinite responsibility to the other according to Levinas. As a baby (34-35) and a young boy, the hearer looks up to the others he encounters, particularly the women, his mother (6) and his girl-friend in the early days of their love (35). This is a time of innocence for the hearer, when his deeds are deemed good, such as the one for which he is blessed by the old beggar woman: “God reward you little master” (11). The first occurrence of the boy having to look down takes

²⁶⁸ The pun on *vice* can be interpreted in several ways, as it is variously adapted from Latin *vicis* (English; *position*), *visum* (English; *face*), and *vitium* (English; a *defect*, *fault*, or *failing*) (See *Oxford English Dictionary* entry for *vice*). The first implies a reversal of either of the predicative assertions referring to the hearer’s position on his back and his surroundings in the dark. The second reinforces the first predicative reversal, implying that the hearer has his face downward. The last implies a moral turn and unsuppresses a long chain of Judeo-Christian metonyms and metaphors having to do with Virtue and Vice, particularly in light of references here to the passion, or death of Christ.

place at the Forty Foot, a favorite swimming hole in Dublin Bay, which serves as a rite of passage for young men, and where his father is entreating him from the sea below to make the dangerous dive: "You look down to the loved trusted face. He calls to you to jump. He calls, Be a brave boy. The red round face [. . .]. Many eyes upon you" (12).²⁶⁹ Any response to this memory on the part of the young boy or the old hearer is necessarily ambivalent.²⁷⁰ On the one hand, there is a sense of betrayed trust that marks the episode, as the boy's fear, his will not to jump, is contravened by his will to please his father, to subordinate his will to his father's, which poses a threat to the boy's identity. It is a fall from innocence, but an ambivalent one. On the other hand, the next episode from the past to be narrated to the hearer is of himself as a young boy jumping out of a tree to annoy his mother, to contradict her will: "You lie a little with your face to the ground" (15). The pun on "lie" is initiated in this instance and will return throughout the text. It is not clear whether "He has been a very naughty boy" (15) for having lied about something, or for having jumped out of the tree.

The fall from ethical innocence is recapitulated in the encounters with his young lover. One encounter has them lying under an aspen, he on his back facing upward, she propped on her elbows at a right angle leaning over his face, "eyes in each other's eyes"

²⁶⁹ The Forty Foot is visited by Stephen Daedalus in James Joyce's *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*. There are several echoes and allusions from these works in *Company*.

²⁷⁰ The ambiguity in locating the source of the position of the face in past or present is reinforced by the rhetorical question posed three passages later, "What can he have seen then above his upturned face" (13). Does *he* refer to the father or the hearer?

(35). Another, presumably later encounter, occurs in the wake of a sexual one. In his guilt and discomfort, the hearer is obsessed with mentally measuring their comparative height to determine whether they are the same when kneeling as when sitting: "from experience" he knows they are normally the same height, "For when bolt upright or lying at full stretch you cleave face to face then your knees meet and your pubes and the hairs of your heads mingle" (30). The segmenting of her body into parts, and his associating her enlarged abdomen with his father's, leads him to project his fear that he has made her pregnant out of wedlock; so they "sit face to face in the little summerhouse" (31). Memories of himself as an older man generally have the hearer "with bowed head" (25). On his walks alone in the countryside, he always faces the ground: "Halting now and then with bowed head to fix the score" (45; cf. 40, 43-44). Even in the present, the hearer cannot decide whether to stay on his back facing upward, or "On his face" (37). As present and past merge in the final stanza, however, the voice commands the hearer to take particular a position: "You now on your back in the dark shall not rise to your arse again to clasp your legs in your arms and bow down your head till it can bow down no further. But with face upturned for good labour in vain at your fable" (46). Thus, the hearer has come full circle, from birth to death. The face becomes a metonym-with-a-loop-hole, a metaphor of effacement, as well as of the failure of total self-annihilation. The face speaks for the ethical attempt of the self to efface itself in response to all the other faces and voices that form its identity. As a metonym, the face signifies the ethics of the attempt at effacement along a long chain of word-to-word encounters. The hearer's face is

once again upturned in asymmetry, for good, though differently, in that now it is neither wholly his mother nor father whom he faces, but himself as another, alone and all one, as the sum of all voices, to and for whom he is responsible, as he fables to himself for company.²⁷¹

5. *Mal vu mal dit*: The Self-Envisaging Voice and its Gender Identities

In the second of three novels in *Nohow On*, the narrative voice changes the object of its gaze. It shifts from a meditation on its own voice, albeit one made up of others' voices, to the relation between itself as a male voice and those constituent parts of it that are female. Near the end of a life of writing about female as well as male characters, Beckett is reflecting on the both the aesthetic and the ethical nature of that writing. I would go so far as to claim that *Mal vu mal dit* is a figurative summation of the face-to-face encounters with women Beckett had in life and in literature: from his mother, May, to his wife, his lovers, and his intimates; from Sappho to the Brontës, Emily Dickinson and Djuna Barnes; from Antigone to Miss Havisham, Anna Karenina and Molly Bloom; from Celia in *Murphy*, to Maddy Rooney in *Happy Days*, the wife and mistress in *Play*,

²⁷¹ Metaphorically, the hearer learns "to break bread" – one of the etymological connotations of the word company – with his many selves. Regarding the upturned face as a sign of ending, it is interesting to compare the ending of the play, *Catastrophe*, written at about the same time as *Company*, and first produced for stage at the Avignon Festival in 1982 in tribute to Vaclav Havel. For an insightful analysis of the sign of the face in *Catastrophe*, one that employs Levinas's ideas on ethics, see Carey 43-57.

the woman's mouth in *Not I*, and May in *Footfalls*.²⁷² And in an extension of his exploration of his encounters with the voices of women, Beckett is also commenting on the structural malfeasance of the mis-spoken of such encounters, as if such structures are the "evil core" (50) from which "the evil spread" (50).²⁷³ What the critical commentaries have thus far failed to explore is the pun in both English and French titles on *mal*, or *ill*, as an adverb and a noun. Admittedly, the sense is stronger in French than in English, because the English noun only retains the meaning of *evil* etymologically, or, as I would argue, in a metaphorical sense. But it is the linkage between seeing and speaking poorly, and moral and physical sickness, that is at the heart of the encounters between male self and female other in this novel. They are linked by a synecdochic metonymy of part to whole in which some perceived whole is characterized by a deficiency, by a part that is lacking, which is in turn seen or spoken of as being evil. It is in terms of this metonymy of deficiency that the male, narrative voice envisages itself in the face of a female other.

The narrative voice vacillates between two main themes. It speaks about seeing a woman and it speaks about the speaking of it. The voice that speaks and the gaze that sees become identified with each other in that both are always ever partial at best, as fragments of an impossibly "pure figment" (58), whether the fragments are cast in metonyms such

²⁷² This list of some of the associations between the women in Beckett's fiction is provided by Graver, along with an identification of them with Beckett's mother.

²⁷³ Trans. of "foyer maléfique [. . .] que le mal s'est répandu" (2-4). All quotations in French are from Krance, *Samuel Beckett's "Mal vu mal dit"*. English quotations are from *Nohow On*.

as “the filthy eye of flesh” (65), “the madhouse of the skull” (58), the “Silence at the eye of the scream” (64), “the howls of laughter of the damned” (82), or the “vent-holes of the soul that jakes” (85).²⁷⁴ By striving to describe the woman, the narrator confronts the structural deficiencies of his knowledge. Initially, the narrator’s speech is monologic or passively dialogic. As such, it is in line with the aesthetics of the self-envisaging voice. It is monologic when it unconditionally ascribes specific attributes to “old so dying woman. So dead” (58).²⁷⁵ At the end of the first paragraph, for example, after he has described her evening ritual of waiting for Venus to rise, he declares, “All this in the present as had she the misfortune to be still of this world” (50).²⁷⁶ The conditional *as if* refers to the possibility in the narrator’s view that she is still of this world, but the ascribing of misfortune to that condition is a result of the narrator imposing a judgment on his subject. The question of whether the woman is dead and being remembered, or alive and in mourning, is determined by narrative proxy: “No shock were she already dead. As of course she is. But in the meantime more convenient not. Still living then she lies hidden” (73).²⁷⁷ This is followed by an ambiguity as to the source of a statement that makes the

²⁷⁴ Trans. of “n’être qu’ombre” (10): “[ce] sale oiel de chair” (16): “[dans] le manicomie du crâne” (10): “[silence] à l’oeil du hurlement” (14): “le rire des damnés” (28): “lunettes de l’âme ces chiottes” (30).

²⁷⁵ Trans. of “Cette vieille si mourante. Si morte” (10).

²⁷⁶ Trans. of “Tout cela au présent. Comme si elle avait le malheur d’être encore en vie” (2).

²⁷⁷ Trans. of “Elle serait morte déjà que cela n’aurait rien de choquant. Elle l’est bien sûr. Mais en attendant cela ne fait pas l’affaire. Elle gît donc encore en vie sous la
(continued...)

narrative passively dialogic, and to an ambivalence that is attributable to her motives, as well as his: "Having for some reason covered her head. Or for no reason. Night. When not evening night. Winter night. No snow. *For the sake of variety. To vary the monotony*" (73: emphasis mine).²⁷⁸ Throughout the text, the narrator repeatedly vacillates between poles of certainty and uncertainty when speaking about his own narrative. He self-consciously steers himself, or his character, or his reader through the text; at first with cautionary remarks, "Careful"(50), "On" (58), "Gently gently; then later with adverbial imperatives "Quick" (55), "Enough" (52), "basta" (86), and finally with a determinate sounding verbal imperative, "Know happiness" (86).²⁷⁹ These gradations of the imperative are monologic, resulting from the narrator's attempt to assert control over his character and his reader, despite the narrator's awareness of his own deficient capabilities.

On the ethical plane, it becomes clear that the self-envisaging voice is at pains to identify itself in the face of a female other. The old woman's otherness is what necessitates and inspires the narrative gaze. The "evil core" that is the cabin, a metonym for the woman's body and soul, lies in opposition to the surrounding zone of stone and the pastures, metonyms of natural order and disorder. Culture, or language, is what serves

²⁷⁷(...continued)
couverture" (22).

²⁷⁸ Trans. of "L'ayant remontée pour des raisons obscures pardessus la tête. Ou sans raison. C'est la nuit. Quand ce n'est pas le soir c'est la nuit. Nuit d'hiver. Sans neige. *Question de variété. Dans la monotonie*" (22: emphasis mine).

²⁷⁹ Trans. of "Attention" (2): "Aller"(2): "Du calme" (4; 28): "vivement" (6): "Assez" (4): "baste" (32): "Connaître le bonheur" (32).

as the mediating device between the male gaze and the female object. *Mal vu mal dit* is replete with intertextual echoes from the history of literature, art, and philosophy that reflect this mediation in the context of the two main themes mentioned above, the face-to-face encounters of men and women, and the will of the male artist in striving and failing to achieve meaningful representations of such encounters.²⁸⁰ One example that may provide a key to understanding the thematic tenor of these echoes is the opening reference to Venus. There are several possible sources for this reference, but beginning with Dante's *Commèdia Divina* we see two specific references to Venus in *Purgatorio*. The first comes in Canto 27, when Dante and Virgil, who have left the seventh circle of hell, sleep at the side of a mountain until shortly before sunrise; "About the hour, / As I believe, when Venus from the east/ First lighten'd on the mountain, she whose orb / Seems always glowing with the fire of love, A lady young and beautiful, I dream'd [...]" (XVIII, 93-97).²⁸¹ Here Dante has a dream in which he encounters the Old Testament

²⁸⁰ Monique Nagem finds several parallels in *Mal vu mal dit* to the work of symbolist poets such as Baudelaire, Nerval, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé. In particular, she draws on several allusions to Mallarmé's *Crise de vers* and "Igitur" to argue that Beckett is subtly parodying its aesthetic ideals. For example, the old woman and the twelve are prefigured in "Igitur": "Ne sifflez pas' aux vents, aux ombres – si je compte, comédien, jouer le tour – les 12 – pas de hasard sans aucun sens" (Mallarmé [368]). Nagem also refers to an unpublished essay by Marjorie Perloff ("Une voix pas la mienne: French/English Beckett and the French/English Reader": paper presented at the *Beckett Translating/ Translating Beckett* conference, University of Texas, Austin, 1984) in which Perloff draws out many literary references, including several to Pre-Raphaelite poets such as Symonds, to Wilde and to the early Yeats. My own research has uncovered allusions to nineteenth-century French and English novels as well.

²⁸¹ Though Beckett read *The Divine Comedy* in the original Italian, it is possible
(continued...)

figures of Leah and Rachel, who signify the active and contemplative life, respectively. They are meant to parallel the appearance of Martha and Mary in the New Testament, and to foreshadow Dante's encounter with Matilda in Canto 28 and Beatrice in Canto 30.

In Canto 28, Dante awakes, Virgil departs, and Dante goes on to meet Matilda, who is his first guide through terrestrial paradise. Dante again refers to Venus in describing the light that emanates from Matilda: "I do not think there shone so great a light / Under the lids of Venus, when transfixed / By her own son, beyond his usual custom" (XXVIII, 65-67). As his guide, Matilda explains that "The Good Supreme, sole in itself delighting, / Created man good, and this goodly place / Gave him as hansom of eternal peace" (XXVIII, 91-93).²⁸² Like Beatrice, who will lead him from purgatory to paradise, Matilda is a spiritual guide, as well as a literary muse. The notion of the muse as a source of artistic inspiration figures prominently in *Mal vu mal dit*. The old woman is the narrator's muse, albeit one he can only imagine deficiently. She is an intertextual

²⁸¹(...continued)

that he borrowed from the Longfellow translation for the English references to it in *Ill Seen Ill Said* in keeping with the gentle parody and stylization of nineteenth-century poetic language. The intent here seems to be a connection between fin-de-siècle poetry and the romantic portrayal of the feminine muse.

²⁸² There is another allusion in the text to this passage: "Absence supreme good and yet" (85). Further allusions regarding Dante's dream in *Purgatorio* may be to Ruskin's commentary on it in *Modern Painters III* (221), where Ruskin describes Venus as rising in the constellation of Pisces (*Nohow*, 57; reference to the "pisciform" buttonhook), two hours before the sun. Ruskin also describes Leah as gathering flowers ("withered crocuses"), while Rachel contemplates her own face; similarly, Matilda labors for God, while Beatrice contemplates God's visage. There are other echoes from *Inferno* and *Paradiso*, but because most references appear to come from *Purgatorio* it could lead one to ask whether *Mal vu mal dit* is Beckett's *Purgatorio* in the *Nohow* On tryptych.

metonym for all references to author-muse relationships in literature, and, by extension, a metaphor for the manifestation of the need or desire to write. In a broader cultural context, the role women have played as inspiration for artists, a role ascribed in large part to them by male artists, constrains women's identity as artists in their own right. Such is the ethical dilemma of the male artist attempting to characterize a female other accurately and in good faith. For Nussbaum, as for Dante, literature should be able to guide readers toward a just resolution. In *Mal vu mal dit*, however, the narrator envisages himself envisaging the muse deficiently. The idea that male writers have identified the source of their inspiration for writing, even the need to write, with the otherness of the female subject, is treated as a paradox. The evil seen and the evil said is what results from this paradox, from the inescapable desire, manifest in language, culture and art, to represent and thereby idealize the other in order to envisage oneself: "The cabin [. . .]. And from it as from an evil core that the *what is the wrong word* the evil spread" (50; emphasis mine).²⁸³

In a dialogue with other literary works that portray women as either inspiration for, or inhibitor of, creative endeavor, *Mal vu mal dit* envisages itself at times in a passively double-voiced context that can be either uni-directional or vari-directional. Stylization, a uni-directional type, occurs, for example, in the echoing of literary words from Classical, Medieval, Renaissance and Modernist literary discourse that relate

²⁸³ Trans. of "Le cabanon [. . .]. Et à partir de lui comme d'un foyer maléfique que le *comment mal dire* que le mal s'est répandu" (2-4; emphasis mine).

instances of notable encounters between men and women, as in the example of Dante cited above. Various forms of parody, which belong to the types of vari-directional dialogue, occur with words that echo a position taken by an earlier work and that the narrative might disagree with. In the English, *Ill Seen Ill Said*, there are six references to a “buttonhook” that illustrate this stylization (57, 59, 68, 77, 82, 84). On the one hand, they are part of the broad stylization of nineteenth and early twentieth-century European literary discourse, in which the buttonhook, like the spindle-backed chair, the pallet, the coffer, and the hutch, is a common household object.²⁸⁴ A buttonhook figures in such novels as John Galsworthy’s *The Forsyte Saga*, Edith Warton’s *Glimpses of the Moon*, as well as in Virginia Woolf’s *Voyage Out*.²⁸⁵ It also appears in Balzac’s *Un provincial distingué à Paris*, where the aspiring poet, Lucien, falls in love with his muse, Coralie, who has betrayed her wealthy lover, Camusot, a betrayal Camusot discovers from Lucien’s boots and the use of a buttonhook, and which will ultimately lead to Lucien’s ruin and Coralie’s death. On the other hand, the buttonhook acts in unison with other genres and periods to effect a parody with all its nuances. That Beckett’s buttonhook is pisciform and hangs from a nail on the cabin wall adds a Christian gloss to the image.

²⁸⁴ References to a “spindle” in the “spindle-backed chair” echo the legend of Er in Plato’s *Republic: Bk. X* (§§ 614–621) where the cosmos turns on the spindle sitting on the lap of Necessity, whose three daughters are the Fates; Lachesis, the Past, Clotho, the Present, and Atropos, the Future.

²⁸⁵ References to words and works listed above are derived from extensive searches on the “Literature Online” database at <http://proxy.library.carleton.ca:17223/> and the search engine of the “Concordance of Great Books” site at <http://www.concordance.com/>

Bent and worn down from use, quivering and shimmering in the light of the moon, this image can be read as a nuanced parody of the Western, patriarchal project of ontology by which the otherness of femininity, paganism, and nature is suppressed. In dialogue with these literary precedents, the male narrative voice renders them passive, as it makes use of them to dispute the ideas on writing and ethics from which it has emerged, a posture whereby the text is itself envisaged as a form of ethical writing in a polemic with itself.

6. *Mal vu mal dit*: The Self-Effacing Voice and its Gender Differences

The narrator's deficiencies gain in significance when seen in the light of an aesthetics and ethics of the self-effacing voice. It is an aesthetics of deficiency that characterizes the self-effacing relationship between the narrator and the character of the old woman. Between the force of his conviction that he is observing the woman and the power of his doubt as to the veracity of his observations, the narrator is caught in a vortex of self-contradiction and self-renunciation. This aesthetic outlook is in line with Adorno's negative aesthetics insofar as the narrative renounces its own ability to narrate successfully. At the same time, it must come to terms with its inability not to narrate in the very act of observing others. When, for example, the narrator describes another man trying but unable to observe the woman, it is unclear whether he identifies himself with this stranger or not:

To the imaginary stranger the dwelling appears deserted. Under constant watch it betrays no signs of life. The eye glued to one or the other window has nothing but black drapes for its pains. Motionless against the door he listens long. No sound. Knocks. No answer. Watches all night in vain for the least glimmer. Returns at last to his own and avows, No one. She shows herself only to her own. But she has no own. Yes yes she has one. And who has her [. . .]. (53)²⁸⁶

Who or what is the one? Is it a fragmentary figment of the narrator's own self? Is it the man the old woman mourns at the large stone that is both tomb and altar? Or is he some other, there to confirm, or question the narrator's identity?

The unanswered question at the end of this paragraph is a loophole allowing for the possibility that the old woman has the capacity to assert her authority over that of the narrator. Shortly thereafter, the words, "No one," are again avowed, but this time they are avowed by "the other" (56).²⁸⁷ Once more, the old woman appears as unwillingly as before, and the other responds accordingly:

From one moment of the year to the next suddenly no longer there. No longer anywhere to be seen. Nor by the eye of flesh nor by the other. Then as suddenly

²⁸⁶ Trans. of "À l'imaginaire profane la mesure paraît inhabitée. Surveillée sans relâche elle ne trahit aucune présence. L'oeil collé à l'une et à l'autre fenêtre ne voit que rideaux noirs. Longuement immobile contre la porte il écoute. Rien. Cogne. Personne. Guette en vain la nuit la moindre lueur. Rentre enfin dans son pays et avoue, Personne. Elle ne se montre qu'aux siens. Mais elle n'a pas de siens. Si si elle en a un. Et qui l'a elle [. . .]." (6)

²⁸⁷ Trans. of "par l'autre" (8).

there again. Long after. So on. *Any other would renounce*. Avow, No one. No one more. *Any other than this other*. In wait for her to reappear. In order to resume. Resume the – what is the wrong word? What the wrong word? (56; emphases mine)²⁸⁸

To renounce oneself, or at least to avow that there is no one self, is that what the narrator is implying? Who is to resume what, if what is the wrong word, the word not said well? Is it the narrator who is to resume the pursuit of what, or the woman, or both? Narrative authority, a metonym of the self-envisaging voice, is thereby dispersed across the field of utterances in the active, double-voicing of the narrator's self-conscious unreliability, in his articulation of a self-other relationship where he is an other to himself, as he is an other to the old woman.

The deficiency signified by the ill seen and ill said is itself a metaphor through which the voice becomes actively doubled, dispersed and effaced. The narrator offers the authority of his work in sacrifice, but he cannot completely part with having to see and say and narrate as long as he is conscious. He cannot even be re-assured that death will end this condition. To sacrifice his life, therefore, is no answer. Instead, one continues to write. And this writing becomes part of a long series of literary words or works, such as

²⁸⁸ Trans. of “De n’importe quel moment de l’année à l’autre elle peut ne plus être là. Soudain plus nulle part à voir. Ni par l’œil de chair ni par l’autre. Puis tout aussi soudain là de nouveau. Longtemps après. Ainsi de suite. *Tout autre renoncerait*. Avouerait, Personne. Plus personne. *Tout autre que l’autre*. L’autre attend qu’elle reparaisse. Pour pouvoir reprendre. Reprendre le – comment dire? Comment mal dire?” (8; emphases mine)

“the white heap of stone. Ever heaping for want of better. Which if it persist will gain the skies. The moon. Venus” (63).²⁸⁹ This is the loophole in the narrator’s self-renunciation. In order to gain Venus, or love, one must at least continue to live and work: “*Slaving* away forever in the same place. At this and that trace” (86; emphasis mine).²⁹⁰ The work may never be done, there may never be recompense or redemption, but it must continue. Given the example of the old woman, object of his aesthetic gaze, the narrator accepts the inevitable uncertainty of his position, the imponderable result of his sacrifice:

Decision no sooner reached or rather long after than what is the wrong word ? For the last time at last for to end yet again what the wrong word ? *Than revoked*. No but slowly dispelled a little very like the last wisps of day when the curtain closes. Of itself by slow millimetres or drawn by a phantom hand. Farewell to farewell. Then in that perfect dark foreknell darling sound pip for end begun. First last moment. Grant only enough remain to devour all. Moment by glutton moment. Sky earth the whole it and boodle. Not another crumb or carrion left. Lick chops and basta. No. One moment more. One last. Grace to breath that void. Know happiness. (86; emphases mine)²⁹¹

²⁸⁹ Trans. of “Tout en jouissant du monceau de minéral blanc. S’amoncelant sans cesse faute de mieux sur lui-même. Qui s’il continue gagnera les cieux. La lune. Vénus” (14).

²⁹⁰ Trans. of “Au lieu de *s’acharner* sur place. Sur telle et telle trace” (32; emphasis mine).

²⁹¹ Trans. of “*Parti pas plus tôt pris* ou plutôt bien plus tard que comment dire?
(continued...)

Thus, the narrative closes with the narrator's ambiguous manifesto of decided undecidability encapsulated in the paradoxical metaphor of both the English and French pun at the end. Is no happiness to know happiness, or vice-versa? Is knowing the *good hour* the same as knowing happiness? In aesthetic terms, these are like other words that may be addressed to or directed at the words of several other voices at once and whose intonation or provenance may be ambiguous. Their meaning is doubled and re-doubled so that they retract themselves, then retract their retractions, leaving a loophole wherein many possibilities exist metaphorically, speaking to one another in momentarily unsuppressed dialogue.

As for the ethics of the self-effacing voice, the narrator's desire to identify with the old woman, to tell her story, cannot be separated from his failure to respond adequately. He encounters her in his imagination, but this encounter is face-to-face in Levinas's sense, only in that the saying of the story leads the narrator to acknowledge his responsibility to the other of his character. On the surface, the narrator envisages her as a set of body parts in relation to one another and to her surroundings: "There then she sits as though turned to stone face to the night. Save for the white of her hair and faintly

²⁹¹(...continued)

Comment pour en finir enfin une dernière fois mal dire? *Qu'annulé*. Non mais lentement se dissipe un peu très peu telle une dernière traînée de jour quand le rideau se referme. Plane-plane tout seul où mû d'une main fantôme millimètre par millimètre se referme. Adieu adieux. Puis noir parfait avant-glas tout bas adorable son top départ de l'arrivée. Première dernière seconde. Pourvu qu'il en reste encore assez pour tout dévorer. Goulûment seconde par seconde. Ciel terre et tout le bataclan. Plus miette de charogne nulle part. Léchées babines baste. Non. Encore une seconde. Rien qu'une. Le temps d'aspirer ce vide. Connaître le bonheur. (32; emphases mine)

bluish white face and hands all is black" (49-50).²⁹² Hands, feet, heart, brain, and, above all, her face become metonyms for her identity. In addition, her face is seen in its synecdochic parts: "ill half seen the mouth" (79); "thin lips" (78); "Ghost of an ancient smile" (79); "widowed eye" (60); "lashes jet black remains of the brunette she was" (62); gaping "pupil thinly nimbbed with washen blue" (72); her "long white hair [that] stares [. . .] as if shocked still by some ancient horror. Or by its continuance. Or by another. That leaves the face stone-cold. Silence at the eye of the scream. Which say ? Ill say. Both. All three" (64).²⁹³ As this last quotation indicates, it is impossible to know which part speaks for the others. In and of itself, the woman's face is an "impassive face" (64), even an "inscrutable face" (83).²⁹⁴ For the narrator to understand her, to read her physiognomy for signs that he might otherwise respond to, would be to impose an identity on her. He sees her face, rather, as a death-mask, and it is his encounter with the infinite mystery of this image that compels him to acknowledge a responsibility to it: "Wooed from below the face consents at last. In the dim light reflected by the flag. Calm slab worn and polished

²⁹² Trans. of "La voilà donc comme changée en pierre face à la nuit. Seuls tranchent sur le noir le blanc des cheveux et celui un peu bleuté du visage et des mains" (2).

²⁹³ Trans. of "la bouche mal entrevue" (26); "mince lèvres" (26); "Ombre d'un ancien sourire" (26); "L'oeil veuf" (10); "Cils d'un noir de jais vestiges de la brunette qu'elle fut" (12); "Pupille béante nimbée chichement d'un bleu délavé" (20); "Les longs cheveux blancs se hérissent en éventail [. . .]. Comme jamais revenus d'un effroi ancien. Ou sous le coup du même toujours. Ou d'un autre encore. Qui laisse la face de glace. Silence à l'oeil du hurlement. Lequel dire? Mal dire. Les deux. Les trois" (14).

²⁹⁴ Trans. of "demeurée calme" (14), and "l'inscrutable visage" (30).

by agelong comings and goings. Livid pallor. Not a wrinkle. How serene it seems this ancient mask. Worthy those worn by certain newly dead” (62).²⁹⁵

While the woman is and is not dead, she is envisaged in the act of mourning. Her mourning consists of attempts at encounters with a dead man – a husband, son or father – and constitutes the plotting of her actions: “All in black she comes and goes” (59).²⁹⁶ She traverses time and space, from her cabin to the zone of stones to the edge of the pasture, performing acts of ritual grieving. Metonymically, the “rounded rectangular block” (52), the “distant tomb” (56), the “headstone” (65) whose “averse face” (75) stands for her departed other.²⁹⁷ At times, he may be one of the twelve who surround her during her walks to the tomb, “Out of her sight as she of theirs” (60).²⁹⁸ His presence is a set of traces from her past: “In the distance stiff he stands facing front and the setting sun. Dark greatcoat reaching to the ground. Antiquated block hat. Finally the face caught full in the last rays” (60).²⁹⁹ In a metaphorical sense, she walks from cabin to tomb “Out of her sight

²⁹⁵ Trans. of “Entrepris d’en dessous le visage se laisse faire enfin. A la faible lumière que renvoie la dalle. Calme bloc doucement concave poli par des siècles d’allées et venues. Blancher plombées. Pas une ride. Comme il paraît serein ce masque ancien. A l’égal de ceux de certains nouveau-morts” (12).

²⁹⁶ Trans. of “Tout en noire elle passe et repasse” (10).

²⁹⁷ Trans. of “Rectangle cintré” (4): “La tombe lointaine” (2): “la pierre” (15) whose “face mi-offerte” (22).

²⁹⁸ Trans. of “Hor de sa vue comme elle de la leur” (10).

²⁹⁹ Trans. of “Il se dresse au loin de face face au couchant. Manteau sombre jusqu’à terre. Chapeau bombé du temps jadis. Enfin le visage frappé de front par les derniers rayons” (10).

as she of theirs”(60),³⁰⁰ carrying in the process “by the stem or round her arm the cross or wreath” (56), an unsuppressed sign of all crosses and all wreathes ever borne.³⁰¹ Her ritual enactment of grieving is a way to wait for the time when she will possibly join her husband. Meanwhile, in the darkness of her solitude, she anticipates the encounter in her imagination. The traces of her physical presence are gradually reduced until, in her pallet in the cabin, hidden “from chin to foot under a black covering she *offers* her face alone. Alone! Face defenceless evening and night” (72; emphasis mine).³⁰² Here she is able to imagine an end, or at least a future in which all the attributes of the past are erased. The change, or difference, is so imperceptible as to be almost inexistant. Thus, the narrative takes up the woman’s example, and offers itself in response to her call, insofar as the narrative effaces itself as much as possible in the light of her defencelessness:

Absence supreme good and yet. Illumination then go again and on return no more trace. On earth’s face. Of what was never. And if by mishap some left then go again. For good again. So on. Till no more trace. On earth’s face. Instead of always the same place. Slaving away forever in the same place. At this and that trace. And what if the eye could not ? No more tear itself away from the remains of trace. Of what was never. Quick say it suddenly can and farewell say say

³⁰⁰ Trans. of “En tenant par la branche inférieure ou passé sur le bras la croix ou la couronne” (8).

³⁰¹ Trans. of “la trace de ses pas s’efface” (6).

³⁰² Trans. of “Recouverte des pieds au menton d’une couverture noire elle ne *livre* que la tête. Ne que! Soir et nuit sans défense ce visage” (20; emphasis mine).

farewell. *If only to the face. Of her tenacious trace.* (85)³⁰³

It is the tenacity of her voice, the face of her trace, that the narrative submits itself to. It is more than merely an homage to the role of women in literature and life. In the last paragraph, the narrative asserts its effacement in rhythmic and lexical echoes of Molly's monologue at the end of Joyce's *Ulysses*. But with that intertextual metaphor, the final affirmative declaration to "Know happiness" assumes added significance. This utterance is indicative of a double-voiced encounter in which the male narrative voice sees its own effacement vis-à-vis the female other, while having to acknowledge that that effacement is always only partial, that narrative voice can never efface itself fully in light of its responsibility to the call of the other.

7. *Worstward Ho*: The Self-Envisaging Voices of a Third-Person Pronoun

Written between 1981 and 1982, *Worstward Ho* is the last prose work Beckett published, with the exception of a short piece that appeared in 1988 in the *New Yorker Magazine* as "Stirrings Still." Also considered by at least one critic to contain autobiographical references (Knowlson, 613), "Stirrings Still" is comprised of two

³⁰³ Trans. of "Absence meilleur des biens et cependant. Illumination donc repartir cette fois pour toujours et au retour plus trace. A la surface. De l'illusion. Et si par malheur encore repartir pour toujours encore. Ainsi de suite. Jusqu'à plus trace. A la surface. Au lieu de s'acharner sur place. Sur telle et telle trace. Encore faut-il le pouvoir. Pouvoir s'arracher aux traces. De l'illusion. Vite des fois que soudain oui adieu à tout hasard. *Au visage tout au moins. D'elle tenace trace* [. . .]." (32; emphasis mine)

fragments written at roughly the same time as *Worstward Ho* and later re-worked along with a third fragment over the three years prior to its publication. Beckett felt he could not translate *Worstward Ho* himself, but he agreed to consult with Edith Fournier on her attempts. Eventually she completed the task and published it as *Cap au pire* in 1991, two years after Beckett's death in December, 1989. As Stanley Gontarski reports in the "Introduction" to the American edition of *Nohow On*, Beckett participated in the decision to have *Company*, *Ill Seen Ill Said* and *Worstward Ho* published in one volume, and to give the collection its title, but he resisted allowing it to be called a trilogy, as he had resisted it with the earlier collection of three novels, *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*. Beckett's reasons for this would seem to be an obvious desire to have the works read as thematically and stylistically discontinuous. This desire runs counter to most readers' desire to read *Nohow On* as one continuous expression of Beckett's artistic and philosophical vision. There are certain images that recur from one work to the next. The boy holding his mother's hand in *Company* is reflected in the image of the boy holding the man's hand in *Worstward Ho*, which combines aspects of the man, woman and child in *Company* and *Mal vu mal dit*. Though the distinction between continuous and discontinuous readings is important, it behooves us once again to listen to these competing voices as metonyms and metaphors of a dialogic encounter, as the voices of a self-envisaging reader in conversation with those of a self-effacing writer.

With regard to the aesthetics of *Worstward Ho*, I would argue that the metonymic, self-envisaging voice is only barely able to suppress the metaphorical. Referred to as a

prose poem by at least one critic, the dialogue between prose and poetry must be looked at closely, not merely in terms of the rhythm, syncopation and sonority of poetry versus prose, but as the product of negotiation between semantic and syntactic metonymy and metaphor.³⁰⁴ Otherwise, what does it mean to differentiate prose from poetry? What meaning is generated by such differentiation? From the point of view of my premise that the metonymic voice emerges from the suppression of the metaphoric, I would claim that the voice attempts to envisage itself in the materiality of language. In other words, a metonymic narrative does emerge: the narrative of a voice trying to envisage, or embody, itself “Bit by bit” (91). A voice speaks about being, which means speaking: “On. Say on. Be said on” (89). Charles Krance has explored the lexico-semantic scope of the word “on”.³⁰⁵ Normally used in prepositional, adverbial or adjectival phrase structures, Beckett repeatedly uses the word in varying contexts so as to produce a philosophical if not ontic meaning effect. “Say on” or “Say, on” splits the syntactic signification of the narrative voice, entreating or commanding itself and its listener both to continue saying, which presumes a cessation, and to say the word, on, which one is compelled to do if only with the silent inner voice of the mind while it is reading. As such, we are drawn along by this narrative, by the effect that the voice is trying to describe, namely, the impression that we are but words. “Be said on” becomes both “Be said, on” and re-iterates the imperative,

³⁰⁴ See Perloff 415.

³⁰⁵ See Krance (124) for a discussion of the significance of *on* words as a series of puns on the Greek word for Being, *ontos*.

but with a past participle, and echoes the arcane command, *be gone*, while “Be, said on” repeats the declarative “on,” a pun on the Greek, announcing that “on” is a substitute identity for “be.”³⁰⁶

From this point, the voice takes place, literally. After having posited itself as having been said in paragraphs one and two, the voice assumes a body in paragraph three. It posits itself in space, as a body, or a place for a body. And it posits this body in speech, by uttering “Say a body” (89). With the intention of unifying various metonymic characteristics of itself, the voice speaks in the monologic register of objectified discourse. A series of binary relations emanate from the voice after having posited itself in space and time: body and mind, in and out, on and off, move and stay. The mind is what tries to forge identities between them: “First the body. No. First the place. No. First both” (90). The discourse is objectified by the necessity of the voice having to posit a relation in line with the law of non-contradiction. Even despite the failure to sustain the illusion of this objectified self-envisaging, a voice cannot speak without some semblance of unity. It recognizes the impossibility of escaping this double-bind, and persists regardless of it: “First both. Now either. Now the other. Sick of the either try the other. Sick of it back sick of the either. So on. Somehow on” (90). Informed by this need to try at least to see itself, to put a body to the voice, the voice imagines its body

³⁰⁶ As participants of the Beckett London Seminar have noted, there is also a hint of the biblical phrase, “Let it be said [. . .]”. See the proceeding of the London Beckett Seminar for June 14, 2000: <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/eh/eng/becksem/14_6_00.htm>.

metonymically, “bit by bit”: first, the “bones” (90); then, the “Head sunk on crippled hands” (91), the “Clenched staring eyes” (92); finally, the image of “an old man and child” (93) hand in hand seen from behind, or a single “Topless baseless hindtrunk [. . .] On unseen knees” (99); perhaps this belongs to the narrator, perhaps to an old man, perhaps it is an “old woman’s” (108). The voice envisages itself by and in the very act of speaking. Aesthetically, the voice cannot but continue to envisage itself in space and time, which is what propels the narrative of *Worstward Ho*, suppressing the tautology of its existence “Till nohow on” (89) is “Said nohow on” (89, 116).

Likewise, the ethics of the self-envisaging voice in *Worstward Ho* is organized around the narrator’s desire to express the inexpressible. Presumably, the success associated with a mastery over language would allow the voice to live a good life, similar to what Nussbaum sees represented in literary heroes. For the narrator of *Worstward Ho*, the good life can be achieved by expressing silence.³⁰⁷ It is a paradox to express silence, to envisage the invisible, but the self-envisaging voice strives to achieve this end, nonetheless. It reasons that accomplishing a failure to speak will be good: “Try again. Fail again. Better again. Or better worse. Fail worse again. Still worse again. Till sick for good. Throw up for good. Go for good. Where neither for good. Good and all” (90). The achievement of this absolute “for good” is what constitutes the ethical desire of the voice.

³⁰⁷ This is the familiar theme of *L’Innommable*, but there is a significant discontinuity between the works, as argued convincingly by Watson in the final chapter of *Paradox*.

By throwing up words, by purifying itself of language, thus achieving mastery over it, the voice may find silence, a place where neither the body nor the voice are the mark of differentiation between self and other. On the other hand, how will the voice know it has achieved silence when it does not have language to process the experience of that knowledge? This is the paradox that resists the achievement, and the narrator is highly conscious of it. The voice explores this paradox as it proceeds through the narrative. Or rather, two voices explore the two sides of the “self-same” paradox as a dialogue between single and double-voiced registers. One voice proposes itself in a single-voiced assertion of its identity as an observer of the old man, the child and the old woman. Another voice speaks in a passively double-voiced register, when, for example, the narrator says, “All of old. Nothing else ever. But never so failed. Worse failed. *With care* never worse failed” (91; emphasis mine). In what is an obliquely self-referential statement, there may also be a parodic echo here of the Heideggerian notion of care, or *Sorge*, which underlies an existentialist ethics of otherness that the narrator can only hope to fail at.³⁰⁸ Between these vocal registers, the self-envisaging voice projects an ethics of hope and failure, of the hope for failure.

While the second voice is the culmination of a life of speaking in which it has never cared so much about failing to speak, the first voice cannot help but assert its being by speaking. It has a duty to try to fail: “How try say? How try fail? No try no fail” (96).

³⁰⁸ On Heidegger’s concept of *Sorge*, see Chapter Four of *Sein und Zeit*. The term *Sorge* can also be translated as worry, concern, dread, or anxiety, and, as such, has a long lineage in Existentialist philosophy and literature.

But how is it ultimately to succeed at such failure? The paradox of knowing the difference between self and other arises when the voice sees the image of a body that may or may not be its own: "Any other would do as ill" (93); "Any others would do as ill. Almost any. Almost as ill" (94). The two bodies of the old man and the child are seen or imagined variously as either one or two shapes, either in the present or the past. The ability or inability to differentiate and distinguish shapes is what compels the voice to establish its relationship with the other. If only it could be sure how to tell the difference. At times, the voice may see itself as an old man, or as a child, but, when it sees them "hand in hand," it cannot see itself as both simultaneously. By having to identify itself with one figure as opposed to the other, the voice envisages itself as separate and alienated from whichever other it is not. It consolidates those attributes it can claim for itself into a vision of a relatively stable subject, and views those differences, represented by the un-assimilated attributes of the other, as comprising a lack whose fulfillment is desired. As long as the voice strives to identify itself with all attributes, with the absolute unknowable of death, or the void, for instance, all will be good: "The void. How try say? How try fail? No try no fail. Say only – "(96); "Something not wrong with one. Then with two. Then with three. So on. Something not wrong with all. Far from wrong. Far far from wrong" (98).³⁰⁹ Good and bad, right and wrong are attributes the voice cannot escape from looking for in itself. It is embedded in the very structure of selective cognition,

³⁰⁹ Echoes of trying and failing can also be heard in earlier novels, such as, *How It Is*; "simply try again not yet say die" (*Comment* [88]; *How* [79]).

which is expressed metonymically, and occasionally with comparative and superlative adjectives. But the more the voice tries to fail at differentiating between language and silence, self and other, all and nothing, good and bad, right and wrong, being and not being, the more it fails to fail. As long as the voice cannot fail at saying, it cannot fail at seeing itself somehow.

8. *Worstward Ho*: Self-Effacing Voices in Search of a First-Person Pronoun

The famous, last words of *L'Innommable* repeat in syncopated phrases the first-person singular pronoun, *I*, and the impersonal, second-person, singular pronoun, *you*, while alternating between declarative and negative statements of future intent and present doubt: "it will be I, it will be the silence, where I am, I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know, You must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on" (414).³¹⁰ In contrast to the parody of solipsistic, self-doubt expressed in part by the frequent repetition of personal pronouns in *L'Innommable*, *Worstward Ho* eschews certain personal pronouns altogether. The third-person, impersonal, singular, pronouns "it" and "one," and the third-person plural pronoun "they" are the only nominative, accusative or dative pronouns to

³¹⁰ We see here, perhaps, an early example of the elided punctuation that creates a metaphorical syntax in the line, "in the silence you don't know" (*Three Novels* 414). In the English version, at least, this can be read as, *in the silence, you don't know*, as well as, *in the silence that you don't know*. There are, though, far fewer examples of this ambiguous syntax in *The Unnamable* than in the later prose works.

appear in the text. These pronouns refer exclusively to objects, such as “The head” (98) or “Worsening words” (104). The elision of pronouns is itself, perhaps, a parody of the ontology and epistemology of nominalism and solipsism. It also signifies a departure from Beckett’s previous prose works and an advance into a radical aesthetics of self-effacement. By sacrificing, as it were, the utilitarian function of personal pronouns, *Worstward Ho* allows the metaphorical properties of impersonal pronouns to become unsuppressed. There is no longer any means in the language of the narrative to distinguish between the individual identities of the narrative voice, the old man, the old woman and the boy. All these voices are effaced, until only the impersonal pronoun, *one*, remains. Indeed, the metaphorical syntax of *Worstward Ho*, a syntax and grammar that will sacrifice much of its own capacity for forging metonymic, pronominal identity, goes so far as to mitigate against any and all vocal recitation of the text. In opposition to the prose-verse of the theatre pieces that demands interpretative and performative vocalization, Beckett’s metaphorical, unspeakable prose requires a reading that compels the reader to hear the dialogical encounter in the simultaneity of indicative, interrogative and subjunctive voices.³¹¹

From a Bakhtinian perspective, this unspeakable dialogism is an effect to be heightened as much as possible. But can it be maintained that the heightening of active

³¹¹ In speaking about his own inability to translate *Worstward Ho* into French, Beckett told one interviewer, “Le premier mot déjà est intraduisible, à moins de grands sacrifices” (*L’amitié* 99).

double-voiced discourse is in any way a characteristic of the formal distortions of the literary avant-garde as solicited by Adorno? As I have argued, there is always the potential for a dialogic relationship between units of speech that are monologic or passively double-voiced, that suppress the metaphoricity of their syntax in order to provide value in meaning, and those that are actively double-voiced in order to unsuppress the metonymy of the syntax and put the value in question. A loophole in Beckett's parody of nominalism and solipsism, a parody of his own parody, as it were, emerges in the one instance of an appearance by the third-person, singular, objective, personal pronoun, *him*: "Whose words? Ask in vain. Or not in vain if say no knowing. No saying. No words for him whose words. Him? One. No words for one whose words. One? It. No words for it whose words. Better worse so" (98). As an effect of the exchange-value of dialogue, there are no words for him. In formal terms, the effacement of the self is effected by the metaphoric elision of pronouns, but, in terms of the content of the text, the self re-emerges through a loophole, as a voice, signified by an *it*, whose being is in words, signified by a *they*:

Worsening words whose unknown. Whence unknown. *At all costs unknown*. Now
for to say as worst they may only they only they. Dim void shades all they.
Nothing *save* what *they* say. Somehow say. Nothing save they. What they say.
Whosoever whencesoever say. As worst they may fail ever worse to say. (104;
emphases mine).

Such loopholes bestow an invaluable value on those words whose metaphoricity

envisages identity in the act of effacing it. More specifically, the aesthetics of the self-effacing voice allows for a loophole in the metaphor of effacement, which in turn gives the self-effacing voice a negative identity.

With regard to the ethics of the self-effacing voice in *Worstward Ho* a set of images entirely different from those of the self-envisaging voice informs the relationship between self and other.³¹² The metonymic search for a source to the words of narrative self-realization gives way to a metaphoric discovery of the other in a series of images where the outline of the other is seen from behind, ambiguously undifferentiated from the one observing it. As in a dream, the narrative voice searches to see a face, but there is no face of the other to differentiate self and other. Any face-to-face encounter between the words of the self and the words of the other is subject to the ambiguous dialogic between the contextual metonymy or metaphoricity of those words. What characterizes the encounter between words in *Worstward Ho* is analogous to Levinas's distinction between *le Dit* and *le Dire*, where the Said is akin to the already-uttered, even to the sum of all utterances, and the Saying is whatever understanding lies in the shadows of such utterances, in their potential to signify. In one possible interpretation, the Said may be

³¹² See Guérin for an analysis of the motive for Beckett's decision not to translate *Worstward Ho*. Guérin sees Beckett's refusal to translate this end-work as an admission; *Worstward Ho* "était jugé par Beckett incapable d'effectuer un dernier mouvement de langues du Même à l'Autre entre l'anglais et le français" 81. In Beckett's own words, "C'est le point final, je m'y reconnais encore [. . .]. Je crois que *Worstward Ho* m'a achevé" (Bernold 58; qtd. Guérin 82). For Guérin, what is ultimately achieved in Beckett's writing of *Worstward Ho* is "un signe de grande 'responsabilité pour autrui' pour reprendre Emmanuel Lévinas" (88).

deemed the source of an unethical will-to-power: "Said is missaid. Whenever said said said missaid. From now said alone" (109). In another sense, the Saying merely refers to the hope of achieving understanding: "Back unsay better worse by no stretch more. If more dim less light then better worse more dim. Unsaid then better worse by no stretch more. Better worse may no less than less be more. Better worse what? The say? The said. Same thing. Same nothing. Same all but nothing" (110). Ultimately, neither voice prevails in the dialogue between the Said and the Saying, but the goal remains to answer the question, "How fail say how other seen?" (111).

By the final stanzas of *Worstward Ho*, the narrative falters in the direction of an answer to this question. On one level, the voice has been trying to know itself better by observing others. The more the mind of the narrative voice tries to comprehend the significance of the three bodies of the old man, the old woman, and the child, the less it knows of itself. In its encounters with the words of the other, it has also tried to know itself by subtracting those words from the vocabulary that gives it its identity. This *reductio ad nihilum*, the minimalization of its vocabulary, is what gives the voice hope that it can stop the pain of desiring. The more it reduces its vocabulary, the closer it comes to being part of the elemental ooze at the beginning of time: "What words for what then? How almost they still ring. As somehow from some soft of mind they ooze. From it in it ooze" (107).³¹³ But at its lowest point, it still sees a form, what it thinks is a woman's

³¹³ It is tempting to interpret "soft" – usually a Beckettian metonym for the brain – in "Soft of mind," as a pun on the colloquial phrase *soft in the head*, which can signify the
(continued...)

form, a trace of the face of the other: "Oozed from softening soft the word woman's" (108). From here the voice reconstitutes itself yet again. On its way back up the scale of being, it sees itself metonymically in animal terms, "preying. Gnawing" (112). Yet a series of metaphors are activated by the repetition of these words as puns: "No stilling preying. The shades. The dim. The void. All always faintly preying" (112). The voice catches itself in the act of praying, of addressing its words to another. And these words negate their own negation. They keep saying no, or *naw*: "Gnawing to be gone. Less no good. Worse no good. Only one good. Gone. Gone for good. Till then gnaw on. All gnaw on. To be gone" (113). They even say no to the void, passionately: "A pox on void" (113).

Then, as they reclaim themselves in their intercourse with each other, the words take shape again in the form of body parts: "Nothing from pelves down. From napes up. Topless baseless hindtrunks" (113-114). They come face-to-face with one another: "Stare clamped to stare. Bowed backs blurs in stare clamped to stare. Two black holes. Dim black. In through skull to soft. Out from soft through skull. Agape in unseen face" (114). Is there not also here a metaphor in the pun on *agape*, invoking the Greek word *āgape* (English *love*), whose source is the two black holes in an unseen face? This is the possibility that is raised in the faint-hope clause of one's regard for the other, the loophole that can be opened by the word of one in response to the word of another:

³¹³(...continued)

dementia or senility associated with Alzheimer's Disease, and which Beckett thought he suffered from in mild form. See Knowlson.

The three bowed down. The stare. The whole narrow void. No blurs. All clear.
Dim clear. *Black hole agape on all*. Inletting all. Outletting all.

Nothing and yet a woman. Old and yet old. On unseen knees. Stooped as
loving memory some old gravestones stoop. In that old graveyard. Names gone
and when to when. Stoop mute over the graves of none. (115; emphasis mine)

It is in this image of the woman in mourning then that the voice recognizes the need for love. As a loophole in its own negative self-effacement, its own desire for an ultimate end to itself, the voice sees itself effacing itself for another. It goes on to indicate that it is better to keep the skull, because without the skull there can be no black holes – in other words, no love. And this slightest of admissions is enough for the voice to declare with an imperative potency that it must keep speaking:

At bounds of boundless void. Whence no farther. Best worse no farther. Nohow
less. Nohow worse. Nohow naught. Nohow on.

Said now on. (116)

In the end, the self-effacing voice of the narrative is not obliged to speak in the guise of a first-person pronoun in order to experience a modicum of love in its encounter with the other.

9. Conclusion: Writing for One's Others' Selves

It might be said with some qualifications that for Beckett the self is a pronoun in

search of an author. If this is true to a certain extent for his earlier work, can it be said of the later work, as well? Or is there notable discontinuity? The argument here has been that there are notable differences, that in the final works there is a sense of Beckett having found a self for his voice in utterances once written by himself, now by an other. It is as if Beckett's investigations on selfhood lead him to conclude that the identity of any given self is irreducible to itself, but it can be apprehended in the language of the other. The self is a necessary illusion. It is a figment of the other's imagination. It is beholden to the other for its being. The voice gives utterance to a word by encountering an other, and this utterance identifies itself as a self, or at least as belonging to a voice. In the course of his writing career, Beckett has proven himself a master at interrogating the secret desire of the self to assert itself over an other to whom it is otherwise beholden. At the same time, he has maintained a strict accounting of the failures of the self to achieve its end of either subsuming the other into itself, or subsuming itself into the other. To some extent, *Nohow On* represents Beckett writing about this career from the vantage point of the immanent approach of death. This has an obvious effect of being a mimetic re-iteration of his life-work, but it also inspires an internal dialogic with itself that is remarkable for both the continuities and discontinuities it reveals. From the narrative voice in *Company*, who accompanies himself with his words, to the narrative voice in *Mal vu mal dit*, whose imaginings of an old woman are both historically distant historic and intensely personal; to the narrative voice of *Worstward Ho*, who imagines itself as all the parts of a family put together, there is a pathos to Beckett's endeavor that belies the desire of each narrator

to dissolve itself in the acid bath of language. The self-effacing voice always seems to give way to the self-envisaging one.

And this insertion of the self-envisaging voice into the self-effacing one is perhaps the legacy that will continue to see Beckett's works read, in silence and otherwise. How else do we respond to a voice whose last words are, nohow on, rather than, I must go on? Jacques Derrida gives us a hint of the difficulty in his own ambivalent response to this question, when he says:

This is an author to whom I feel very close, or to whom I would like to feel myself very close; but also too close. Precisely because of this proximity, it is too hard for me, too easy and too hard. I have perhaps avoided him a bit because of this identification. Too hard also because he writes – in my language, in a language which is his up to a point, mine up to a point (for both of us it is a 'differently' foreign language) – texts which are both too close to me and too distant for me even to be able to 'respond' to them. How could I write in French in the wake of or 'with' someone who does operations on this language which seem to me so strong and so necessary, but which must remain idiomatic? How could I write, sign, countersign texts which 'respond' to Beckett? (55)

It is precisely Beckett's operations on language in general, and on the language of selfhood in particular that are so strong and necessary, and which continue to call us to respond to them.

In what could be construed as a reference to Beckett's later works, Derrida goes

on to address the difficulty of having to teach such works, when he says:

I would take three lines, I would spend two hours on them, then I would give up because it would not have been possible, or honest, or even interesting, to extract a few 'significant' lines from a Beckett text. The composition, the rhetoric, the construction and the rhythm of his works, even thrones that seem the most 'decomposed,' that's what 'remains' finally the most 'interesting,' that's the work, that's the signature, this remainder which remains when the thematic is exhausted.

(55)

In this way of reading or not reading Beckett's texts, Derrida offers an interesting challenge. How is anyone who writes on Beckett to respond to Derrida's response? Has the preceding study of Beckett's portrayal of selfhood been honest or interesting in attempting to analyze the remainder that remains when the thematic is exhausted? As Derrida suggests, there is always a remainder there to be analyzed. The question remains, how can it best be analyzed? And this remainder would appear to present the possibility that by answering the call to analyze our response to the text, we allow a portion of the writer's voice to utter words on our behalf, as a remainder of our own selves beyond any thematics of the individual self.

FINAL REMARKS

Car Je est un autre. Si le cuivre s'éveille clairon, il n'y a rien de sa faute. Cela m'est évident: j'assiste à l'éclosion de ma pensée: je la regarde, je l'écoute [. . .].

La première étude de l'homme qui veut à être poète est sa propre connaissance, entière; il cherche son âme, il l'inspecte, il la tente, l'apprend [. . .]; tant d'egoïstes se proclament auteurs; il en est bien d'autres qui s'attribuent leurs progrès intellectuel! – Mais il s'agit de faire l'âme monstrueuse [. . .]; Imaginez un homme s'implantant et se cultivant des verrues sur le visage.

Je dis qu'il faut être voyant, se faire voyant.

Le poète se fait voyant par un long, immense et raisonné dérèglement de tous les sens. Toutes les formes d'amour, de souffrance, de folie; il cherche lui-même, il épuise en lui tous les poisons. Pour n'en garder que les quintessence [. . .] Car il arrive à l'inconnu [. . .]! Qu'il crève dans son bondissements par les choses inouïes et innombrables: viendront d'autres horribles travailleurs; ils commenceront par les horizons où l'autre s'est affaissé!

(Arthur Rimbaud: Letter to Paul Demeny, 15 May, 1871)

Final Remarks: Finding One's Others in Words

After having located the author in the dialogic exchange between self-envisaging and self-effacing voices, we discover that we are just as likely to lose it again. At least

now we have evidence that the author's desire to disappear from the text is as untenable as his or her desire to be found in it. Does the question not, then, revert to a question of our desire to find in an image of the author's self a moiety of our own true selves? Is this desire on the part of the reader not what Foucault has overlooked in his analysis of the authorial function. It is not the author's desire to disappear that is at issue, but rather the reader's desire to impose an authorial image on the text. By heightening the intensity of the dialogic conversation between self-envisaging and self-effacing voices, an author allows himself or herself to affect a posture of self-effacement, ostensibly in order to wean his or her reader from the need to search for an authoritatively self-envisaged author. Foucault names Beckett as part of the tradition of writers since Mallarmé who have sought by disappearing from their texts to effect a break with the tradition of authorial genius. But Foucault's desire to break with that tradition is restrained by exclusively social and historical analyses of the author function. As we have seen, both Canetti's and Beckett's attempts to disappear from their text are rhetorical, as effects of language, and these effects require close readings. Ultimately, the disappearance of the author is rhetorical, but it is a necessary manoeuvre, if there is to be a genuinely dialogic encounter between self and other, between writer and reader.

In the face-to-face encounter with a text, the reader must decide whether to answer the call of the text or not, but the reader is also responsible for the reasons for his or her response. As a comparative analysis of the late works of Canetti's and Beckett, this study has sought to highlight the ways in which their writing generates dialogic conversations

between self-envisaging and self-effacing voices. In spite of ethnic, cultural, and personal differences, each author examines the self in order to better understand the other. As the instantiation of two men who write about themselves having spent a life-time writing about the self, Canetti and Beckett's late-life writing reveals to the reader the possible conditions for better knowing the other. Both authors affirm the idea that the face-to-face encounter between reader and writer, which is mediated by the language of the text, is an aesthetic, as well as an ethical, experience of that language. Where the writer must be responsible for the otherness of the reader, the reader must be responsible for the otherness of the writer. To Canetti, the "moral responsibility" of the author, to borrow the words of the Swedish Academy, is a function of the author's ability to know the other by effacing the self, a lesson he does not learn until the end of the memoirs, when, at the time of their mother's death, he is able to respond to his brother's grief rather than exclusively to his own. The writing of the memoirs is indeed the manifestation of a broader theoretical statement on the moral responsibility of the writer that Canetti made in 1976 at the outset of working on them. In a speech at the University of Munich, which later became the essay "The Writer's Profession," Canetti addresses the question of a writer's responsibility to language and for history. He defends the traditional ideal of the *Dichter*, in spite of allegations that writing has failed to prevent catastrophic events such as World War II. But he also requires that everyone who writes as a *Dichter* "must seriously doubt his right to be one" (*Conscience* 237). Canetti sees a contradiction in the argument that words failed to prevent war, because assuming responsibility for a failure

presupposes the possibility of responsibility for success. Such is the inherent power of words. As he formulates it, if “words can do so much” to cause war, “why cannot words hinder it?” (238-39) This puts the onus on the writer to accept responsibility for every word he or she writes. The terms and conditions of fulfilling this responsibility are for the writer to know all literatures to the best of his or her ability and, by “experiencing others from the inside” (242), in the discursive exchange of the face-to-face encounter. In the memoirs, Canetti puts his theories into practice.

The same sentiment might also apply as a theory to all Beckett’s writing, though with some qualifications. As the Swedish Academy said of his work, the author’s voice is able to “speak to his peers and find in companionship solace.” It can do so, because Beckett seems to have long since discovered that writing about the self can lead to an effacement of the self, which in turn allows him to come closer to knowing the other. In *Nohow On*, the voice never stops talking to its others, whoever they may be, mother, father, lover, or the ghost of selves past, as long as there is a voice to speak with. From a well-known declaration he made earlier in his career, not long after World War II, Beckett articulates his own sense of the responsibility of the writer in the face of catastrophic events: “I speak of an art turning from it in disgust, weary of its puny exploits, weary of pretending to be able, of being able, of doing a little better the same old thing, of going a little further along a dreary road” (*Disjecta* 139). Responding to Georges Duthuit’s question of what the alternative might be, Beckett’s reply was strategically paradoxical: “The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing

from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express" (139). Writing some thirty to forty years later, Beckett continued to fulfill the obligation to express, while maintaining the failure of art to change history. Indeed, by articulating the failure to express in such works as *Nohow On*, he effects the logic of self-contradiction unearthed in Canetti's analysis: namely, that an admission of the failure to express is a tacit acknowledgment of the assumption that there is a responsibility to express.

In terms of having an authorial function, a conceptualization of the *Dichter* as someone who writes in order to achieve some purpose, both Canetti and Beckett explore the limitations of the dialogic exchange between self and other. Perhaps it is here, at the limits of the self-other encounter, that they best fulfill, at the end of the twentieth century, the pronouncements made by Rimbaud in the nineteenth century on the prophetic nature of the poet. The role of seer is executed by Canetti and Beckett insofar as their writings echo in the dialogue of self-envisaging and self-effacing voices an experience of consciousness where all words are present in face-to-face encounters between the past and the future. The writer-as-seer is perhaps nowhere better exemplified by Canetti, who was able to foresee and escape the dangers posed by the Nazis, or by Beckett, who took part in the fight against fascism and whose works foretell of its recurrence in our everyday lives. They both saw the imminence of the catastrophe. This same sense of responsibility to the future is borne out in their writings.

Perhaps it is all the more important to re-think the authorial function in its role as

a context for writing about the self among others. The author functions as an authority on the self, because of its ability to write about the self with an effective use of language. No matter that the language used by that author belongs to him or her provisionally, it is distinct enough that we as readers desire to understand its implications for knowing the other. In light of an authorial function that emphasizes the responsibility of the writer to the future of language, is there not value in studying the components parts of an author's selfhood? Can the authorial function not be seen to some extent as a process of summarizing one's life-work on the self? Would it help to develop a vocabulary for analyzing these efforts in and of themselves? Are there criteria for measuring, according to some basic principles of comparative analysis, the effectiveness of rendering the self-other dialogic in literary discourse? What I have proposed as an elementary structure in the form of the dialogic exchange between self-envisaging and self-effacing voices might serve to further the ends of a literary methodology dedicated to reading literary texts for their aesthetic and ethical treatment of self-other encounters.

In terms of the broader implications for such a field of study, it may be possible to theorize a methodology of researching self-other relations across various cultures and contexts. In the twenty-first century, it is more urgent than ever to produce a body of theoretical and literary work that could help better understand the self and its others, particularly as the potential for conflict between them threatens to escalate to greater and greater levels of mutually assured self-destruction. The absence of stable, on-going dialogue between competing world ideologies, and the rise of a multiplicity of voices

ving for an audience, have increased the danger to any semblance of unity, but have also added an invaluable opportunity to share wisdom and compare experiences among an unprecedented number of cultures and language groups. Perhaps this increase in the channels of dialogue could be achieved in part within a theoretical framework that would study international literature in terms of a comparison of world-views that characterize the civilizations of the planet. International literature could investigate the nature of self-other relations in light of the dialogic exchange between civilizations, between religious and secular expression within them, between the articulation of aesthetic and ethical ideals that characterize them, and between the identities and differences of individuals or groups whose own face-to-face encounters with one another comprise the collective experience of every civilization. Such an approach to the literary expression of experience would place language in general and the word in particular at the center of the focus on our responsibility for the future.

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