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# The Future Regained: Toward a Modernist Ethics of Time

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# The Future Regained: Toward a Modernist Ethics of Time

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# THE FUTURE REGAINED

## Toward a Modernist Ethics of Time

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"My brothers, do you want to suffocate in the fumes of their snouts and appetites? Rather break the windows and leap to freedom!"[1]

"I walk among men as among the fragments of the future—that future which I envisage."[2]

[1] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 162.
[2] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 251.

# INTRODUCTION

On the opening pages of *Specters of Marx*, Derrida writes, "But to learn to live… is that not impossible for a living being? Is it not what logic itself forbids? To live, by definition, is not something one learns… And yet nothing is more necessary than this wisdom. It is ethics itself."[3] At the heart of this question is the essential problem of futurity: how can that which is to come go beyond that which already is? Is literature—and the vision of the future that it can provide—anything more than a reflection and projection of the present moment? In Derrida's terms, how can we learn about living when we have not yet lived? These questions are immediately applicable to projects of political utopianism, but, as will become clear, they are ultimately fundamental to ethical and political thought more generally construed. Insofar as the future is always the potential location of a better, more just world where the promises of the present are able to be realized, ethical being is inevitably and necessarily bound up in futural being. While we should rightly be concerned about how an assignment of primary significance to the future might permit escapism and an ever-receding potentiality—a concern my project is constantly cognizant of—the foundation of ethics, which distinguishes what ought to be from what already is, demands of us a theorization of the coming-to-be of a more ethical world, a process inseparable from the simultaneously mundane and inscrutable, inevitable and paradoxical boundary between the future and the present. In other words, an underlying principle of this project is that, despite the challenges that an embrace of futurity poses to ethical life, we cannot have ethics without the future.

Ultimately, this project makes the claim that modernism, instead of foreclosing on the future as is sometimes argued, suggests a new, ethically invested vision for what is to come. While it is certainly true that the movement resists traditional notions of progress, utopia, and teleology,

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[3] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, xvii

we should not interpret this skepticism as a wholesale rejection of futurity—in other words, I contend that conventional readings of key modernists texts which render them dystopic, fatalistic, or amoral miss the mark. These claims are also linked to another assertion—one which proposes that antidialectics, post-structuralism, queer theory, and modernism itself are not ethically impoverished or insufficient, as critics have claimed. In each of these cases, as with my treatment of modernist futurity, I hold that rejection of traditional ethical foundations, such as the antidialectical critique of our relation to otherness, the post-structuralist critique of the coherency of a stable temporal order, and the queer-theoretical critique of a definite self should not be regarded as abandonments of the ethical altogether, but rather the sources of an essential re-evaluation of the way that literature understands our obligations to each other and the world.

This position might be preliminarily grasped in the words of Rainer Maria Rilke, who, in *Letters to a Young Poet* (1929), writes of the "solemn task" to "gather sweetness, depth, and strength" in order to announce the "song of some future poets, who will appear in order to say ecstasies that are unsayable."[4] These literary prophets, he continues, "call forth the future; and even if they have made a mistake and embrace blindly, the future comes anyway, a new human being arises, and on the foundation of the accident that seems to be accomplished here, there awakens the law by which a strong, determined seed forces its way through to the egg cell that openly advances to meet it."[5] These lines recall Percy Shelley's articulation of the role of poets, whom he calls the "unacknowledged legislators of the world,"[6] and "the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present."[7] One formulation of the aim of this project is to contend

[4] Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, 15.
[5] Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet,* 15.
[6] Shelley, "A Defense of Poetry," Norton, 794.
[7] Shelley, "A Defense of Poetry," Norton, 794.

with Shelley's "shadows" of "futurity," and with Rilke's "solemn task" to "call forth the future," an undertaking crystalized by the image of the window, which serves as a symbol for the complexities of glimpsing and confronting that which is yet to come. While this image is in many ways inadequate (not least because, in a literal sense, windows would seem to look only from an indoor present to an outdoor one), the frame of being confined to a space while also looking beyond it captures something important about temporality—the window transgresses the boundary between inside and outside, present and future, while also being the very thing which marks their separation. The figure of the window, along with related images such as mirrors and openings, serves as a visualization of the delicate temporal boundary at the heart of my project. Guided by this theoretical model, I will ultimately find in modernism an annunciation of the futural which presents an understanding of time and ethics in which the future is always already embedded within the present.

I argue that modernism provides us with two critical propositions, drawing from the major works of three of the most monolithic figures of modernism: Virginia Woolf, Marcel Proust, and James Joyce. Each of these authors, while disparate, provides an essential facet of my argument about modernist futurity. The first proposal is this: the present is already fractured, made nonlinear and disrupted by the realizations of the incoherence of identity, the "out-of-joint"-ness of art, and the blanks and absences of the world. In other words, the traditional version of temporality in which the past, present, and future are clearly divided and linearly arranged is replaced by a more porous, complex version of time. This idea is suggested by key modernist concepts, which, in addition to being suspicious of easily definable versions of the future, are more broadly concerned with transgressing and destabilizing sharply demarcated boundaries. Woolf's, Proust's, and Joyce's attention to the process of fracturing traditional divisions and the space this fracturing

creates will be a major part of my project. The idea of being simultaneously dead and not-dead is particularly important, and echoes across all three authors—from Septimus and Clarissa's connection in *Mrs. Dalloway*, to the spectral work of memory and aging in the final volume of *In Search of Lost Time*, to Gabriel's musings at the close of "The Dead." A realization of futurity within the present is powerfully linked to this interest in death: just as death is unimaginable and undeterminable, even as it arrives, our encounter with genuine futurity prohibits its own formulation—burned away by the continual motion of absolute difference while also remaining resolutely present. This mechanism is the figure of the "cinder," evoked in Derrida's phrase, "Cinders there are,"[8] which represents the possibility of something which may be wholly other, stripped of all familiarity or recognizability, but which nonetheless confronts us. In other words, while our encounter with things in the world is, in some sense, always present, just as we are, and therefore "stripped" of its futurity, we might still be able to recognize in them something which *exceeds* the present—which, like the cinder, persists even as any nameable features are burned away.

However, Woolf, Proust, and Joyce also provide a second, and ultimately more crucial proposition: beyond merely recognizing the future as already within the present, we can take action to announce the futural—actively affirm its presence while also preserving the space that makes it possible. This is what makes the ethics of these three thinkers something more than a passive mindset about the world. This element is pointed to by *Cinders*, where Derrida writes, "One must still know how to "let it blaze." One must be good at it."[9] By seeing each moment as already imbued with both the possibility of burning and the potential presence of the future, we are also drawn to Walter Benjamin's formulation of messianic potential. In his claim that "for every second

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[8] Derrida, *Cinders*, 13.
[9] Derrida, *Cinders*, 49-51.

of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter,"[10] we can see the possibility of the future already within the present. In Woolf, Proust, and Joyce, instead of seeing ourselves as the passive onlookers to this arrival, we are instead invited to imagine how we could bring it about—to call forth the moment of salvation—and perhaps even to see ourselves *as* the figure of Messiah, entering into history through the strait gate and making possible the realization of a better world through the production of an encounter with the fragments of futurity within the present. In this light, Benjamin's claim that "like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim"[11] is generalized even further—each moment and individual becomes essentially messianic: its power is derived from the realization that the future is imminent and from our own ethical ability to announce and participate in its arrival. Ultimately, this approach is one that is profoundly invested in an affirmation of the future, and in the possibility that a sense of the futural can be retained in the midst of a modernist, post-structuralist, and queer framework. This affirmation is that which Deleuze describes when he writes, "To affirm is not to bear but, on the contrary, to discharge and to lighten… The negative is an epiphenomenon. Negation, like the ripples in a pond, is the effect of an affirmation which is too strong or too different."[12] Ultimately, our ethical task is the same one that Rilke and Shelley set forth: to become "the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present"[13] ; to "call forth the future."[14]

Over the course of my project, I will return to the image of the window, which, as I have noted already, serves as a figure for my exploration of futurity. In Woolf, Septimus's leap to his

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[10] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Section XVIIIB, Page 209.
[11] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Section II, Page 197.
[12] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 54.
[13] Shelley, "A Defense of Poetry," Norton, 794.
[14] Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, 15.

death and the penetrating beam of the Lighthouse both serve to engage with and disrupt the window pane and frame's rigid division of interior and exterior (present and future), presenting the possibility of a perspective which incorporates one's own death—that which is "outside" or "beyond." Later, *Orlando* reinforces this association while taking it a step further—the window comes to represent a kind of fractured selfhood and a disruption in the temporal order as a whole. For Proust, the window exemplifies the mingling of the art-object and the questions of futurity, as the narrator gazes up at Albertine's window in *The Prisoner*. Here, the pane, illuminated with golden light, becomes both a marker of imprisonment and the unreachability of the future and a reminder of Proust's aesthetic conception of ethics, in which truth, beauty, and meaning belong to another world which is yet to come and are cast backward into the present like Shelley's shadows of futurity. In Joyce, Gabriel's famous reflection on the snow falling over Ireland in "The Dead" catalyzes the question of whether or not the future can ever be imagined—and whether a promised utopia will ever arrive—by maintaining the ambiguity of the frosted, obscured glass and problematizing the relationship between what is seen beyond the window and what is only a reflection of the inside. As *Ulysses* nears its close, the window again returns, as the object of Bloom's journey and fantasy, outlined by Molly's light. Here, the prophetic quality of the window and Bloom's longing gaze up towards it centers a crucial conversation about messianism, false prophecy, and what it might mean to "announce" the future. In each of these cases, the window serves as a symbol for the future *par excellence* insofar as it captures something about the interaction between the "here-and-now" and the "beyond" which is essential to both a theorization of temporality and a theorization of ethics.

The entrance of the future into the present is, foundationally, reliant on the division between present and future itself, a formulation which is made evident by the simultaneous separation

and definition I have just described through the image of the window. In other words, the divergence of the exterior and the interior, the same and the other, the present and the future, which we might call the "window-pane," is, in some sense, necessary for the transgression of that boundary. In this way, my central claim is reliant upon a theory of otherness which resists the overcoming of difference in order to maintain the strangeness and ethical potency of a futurity which is within the present without being a part of it. Here, Emmanuel Levinas's formulation of the "absolute Other" becomes essential. The Levinasian Other is differentiated both from Hegel's other and from the societally produced other which is the subject of postcolonial studies, as examined by Homi Bhabha in his book *The Location of Culture*. In other words, the Levinasian other is not produced culturally, but rather produced phenomenologically, through a basic ethical encounter. It is important to note that these forms of otherness are far from wholly distinct—indeed, one of the major challenges facing a post-Levinasian ethical approach is attempting to discriminate between the genuine ethical encounter and the internalized cultural scapegoat. By this I mean that we must be careful with the term "other"—it is easy to mistake that which is absolutely and fundamentally different from that which is contingently different, made alien to us by cultural forces. Nevertheless, even recognizing the potential pitfalls of distinguishing a constructed other from a phenomenological one, the idea of an absolute Other which may not be subjugated to the Same is a critical concept for my project.

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas attempts to reformulate the position of ethics as pre-ontological, theorizing a confrontation with an absolute Other from which we derive an infinite obligation and responsibility. For Levinas, the essential feature of the Other is its incommensurability. Unlike in a Hegelian model where everything external is potentially sublated, the infinitude of the Other overwhelms and rejects any possibility of incorporation into the subject. It is precisely this

separateness and ultimate externality which forms the basis for the pre-ontological ethical obligation. This position is perhaps best put in the following section from a chapter entitled "Ethics and the Face": "The relation between the Other and me, which dawn forth in his expression, issues neither in number nor in concept. The Other remains infinitely transcendent, infinitely foreign; his face in which his epiphany is produced and which appeals to me breaks with the world that can be common to us, whose virtualities are inscribed in our nature and developed by our existence."[15] The arrival of the Face of the Other requires *recognition*, but resists an attempt to incorporate it into a *synthesis*. Similarly, there can be no assumption of mutuality—the Other cannot be said to possess a comparable interiority or privacy. Unlike the dialectical unity which was presented in Hegel, Levinas's model does not imply a self-sublation or self-renunciation. He writes, "And yet the Other does not purely and simply negate the I; total negation, of which murder is the temptation and the attempt, refers to an antecedent relation."[16] While Levinas certainly values the encounter between the Self and the Other, the Hegelian move of self-transcendence is neither required nor permitted.

The theoretical role and importance of this Levinasian "absolute Otherness" does not fully become realized, however, until the boundary between the same and the other, between the present and the future, begins to be transgressed. This brings us up against Woolf's famous comment that Joyce's "indecency" in the sense that "he must break the windows."[17] Here Woolf presents a kind of discomfort over Joyce's embrace of the vulgar and the profane—a sentiment echoed by many readers and critics. However, as I will return to at the beginning of the first chapter, Woolf herself is by no means a stranger to transgression—while her novels do not feature the same emphasis on

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[15] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 194.
[16] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 194.
[17] Woolf, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," 21.

excrement and bodily desires which Joyce's do, her work is pervaded by a profound anxiety about the proper and the socially normative, and often manifest a kind of desperate, violent logic of escape which neither Joyce nor Proust allow. To this point, it is Septimus, not Gabriel, who ultimately refuses the tortured emptiness of his world, pushing out beyond the boundary of his window and plunging to his death. Reflecting beyond this quotation, I argue that modernism, as seen through each of the authors I deal with, is committed to disrupting the sanctity of the "window"—to destabilizing the linear, causal, distinctly partitioned relationship between the past and the future represented by the window frame and the pane (literal or figurative) it holds in place. This may also be seen in the following passage, taken from Blanchot's *The Writing of the Disaster*, where he theorizes the "primal scene"—for us, the fundamental fracturing of the temporal order:

> *Nevertheless, the same sky… —Exactly, it has to be the* same*.—Nothing has changed.—Except the overwhelming overturning of nothing.—Which breaks, by smashing of a pane (behind which one rests assured of perfect, or protected, visibility), the finite-infinite space of the cosmos—ordinary order—the better to substitute the knowing vertigo of the deserted outside*.[18]

First, I argue that this "primal scene," in which "the same" is "overturn[ed]" by the "smashing of a pane" and replaced by the absence of "the knowing vertigo of the deserted outside," is essential for modernist ethics—it is crucial to a model in which the future enters into the present, rather remaining alienated from it. In Blanchot's formulation, we can see how the complacent view from inside the window, which is comfortable with its own mediated perspective of what is beyond, is spurred into action by the shattering of the barrier between interior and exterior. The "vertigo" of the gaze out of the broken window is particularly important—it describes a feeling which only arises from grappling with something both overwhelmingly other and imminently present.

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[18] Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, 115.

Second, I argue that, for modernism—particularly in the context of Woolf, Proust, and Joyce—the breaking of the window is inseparable from a queer politics. Each of these authors is invested in bringing queerness to the page—not just in the form of queer subjects, but also in the form of a fundamental textual shift in the way literature is written and the way its implications are understood. By looking at modernism's characteristic textual play, narrative disruption, and rejection of convention with a queer reading in mind, we can see that it already partakes of a queer methodology, even before explicit mentions of gender or sexuality, insofar as it resists the conventions of totalization and frustrates readerly expectations of climax, conclusion, and dramatic unity. While these literary features may be understood in a number of different ways, I look to queer readings in order to understand how the destabilization of tradition, normativity, and expectation resonates across text, plot, and character. More importantly, however, I will take guidance from queer theory's proposition that we cannot understand ethics, society, and identity as separate from temporality—rather, a critique or reimagining of one of these requires the same examination of them all. In this way, queer time is an important backdrop for my project—both in its particular formulations and in its general motivation.

In my exploration of this queer register of modernist temporal ethics, I will draw primarily from three key theorists: Lee Edelman, Jose Estaban Muñoz, and Elizabeth Freeman. For Edelman, particularly as articulated in his book *No Future*, the act of negation is fundamental to an ethics of queerness. He establishes what he calls the role of the "*sinthom*osexual"—someone who rejects traditional valuations of reproduction and perpetuation, someone who says, "Fuck the social order and the Child."[19] For Edelman, this ethical proposition, which embraces unmediated negativity, is

[19] Edelman, *No Future*, 29.

inseparable from an attack on the traditional model of temporality. On this view, which understands fully the teleological and heteronormative foundations of our cultural belief in reproductive futurity, the only ethical position for the queer subject is to abandon futurity altogether and invest in "no future at all."[20] Edelman's analysis is an important background and interlocution for my project. While I will ultimately disagree that any imagination of the future must be abandoned, his critique of reproductive futurity is a constant check on any attempt that goes too far in determinately defining temporality. My aim is to locate in Woolf, Proust, and Joyce a version of futurity that escapes Edelman's criticisms: one which maintains a sense of potential and affirmation while also refusing to slip into the dangers illustrated in *No Future*—dangers which may be traced back to Hegel and Freud's depictions of a teleologically defined order of time which centers around the fulfillment of fore-pleasure and expectation rather than political emancipation or the arrival of the new.[21]

Part of the response to Edelman can be found in Jose Esteban Muñoz's book *Cruising Utopia*, which similarly examines the essential connection between futurity and queerness, proposing that queer theory ought to embrace futurity, rather than negate it. He writes, "Queerness is

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[20] Edelman, i, 46.

[21] Here, I am particularly referring to Hegel's dialectical view on which the past and future are subordinated to the movement of the spirit through history. This view, later taken up by Marx, attempts to unify temporal structure (the arc of history) and reduce the otherness of the past and the future into a sensible and inevitable progression. While there is not space to make this point here, I argue that this structure, on which the past and present are, in some sense, defined by their relation to a forthcoming moment of fulfillment, expectation, or climax, can be understood in reference to Freud's model of heteronormative desire-fulfillment, where he explains the sexual telos by saying, "This last pleasure is the highest in intensity, and its mechanism differs from that of the earlier pleasure. It is brought about entirely by discharge: it is wholly a pleasure of satisfaction and with it the tension of the libido is for the time being extinguished." (Freud, 76.) With the Hegelian structure of temporality in mind, I argue that the course of history comes to resemble what Freud calls "fore-pleasures"—fragments whose value lies in their contribution to an end of fulfillment and completion. It is worth noting, however, that both Hegel and Freud have elements of their thought which exceed this model. For Hegel, the concept of plasticity developed in Catherine Malabou's book *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality, and Dialectic* suggests that the Hegelian future is not quite so reductively determined. Similarly, Freud's later work on the death drive, which will become important to my analysis in Chapter 1, destabilizes the teleological model of pleasure presented in the earlier *Three Essays on Human Sexuality*. Here, I am primarily responding to a traditional understanding of both of these thinkers in order to make clear the responsive theorizations of authors such as Levinas, Edelman, and Muñoz.

not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality... The future is queerness's domain."[22] After our discussion up to this point, we are able to realize that the "not-here-ness" of queerness and queer utopia is not a mere contingent fact, predicated by a particular historical moment where gender roles remain dominant and homosexual practices are stigmatized. Instead, for Muñoz, it is the very structure of the future—a place characterized by its un-foreclosed ethical potential. The queer subject, therefore, recognizes the importance of a wholly other future while also rejecting the traditional order of temporality. Muñoz explains this by saying, "To see queerness as horizon is to perceive it as a modality of ecstatic time in which the temporal stranglehold that I describe as straight time is interrupted or stepped out of."[23] This formulation is closely connected with Elizabeth Freeman's idea of erotohistoriography, in which "erotohistoriography does not write the lost object into the present so much as encounter it already in the present, by treating the present itself as hybrid."[24] The hybridization of the present is crucial to my project—the idea that what we think of as a homogenous slice of time is, in fact, a fractured aporia-structure in which the past and future enter while also remaining wholly distinct. By acknowledging hybridization, we open the possibility of a new kind of futurity. Rephrased in different language, Freeman's account of queer time suggests that the window does not and cannot provide a clear, stable division between present and future—the barrier is always broken, the "*pane*" is always "*shatter[ed]*."

This moment of rupture can also be found in Derrida, who writes in *Glas,* "As soon as it appears, as soon as the fire shows itself, it remains, it keeps hold of itself, it loses itself as fire.

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[22] Muñoz, in Rivkin, *Cruising Utopia*, 1054.
[23] Muñoz, in Rivkin, *Cruising Utopia*, 1064.
[24] Freeman, *Time Binds*, 95.

Pure difference, different from (it)self, itself, it loses itself as fire. That is the origin of history, the beginning of the going down, the setting of the sun, the passage to occidental subjectivity. Fire becomes for-(it)self and is lost; yet worse since better."[25] Put this way, the theorization of a future associated with burning, which "burns itself in the all-burning it is, leaves, of itself or anything, no trace, no mark, no sign of passage"[26] is one which embraces a porous, fragmented boundary between the present and the future, riddled with what Derrida would call "aporias." It allows for the opening of a future which admits the possibility of nonlinearity with the present—one in which the future is found to be imminent all along, continually presenting and disrupting itself.

My ultimate argument, however, is not about the shattering of the window, per say, but about the space that the pane leaves behind. It is worth noting that this result, which is more interested in opening than in breaking, complicates the relationship of radical, queer futurity to violence. In other words, Blanchot's language, echoed by certain moments in each of my three central authors, need not imply that our encounter with futurity has an irreducibly violent quality—an essential observation as I attempt to formulate an inherently ethical approach to temporality. Rather than the specific act of breaking, the more generalized *opening* connotes both an embrace and a confrontation, and acceptance and a look into the beyond. Furthermore, there is a necessary link between our understanding of an opening as the elimination (or at least reshaping/revealing) of something old, the introduction of something new, and the promise of something to come. All three of these senses will appear over the course of my project in different forms. However, as I noted at the outset, it is the third and final meaning—the promise of something to come—which is at the heart of my attempt to reconceptualize a modernist ethics of the future. In some sense, the

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[25] Derrida, *Glas*, 240.
[26] Derrida, *Glas,* 238.

act of opening is a blind affirmation—a making-room for that which cannot yet be seen or understood. It is a proclamation of that which is not yet imaginable, an annunciation of the presence of something which is only visible to us through the absence or blank of its imminent arrival. If there is one image that runs throughout my project, it is the image of throwing open the shutters, saying Yes to a future which has been latent all along—which only needs opening. It is an image marked with both the optimism of greeting a new day and the political immediacy of blinds being flung up to watch and welcome the revolution sweeping the streets below.

What is meant by opening or annunciation is different from author to author, and this project's treatment of a range of sources is an attempt to reflect and explore this variety; each model of futurity has its own implications and particularities. Through Woolf, I will explore the crucial relationship between death and the opening, opposing the Heideggerian picture on which an awareness of our eventual mortality constitutes the foundation of our being-in-the-world. Instead, drawing on theorists like Derrida and Blanchot, I will argue that death presents an opening of the futural, insofar as it is at once wholly other and also perpetually present within the fractured nature of selfhood. Through Woolf's novels, particularly *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Orlando*, the possibility of entering into and emerging out of death, of being "dead and not-dead," to borrow a phrase from Blanchot, will take center stage, the spectral testimony described in *The Instant of My Death* serving as the theoretical background for the act of announcing one's own death. In Proust, I will turn to aesthetics, which offers a different, though intimately related, conception of the opening. Here, art objects, in the form of paintings, novels, and especially phrases of music, are seen as belonging to the world of the future, out of place in the present. Our encounters with them, therefore, are necessarily confrontations with a fragmented temporality, which points towards something which is yet to come while also already here—something which is immediately visible while also strange,

unknowable, and out of joint. The novel's playful treatment of its own creation will ultimately suggest that, for Proust, our search for meaning leads us not to the completion offered by the re-gaining of the past, but rather to a kind of *in*completion, exemplified by his treatment of time. Finally, in Joyce, who is the most suspicious of prophecy and futurity of any of the three, the opening is only possible through renunciation and the burning away of false messiahs. It is in *Ulysses* where an affirmation of the future comes the closest to negation, brushing up against it while never fully embracing it. In the end, the figure of Elijah, who announces the presence of a messiah who cannot be named or described becomes the defining image of Joycean futurity. It is also Joyce who most explicitly theorizes our own participation in the act of calling forth the future, implicating character, reader, author, and text in the process of burning and "omission" which opens the window to something beyond.

In light of these modernist re-imaginings of the future, Shelley's claim that poets are "the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present,"[27] first introduced at the outset of my discussion, takes on a strange symbolic significance—in some sense, the mirror is the opposite of the window; an opaque surface which allows nothing to pass through, which only shows that which is behind and refuses to hint at that which is beyond. However, the window can also be a mirror—when the world beyond is dark, or when it is obscured by dust or frost. Perhaps in the image of a mirror do we feel most strongly a space which cannot be reached, a future which is so effectively hidden that we risk being satisfied with the reflected world we already know. However, it is my proposition that modernism teaches us an essential lesson, which might be phrased like this: an ethical approach to temporality requires us to look beyond the mirror to the

[27] Shelley, "A Defense of Poetry," Norton, 794.

spaces it generates and leaves behind, and to affirm these absences and openings, which are everywhere, provided we know where to look. It asks that we undertake the "solemn"[28] yet "ecstatic"[29] task to "call forth the future" and "openly advance[] to meet it."[30]

[28] Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, 15.
[29] Muñoz, in Rivkin, *Cruising Utopia*, 1064.
[30] Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, 15.

# CHAPTER 1: THE ARRIVAL OF PRESENTNESS

## On the Woolfian Figure of Re-Entrance

"I have seen her die twenty times upon far poorer moment. I do think there is mettle in death, which commits some loving act upon her, she hath such a celerity in dying."[31]

In her essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," Virginia Woolf famously writes, "Mr. Joyce's indecency in *Ulysses* seems to me the conscious and calculated indecency of a desperate man who feels that in order to breathe he must break the windows. At moments, when the window is broken, he is magnificent. But what a waste of energy!"[32] In some ways, this quotation fits neatly into a narrow, reductive view of Woolf—willing to break with the stuffy Edwardian materialist realism, but never able to fully accept the boundary-shattering vulgarity of Joyce and other Modernists. However, as readers of Woolf, we are aware that her characters are, to the contrary, often the ones who transgress boundaries and refuse societal norms—their own kind of "breaking windows." While Gabriel Conroy stays inside his well-sealed room, gazing out at the snows "general all over Ireland,"[33] Septimus Smith tragically and triumphantly overcomes the barrier of the window-frame: "'I'll give it to you!' he cried, and flung himself vigorously, violently down on to Mrs. Filmer's area railings."[34] Beyond *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf's texts are suffused with instances of the desperation, violence, and sudden openness which might be called the "breaking of windows"—in *To the Lighthouse*, "the Lighthouse beam entered the rooms… Nothing now withstood them; nothing said no to them"[35]; in *Orlando*, the eponymous hero is made "strangely afraid" by the "present moment," "as if every time the gulf of time gaped and let a second through some unknown

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[31] *Antony and Cleopatra*, Act 1, Scene 2, Lines 134-136.
[32] Woolf, "Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown," 21.
[33] Joyce, *Dubliners*, 223.
[34] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 146.
[35] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 138.

danger might come with it"[36]; in *The Waves*, Rhoda laments "The world is entire, and I am outside of it, crying, 'Oh, save me, from being blown for ever outside the loop of time!'"[37]

These instances illustrate a recurrent and central motif in Woolf's work—a structure in which her characters (and sometimes her readers) are confronted with a pivotal moment of violent disruption, hurled out of the familiar world of the present and dislocated from themselves. What makes this process so important is that it represents something beyond an encounter with unfamiliarity. Instead, it requires a complete entrance into otherness—achieved by the elimination of one's subjectivity, by the proposition of one's own death, or by the fundamental disruption of one's identity. In this way, Woolf generates what I will call the "impossible perspective": a point from which readers and characters are structurally forbidden, but which we nonetheless access through a dramatic overcoming of the framework we inhabit. In terms of the metaphor set out in the introduction, the impossible perspective might be understood as an inversion of the window's asymmetrical directionality—something which allows us to look back in from a position outside, rather than remain trapped on one side of the pane. Also essential is what happens after this violent transformation: rather than becoming wholly alienated from the world from which they came, Woolf's characters re-enter the present in moments of messianic potential, this model serving as an instantiation of the more general act of affirmation essential to the temporal ethics of my project. In this chapter, I will examine the structure of disruption, dislocation, and return in order to suggest that it lays the groundwork for a Woolfian version of temporal ethics in which meaning is derived from a departure into an alterior future and a subsequent re-entrance back into the present. In this way, I argue, Woolf provides the theoretical framework for an ethical structure which both invites the utopian imagination of a better, more just world by uncoupling the future from the present and

[36] Woolf, *Orlando*, 235.
[37] Woolf, *The Waves*, 21-22.

overcomes the danger of perpetually deferred justice by emphasizing the necessity of a messianic return out of otherness.

## Part I: The Impossible Perspective of the Lighthouse

To explore this structure and its implications, I will begin by studying the famously elusive middle section of *To the Lighthouse*, entitled "Time Passes." Here, despite the lack of human inhabitants, Woolf is careful to note that the inner life of the Ramsay home does not go uninterrupted. She writes, "Only the Lighthouse beam entered the rooms for a moment, sent its sudden stare over the bed and wall in the darkness of winter, looked with equanimity at the thistle and the swallow, the rat and the straw. Nothing now withstood them; nothing said no to them."[38] This passage, along with the simultaneous presence and absence of the Lighthouse which threads through the first half of the novel, gestures at the narrative role of the Lighthouse as the paradigmatic modern other. By this I mean that the idealized Lighthouse takes on the features of a post-Hegelian alterity which refuses to be sublated and cannot be put into dialectical relation with the subject. To illustrate this characterization, compare the searching otherness and equanimity of the Lighthouse beam to Emmanuel Levinas's proposal of an absolute Other which "remains infinitely transcendent, infinitely foreign; his face in which his epiphany is produced and which appeals to me breaks with the world that can be common to us, whose virtualities are inscribed in our nature and developed by our existence."[39] For Woolf, therefore, the face of the Other is metamorphosed into the beam itself—breaking into the common world and preventing its calcification into sameness. The foreignness and transcendence of the figure is embodied on the final pages of the novel, where, despite the arrival of James, Cam, and Mr. Ramsay in its shadow, Lily Briscoe leaves us with the final parting

[38] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 138.
[39] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 194.

image that "the Lighthouse had become almost invisible, had melted away into a blue haze"[40] and that "the effort of looking at it and the effort of thinking of him landing there… had stretched her body and mind to the utmost."[41]

The Lighthouse also has a temporal register which is central to its particular Woolfian otherness. With bell-like regularity we are reminded that "perhaps it will be fine tomorrow"[42]—that this deferred "fineness" is the condition of the arrival of the anticipated journey. In this way, the Lighthouse itself becomes not simply the location of otherness, but also the location of futurity. Drawing on the conclusions already mentioned from Lee Edelman's book *No Future*, it is easy to see how the association of the Ramsay children with reaching the Lighthouse can be read as an instantiation of the social mechanism of reproductive futurity. Concurrently, the perpetual deferral of the journey is perhaps representative of a future which remains out of reach and sacrifices justice in the present in the name of a better world "for our children"—at least once they've grown up. However, Woolf's Lighthouse also provides the grounds for the resistance of this reading. As the boat approaches its destination, she writes, "But Cam could see nothing. She was thinking how all those paths and the lawn, thick and knotted with the lives they had lived there, were gone: were rubbed out; were past; were unreal, and now this was real; the boat and the sail with its patch; Macalister with his earrings; the noise of the waves—all this was real."[43] Contrary to Edelman's account, Woolf suggests that while it may be a child-like impulse that is the foundation for futural anticipation, entrance into futurity itself results in the destruction ("rubbing out") of childhood. The explanation for this inversion seems to be that Woolfian temporality is essentially alterior—

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[40] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 208.
[41] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 208
[42] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 15.
[43] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 167.

in some important sense, our imagination of the future can never be reduced to a mirrored reflection of what we already expect or desire, always granting us some kind of glimpse into an utterly unknown world. Variations on this reading are found throughout her novels, in moments such as *Orlando*'s playful characterization of periodization in which "everything was different" between literary ages;[44] Neville's realization that "Barns and summer days in the country, rooms where we sat—all now lies in the unreal world which is gone. My past is cut from me";[45] and even Jinny's exclamation, "There was no past, no future; merely the movement in its ring of light, and our bodies; and the inevitable climax, the ecstasy."[46] Connecting this temporal dissociation back to the earlier formulation of the otherness of the Lighthouse (comparable to the Levinasian Other), it is the location of otherness in temporality—the fundamental alterity of the past and the future—that resists Edelman's fear that "The Future is Kid Stuff" by stripping the child of the reproductive teleology which he ascribes it. It is absolute otherness of the future that makes Woolf's characteristic disruption something more than an encounter with unfamiliarity.

The introduction of the "impossible perspective" emerges more explicitly in a return to "Time Passes." Peculiarly, our view as readers seems to align with the searching, intruding Lighthouse beam, which we have just identified as exemplary of the transcendent, temporal Other. Alongside it, through the inhuman "stare" of the lighthouse beam, we observe that the "saucepan had rusted and the mat decayed,"[47] and "tortoise-shell butterflies burst from the chrysalis and patterned their life out on the windowpane."[48] The implications of this perspective and our association with it transform it from a narrative oddity to a powerful theoretical device. Fundamentally, the

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[44] Woolf, *Orlando*, 20-21.
[45] Woolf, *The Waves*, 151.
[46] Woolf, *The Waves*, 252.
[47] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 137.
[48] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 137.

perspective of the Lighthouse beam is an *anti-phenomenological* one—even beyond the positing of a perspective from the eyes of another, it posits an understanding from no perspective whatsoever. The radicality of this is ensured by the structural removal of possible perspectives. The introduction of any potential human observer would eliminate the object of the scene: the unobserved, uninhabited house. In this theoretical circumstance we are therefore forced to inhabit an impossible perspective—one that *cannot* be, but nonetheless *is*. While one potential route is to reject "Time Passes" as a mere flight of literary fantasy, in this project I mean to take seriously the possibility of an "impossible perspective," our ability to inhabit it, and the way in which it allows us, along with the beam of the Lighthouse, to re-enter the present (the Ramsay home) uninhibited by the seeming phenomenological necessities of being-present.

Despite the effectiveness of this passage in conveying Woolf's idea of the "impossible perspective," however, a full understanding of the ethical structure she develops requires a turn to other examples, in part because this particular iteration blends the moment of departure with the moment of return: our alignment with the Lighthouse-beam both dislocates us from our phenomenological experience and constitutes the re-entrance back into the present (the Ramsay home). Furthermore, the fact that this particular entrance into otherness is predicated on the absence of people means that its ethical potential is severely limited. While it may provide insights into the development of a post-humanist framework, it also forecloses the possibility of providing insight into how we ought to act, particularly in relation to others. With this limitation in mind, I will move beyond *To the Lighthouse*, using its final moments as a point of departure. Victor Brombert writes of Lily's last look out towards the Lighthouse, which I already argued is linked to its otherness and the strangeness of futurity: "metaphoric dying may well imply a complicity with death… Lily's concluding words are telling. As she finishes her painting and lays down her brush, she says to

herself, 'I have had my vision.' The pluperfect tense ('have had') seems to speak from a beyond. Art as elegy. But elegy depends on the presence (and present tense) of the survivor."[49] This conclusion suggests another method by which the "impossible perspective" may be attained: through an immersion and complicity in our own death, which I will suggest takes up Derrida's proposal of an "unexperienced experience" where "where one is *not yet* dead in order to be already dead."[50]

## Part II: Death and Ecstasy in Clarissa's Descent

To formulate a theory of dislocation and re-entrance in Woolf, and attempt to understand the ethical potentialities of such an approach, it seems necessary to address the final pages of *Mrs. Dalloway*. This depiction of Clarrissa's notable absence and subsequent re-emergence in the last lines of the novel provides an explicit example of the structure I argue is the basis for Woolf's temporal ethics. As the narrative comes to a close, it is not a transcendent escape or disappearance we are left with, but instead a triumphant *return*—a return which forms its own kind of immanent apotheosis. Crucial to this scene, as I have already noted in my study of the figure of the Lighthouse beam, is the location from whence the return comes—that is, from alterior futurity. Ultimately, what this pattern reveals is that the future is not cleanly separated from the present at all, nor is it irrevocably deferred or alienated—instead, it may encountered, entered, and, most importantly, returned back into the present.

Temporal otherness presents itself just as powerfully in *Mrs. Dalloway* as it does in Woolf's other novels, beginning with the dislocation and dissonance of the competing clock-towers and quickly becoming the substance of Clarissa's ruminations. In a particularly important passage Woolf writes,

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[49] Brombert, "Virginia Woolf—'Death Is the Enemy,'" 443.
[50] Derrida, *Demure: Fiction and Testimony*, 68.

> All the same, that one day should follow another; Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday; that one should wake up in the morning; see the sky; walk in the park; meet Hugh Whitbread; then suddenly came in Peter; then these roses; it was enough. After that, how unbelievable death was!—that it must end; and no one in the whole world would know how she had loved it all; how every instant...[51]

First, this passage is a key link between Woolf's queer approach and her temporal one. For Clarissa, the past is shaped by the regret, longing, and sexual repression/experimentation of her homoerotic relationship with Sally Seton. Concurrently, her rejection of the normal progression of days and the sensibility of progressive time is one closely linked to the arrival of male suitors—first Hugh, and then Peter. While on a traditional model, the arrival of these figures would herald key life events (we think of the narrative of the woman waiting for completion, which comes with the arrival of her "other half"—that is, a husband), for Clarissa they serve only to make the passage of life and time itself strange and unbelievable. Secondly, this passage anticipates a key Derridian critique of Heidegger's "being-towards-death." For Derrida, as for Woolf, death is something unimaginable, other, and therefore cannot be the object of a metaphysical or psychological teleology. The unbelievability of death is therefore linked to the unreality of temporal progression—its end and direction rendered unreachable, the passage of days, once held together by common accumulation and teleological unity, becomes as strange as death itself. Put slightly differently, the alterity of death, which we might understand as the synthesis of moments and days, makes the constituents of that synthesis—the moments and days themselves—alterior as well. In terms of erotics and queer reformulation, we can see that this critique of being-towards-death also recalls a critique of climax and erotic teleology in general, particularly paralleling the way Freud links the sex drive with the death drive in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. For Woolf, this connection is vitally important. Because the past cannot be synthesized or made whole, neither comprehension of the

[51] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 119.

completion of life (that is, death) nor totalized moments of presentness are possible.

With this commentary already in play, the scene which unfolds at the party demands we pay particular attention to the way death and queer temporality provide the violent dislocation which opens the possibility of entrance into otherness and messianic return out of it. In the moments leading up to Clarissa's (impermanent) departure from the narrative she reflects, "But that young man had killed himself… Somehow it was a disaster—her disgrace."[52] This thought finally draws together the central and interwoven narratives of Clarissa and Septimus and serves to powerfully associate Clarissa with death—particularly, with suicide. Later on the page she adds,

> The young man had killed himself; but she did not pity him; with the clock striking the hour, one, two, three, she did not pity him, with all this going on. There! the old lady had put out her light! the whole house was dark now with this going on, she repeated, and the words came to her Fear no more the heat of the sun. She must go back to them. But what an extraordinary night! She felt somehow very like him—the young man who had killed himself. The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. He made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun. But she must go back.[53]

It is this association of Clarissa with "the young man who had killed himself" which ultimately allows for her to occupy an "impossible perspective"—being both dead and not-dead. It is important to note that the alterity of death is still preserved—it is still something incomprehensible and unconceptualizable, even as it is felt as an inexplicable association. With this in mind, it is important to explore the nature of this pivotal association. Beyond a feeling of inexplicable affinity, Clarissa's interest in the imagination of queer time is echoed in Septimus, who desperately tries to understand his taboo desires amid the fractured consciousness of shell shock ("Now for his writings... odes to Time; conversations with Shakespeare; Evan, Evans, Evans—his messages from

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[52] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 181.
[53] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 181-182.

the dead."[54]). Similarly, Septimus's experience of consuming presentness in Regent's Park is closely connected with Clarissa's reflections.

The parallel is actualized as Clarissa departs from her party guests, retreating upstairs in much the same way that Septimus barricades himself in his second-floor room. Woolf describes Septimus's descent in the following passage:

> But he would wait till the very last moment. He did not want to die. Life was good. The sun hot. Only human beings—what did they want? Coming down the staircase opposite an old man stopped and stared at him. Holmes was at the door. 'I'll give it to you!' he cried, and flung himself vigorously, violently down on to Mrs. Filmer's area railings.[55]

Here, light, heat, and time all serve to put this passage in conversation with Clarissa's thoughts on her own departure and potential return. Just as Septimus's suicide begins with waiting "till the very last moment," Clarissa is prompted by the insistent ringing of the bells, a reminder of the link between the alterity of time and the unreality of death. Similarly, both describe what we understand to be an encroaching nearness to death as a kind of ecstasy, enveloped in an acceptance of the "heat of the sun." Brombert emphasizes that the connection between the two goes beyond conceptual similarity: "This disposition to feel another person's death in her own body is shared by... Clarissa Dalloway, who imagines in detail Septimus' last seconds of consciousness after he jumped out of a window and impaled himself on the rusty spikes of the area railings. She literally feels the 'thud, thud, thud' in his brain, and then the 'suffocation of blackness.'"[56] Importantly, these common feelings are not the result of a completionary being-towards-death, but rather the result of an ecstatic imagination of the unreality of death. It is also interesting to note that both scenes feature an elderly onlooker: the "old lady" in Clarissa's case and the "old man" in Septimus's. One

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[54] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 144.
[55] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 146.
[56] Brombert, "Virginia Woolf—'Death Is the Enemy,'" 433.

Levinasian interpretation of these figures is that death, which can never by fully cognized within the self, is always haunted by a nameless onlooker—that is, the Other. We might also understand these observers in a more temporally playful way: recognizing that Clarissa sees an older woman while Septimus sees an older man, it is possible to understand these encounters or visitations as already anticipating an arrival from the future and out of death, reading the characters as versions of Clarissa and Septimus themselves.

When she ultimately returns, prompting Peter to think in awe, "It is Clarissa, he said… For there she was,"[57] the connection with death, otherness, and queerness is crucial to our reading of the significance of this re-emergence. Rather than feel relief that Clarissa has perhaps escaped the danger of committing suicide, it is my argument that we ought to understand her as transformed into something else—a figure caught in a state of post-death. Brombert notes, "This sense of doom and solitude links Septimus to Clarissa Dalloway. It appears that Woolf at first planned to have Clarissa also die at the end of the novel, if not at the end of her party, much as though death were contagious."[58] By associating, both intellectually and structurally, with Septimus, Clarissa takes on the impossible perspective of one who both dies and enters back into the world. Following from what I have already argued about the central link between death and temporal alterity, we can also read this figure as follows: when Clarissa comes back down to the party, her re-entry is representative of a messianic return from a fundamentally alterior futurity into the present. Just as with the Lighthouse beam, Woolf suggests the possibility of an *impossible perspective*—this time one made possible through the integration of one's own death.

Recognizing the imaginative ethical space opened up in *Mrs. Dalloway* by the impossible

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[57] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 190.
[58] Brombert, "Virginia Woolf—'Death Is the Enemy,'" 434.

perspective, I will now take up the question of what this space is and why it might be significant. Answers begin to become visible through Clarissa's own thoughts about her return. Woolf writes, "The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. He made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun. But she must go back."[59] In the imminent obligation to return, and indeed, the possibility to return, we can draw parallels with Walter Benjamin's formulation of messianic potential which draws us back out of the comforting fantasy of utopia. In his assertion that "every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter,"[60] we can see Sally's anticipatory thought, "Why did not Clarissa come and talk to them?"[61] as well as her confidence that, amid the throng of the party, Peter "was thinking only of Clarissa."[62] However, our habitation in the mind of Clarissa throughout the novel also prompts us to imagine ourselves *as* the returning figure—who is both dead and not dead. In Benjaminian terms, instead of imagining ourselves as the Jews who anticipate and await the arrival of the Messiah we are instead invited to see ourselves *as* the figure of Messiah, entering into history through the strait gate and bringing with us the imminent opportunity for redemption. In this light, Benjamin's claim that "Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim"[63] is generalized even further: insofar as alignment with one's own death displaces the subject and permits the impossible perspective, messianic political and ethical action becomes attainable.

The ethical possibilities in *Mrs. Dalloway* are developed through a comparison with another famous story of departure and return through an encounter with one's own future and death:

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[59] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 181-182.
[60] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Section XVIIIB, Page 209.
[61] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 187.
[62] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 187.
[63] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Section II, Page 197.

Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. In his essay "Christmas Yet to Come," where he examines futural and utopian elements in Dickens and Joyce, Paul Saint-Amour writes, "the *Carol* constellates *futurity* with *death* and *social relations* as having in common an encounter with radical otherness and with radical temporality. Scrooge's discovery that the alternative paths and selves of the possible future cast ghostly shadows in the present… is knit up with his emergent power to receive others in their strangeness."[64] In this sense, Dickens's *Carol* comes close to *Mrs. Dalloway*. However, Woolf takes Scrooge's encounter with death a step further: Septimus's literal suicide and Clarissa's sense that "She felt somehow very like him—the young man who had killed himself"[65] invite us to consider an association with death that goes beyond the intellectual or the perceptual.

Saint-Amour's analysis of the *Carol* helps to explain Woolf's more radical version. He writes, "The *Carol* invites us to act before the inevitable happens; 'The Dead' asks us to be vigilant in case the unforeseeable should arrive. In this sense, at least, Joyce's is the more vertiginously open of the two tales, depicting the ruination of Gabriel's plans without showing us the aftermath of that ruination, without even the concessions the *Carol* makes to the diegetic future in its reassurances that, for example, 'Tiny Tim… did NOT die.'"[66] The danger of the *Carol*'s "diegetic future" is that any imagination of the future from the perspective of the present is necessarily constrained by presentness itself. When futurity becomes a point of destination, even for progressive or utopian aims, it is entered into a teleology of progression and completion, fixed into dialectical relation by its association with the present and past which accumulate to bring it about. In this way, determinate futurity becomes a kind of post-history of the present, entrapped by what has come before. Paradoxically, this association with the past eliminates the possibility to redeem it; insofar

[64] Saint-Amour, "'Christmas Yet To Come': Hospitality, Futurity, The Carol, and 'The Dead,'" 98.
[65] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 181-182.
[66] Saint-Amour, "'Christmas Yet To Come': Hospitality, Futurity, The Carol, and 'The Dead,'" 112.

as a futurity whose arrival is defined by anticipation always presents itself as a moment of completion, it can never be salvific (for its potency is stripped by the inevitable re-entry of totality and synthesis). It is here that Dickens's futurity fails—even as the ghosts reveal the "alternative paths and selves of the possible future," they partake of the definition and fixation of determinate futurity, closing off its ethical potentiality by rooting it in the present. By the time Dickens informs us that "Tiny Tim… did NOT die," the future is all but spent, diminished by the clarifying light of narrative exegesis.

Conversely, Woolf's moment of return is devoid of reassurances, refusing to provide conclusions regarding Peter's visit, Clarissa's relationship with her daughter and sense of imprisonment in her heterosexual marriage, or even about the conclusion of the party. Most radical, however, is Woolf's unwillingness to even fully reassure us that Clarissa "did NOT die"; while we might assume the final lines of the novel ("For there she was"[67]) indicates that she has not committed suicide, Woolf resolutely keeps open the possibility that this appearance is a haunting rather than a living presence. In this way, *Mrs. Dalloway* more genuinely takes up what Saint-Amour calls "the quintessential Dickensian recognition," "*that he himself is the ghost*,"[68] by leaving the boundary between specter and survivor unresolved.

This comparison between the ethical structures of the *Carol* and *Mrs. Dalloway* also brings us back to Edelman's analysis of the *sinthom*osexual and reproductive futurity. Edelman writes, "As 'Scrooge' thus names the 'wicked old screw' who screws, or fucks with, the future, so *A Christmas Carol*, like the *sinthom*ophobic culture that it reflects, must, to preserve the fantasy that lives with our Tiny Tims, give a turn of the Scrooge that turns him toward the promise of futurity

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[67] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 190.
[68] Saint-Amour, "'Christmas Yet To Come': Hospitality, Futurity, The Carol, and 'The Dead,'" 98.

by turning him into 'a second father' to the boy who 'did NOT die.'"[69] I propose we see this criticism as yet another example of the danger of conceptualizing the future as the post-history of the present. What Edelman points to as the perniciously heteronormative expectation that the future matters *because* it is the location of the lives of our children is a condition of the revelation (or imagination) of the "alternative paths and selves of the possible future." However, instead of seeing the only alternative to reproductive futurity as "no future at all,"[70] I suggest Woolf provides a formulation of queer futurity through a serious treatment of otherness and indeterminacy which Dickens fails to realize. In other words, Clarissa's departure and return, which is founded upon an entrance into death rather than a fantasy of future life, opens the possibility of saying, "Fuck the social order and the Child"[71] while also imagining a better future.

## PART III: THE MESSIANIC RETURN IN *ORLANDO*

With Clarissa and *Mrs. Dalloway* firmly in mind, I finally move into a discussion of *Orlando*. Here, the impossible perspective is taken even further, as is the moment of re-entrance. This is largely because *Orlando* is Woolf's most playful and imaginative novel; while it grapples with many of the same fundamental issues as her other works, both earlier and later, it does so free, in some sense, of the crushing sense of restriction and desperate futility that is a dominant force in other narratives, particularly in *The Waves*. Insofar as she continues to wonder about death, she also explores how death can be rendered unreal—how its completionary aspect can be overcome and transformed into a queer vision of the future. The first line of the novel brings each of these considerations into play, introducing Woolf's interest in destabilizing traditional assumptions of gender and setting the tone for an irreverent yet visceral treatment of death: "He—for there could

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[69] Edelman, *No Future*, 46-47.
[70] Edelman, *No Future*, 46.
[71] Edelman, *No Future*, 29.

be no doubt of his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it—was in the act of slicing at the head of a Moor which swung from the rafters."[72] *Orlando* is filled with examples of each of the theoretical moves I have already explored: as its eponymous hero moves from year to year, age to age, death (as well as its suspension) and queerness are accompanied by the radical difference in the character of each historical moment and the light, sound, and heat of the shifts between these periods. The very structure of the novel, episodic and wide-ranging, invites a pattern of ecstasy, departure, and re-emergence.

In the novel's famous gender transformation, Orlando enters into a trance-like stupor as the British Embassy is overrun with revolutionaries. Centrally, this state is again described as a moment of death; "The rioters broke into Orlando's room, but seeing him stretched to all appearance dead they left him untouched."[73] The narrative voice even announces, "Would that we might spare the reader what is to come and say to him in so many words, Orlando died and was buried."[74] As the scene continues, Orlando is assailed by a surreal series of personifications, including *Our Lady Chastity*, who proclaims, "when I walk, the lightnings flash in my hair; where my eyes fall, they kill. Rather than let Orlando wake, I will freeze him to the bone."[75] While Chastity is fended off by the pealing of trumpets, in some ways, this work is already accomplished—while not permanent, Orlando's stupor instantiates precisely the kind of "freezing" which Chastity equates to death. All of this language suggests that we might read Orlando's trance in much the same way in which we read Clarissa's association with Septimus and death, or in the same way as our own readerly association with the Lighthouse.

This entrance into otherness is taken even further in *Orlando*, however. Eventually, we

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[72] Woolf, *Orlando*, 11.
[73] Woolf, *Orlando*, 99.
[74] Woolf, *Orlando*, 99.
[75] Woolf, *Orlando*, 100.

hear that "the trumpeters, ranging themselves side by side in order, blow one terrific blast:—'THE TRUTH!'"[76] This moment presents, in an ecstasy reminiscent of Septimus's or Clarissa's, the overcoming of the normal order of things by a radical, violent dislocation. In the wake of this departure from sameness, Woolf writes, "He stretched himself. He rose. He stood upright in complete nakedness before us, and while the trumpets pealed Truth! Truth! Truth! we have no choice left but confess—he was a woman."[77] Here, the violent break is materialized in a miraculous physical and psychological transformation—literalizing the impossible perspective. It is also important to understand Woolf's use of parody here. Even as she upends the ossified gender binary, she also pokes fun at the idea of a coherent, underlying image of the self. In the exaggerated and stilted reassurance that "the change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity,"[78] and the forced biographical clarification about what pronouns are appropriate to use, Woolf anticipates the later section of the novel, which calls into question the concept of identity altogether. This parodic treatment also highlights the reader's own assumptions—as we read this passage, we expect that, at least on some level, "Orlando" will remain the same individual, an expectation paralleled by the fictional biographer's commentary. What Woolf invites us to consider, therefore, by presenting an exaggerated confidence, is the possibility that there is something fundamentally fractured in subjectivity: a fracture revealed by the incoherence of gender.

Orlando his/herself therefore functions as what Derrida calls the "cinder"—that which "burns itself in the all-burning it is, leaves, of itself or anything, no trace, no mark, no sign of passage."[79] As with the Woolfian structure of departure and return, Derrida recognizes the ethical potential in that which is broken off from its past (burned, dead, transformed) and yet retains the

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[76] Woolf, *Orlando*, 102.
[77] Woolf, *Orlando*, 102.
[78] Woolf, *Orlando*, 102.
[79] Derrida, *Glas* 238.

possibility of return into the present—another variation on the main theme of my project: that which is returned from the future and yet retains its ethical potentiality. Along these lines, I take Derrida's recurrent phrase, "Cinders there are,"[80] as a recognition of that which remains after the process of absolute deconstruction, that which is stripped bare of the constraints of the present and the determinate future, and an invitation to take up this openness. I suggest that Woolf does just this—daring to imagine the rekindling of the cinder after its burning.

This re-kindling occurs just as we come to terms with the post-climax of Orlando's transformation. Woolf writes, "she leant out of the window, gave one low whistle, and descended the shattered and bloodstained staircase, now strewn with the litter of waste paper baskets, treaties, dispatches, seals, sealing wax, etc., and so entered the courtyard."[81] While Orlando's staircase might not be quite as orderly and pristine as Clarissa's, the parallel is clear—by emerging back into the present, both characters open the possibility for an ethics which overcomes deferral while also partaking of the ethical potential of immersion in otherness. Here, Orlando embodies the messianic force which Benjamin points to in "Theses on the Philosophy of History": her descent into the rubble-strewn courtyard engages with both the general message of salvific return and the particular material and catastrophic register of Benjamin's work. The discussion of Klee's 'Angelus Novus,' which sees history as "one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage,"[82] and the exhortation to "blast open the continuum of history"[83] parallel Woolf's own imagination of a moment of return steeped in violent disruption and political upheaval, a parallel to which she adds gender transformation, weaving together social and political emancipation with queer temporality. This return, which can only occur after Orlando's death-like trance and radical

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[80] Derrida, *Cinders*, 13.
[81] Woolf, *Orlando*, 104.
[82] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Section IX, Page 201.
[83] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Section XVI, Page 207.

transformation, serves as exemplary study of Woolf's temporal ethics.

However, even this climactic re-emergence is overshadowed by the end of the novel. As *Orlando* nears its conclusion, death again begins to haunt the narrative. As the seemingly ageless hero begins to ponder her unnaturally extended life, Woolf writes, "Once more Orlando stood at the window, but let the reader take courage; nothing of the same sort is going to happen today,"[84] drawing a playful yet poignant parallel with Septimus and his suicide, acknowledging the strange deferral of death, thereby bringing it even closer. Soon, we learn that although Orlando still looks youthful and beautiful, she has begun to feel dislocated from the present: "'Time has passed over me,' she thought… How strange it is!"[85] A few lines later, we get the following passage:

> That Orlando had gone a little too far from the present moment will, perhaps, strike the reader who sees her now preparing to get into her motor car with her eyes full of tears and visions of Persian monuments… some we know to be dead, though they walk among us; some are not yet born, though they go through the forms of life; others are hundreds of years old though they call themselves thirty-six.[86]

The proliferation of impossible perspectives is striking—Woolf suggests that those who are displaced from the present, a state made possible by immersion in death, exist not only by virtue of miraculous and fantastical transformations, but as a part of the general course of human events.[87] Critically, this is not because the dislocation of the self, the entrance into otherness, is any less violent or extraordinary—rather, it is because there is something disjointed within identity itself.

On the following page, Woolf further supports this proposition, wondering, "For if there are (at a venture) seventy-six different times all ticking in the mind at once, how many different

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[84] Woolf, *Orlando*, 217.
[85] Woolf, *Orlando*, 223.
[86] Woolf, *Orlando*, 224.
[87] A parallel which may be worth pursuing here is Nietzsche's discussion of dying too early or too late in Book 1 of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Woolf seems to imply an untimeliness, both in these particular comments on the multiplicity of internal ages and more generally in Orlando's weariness with and discomfort in the present, which has a recognizably Nietzschean register.

people are there not—heaven help us—all having lodgment at one time or another in the human spirit?"[88] The future becomes accessible in precisely the ways we have explored—through the radical disruption of identity and the alignment with an impossible perspective. However, Woolf's final, and most important, move is to propose that the impossible perspective is already latent within identity itself. Further down the paragraph quoted above, she writes, "Come, come! I'm sick to death of this particular self. I want another."[89] It is no mistake that Woolf again invokes the haunting possibility of death, which is continually presented as the route through which the past and present are left behind and the future might be reached. Because identity is inherently fractured, internally riven by the instability of gender and its simultaneous presence in the past, the present, and the future, it is always already dead and not-dead, always already displaced from itself. Put differently, we are already the specter, already the messiah, so long as we are able to recognize our own entrance into otherness and return out of it.

The final line of *Orlando* reads, "And the twelfth stroke of midnight sounded; the twelfth stroke of midnight, Thursday, the eleventh of October, Nineteen Hundred and Twenty-eight."[90] Even now, almost a hundred years later, the underlying message of this line is still poignant: We have arrived in the present. Despite its invocation of a particular date (most likely corresponding to the novel's publication), it invites us to substitute our own present moment—a glance up to the clock which stretches out across time. Like any of Woolf's moments of re-entrance, this concluding line is suffused with ethical potential. It implicates us in what comes after the book: the closing of the cover, our re-entrance into our own time and our own world. However, it also comes with a singular urgency: because our messianic arrival in the present is predicated on the dislocation and

[88] Woolf, *Orlando*, 225.
[89] Woolf, *Orlando*, 225.
[90] Woolf, *Orlando*, 241.

even incoherence of identity, there is no guarantee of the *next* moment of arrival.

Derrida puts this realization beautifully, writing on Paul Celan's poetry: "Each poem is a resurrection, but one that engages us to a vulnerable body, one that may be forgotten again… Nothing insures a poem against its own death, either because the archive can always be burnt in crematoria or in flames, or because, without being burnt, it can simply be forgotten, or not interpreted, or left to lethargy. Oblivion is always possible."[91] Though we have arrived in the present, having emerged out of otherness and out of death, we must remember that "Oblivion is always possible." With this possibility in mind, the realization of our own presentness becomes somehow more miraculous—and more pressing. In other words, the gap or absence produced by the ethical encounter with the future is recognized as something fragile and precious—something which must be affirmed and preserved. As in the moments of return in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Orlando*, there is no sense of inevitability, only the hope of re-emergence. While the strait gate of the messianic return may be universally open, we must go through it—simultaneously announcing ourselves as always already dead and bringing the openness of otherness and futurity back into the present. Only in the full realization of this ethical structure can we understand Septimus's desperate, ecstatic, salvific cry:

> He strained; he pushed; he looked; he saw Regent's Park before him. Long streamers of sunlight fawned at his feet. The trees waved, brandished. We welcome, the world seemed to say; we accept; we create. Beauty, the world seemed to say… To watch a leaf quivering in the rush of air was an exquisite joy…—all of this, calm and reasonable as it was, made out of ordinary things as it was, was the truth now; beauty, that was the truth now. Beauty was everywhere.[92]

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[91] Derrida, *Sovereignties in Question*, "Language Is Never Owned" (Page 106-107).
[92] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 67-68.

# CHAPTER 2: THE PROMISE OF THE FUTURE

## The Aesthetic Future in Proust

Woolf, in addition to being a monolithic figure in her own right, was a great observer of and commentator on the literary world around her, both historical and contemporary. One of her observations, made in a letter to Richard Fry letter in 1922, points forward to the subject of the next section of my project: "My great adventure is really Proust. Well—what remains to be written after that?"[93] In this way, my understanding of Proust is intimately connected with my discussion of Woolf, just as it is similarly interrelated with my turn to Joyce in the final chapter. This second connection is made abundantly clear by Blanchot, who writes in *The Book to Come*, "Neither Proust nor Joyce gives birth to other books that resemble them… They close a door."[94] He goes on to add, "But this result is not only negative. If it is true that Joyce breaks the novelistic form by making it aberrant, he also gives us a premonition that perhaps lives only on its transformations."[95] I begin with this proposition: like Joyce, Proust both typifies the modernist tradition and exceeds it, breaking down the things that we think we know about the world and about our own experience while also leaving an open space for the reclamation of temporality as a new source for ethics. In other words, Proust destabilizes a typical understanding of our engagement with the world—characterized in part by a linear progression of time and experience—while also laying the groundwork of a new understanding of the future: a new way of reading *Le Temps retrouvé*.

I will ultimately show that Proust parallels and anticipates Joyce in his affirmation of openness, nothingness, and omission, opposing a purely negative formulation of ethics and futurity. In

[93] Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 2.
[94] Blanchot, *The Book to Come*, 109.
[95] Blanchot, *The Book to Come*, 110.

her book *Ethical Joyce*, Marian Eide begins the first chapter by writing, "The *aporia* that is Beckett's mark of uncertainty, invalidation, and even hopelessness is for Joyce a rupture in certainty that makes possible ethical thought."[96] In some ways, this quotation drives right to the heart of Proust's enduring importance as well as Joyce's: even though they set in motion and exemplify many crucial modernist themes, their letters, stories, novels, and other writings already go beyond these definitions. Proust is deeply engaged with both the critiques of the traditional order of time, morality, culture, and narrative which are at the center of so many modernist texts, and with the beginning of a more ambitious theoretical, ethical, and literary exploration. Departing from Beckett's traditional reading in which "the Proustian solution consists, insofar as it has been examined, in the negation of Time and Death, the negation of Death because the negation of Time,"[97] I will suggest that Proust emerges out of his temporal aporias, entwining death, art, and spectral memory in order to develop an ethics of the future: an imaginative insight which Blanchot might call "A new contact with 'reality.'"[98]

For Beckett, the essence of Proust is in his interest in the workings of habit, the way the narrator takes careful note of how the repetition of things inevitably results in their impoverishment. He explains this temporal construction, writing,

> The individual is the seat of a constant process of decantation, decantation from the vessel containing the fluid of future time, sluggish, pale and monochrome, to the vessel containing the fluid of past time, agitated and multicolored by the phenomena of the hours. Generally speaking, the former is innocuous, amorphous, without character, without any Borgian virtue. Lazily considered in anticipation and in the haze of our smug will to live, of our pernicious and incurable optimism, it seems exempt from the bitterness of fatality: in store for us, not in store in us.[99]

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[96] Eide, *Ethical Joyce*, 30.
[97] Beckett, *Proust*, 56.
[98] Blanchot, *The Book to Come*, 110.
[99] Beckett, *Proust*, 4-5.

This proposition becomes, for me, essential: Does the "sluggish," "amorphous," Proustian time pour from the vessel of the future to the vessel of the past in an endless cycle of waste and re-use? Is wasted time ever regained, or is it instead perpetually re-wasted? Proust himself is urgently invested in this question, a realization evident from the title of the novel alone. The narrator wonders, "The world of real differences does not exist on the surface of the Earth, among all the countries leveled by our perception; how much less, therefore, does it exist among the 'worldly.' Does it in fact exist anywhere?"[100] and elsewhere, "If art was indeed only an extension of life, was it worth sacrificing anything for, was it not as unreal as life itself?"[101] If this worry were realized, it seems the only possible Proustian solution, the only escape from the grim, cyclical repetition of time, would be the one presented already: "the negation of Time and Death." This problem may be framed another way: does anything in Proust escape the work of habit? Is there anything that we can never be familiar with—anything that *promises newness*? Is there a version of the Proustian future which is outside the present and yet emerges in it?

This question invites a re-orientation, steering away from the Beckettian Proust which orbits around the work of habit and memory, and towards Deleuze's reading in *Proust and Signs*. Here, Deleuze writes, "Proust's work is not oriented to the past and the discoveries of memory, but to the future and the progress of an apprenticeship."[102] This is to say, looking only backward into the "lost time" misses the point—or at least it fails to grasp the crucial innovation of *In Search of Lost Time*. Instead, the pivotal literary foundation of the novel is the *search*, which directs us towards a moment in the future when the past and present become meaningful: when wasted and lost time are regained. In this way, an attempt to reclaim the individual, the irreducible, the new—

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[100] Proust, *The Prisoner*, 263.
[101] Proust, *The Prisoner*, 241.
[102] Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, 26.

the desire for a time when "we believe with a profound faith in the originality, in the individual life of the place in which we happen to be,"[103] with "the effect of habit being suspended, and our abstract notions of things set aside"[104]—is essentially an investigation of the future. In the words of Catherine Hansen, "It is like that *something* behind Vinteuil's 'petite phrase,' manifest in the notes that make it up but neither reducible to them nor expressible in the language of day-today utility and analysis… The temporal 'rays' that we release from within our material secrecy are responsible for our finding in things 'cet immense contenu latent de passé, de futur et d'ailleurs, que [le visible] annonce et qu'il cache' (153)."[105] It is this interaction between the individual and the world, which goes beyond being the "seat of a constant process of decantation" and engages with the latent content of the future ("contenu latent… de futur"), —a future which is already embedded within the present—that will center my study of Proust.

Importantly, this is not a study of Proust's approach towards empirical content of the future. Rather, it is an attempt to grasp the *structure* of Proustian time, exploring how Proust's particular understanding of the future yields not only temporal insights, but also ethical ones. I will argue that it is not from the past, from the "immense edifice of memory," that significance and ethics ultimately derive.[106] Rather, Proustian ethics is founded on an encounter with the future—an encounter made possible by the otherness of the artistic object. It is this confrontation, both as a consumer and a creator, which constitutes Proustian ethical being—an ethical being which allows individuals to escape the limits of their own habits and subjectivity and imagine a future world from which artists and artworks emerge. Ultimately, I will turn to the most dramatic instance of

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[103] Proust, *Swann's Way*, 160.
[104] Proust, *Swann's Way*, 160.
[105] Hansen, "Anonymous Flesh," 39.
[106] Proust, *Swann's Way*, 47.

art's promise of the futural unknown—presented in the *Time Regained* as a destabilization of death. This is accomplished not through immortality or eternity, but rather because death has already entered the present: a present reality rather than a deferred horizon. In the final moments of the novel, through Bergotte's epiphany about the patch of yellow in Vermeer's "View Above Delft" and the narrator's reflexive reflection upon the narrative itself, Proust affirms the ethical potential of future by incorporating death into artistic creation while also leaving the promise of art unfulfilled and rendering the inevitability of death "perhaps less probable."[107]

Throughout my exploration of the Proustian future, I will use one of the novel's most poignant scenes as a guiding image, and as a point of contact with the figure of the window set out in the introduction: returning from a soiree at the Verdurin's in *The Prisoner*, the narrator recounts, "From the pavement I could see the window of Albertine's bedroom, that window which had always been dark in the evening when she did not yet live in the house, and which the electric light from the inside, sectioned by the slats of the shutters, now striped with parallel golden bars."[108] Here, Marcel's relationship with Albertine plays out in spatial terms—even as she is a captive in his home, he remains resolutely exterior, prevented from accessing the interior life he so desperately desires. She is able to look down upon him (though he is unable to determine whether or not she is actually looking), while his upward view is reduced to a pane of light and a fantasized space beyond. He continues, "Certainly the luminous stripes I could see from below, which would have seemed insignificant to anyone else, had for me a consistency, a plenitude, and extreme solidity which came from the meaning with which I endowed them, from the treasure, if you like, a treasure unsuspected by others, which I had hidden there and from which these horizontal rays emanated:

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[107] Proust, *Swann's Way*, 363.
[108] Proust, *The Prisoner*, 315.

a treasure, however, for which I had given my freedom, my solitude, my thoughts."[109] Here lies the crux of the Proust's dilemma—on one hand, it is only through the attempt to understand the essence of things, to grasp them, to capture them, that they become meaningful to us. In temporal terms, we might say that we continually and inevitably attempt to grasp the future—to render it comprehensible and determinable. However, this same process alienates us from the very essence we seek; as Marcel becomes more and more consumed by a jealous desire to reveal all of Albertine's secrets, his own desire creates, projects, and makes unreachable these very secrets. This problem is produced and maintained by the distance between the watcher below and the window above. In *Proust and Signs*, Deleuze argues that this distance is a pivotal tool by which to understand the novel: "The instrument of the Search is the telescope, not the microscope, because infinite distances always subtend infinitesimal attractions and because the theme of telescoping unites the three Proustian figures of what is seen from a distance, the collision between worlds, and the folding up of parts one within another."[110] On this point, Walter Benjamin agrees, writing, "There has never been anyone else with Proust's ability to show things; Proust's pointing finger is unequaled. But there is another gesture in amicable togetherness, in conversation: physical contact. To no one is this gesture more alien than to Proust."[111]

As the scene continues, its connection to the ethics of the future becomes more pronounced. Marcel reflects upon the window further, thinking, "So that lifting my eyes for the last time to the window of the room where I should shortly be, I seemed to see the cage of light that would presently close upon me, and of which I myself, for my eternal enslavement, had forged the golden

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[109] Proust, *The Prisoner*, 315.
[110] Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, 143.
[111] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 161-162.

bars."[112] Crucially, this passage engages with a time beyond the present, an imminent point when desire will be fulfilled, meaning reached, not merely gazed up at from below. He imagines a rapturous entrance into the world beyond the window, which provides an exemplary case of the *Search*'s enduring and underlying orientation—toward the promise of a yet-unreached but often-dreamed of future. Jennifer Rushworth points to the importance of this promise in "Derrida, Proust, and the Promise of Writing,": "While Swann sensed the presence in Vinteuil's sonata of a promise in the form of a rainbow, but only analogically and therefore at a certain distance (in the simile 'comme une bulle irise´e' and the comparison '[t]el un arc-en-ciel'), the protagonist recognizes not that the septet is like a promise, but that it *is* a promise, dressed in radiant garb. The promise against which Swann brushed almost unwittingly is heard loud and clear by the protagonist."[113] Similarly, the golden-barred window is itself a literalization which implies something beyond without allowing that beyond to be fully comprehended. With this in mind, the window is also an image for the novel itself, insofar as the *Search* promises and anticipates its own writing, though the conditions for that writing are never realized, and the conclusive fulfillment of the novel's search remains unreachable.

## PART I: ETHICS IN THE *SEARCH*

Before fully addressing the promise of the Proustian future, it is essential to establish an understanding of ethics in the *Search*. Here, it is important to distinguish Proust's divergent forms of ethical expression: one descriptive, and the other aspirational. The first is by far the more prevalent: the same principles which he describes when the narrator reflects, "I did not live outside Time but was subject to its laws,"[114] are manifested as psychological laws, governing our internal

[112] Proust, *The Prisoner*, 316.
[113] Rushworth, "Derrida, Proust, and the Promise of Writing," 212.
[114] Proust, *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 55.

and external interactions with ourselves and the world. In other words, the traditional philosophical concern with how we *ought* to act is subordinated to the more empirical concern with how we *do* act. Therefore, when Marcel supposes that "all my previous loves had been mere, slight essays preparing the way for, calling into existence this vaster love… love for Albertine,"[115] we might understand this claim to endorse a view on which our actions and interactions participate in some kind of cumulative striving, adding up to and reaching towards an idealized relationship. In this way, Proust brings to mind a progression of loves reminiscent of both the ladder in Plato's *Symposium* and the continual sublation of the Hegelian dialectic—departing from both, however, by presenting this process as psychological fact rather than philosophical structure. After all, as Deleuze argues, "According to Proust… the philosopher too is a thinker who presupposes in himself the benevolence of thought, who attributes to thought the natural love of truth and to truth the explicit determination of what is naturally worked out by thought."[116] In this turn away from the assumed benevolence of philosophy and towards the underlying dictums of psychology, we are led dangerously close to the overwhelming force of habit, which undercuts even our most sincere convictions and desires, precluding, it might seem, the possibility of intentional ethical action altogether. It is worth noting in the background my earlier claim about the necessary interrelation of ethics and the future—despite the potential dangers, we cannot have genuine ethics without a theorization of futurity. In this way, an approach which takes up Beckett's denial of the possibility of a Proustian future may be necessarily linked to an ethically disinterested reading of *In Search of Lost Time*.

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[115] Proust, *The Prisoner*, 239.
[116] Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, 30.

Part of the reduction of ethics to psychological principles is the domination of the Same over the Other. In these terms, Beckett's emphasis on the futilely recurring character of Proustian time presents itself as an inherent process of desensitization and reduction of others in a habitually driven desire for comprehensibility. In her essay "The Lesbian and the Room," Christina Stevenson expresses the position as follows: "Albertine embodies the feminine otherness that the narrator fantasizes domesticating so that difference will become sameness."[117] On this view, the window represents the narrator's fantasy of domination, its entrapment a result of the narrator's confrontation with his inescapable desire to reduce Albertine and his realization that accomplishing this would be impossible. A crucial part of this impossibility is Albertine's sexuality. Stevenson continues, "The entrance of lesbian desire as an uncontainable force outside of Marcel's control dislocates the fantasy of the room and thus causes profound personal suffering. In the face of lesbian love, Marcel must confront the reality of difference and of his own powerlessness."[118] On a reading of Proust that foregrounds the inescapability of psychological laws, the reality of difference is painfully present but never acceptable: if Marcel's central goal is the overcoming of otherness, he is necessarily caught in this struggle, unable to fully recognize the Other as such. He himself becomes a captive of "the specter of externality,"[119] forcing him to confront the fact that "the room she [Albertine] is supposed to embody is not safe from outside influence, but contaminated by it."[120] Essentially, the narrator is only held prisoner because of his inescapable expectation—an expectation which demands that our ethical encounter with others be constituted by a continual attempt to eliminate difference, overcome otherness, and universalize our subjectivity.

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[117] Stevenson, "The Lesbian and the Room," 11.
[118] Stevenson, "The Lesbian and the Room," 17.
[119] Stevenson, "The Lesbian and the Room," 12.
[120] Stevenson, "The Lesbian and the Room," 12.

However, Deleuze also points to certain moments in Proust, all the more striking for their rarity, where "the world expressed is not identified with the subject; it is distinguished from the subject precisely as essence is distinguished from existence, even from the subject's own existence… It is not reducible to a psychological state, not to a psychological subjectivity, nor even to some form of higher subjectivity."[121] In these moments, the laws of habit may be overcome and the potential for something beyond opened up. To return to the image of the window, we are invited to wonder, Is Marcel wholly entrapped by his idealized vision of Albertine? Are the golden bars unbreakable, or is it possible for them to suggest a utopian future rather than a doggedly recursive one? In contrast to the view of habit's dominance over the ethical outlined above, Danielle Cohen-Levinas contends that a particular Levinasian ethics is asserted within the relationship between Marcel and Albertine. She writes, "In Proust, human reality is not inferred from the mere dialectic of the historical totality and eschatological rupture. It is always in constitutive tension with the pure meaning of others, thus excluding objective unveiling and avoiding a political-historical order: 'The entire story of Albertine as a prisoner—is the story of the relationship to others,' Lévinas writes in the *Carnets de captivité* (2009, 72)."[122] With this alternate view in mind, I propose that the moments Deleuze alludes to, in which habit is overcome and the world is expressed beyond subjectivity, provide the grounds for an understanding of our ethical being which breaks free of psychological determinism. Ultimately, that which exceeds the habitual, that which resists being made into sameness by the mind, is the encounter with otherness which is a basic phenomenological experience at the heart of modern ethics.

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[121] Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, 42-43.
[122] Cohen-Levinas, "The Corporeal Meaning of Time," 28.

Early on in the novel, Swann is confronted by "the presence of one of those invisible realities in which he had ceased to believe and to which, as if the music had had a sort of sympathetic influence on the moral dryness from which he suffered, he felt in himself once again the desire and almost the strength to devote his life."[123] It is to this kind of experience, which forces Proust's characters to recognize a world that goes beyond them and compels them towards ethical being (a "sympathetic influence on the moral dryness"), that Eve Sedgwick points to when she writes, "Surprise is the mark of reality, insofar as what is real—what surrounds the subject, the weather of the world—has to exceed the will of the subject, including its will to arrive at truth… It's in this context that one might compare Proust's love of the weather with the more overtly philosophical *amor fati*, the love of fate or necessity, that Nietzsche declared to represent his 'inmost nature.'"[124] With this in mind, it becomes clear that a view which characterizes Marcel as solely driven by a desire to reduce the world to the Same, or even which characterizes his relationship with Albertine in this way, is misguided. Instead, Marcel's desire—his care for the Other—is predicated upon an encounter with and preservation of that otherness.

This alternative reading is illustrated and supported poignantly by the final sections of *Sodom and Gomorrah*, where Marcel almost loses interest in Albertine altogether, her life having been made utterly comprehensible to him, before the revelation of her potential relationship with Mlle. Vinteuil renders her far stranger than the narrator could ever imagine. In the span of just a few pages, the "furtive pleasures of the imagination… dominated by the—continual—pleasures of sociability"[125] which "made me wish to abandon my plan of marrying Albertine, and even to break

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[123] Proust, *Swann's Way*, 218-219.
[124] Sedgewick, *The Weather in Proust*, 34.
[125] Proust, *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 482.

off our relation once and for all,"[126] are swept aside by the narrator's realization that Albertine's true life is utterly alien to him: "a terrible *terra incognita* on which I had just set foot, a new phase of unsuspected suffering that was opening."[127] Eveline Killian describes the importance of this realization as follows: "Albertine's lesbianism puts her beyond the reach of heterosexual containment. Albertine, for the narrator, represents absolute alterity, which is materialised in her escape and disappearance and, finally, in her death."[128] However, Killian continues by suggesting, "Her death figures as her irrevocable intangibility, but also eventually frees the narrator from her spell and his obsession… The only way this epistemological impasse of restricted accessibility to another's life and consciousness can be overcome is by eliminating the Other – a solution that raises ethical questions of a serious order."[129] Once again, when we assume that the narrator's ultimate goal is to overcome otherness ("eliminat[e] the Other"), the nuances of his interest in preserving the "terrible *terra incognita*" are overlooked. For example, when Albertine is at her most alterior, when she is already dead, the narrator persists in imagining a spectral encounter with her: instead of picturing himself trapped outside the opaque window, he describes, "I felt co-existing in me the certainty that she was dead and the constant hope that I might see her come into the room."[130]

As the novel progresses, it becomes increasingly obvious that Marcel's tortured romances are only poor attempts at achieving a genuine encounter with the Other. As Deleuze writes, "Our only windows, our only doors are entirely spiritual; there is no intersubjectivity except an artistic

[126] Proust, *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 481.
[127] Proust, *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 500.
[128] Kilian, "Alternative Temporalities," 347.
[129] Kilian, "Alternative Temporalities," 347.
[130] Proust, *The Fugitive*, 692.

one."[131] For Proust, art is at the foundation of ethics, permitting access to "a world that goes beyond" and a connection to others, bridging the gap between individuals that elsewhere seems utterly insurmountable. Upon hearing Vinteuil's septet in *The Prisoner*, the narrator tells us, "The impression conveyed by these phrases of Vinteuil's was different than any other, as if, in spite of the conclusions which science seems to be reaching, individuals did exist."[132] In a novel so immersed in the workings and consuming subjectivity of a single mind, this passage assumes paramount importance. Of this section, Michael Clune writes, "The ability to imaginatively occupy another point of view, to see the world through another perceptual matrix, to taste and hear through a different set of associations is for Marcel the one true 'fountain of youth.'"[133] For the narrator, this is the staggering and profoundly ethical power of art: "with new eyes, to see the universe through the eyes of another, or a hundred others, to see the hundred universes that each of them can see, or can be… With them and their like we can truly fly from star to star."[134]

Through art, Proust suggests, identity is displaced, immersed within otherness—allowing us to imagine a world outside of subjective experience. Danielle Cohen-Levinas writes, "The great experiences of our lives that we have not lived—and Proust's entire oeuvre is an admirable example, or a true narrative phenomenality—are such, because the passivity of the subject is no longer thought as the Same already constituted, which then would meet the Other. Passivity in the subject is thought originally as Other-in-the-Same—the Other that for Hegel has opened the Same to the Other."[135] In other words, the Proustian self is not formed before its encounter with otherness, but is instead created by its encounter with otherness. In *Sodom and Gomorrah*, Proust explains,

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[131] Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, 42.
[132] Proust, *The Prisoner*, 242.
[133] Clune, "Can We Imagine Timeless Experience?" 96.
[134] Proust, *The Prisoner*, 244.
[135] Cohen-Levinas, "The Corporeal Meaning of Time," 35.

> Despite all that may be said about survival after the destruction of the brain, I observe that to every deterioration in the brain their corresponds a fragment of death… If I can have, in me and around me, so many memories that I do not remember, this oblivion (a *de facto* oblivion at least, since I do not have the faculty of seeing anything) may apply to a life that I have lived in the body of another man, or even on another planet. The one oblivion erases everything.[136]

Because of the omnipresence of oblivion (a phrase which evokes my discussion of Derrida and Woolf at the conclusion of Chapter 1), of the necessity of a fragmented relation with the world, the self (the Same) can never be wholly constituted as such—instead, it is created and defined by internal and external otherness, just as Cohen-Levinas describes in her depiction of Proust's conception of "Other-in-the-Same." In this way, ethics is not overcome by habit and a world which is the "waste product of experience"[137]; nor is the experience evaded by a detached, amoral aesthetic fetishization. Rather, it begins at the edge of comprehensibility, drawing its power from that which *cannot* be known, from worlds that are only barely visible through the looking-glass of art. In this way, Proust comes up against the sense of oblivion, absence, and ethical potentiality which was already pointed to in Woolf and will become essential to my discussion of Joyce.

## PART II: THE ETHICAL FUTURE

Having established an understanding of the presentation of ethics in the *Search*, and having made the argument that this Proustian ethics is invested in moments when otherness is affirmed, rather than overcome, I will now turn to the future, again keeping in mind Deleuze's assertion that "the Search is oriented to the future, not to the past."[138] At times, the narrator, filled with the same doubts as when he questions whether there is any real value beyond the material, imagines that the

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[136] Proust, *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 374.
[137] Proust, *Time Regained*, 290.
[138] Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, 4.

past might yield "that shadow of itself which we call our future."[139] His claims about the future parallel other modernist critiques of time and futurity, worrying that a conceptualization of the future encounters not a genuine otherness but instead a projected expectation and desire: "Albertine's return being sometime in the future but still absolutely certain, I had both some time at my disposal and a certain peace of mind."[140] These concerns are paralleled in a number of critics, such as Wayne Stables, who writes, "Proust's desire to lay hold of the end, and to forge a form through which this might be accomplished, occurs in time. The 'real goal,' Peter Szondi notes, 'is to escape from the future, filled with dangers and threats, of which the ultimate one is death' (153). Tasked at every moment with the recollection of the past, writing fails to capture the present. To reveal the present as presence: this would be to defer, if only for a moment, the dying always already underway."[141] However, this approach is again resisted by looking to the novel's treatment of art as a way in which to understand that which exceeds the limits of comprehension and schematization. In the same scene with Vintueil's septet already discussed, Proust writes, "Each great artist seems to be the citizen of an unknown homeland which even he has forgotten, different from the land from which another great artist will soon set sail for the earth."[142] The language and imagery here evoke another, much earlier passage, which allows us to understand that this "unknown homeland" is not a refuge *from* temporality, but rather a location of futurity[143]: "What is known as posterity is the work's own posterity… The artist who wishes his work to find its own way must

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[139] Proust, *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 396.
[140] Proust, *The Prisoner*, 144.
[141] Stables, "An Image or a 'Gaping Void,'" 46.
[142] Proust, *The Prisoner*, 243.
[143] The language here—of the "unknown homeland"—also evokes Proust's two great exiled races: the "inverts" and the Jews. Each group lurks at the fringe of social consciousness, simultaneously embedded within society and belonging to some other place. (For more on this topic, see Jonathan Freedman's "Coming Out Of The Jewish Closet With Marcel Proust") This connection, in light of the importance of the "unknown homeland" to ethical and futural thought, suggests that Proust's vision of futurity is importantly intertwined with his interest in inversion and Jewishness.

do what Vinteuil had done, and launch it as far as possible toward the unknown depths of the distant future."[144] Deleuze reflects on these moments, arguing that "each essence is a *patrie*, a country (III, 257)... Essence is indeed the final quality at the heart of a subject; but this quality is deeper than the subject, of a different order: 'Unknown quality of a unique world' (III, 376)."[145]

Ultimately, I argue, that which exceeds the habitual, for Proust, escapes both the past and present and resides in the future. Insofar as the future is the source and destination of art, it is also the location of ethical otherness. The work of art, which arrives to us as the source of both otherness and the overcoming of otherness, has no home in the present; instead, it creates its own power, its own "posterity," by exceeding the present *while remaining in it*. In this way, it is only the work that belongs to the future ("launch[ed]... toward the unknown depths of the distant future") which can return to us from that "unknown homeland," bringing with it the foundations of ethical thought. It is to this proposition to which Blanchot refers when he writes, pointing to the great "Blind Spot" of literature, "We could say that time, scattered by a secret inner catastrophe, lets segments of the future come to light through the present or enter into free communication with the past. Time dreamed, time recalled, time that could have been, finally the future, are incessantly transformed in the shining presence of space, the place of deployment of pure visibility."[146] Through an imminent, individual, and almost apocalyptic encounter with the unknown—"the secret inner catastrophe"—the future arrives back in the present. Contrary to Beckett's assertion that "the future event cannot be focused, its implications cannot be seized, until it is definitely situated and a date assigned to it,"[147] the artistic object appears before us, imminently present, yet resolutely other. This

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[144] Proust, *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 105.
[145] Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, 42-43.
[146] Blanchot, *The Book to Come*, 161.
[147] Beckett, *Proust*, 6.

point is powerfully made in the haunting scene of Bergotte's death, which depicts an artist enfeebled by sickness and age reflecting upon his work and aesthetic endeavors. This passage, which Proust was working on right before his death, closely parallels Proust's own final trip out of his apartment, making its message particularly striking. Here, Proust makes the connection between ethics and the future, unknown world beautifully evident:

> All these obligations which do not derive their force from the here-and-now seem to belong to a different world founded on goodness, conscientiousness, sacrifice, a world quite different from this one… to which we shall perhaps return, to live under those unknown laws which we have obeyed because we carried their teaching within us without knowing who had written it there, these laws to which we are brought closer by any profound work of the intellect, and which are invisible—if ever wholly invisible—only to fools. So that the idea that Bergotte was not dead forever is not at all impossible.[148]

While this passage is couched in a sentimental, hopeful nostalgia that we might be justifiably suspicious of, the particular structure provided, in which goodness and virtue are only made possible through their belonging to a "different world" is powerfully suggestive of an ethics in which meaning is derived from a coming time "quite different from this one"—that is, an alterior futurity. The passage also centers in the narrative a particular artistic register: that of the creator rather than the consumer. While the *Search* is filled with artists of all kinds, it is ultimately in the final sections when the production of art becomes the central concern. This concern is voiced most simply and powerfully as the narrator contemplates his own career as an author in *Time Regained*, wondering, "But for me was there still time? Was it not too late?"[149]

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[148] Proust, *The Prisoner*, 174.
[149] Proust, *Time Regained*, 525.

This shift is accompanied by a series of the narrator's own revelations regarding the power of art, which reiterate some of the previous claims discussed while also introducing new understandings of the relationship of art to ethics and temporality. The narrator first is struck by a similar realization to the one set out when he first hears Vintueil's septet in *The Prisoner*. He describes it as follows: "that... illumination which had made me perceive that the work of art was the sole means of rediscovering Lost Time, shone suddenly within me."[150] He goes on to grasp a further point, saying, "I understood that all these materials for a work of literature were simply my past life."[151] On one level, this would seem to suggest a retrospective orientation to the novel's conclusion, rather than a future-directed one. However, the method of "rediscovering Lost Time" is always predicated on some future moment when retrospection is possible. In other words, the promise of a world beyond both the past and the future—a world when the writing of the book is accomplished—allows for the narrator to grasp the promise of a past imbued with meaning and significance. Kilian provides one articulation of this point: "the narrator's aim to become an artist and produce a great work of art is itself decidedly teleological and future-oriented, and this is quite independent of the fact that it is triggered by his experience of a temporal structure that transcends time… His realisation that 'it was time to apply myself to the work. It was high time' (FTA 344), because his own life might end before he can complete his work, initiates a race against time or, in Paul Ricoeur's words, 'an exhausting struggle against the effacement of traces, against forgetfulness'."[152]

Ultimately, however, Kilian's depiction of the conclusion of the *Search* is only partially correct; while Proust is centrally invested in the "future-oriented" effort "to become an artist and

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[150] Proust, *Time Regained*, 304.
[151] Proust, *Time Regained*, 304.
[152] Kilian, "Alternative Temporalities," 342.

produce a great work of art," this desire is not inherently a teleologically determinate one, nor is it necessarily a struggle against time, nor a struggle against death. Rather, striving towards the futural promise of art incorporates "forgetfulness" and "effacement"—it embraces the fractured nature of ethical otherness rather than attempting to overcome it. To explore this proposition, I will recall a key passage from *Swann's Way* before dealing with the final aesthetic theorization in *Time Regained*. Near the end of "Swann in Love," Proust describes Vinteuil's famous "petit phrase" as "latent in his [Swann's] mind in the same way as certain other notions without equivalents, like the notion of light, of sound, of perspective, of physical pleasure, which are the rich possessions that diversify and ornament the realms of our inner life."[153] Furthermore, we learn that the "petit phrase" "espoused our mortal condition"[154]—that "its destiny was linked to the future, to the reality of our soul, of which it was one of the most distinctive, the best differentiated ornaments."[155] Here, already, Proust's ethical, aesthetic, and temporal threads are brought together—mediated by the omnipresent yet undecidable figure of death. The discussion of the phrase ends with one of the most poetic and striking passages anywhere in the novel. Proust writes,

> Maybe it is the nothingness that is real and our entire dream is nonexistent, but in that case we feel that these phrases of music, and these notions that exist in relation to our dream, must also be nothing. We will perish, but we have for hostages these divine captives who will follow us and share our fate. And death in their company is less bitter, less inglorious, perhaps less probable.[156]

It is essential to consider the depiction of art and the future in this passage, particularly in response to the view outlined above which supposes the Proustian artistic endeavor to be a rejection of death, or at least a struggle against it. Here, Proust refuses any aspirations towards immortality

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[153] Proust, *Swann's Way*, 363.
[154] Proust, *Swann's Way*, 363.
[155] Proust, *Swann's Way*, 363.
[156] Proust, *Swann's Way*, 363.

through art—permitting neither the immortality of the artistic object nor the immortality of the artist himself. He explicitly says, "we will perish," and furthermore claims that the "divine captives"—Vinteuil's phrase and similar essences—will "share our fate." These notions, therefore, and the "future" to which they are "linked," do not escape death, do not transcend it or sublate it. Are we then to suppose that the Proustian endeavor has failed because the struggle against death can never be won? A turn towards the final line of the passage provides a compelling answer to the contrary. While both the art and the artist are fated to die, this fact, though not overcome, is made "less bitter" and "less inglorious" by the presence of art—which is also the presence of the future. The final effect of the phrase is perhaps the most important—its ability to "perhaps" make death "less probable." While again, Proust never suggests that death can be overcome, he also destabilizes it, both denying the possibility of immortality *and* denying the teleological certainty of dying. This seemingly paradoxical double negation is essential to understanding the ethical future—a world beyond the present which returns into it while nonetheless remaining wholly other.

Finally, and maybe most importantly, this passage gives a preliminary introduction to the importance of absences and empty spaces. In the suggestion that "maybe it is the nothingness that is real," we are invited to read in two ways: the first of these is a critique of values and meaning, which calls into question the traditional foundations of belief of all kinds. This reading resonates with a typical modernist model, which focuses on exposing the instability and potential ungroundedness of commonly held values, moral and otherwise. This element is certainly present in Proust, and is worth taking note of, but I'll suggest a more atypical and constructive interpretation: beyond a negation of what already is, we can read the line quoted above as a striking affirmation of nothingness—a realization that absences and blanks are real, imminent, and worth preserving. It is perhaps this idea which marks the opening of a genuinely new ethics of temporality—one which

will play out and assume central significance in the fractured, aporia-ridden world of the last volumes of *In Search of Lost Time*.

## III: The Death of the Author

As the *Search* nears its conclusion, concerns with death, first introduced in *Swann's Way*, become the central focus of the narrative. In relatively short succession, the reader learns of the destruction of Combray and the cathedral at Iliers, the death of Robert Saint-Loup, and the rapidly changing status of characters including Gilberte, Odette, and Mme. Verdurin. All of this transformation is marked by detachment, as Marcel departs from society, weakened by sickness and the impotence of his artistic career. When he finally returns, he finds the world which was so familiar to him (the world of Sameness and habit) utterly changed. He reflects, "And thus the drawing-room of the Princesse de Guermantes—illuminated, oblivious, flowery—was like a peaceful cemetery. Time in this room had done more than decompose the living creatures of a former age, it had rendered possible, had created new associations."[157] Noting the particular language used, we can see that Marcel does not seem to lament this alteration, nor does he attempt to reduce it to what was familiar. Instead, he is drawn to that which exceeds the habitual—the "new associations." Rebecca Comay points to this passage as a pivotal moment in the novel. She explains that the openness of death provides an "abridgement" or "ellipsis," which "points forward towards a Utopian horizon of fulfilment: a list of train stations, a schedule of theater performances, a catalogue of novelties—all these promissory notes that in their paratactic brevity furnish the young narrator with so many hours of delirious anticipation."[158] But she also adds that "ellipsis speaks of loss. It points backwards towards a constantly expanding repository of unrealized possibilities, botched

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[157] Proust, *Time Regained*, 379.
[158] Comay, "Proust's Remains," 4-5.

initiatives, and thwarted hopes. By the novel's close, these two temporal directions converge: an invitation list to a party turns into a census of the living dead. In the final inventory—the *danse macabre* that concludes the novel—sketch meets ruin."[159] In this framework, the "peaceful cemetery" at the conclusion of the novel is not only a recording of those people who have passed away or changed irrevocably, but also a gathering-place for all of the unfulfilled and wasted moments of the narrator's life, which have unfolded on the thousands of preceding pages. This realization certainly has a tragic aspect; some of Proust's greatest moments are made possible by his ability to evoke a sense of loss and lamentation at the workings of time. However, there is also a far less tragic ethical opportunity present in this scene: while one framing suggests that we can only grasp the meanings of things once they are already gone, a different one would propose that it is precisely the incorporation of death, the imminence of loss, that makes meaning possible at all. Put this way, the narrator's great revelation is not that death prevents us from capturing an already-meaningful past, but that death makes possible a meaningful past in the first place by allowing us to grasp a future moment which goes beyond the restrictive forces of sameness and habit.

This reading finally arrives at the way in which Beckett's view, which assumes death is something to be overcome or incorporated, fails to account for the nuances of the *Search*'s affirmation of dying. Instead, that which exceeds the habitual, for Proust, must always come up against and confront the paradoxical impossibility and imminence of death, which is essential to both art and the ethical future. Rather than "negat[e] Death,"[160] Proust refuses to resolve this contradiction, deriving redemptive potential out of its undecidability. Again, the roots of this realization stretch back much earlier in the novel, this time to the narrator's encounter with Elstir. In *In the Shadow*

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[159] Comay, "Proust's Remains," 4-5.
[160] Beckett, *Proust*, 56.

*of Young Girls in Flower*, Marcel reflects, "I had assumed that Elstir was modest; but I realized I was mistaken in this when, in thanking him, I spoke the word 'fame,' then saw a faint sadness in his expression. Those who think their works will last, and he did, come to see them as belonging to a time when they themselves will have become mere dust. By making them think of their own annihilation, any idea of fame saddens them, because it is inseparable from the idea of death."[161] This passage, which closely relates to Bergotte's "unknown homeland," takes the proposition that works of art and the artists that produce them "belong to a different world"[162] and are "linked to the future"[163] to its logical conclusion. Elstir's reaction invites us to consider how, because of the association of art with futurity and otherness, every great artist is, in some sense, already dead. It is not just the particular object that is "inseparable from the idea of death"; it is the identity of the artist himself.

As Marcel finally comes into his artistic maturity in *Time Regained*, this idea that the artist is already dead is taken up over and over. In the most explicit example of this concept, he thinks, "So that if in those early days, as we have seen, the idea of death had cast a shadow over my loves, for a long time now the remembrance of love had helped me not to fear death. For I realized that dying was not something new, but that on the contrary since my childhood I had already died many times."[164] Again, this passage presents death at the origin of the artistic process, rather than as an obstacle the artist must overcome in search of immortality. As Marcel begins to understand that it is through the entrance of alterior, futural art into the present that makes meaning possible, he also comes to understand that he "had already died many times"—that dying is inseparable from the

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[161] Proust, *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 423.
[162] Proust, *The Prisoner*, 174.
[163] Proust, *Swann's Way*, 363.
[164] Proust, *Time Regained*, 515.

effort to imbue the past with significance. While before, he admits that, "It did not occur to me the death of oneself is neither impossible nor extraordinary; it is affected without our knowledge, even against our will, every day of our lives,"[165] the artistic endeavor crystallizes the importance of death in Marcel's mind. Later, as he struggles to write amid bouts of sickness, the narrator says,

> On that day on which I had become a half-dead man, I do not think that it was the accidents characterizing this condition—my inability to walk down stairs, to remember a name, to get up from a chair—that had, even by an unconscious train of thought, given rise to this idea of death, this conviction that I was already almost dead; it seems to me rather that the idea had come simultaneously with the symptoms, that inevitably the mind, great mirror that it is, reflected a new reality.[166]

Ultimately, it is death, working through the creation of art, which provides the most sure and most dramatic escape from the effects of habit. The realization of its imminence, and of the fundamental otherness which accompanies it, produces what can only be described as "a new reality."

Proust's most radical and important innovation, however, traces all the way back to the image of Marcel gazing up at the golden-barred window. Implicit in the formulation of this structure might be an internal multiplicity of perception reminiscent of Woolf's impossible perspective—as Marcel looks up and imagines himself in the room, he also might imagine himself looking back down, meeting his own eyes. Put in terms of past and future, we can see that this interpretation of the scene invites an endless recursion, as the past anticipates the future and the future reflects back on the past. If this were to be the case, we would be back to Beckett's assertion that "the individual is the seat of a constant process of decantation, decantation from the vessel containing the fluid of future time, sluggish, pale and monochrome, to the vessel containing the fluid of past time."[167] Similarly, this recursive structure is also hinted at in the production of the novel itself.

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[165] Proust, *The Fugitive*, 653.
[166] Proust, *Time Regained*, 523.
[167] Beckett, *Proust*, 4-5.

As we reach the conclusion, we are left wondering whether the *Search* itself is the writing that the narrator has been trying to create all along. In fact, Proust actively invites us to make this supposition by bringing the narrative voice and narrative subject closer and closer together. However, he never completes this unity. Even as the narrator imagines himself in the window, the golden bars which make the pane opaque frustrate any hope of fully conceptualizing the future from the perspective of the present or the past. Even as the reader imagines Marcel as the author of the *Search*, this reflexive author-text relationship is left incomplete, as the novel trails off before we can ever know whether or not the narrator and the subject have been unified. Even as death is universalized and rendered an omnipresent force, it remains unactualized—the narrative cut off with Marcel's life hanging in a sickly, spectral, half-death. It is in this incompletion that the foundation of Proustian ethics lies; despite the immense power of habit, psychological law, writing, and even death, things are always already unfinished, fractured, their inevitable completion rendered "perhaps less probable."[168] Whenever the artistic object seems to lose its newness, the narrator is once again "given… the idea that literature did really offer us that world of mystery which I had ceased to find in it."[169] This world of mystery is the world of the future, a world from which all art comes, and from which the possibility of looking beyond the confines of the self emerges. For Proust, the promise of literature, the promise of the future, neither arrives nor disappears. Instead, it hangs in the air, golden bars across a window, the ever-present hint of "a new contact with 'reality'"[170]

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[168] Proust, *Swann's Way*, 363.
[169] Proust, *Time Regained*, 282.
[170] Blanchot, *The Book to Come*, 110.

# CHAPTER 3: CALLING FORTH THE FUTURE

## Joyce and the Messianism of Absence

As Stephen Dedalus walks along the Strand in the third episode of *Ulysses*, he asserts, "Signatures of all things I am here to read, seaspawn and seawrack, the nearing tide, that rusty boot" (*U,* 3:2-3). This is where my reading will begin—at the foundation of reading itself. As much as Stephen may feel alien, and as much as the chaotic narrative of "Proteus" may defy comprehension, his project of "read[ing]" the "signatures of all things" is the very same one we must undertake any time we open the novel's cover. *Ulysses*, with its protean images and figures, phrases and allusions, makes this characterization of reading as an attempt to sort through the symbolic wreckage, the "seaspawn and seawrack" of language, particularly poignant. Beyond the general model of semiotic wandering, I will also follow Stephen in another respect: in searching for the signs of the future. As we later learn in "Proteus" and again in "Circe," his constant guide and companion, the ashplant, is something more than a tool for the interrogation and navigation of the environment of the present: he calls it an "augur's rod of ash" (*U,* 3:408-413), and later exclaims, "Quick! Quick! Where's my augur's rod?" (*U,* 15:4012). I will argue that this object—the ashplant, the augur's rod—speaks to an essential direction of the novel, its characters, and its tropes, which runs contrary to the typical reading on which the mess of signs is the site of perpetual wandering; the search for the signs of the future embedded in the present. This is most easily seen in the novel's obsession with the prophetic and the messianic, as it takes up the possibility of the arrival of the future into the present, both ecstatically announcing its imminence and scrupulously mocking its failed conceptualizations.

Ultimately, the particular Joycean messianism that I argue emerges from the text is intimately connected to the idea of catastrophe; in this, Joyce is aligned with Walter Benjamin, who

writes, “The concept of progress must be grounded in the idea of catastrophe. That things are ‘status quo’ is the catastrophe” (N 9a, 1).”[171] As the novel progresses, the ashplant itself becomes the vehicle of this association:“Nothung! (*He lifts his ashplant high with both hands and smashes the chandelier. Time’s livid final flame leaps and, in the following darkness, ruin of all space, shattered glass and toppling masonry*.)” (*U,* 15:4242-5). Similarly, as Stephen wanders the beach, his search for the auguries and signs of the future is haunted by a premonition of disaster. He thinks, “The flood is following me” (*U,* 3:282) as the waves wash up on the shore. Later, he imagines the inverse apocalyptic vision, saying, “I am caught in this burning scene” (*U,* 3:440-2). This union of the messianic and the catastrophic is essential to Joyce’s imagination of futurity, which is only made possible through destruction and opening up in the present. The primary vehicle of this model is Elijah, who will be central to my reading of *Ulysses*. Insofar as Elijah is able to wholly escape the earth and literally ascend into heaven, he represents a utopianism and futurity which exceeds the present and is unconstrained by it. In Elijah’s mechanism of ascension, the chariot of fire, we can also see Joyce’s catastrophic register, which demands a kind of immolation or destruction for the pathway for the future to be opened. However, Elijah also typifies the strange omnipresence of the Joycean future—just as Elijah is always present in the absences, openings, and blinds of the world, so too does futurity possess a perpetual presence/absence. Ultimately, I will argue that the future in *Ulysses* is only visible through an *affirmative negation*—the possibility of saying no in order to generate and affirm the open space through which the future may enter. This dual yes/no (“Nes. Yo.” (*U,* 15:2766)) both incorporates and goes beyond the ubiquitous Derridean “yes,” addressing the aporia-structure of the present, and finally confronting us with the

[171] Ehrlich, “Joyce, Benjamin, And The Futurity Of Fiction,” 204.

ethical demand that we take up Elijah's act of messianic *annunciation*—that is, embrace the catastrophic in order to call forth the future.

## PART I: PROPHETS, FALSE AND TRUE

While Elijah will eventually become the central figure for my analysis, *Ulysses* is filled with prophetic characters. Paul Saint-Amour goes so far as to write that, "It is as if Joyce's book were an encyclopedia of prophecy."[172] However, just as important as the prophetic aspect of these characters is the failure of their visions: Moses, in particular, serves as a vehicle for the failed utopian ideals the novel remains wary of. In "Aeolus," J. J. O'Molloy mournfully reflects on Moses as follows: "And yet he died without having entered the land of promise… And with a great future behind him" (*U,* 7:872-5). In this passage, we can see the double bind of the Joycean future: on one hand, the "land of promise" is resolutely out of reach, able to be briefly glimpsed but seemingly never achieved. However, as O'Molloy adds, the future is also "behind" us—even as we strive and fail to enter into it, it is already latent in the landscape where we have already been. This very same structure can be extrapolated to the novel as a whole, as Bloom strives towards his own "promised land": the reclamation of his place in Molly's bed. As he nears this idealized destination in "Ithaca," he has his own Mosaic moment of vision from a distance. Joyce writes, "What visible luminous sign attracted Bloom's, who attracted Stephen's, gaze? / In the second storey (rere) of his (Bloom's) house the light of a paraffin oil lamp with oblique shade projected on a screen of a roller blind" (*U,* 17:1171-4). Here, the "light" of the "paraffin oil lamp" in the window of Bloom's house crystallizes the longing for homecoming and deferral of that return which casts Bloom as a kind of tragic Mosaic hero. While he eventually enters and goes up to the bedroom, there is no sense of

[172] Saint-Amour, *Tense Future*, 237.

ecstasy and resolution; instead, he projects backward, recounting the day and accounting for its minutiae. If anything, the future becomes even further out of reach, as Bloom partakes of his habitual imagination of "Bloom Cottage," juxtaposing his progressive fantasy with the quotidian and paralyzed world of Dublin.

However, again, hints of a future embedded within the present are never far away. Even as he is within sight of the lamp in the window, Bloom chooses to delay, reminding us perhaps of Odysseus himself, who, for all of his desire to return to Penelope, seems quite willing to explore the Mediterranean and defer his own *nostos*. In the window's shadow, the following scene unfolds: "At Stephen's suggestion, at Bloom's instigation both, first Stephen, then Bloom, in penumbra urinated, their sides contiguous, their organs of micturition reciprocally rendered invisible by manual circumspection, their gazes, first Bloom's, then Stephen's, elevated to the projected luminous and semiluminous shadow" (*U,* 17:1185-90). This moment is still directed towards the moment of return—the "Promised Land" of Molly's bed—as Bloom and Stephen urinate, their gazes both "elevated to the projected luminous and semiluminous shadow." However, it also suggests something different—a potentiality in shadowed places, in blanks and blindnesses. This scene powerfully calls back to "Proteus," where, for Stephen, the act of urination (which might also be read as masturbation) into the ocean becomes a radical scene of apotheosis: "In long lassoes from the Cock lake the water flowed full, covering greengoldenly lagoons of sand, rising, flowing… And, spent, its speech ceases. It flows purling, widely flowing, floating foampool, flower unfurling" (*U,* 3:453-60). It also, therefore, evokes the dual nurturing and catastrophic character of the ocean already pointed to in Stephen's fear that "The flood is following me" (*U,* 3:282). In "Ithaca," the image becomes even more meaningful, positioned in the shadow of Molly's lamp. Pivotally, the whole

scene is permitted not by the direct light of the lamp, but rather by its "penumbra," its "semiluminous shadow." In this way, the focus is shifted, if only momentarily, from the distant, illuminated room to the darkened space the light casts only negatively—a blindness and concealment which makes possible the fecundity of Bloom and Stephen's double urination. This scene, which derives its significance from the shadows of the future (the lamp) rather than the "Promised Land" itself will be a critical model moving forward into my main analysis of futurity in *Ulysses*.

It is also important to note how race and nationality are intimately linked to messianism, allowing it to take on an explicitly political register as well as a more abstract metaphysical, religious, and ethical one. As Lenehan points out in "Cyclops," "Every jew is in a tall state of excitement, I believe, till he knows if he's a father or a mother. —Expecting every moment will be his next" (*U,* 12:1647-9). However, it soon becomes clear that the Jews are not alone in their anticipation of a messiah. Even this section, in which Lenehan and the Citizen mock Bloom's Jewish anticipation, implicitly brings to mind Christianity's own wait for the second coming of Christ, a parallel made evident by Bloom's famous exclamation, "Your God was a jew. Christ was a jew like me" (*U,* 12:1809-10). Furthermore, the Irish nationalists themselves are certainly not exempt from their own variety of messianism; even as the Citizen again attempts to humiliate Bloom by shouting after him, "That's the new Messiah for Ireland!" (*U,* 12:1642-3), he echoes this same kind of language used throughout the novel by sincere Irish nationalists when they idealize and sanctify the prophetic epitaph of Robert Emmet. In "Sirens" we hear that, "Bloom viewed a gallant pictured hero in Lionel Mark's window. Robert Emmet's last words… Softly. *When my country takes her place among*" (*U,* 11:1274-85). Beyond Emmet, the novel also provides a second Irish messiah: Charles Stewart Parnell, the disgraced redeemer. Beyond cultural deification, Parnell literally becomes a symbol for the arrival of Irish liberation. In "Hades," Mr. Power goes as far as to

say, standing beneath Parnell's grave, "Some say he is not in that grave at all. That the coffin was filled with stones. That one day he will come again" (*U,* 6:924-5). Much later on, Bloom offers his own variation on this claim, imagining, "One morning you would open the paper, the cabman affirmed, and read: *Return of Parnell*" (*U,* 16:1297-8). Through these various visions and assertions, it becomes clear that the stakes of messianism in Joyce are not merely spiritual—they resonate throughout the political, racial, and social landscape of *Ulysses*.

With this general importance in mind, I will now turn to Elijah, who presents the most fascinating and powerful model of messianism in the novel. Eventually, it will become clear that this exemplary nature is due to Elijah's disruption of the traditional models of prophecy and messianism; unlike Moses, who can only catch a glimpse of the Promised Land but never enter into it, Elijah is physically taken up into heaven. Furthermore, unlike the deferred messiahs discussed above, whether religious, political, or national, Elijah is *perpetually present*. This perpetual presence and imminence is emphasized again and again throughout the novel. Even a brief accounting of his appearances yields a host of annunciations: "Elijah is coming. Is coming! Is coming! Is coming!!!" (*U,* 8:13-5); "Elijah thirtytwo feet per sec is com" (*U,* 8:57-8) ; "Elijah is coming" (*U,* 10:294, 10:754) ; "Elijah is com" (*U,* 11:867) ; "Elijah is coming! Washed in the blood of the Lamb." (*U,* 14:1580) In one sense, this polyphony of promised arrivals functions to desacralize the messianic announcement. Saint-Amour writes, "*Ulysses* undertakes to demystify prophecy through aggregation, by assimilating it to its historical moment, and by making it one of many discourses competing for attention."[173] In the midst of the soundscape of Dublin, the signs of Elijah's coming are almost drowned out, subsumed into the cacophony of the crowd and perversely

[173] Saint-Amour, *Tense Future*, 237.

rehearsed by false prophets such as John Alexander Dowie. Furthermore, the continual announcement of Elijah's approach as the novel progresses seems to typify a futile messianism which continues to promise a better future without ever entering it, as the accumulation of promises seems to yield only new deferrals. This is precisely the kind of messianism warned of in Robert Emmett's haunting epitaph—a promised anticipation which seems doomed to never arrive, particularly insofar as it has been textually foreclosed once the saying becomes its own epitaph without the realization of liberation.

However, Saint-Amour continues on, adding, "Yet this deprivileging of prophecy is not the end of the story, for the novel also engages in acts of prescient, if conditional, *hope* that may be the true locus of untimeliness in the text, as against prophecy's false untimeliness."[174] And as I mentioned before, Elijah's potency as a symbol derives in part from his actual, rather than anticipated, presence in the world. One manifestation of Elijah, therefore, comes from his incarnation in the novel's characters. This possibility is set up by Molly's query about the definition of "metempsychosis," to which Bloom responds, "Metempsychosis, he said, frowning. It's Greek: from the Greek. That means the transmigration of souls" (*U,* 4:341-2). The most obvious example of this is the oft-cited conclusion to "Cyclops," where Bloom departs the bar in a moment of parodic triumph. Joyce writes,

> When, lo, there came about them all a great brightness and they beheld the chariot wherein He stood ascend to heaven. And they beheld Him in the chariot, clothed upon in the glory of the brightness, having raiment as of the sun, fair as the moon and terrible that for awe they durst not look upon Him. And there came a voice out of heaven, calling: *Elijah! Elijah!* And He answered with a main cry: *Abba! Adonai!* And they beheld Him even Him, ben Bloom Elijah, amid clouds of angels ascend to the glory of the brightness at an angle of fortyfive degrees over Donohoes in Little Green street like a shot off a shovel. (*U,* 12:1910-8)

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[174] Saint-Amour, *Tense Future*, 237.

Here, Bloom becomes, for a moment, the messianic figure so often anticipated in the novel. Of course, this is partly in mockery—while Bloom "gets the last word," the reification of his status as a social pariah and his meek abstractions and appeal to "universal love" (*U,* 12:1489) when faced with real political and cultural conflict do little to paint him as the victor of the confrontation. However, it also presents the fleeting possibility that metempsychosis is linked to messianism—that genuinely emancipatory moments of prophecy may enter the world through the unexpected gate of mundane occurrences like a "wandering jew" (*U,* 9:1214) opening a pub door. It also suggests that Elijah, who is always present in the world while also perpetually invisible or undetectable, may appear *through* the world—and the people in it.

By the time Bloom reaches the brothel in "Circe," his prophetic associations become fully realized. As he imagines his election as the cosmopolitan, humanist, and wildly popular "Lord Mayor of Dublin" (*U,* 15:1364), the recurrent John Howard Parnell appears, proclaiming, "Illustrious Bloom! Successor to my famous brother!" (*U,* 15:1513-4). As Bloom takes office, he sermonizes, "My beloved subjects, a new era is about to dawn. I, Bloom, tell you verily it is even now at hand. Yea, on the word of a Bloom, ye shall ere long enter into the golden city which is to be, the new Bloomusalem in the Nova Hibernia of the future" (*U,* 15:1542-5). While the fantasized servants and builders "*construct the new Bloomusalem*" (*U,* 15:1546-8), the parallels to Elijah and other messianic figures become more pronounced—particularly evoking the second coming of Christ and the construction of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Even the prophets seem to confirm this salvific role: the "THE VEILED SIBYL" exclaims, "I'm a Bloomite and I glory in it. I believe in him in spite of it all" (*U,* 15:1736-7). This "Paradisiacal Era" (*U,* 15:1632) also foreshadows

and links to a second utopian vision—Bloom's fantasy of the cottage in the later sections of "Ithaca." Combined, these two scenes powerfully link Bloom and the themes of messianism and utopianism, inscribing the questions of futurity into the center of the novel.

However, just as with the "ascension" in the conclusion of "Cyclops," it would be a serious oversight to not consider the parodic comedy and palpable absurdity of the depictions of the "new Bloomusalem" and "Bloom Cottage" (*U,* 17:1580). As Kiron Ward writes, "Bloom tacitly acknowledges that the fantasy is less about a set of achievable desires than a pragmatic sublimation of desires—as if a vision of bourgeois aspiration fulfilled is the best preparation for another day of radical potential unachieved."[175] In other words, we cannot take for granted the seriousness and even pretended seriousness of any of these depictions. In many ways, this is the central problem of utopianism and futurity as a whole: how can visions of the future be anything beyond "vision[s] of bourgeois aspiration"? Ward continues, "Both the new Bloomusalem and Bloom Cottage presuppose realities that are totalized—consistent and coherent from the center to the margin."[176] Even as Bloom's association with Elijah and commitment to the imagination of new worlds presents what might be an enticing version of futurity, the obvious—and self-aware—disruption of these pictures is essential to understanding the novel's presentation of messianism. In fact, the absurdly heightened sense of consistency and coherency serves to make clear the failings of a version of the future imagined only from the perspective of the present; as Bloom describes the landscaping and milk-delivery services in Paradise, we can painfully feel the limitations of this potential "utopia."

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[175] Ward, "Paradise and the Periphery: The New Bloomusalem and Bloom Cottage," 117.
[176] Ward, "Paradise and the Periphery: The New Bloomusalem and Bloom Cottage," 120.

Along these same lines, the novel is emphatically concerned with the identification of false prophets and messiahs. In fact, the first time Elijah is introduced, it is under the banner of the iconic religious leader, Dr John Alexander Dowie. He hear that, "Elijah is coming. Dr John Alexander Dowie restorer of the church in Zion is coming. Is coming! Is coming! Is coming!!!" (*U,* 8:13-5) We also cannot help but think of Stephen's dictum from "Proteus," later repeated in "Ithaca": "beware of imitations" (*U,* 3:483, 17:604). This is a striking cautionary note, both for the announcements of utopia and for the utopias themselves: as the coming of Elijah reverberates throughout the text, we are reminded to regard it with suspicion, alongside any other claim to a genuine, unmediated futurity. As Stephen adds, "Sounds are impostures… like names" (*U,* 16:363-3). This criticism applies particularly to Bloom, the most extravagantly progressive character in the novel. Molly remarks, "hes always imitating everybody" (*U,* 18:1205). With all of these warnings in mind, we might be tempted to conclude that a search for a Joycean future is entirely futile—that every instance of prophecy or utopia is fatally corrupted by mimicry, imitation, and imposture. On this view, every manifestation of Elijah is secretly the false prophet John Alexander Dowie, and every "Paradisiacal Era" (*U,* 15:1632) is another version of the "bourgeois aspiration." At the very least, Joyce forces us to be profoundly suspicious of the future and the forms in which it confronts us.

Despite this almost overwhelming suspicion, I argue that there is room for the Joycean future—found in the penumbras and shadows, to return to the image of Molly's window lamp. In his seminal essay "Ulysses Gramophone," Jacques Derrida writes, "Everything that happened to me, including the narrative that I would attempt to make of it, was already pre-dictated and pre-narrated, in its dated singularity, prescribed in a sequence of knowledge and narration: within *Ulysses*, to say nothing of *Finnegans Wake*, by a hypermnesic machine capable of storing in an

immense epic work Western memory and virtually all the languages in the world *including traces of the future*."[177] These "traces of the future" will be the focus of the remainder of my study. Combining this phrase with the images of shadows and penumbras already introduced, we arrive at something strikingly similar to, though ultimately diverging from and going beyond, Shelley's famous depiction in "A Defense in Poetry" of "the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present."[178] In fact, Joyce seems to evoke this image at multiple points throughout *Ulysses*.[179] As Stephen reflects upon his ashplant in "Proteus," as I have discussed already, he thinks, "Me sits there with his augur's rod of ash, in borrowed sandals, by day beside a livid sea, unbeheld, in violet night walking beneath a reign of uncouth stars. I throw this ended shadow from me, manshape ineluctable, call it back" (*U,* 3:408-413). Augury and futurity are linked to the "throw[n]" shadow, which is called back into the present. This point becomes even more obvious in "Lestrygonians," where Bloom muses that "Coming events cast their shadows before" (*U,* 8:525-6). Through these shadows "cast" back, we can finally come to an understanding of a utopia which genuinely emerges out of the future rather than the fantasies of the present. Crucially, this futurity can only be seen after the false visions have been cleared away, when space has been made for it. In this way, Joyce's engagement with and rejection of false prophets is not an incidental aspect of his project. Instead, as Hugo Azérad writes, "Bloom symbolically incarnates the ambivalence of utopianism, and perhaps the necessity for it to be ridiculed… Only negated utopia, a utopia that constantly engages with hopelessness, with "the rifts and crevices" mentioned by Adorno, may

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[177] Derrida, "Ulysses Gramophone," 281.

[178] Shelley, "A Defense of Poetry," Norton, 794.

[179] Note that Joyce mentions Shelley directly only two times, both times in "Scylla and Charybdis." The second of these direct references may be relevant. Joyce writes, "In the intense instant of the imagination, when the mind, Shelley says, is a fading coal, that which I was is that which I am and that which in possibility I may come to be. So in the future, the sister of the past, I may see myself as I sit here now but by reflection from that which then I shall be." (*U*, 9:381-5)

have its place in *Ulysses*."[180] It is here where the ethical futurity of *Ulysses* may be found: in the "rifts and crevices," in the open spaces and ellipses, and, most importantly, in the shadows cast back by the future.

## PART II: CATASTROPHE AND BLINDNESS

This orientation towards the futurity of gaps and shadows brings us back to Elijah, whose presence may only be realized in absence—an ethical potentiality which fills the spaces left open. In her essay "The Role of Elijah in *Ulysses*'s Metempsychosis," Tekla Schell writes, "Closely associated with the idea of transfiguration, Elijah is a constant reminder of that which is always present: he is still alive (in heaven and in the figure of Elisha) and always in motion and absent, through the memory of his journey to heaven."[181] While up until this point I have discussed Elijah's presence in the novel primarily in terms of his metempsychotic embodiment in its characters, he also, and perhaps less parodically, emerges as something insubstantial. In "Nestor," Stephen first characterizes God to Mr. Deasy as a disembodied voice, saying, "That is God… A shout in the street." (*U,* 2:383-6) Later, in "Scylla and Charybdis," he adds, "God: noise in the street: very peripatetic. Space: what you damn well have to see. Through spaces smaller than red globules of man's blood they creepycrawl after Blake's buttocks into eternity of which the vegetable world is but a shadow. Hold to the now, the here, through which all future plunges to the past" (*U,* 9:85-8). Here, Stephen's association of God as a "noise in the street" with Blake already puts this characterization into conversation with the Blakean apocalyptic and eschatological vision gestured at in the beginning of "Nestor," in which "History… is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake"

[180] Azérad, *Joyce in Trieste*, 106.
[181] Schell, "The Role of Elijah in Ulysses's Metempsychosis," 432.

(*U,* 2:376)—perhaps only through the radical temporal disjunction of a messianic moment. This passage also reinforces the latency of the future within the present, briefly becoming visible as it "plunges to the past."

It is also essential to remember that Elijah is not himself the messiah; instead, he is a herald who brings news of the imminence of the messianic moment. Of course, all of the same concerns regarding the danger of deception and false prophecy remain: the foretelling of the messiah can be false just as much as the actual arrival can. However, as the figure of Elijah traces through the text, his role is a particular one. Beyond prophecy, Elijah's annunciation suggests the fulfillment of a promise—the actual rather than projected fruition of an anticipated future. In this way, the perpetually multiplied embodiments of Elijah in *Ulysses* participate in what we might call a "declaration of presence," which affirms the arrival of the messiah into the world, marking it in the here-and-now. Powerfully, at least to a particular Jewish messianism in which the messiah remains unnamed and undefined, the annunciation of Elijah serves to herald our encounter with something unknowable and unrecognizable—that is, the future. Therefore, as I move forward towards a final understanding of futurity in the novel, I will pay special attention to the act of annunciation—and to the futural absence which it promises.

The further we look into the novel, the more these annunciations, these "shout[s] in the street," proliferate. In this soundscape, which Derrida would call the gramophonic machine of *Ulysses*, the voice of Elijah is multiplied, seeming to come from everywhere and nowhere. As Bloom reflects on the blind man in Lestrygonians, he acknowledges the revelatory power of the voice, saying, "Knows I'm a man. Voice" (*U,* 8:1102). In "Circe," the Voice returns, questioning Bloom's messianic association: "A VOICE: Bloom, are you the Messiah ben Joseph or ben Da-

vid?" (*U,* 15:1833-4). In fact, Derrida goes as far as to say that Elijah is defined by this accumulation of Voices, signaling his presence while remaining resolutely disembodied. Derrida writes, "Elijah is just a voice, a skein of voices."[182] Tracking these voices alongside Elijah, we can see that "Circe" becomes increasingly apocalyptic in tone and imagery. We hear that "A rocket rushes up the sky and bursts. A white star falls from it, proclaiming the consummation of all things and second coming of Elijah" (*U,* 15:2174-6). Eventually, the voices begin to cry out, signaling the union between messianism and catastrophe which I have already suggested. As "Circe" races to its climax, Joyce writes, "DISTANT VOICES: Dublin's burning! Dublin's burning! On fire, on fire!" (*U,* 15:4659-60). I pause for a moment to consider the implication of this message, presented in the prophetic register of the disembodied voice. In the midst of a novel which Joyce famously claimed could wholly reconstruct Dublin, we already find the seeds of its destruction: a conflagration which immolates the subject from within.

This fire is, of course, essential to Elijah, whose own ascent to Heaven, which I have suggested we may read as the ultimate escape from the present and false futurity, is predicated on his passage in the flaming chariot. However, the fire also evokes another crucial theme of the novel, which has been explored at length by Saint-Amour and other critics: its archival and encyclopedic quality. Irina Goloubeva writes, "What underlies Joyce's epic method is not its universalizing ambition, which in Hegel's terms would be a constricting universality or bad infinity, but rather its documentary particularity."[183] And, as Saint-Amour points out, the novel is cognizant of its own position within the tradition of encyclopedic projects. In Bloom's fantasy of Flowerville, he imagines a "fumed oak sectional bookcase containing the Encyclopaedia Britannica" (*U,* 17:1523).

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[182] Derrida, "Ulysses Gramophone," 278.

[183] Goloubeva, ""That's the Music of the Future": James Joyce's *Ulysses* and the Writing of a Difficult History," 686.

Elsewhere in "Ithaca," the pattern of question and answer is broken as the narrative Voice simply commands, "Catalogue these books" (*U,* 17:1361). However, what might be the most important passage about the archive comes in "Proteus," where Stephen blends the drive to generate the archive with the inherency of its destruction. He self-reflexively asks, "Remember your epiphanies written on green oval leaves, deeply deep, copies to be sent if you died to all the great libraries of the world, including Alexandria? Someone was to read them there after a few thousand years, a mahamanvantara" (*U,* 3:141-4). The strangeness of this statement should not be overlooked: Stephen intends to send copies of his work (the Derridean postal system is powerfully at play here) into an archive which has *already been burned*—the library of Alexandria. This image perhaps provides the first instance of what I will eventually argue is the heart of Joycean ethics—an "*affirmative negation*" which actively embraces destruction (sending the "written" "epiphanies" into an archive which has already been conflagrated) in order to reveal the space which they leave behind. This passage also suggests a second form of destruction: the accumulation of history and the immense stretch of time (a "mahamanvantara") which produces its own kind of destruction. To this point, Heyward Ehrlich writes, "Perhaps Benjamin's strongest image for readers of Joyce is based on Paul Klee's painting in which the Angelus Novus averts the view of progress piling storms of wreckage at his feet by keeping his eyes fixed on the past."[184] Like Klee's and Benjamin's angel, Stephen gazes back at the detritus of the past, and strangely, staggeringly, plans to send his own writing into that cataclysmic wreckage.

In order to understand this, it is essential to understand the pivotal position that absences and openings have for Joyce. As Marian Eide writes in *Ethical Joyce*, "The *aporia* that is Beckett's mark of uncertainty, invalidation, and even hopelessness is for Joyce a rupture in certainty that

[184] Ehrlich, "Joyce, Benjamin, And The Futurity Of Fiction," 209.

makes possible ethical thought."[185] She later adds, "*Aporia*, the impassable passage, is the locus for Joyce's ethics."[186] Here, it is useful to turn to Margot Norris's essay "Risky Reading of Risky Writing":

> The gaps, occlusions, and mysteries in the Joycean texts play their own role in risky reading as adventure, because they function as *performatives*… In other words, gaps and mysteries don't just *say nothing*: they actually *do* things. They suppress words, they hide scenes, they conceal information, they frustrate our desire to know. They taunt and challenge us, and thereby beckon us. This produces the adventure, the imaginative entry into a sometimes strange, exotic, surprising other place or place of otherness. But at other times, something seems to call out to us from behind the mysteries in the texts, like a cry for understanding that begs for our attention. When these two kinds of performative imperatives behind the mysteries in the text come together, then risky reading as ethical exercise and risky reading as adventure converge.[187]

In Norris's formulation, the potency of the text, both in a writerly sense and an ethical one, is founded upon what she calls the "gaps, occlusions, and mysteries." Recalling the previous discussion of the penumbras of Molly's window and the shadows of the future cast back on the present, it seems natural to add shadows and absences to this list. I would also suggest that the power of these gaps is inseparable from the dual presence and absence of Elijah—and therefore inseparable from the messianic emergence of the future into the present. Furthermore, I propose that we can take Norris's evaluation in "Risky Reading of Risky Writing" a step further, and ask: How are these gaps produced in the first place? And, even more poignantly, Do we have an obligation to participate in this generation? In the answer to these questions the underlying structure of Joycean ethics begins to present itself.

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[185] Eide, *Ethical Joyce*, 30.
[186] Eide, *Ethical Joyce*, 30.
[187] Norris, "Risky Readings of Risky Writing," 39.

The emergence of openness and *aporia* in Joyce is intimately linked to the "Yes" at the heart of *Ulysses*, which Derrida explores in "*Ulysses* Gramophone." He calls this strange linguistic function, "Not this time a postcard without an address but a postcard without a message."[188] This affirmation, for Derrida, which undergirds the possibility of language and encounter with the Other, is omnipresent, even when invisible: "*Yes* can be implied without the word being said or written."[189] In this sense, it mirrors what we have already said about Elijah. In a second parallel, it arrives without determinate content or, in an abstract sense, a body—a "postcard without a message"—drawing to mind the disembodied Voices I have discussed at length. Reinforcing this connection, Derrida also links the "Yes" to futurity, writing, "We cannot say yes without promising to confirm it and to remember it, to keep it safe, countersigned in other *yes*, without promise and memory, without the promise of memory."[190]

However, even in the most famous example of affirmation in the novel, Molly's climactic final lines, the "Yes" is already intertwined with negation, or at least openness and negativity. She thinks, "I thought well as well him as another and then I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes and then he asked me would I yes to say yes my mountain flower and first I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes" (*U,* 18:1604-9). Amid the multiple affirmations, Bloom's presence is dislocated by the comment, "as well him as another." While this is not the explicitly articulated "No" which I will soon discuss, it is certainly an opening: a space which seems to have been filled by Bloom, but which is reopened by the revelation that its filling is somehow accidental or non-essential. While this is not a counterpoint to the Derridean assertion

[188] Derrida, "Ulysses Gramophone," 261.
[189] Derrida, "Ulysses Gramophone," 296.
[190] Derrida, "Ulysses Gramophone," 305.

of the omnipresence of the "Yes" (Derrida writes, "Negative may ensue, but even if they completely take over, this *yes* can no longer be erased"[191]), it is a suggestion that affirmation and negation are not necessarily opposed: that the "Yes" can coexist with and be present within the "No," and that the "No," which may manifest as burning, destruction, or non-serviam, may also be "Yes" which affirms blankness or openness. The confusion of these two irreducible speech acts is essential to the novel, which is again self-aware of the embeddedness of each within the other. In "Circe," they are literally fused together: "Nes. Yo" (*U,* 15:2766). An episode later, in "Eumaeus," D. B. Murphy, who is himself linked to futurity and false messianism, is depicted this way: "The sailor grimaced, chewing, in a way that might be read as yes, ay or no" (*U,* 16:612-3).

In fact, looking closely at the text, negation and affirmation are powerfully copresent, especially when we extend Derrida's idea of the "implied" "Yes." As early as "Nestor," Stephen brings negation to bear on the issues of messianism, denying Mr. Deasy's progressive, Hegelian model of temporality, in which "All human history moves towards one great goal, the manifestation of God" (*U,* 2:380-1). In its place, he does not substitute his own determinate historiographical version, but instead describes an absence and blank which results from loss: "I hear the ruin of all space, shattered glass and toppling masonry, and time one livid final flame. What's left for us then?" (*U,* 2:9-10). Later, tracing back to his epiphany in Chapter 3 of *Portrait*, Stephen cries, "*Ah non, par exemple!* The intellectual imagination! With me all or not at all. *Non serviam!*" (*U,* 15:4227-8). This scene sets the stage for "Ithaca," in much the same way as Bloom's affirmation of the utopic Bloomuselum sets up his vision of Flowerville. To Bloom's offer of hospitality in "Ithaca," Stephen famous responds with "A monosyllabic negative answer." (*U,* 17:946) We hear, "Was the proposal of asylum accepted? / Promptly, inexplicably, with amicability, gratefully it

[191] Derrida, "Ulysses Gramophone," 298.

was declined." (*U,* 17:954-5) These negations, importantly, do little to provide assertions of their own—in other words, they are not merely counter-affirmations. Instead, they make space for absence. The most extended example of this can be found in J. J. O'Molloy's recollection of Charles Taylor's speech on Moses:

> *But, ladies and gentlemen, had the youthful Moses listened to and accepted that view of life, had he bowed his head and bowed his will and bowed his spirit before that arrogant admonition he would never have brought the chosen people out of their house of bondage, nor followed the pillar of the cloud by day. He would never have spoken with the Eternal amid lightnings on Sinai's mountaintop nor ever have come down with the light of inspiration shining in his countenance and bearing in his arms the tables of the law, graven in the language of the outlaw*. (*U,* 7:862-9)

In this sweeping passage, Moses's ultimate affirmation of his faith, nationality, and ethical position, is derived from an unspoken, unargued, resolute, "No." Rather than attempting to compete with the High Priest, Moses simply refuses. The product of this negation is an opening—a *promise*—by which the liberation of the Jews becomes possible and through which the Messiah will one day arrive. Blanchot comments on the embedded absences in *Ulysses*, "this result is not only negative. If it is true that Joyce breaks the novelistic form by making it aberrant, he also gives us a premonition that perhaps lives only on its transformations."[192] Put into Blanchot's terms, I suggest that this Mosaic moment links back to the annunciatory quality of Elijah. As with Elijah, Moses, while a central religious figure, is not himself the messiah—insofar as he opens the possibility of a future for the Jews, he does so indirectly: he opens up an alien and unrecognizable future that "lives only on its transformations." However, Moses's act of negation is nonetheless fundamentally linked to this future—it "also gives us a premonition," making room for it and promising its arrival even as it refuses to define it, paralleling Elijah's own annunciatory role, which asserts the arrival of something unspoken. As with the stories of Moses and Elijah, the ethical power of

[192] Blanchot, *The Book to Come*, 110.

the novel derives not from what is said (the absurd utopias, the message of universal love, the supposed victory of Bloom and his marriage), but rather from what is unsaid—what is presently and powerfully absent.

As I have pointed out already, the embrace of absences, which I have called "*affirmative negation*," goes beyond a passive appreciation or recognition: instead, the novel's characters are continually concerned with the ways openings are generated, an interest perhaps best seen in the recurrent theme of blindness. Looking back to the opening pages of *Portrait*, we can recall the haunting and even disturbing refrain of Stephen's childhood: "*Pull out his eyes,* / *Apologise,* / *Apologise,* / *Pull out his eyes*" (*P*, 8). This song, which directly follows Dante's warning that if Stephen does not behave as he should, "the eagles will come and pull out his eyes" (*P*, 8), brings to mind the Greek prophet Tiresias, whose own gifts of foresight and communion with birds were necessarily linked to the loss of his vision. Tiresias, who permeates Greek myths from the Oedipus Cycle to the *Odyssey* itself, becomes a figure for the inseparable connection between insight into the future and a loss, blindness, or blank.

Later in the first chapter of *Portrait*, this refrain is renewed in the memorable episode with Stephen's broken glasses—a moment so pivotal that it re-emerges in *Ulysses*, when Stephen is haunted by the accusation, "Broke his glasses? Lazy idle little schemer. See it in your eye" (*U,* 15:3671). In this scene, loss of sight (at least partial sight) is unified with the themes of destruction and burning. The young Stephen responds to rector's question, "And where did you break your glasses?" (*P*, 43) by explaining, "On the cinderpath, sir. A fellow was coming out of the bicycle house and I fell and they got broken. I don't know the fellow's name" (*P*, 43). Here, the destruction of the glasses, in addition to providing a literal loss of vision, is essential to another blank: the space for Stephen's testimonial of the scene, which can never be verified—either by the rector (the

story's internal authority) or by the reader (the story's external judge). This provides the space in which Stephen assumes control of the narrative—again, both in his account to the rector and his control over the text—and opens the possibility for the almost-messianic conclusion to the first chapter, in which his friends "made a cradle of their locked hands and hoisted him up among them and carried him along till he struggled to get free" (*P*, 45). Importantly, the particular account of the event is only secondary—as readers, we become aware that it seems too triumphant and too narratively satisfying to be wholly trusted. However, it is the text *itself* which reveals this—and thereby reveals the space or blindness which allowed it to be created. As our own blindness is made obvious alongside the destruction of Stephen's glasses on the "cinderpath," the negative space it leaves behind is presented as our primary encounter with the text, rather than the literal description of Stephen's recollections.

In *Ulysses*, the double figuration of literal and metaphorical blindness is reproduced and taken even further. In "Proteus," Stephen again experiments with the loss of vision, this time intentionally forcing blindness upon himself—he tells himself, "Shut your eyes and see" (*U,* 3:9). The *aporia* of this lost sight becomes the locus of an exploration of the nature of our phenomenological encounter with the world—and for Stephen's own role as an artist and creator. This, of course, provides a commentary on both the text itself and our reading of it, a process which I described at the outset as "read[ing]" the "signatures of all things" (*U,* 3:2-3). It also returns to the prophetic register intertwined with the tradition of aesthetic blindness: the result of Stephen's experiment is the realization that there is a reality which surpasses his present, subjective experiences: "There all the time without you: and ever shall be, world without end" (*U,* 3:27-9). We cannot help but feel a messianic quality to this realization, which utilizes both the language of philosophical discourse and religious epiphany. Later in the novel, Bloom has his own encounter

with blindness as he looks on as "A blind stripling stood tapping the curbstone with his slender cane. No tram in sight. Wants to cross" (*U,* 8:1075-6). He provides assistance, and begins to wonder, as does Stephen, what the world is to the blind. Closing his own eyes, he muses on the revelatory potential of a world obscured from sight: "Must be strange not to see her. Kind of a form in his mind's eye. The voice, temperatures: when he touches her with his fingers must almost see the lines, the curves" (*U,* 8:1127-9). Most strikingly, he comments, "Wonder would he feel it if something was removed. Feel a gap. Queer idea of Dublin he must have, tapping his way round by the stones" *(U,* 8:1109-11). In Bloom's commentary, the novel's interest in blindness and absence is realized in its fullest form, making explicit Joyce's effort of mapping Dublin from afar, highlighting how this encyclopedic project is founded just as much on its omissions and shadows than on its scrupulous accounting for street-corners and shop-signs. Furthermore, the phrase "Feel a gap" takes on a poignant significance in the context of all the themes I have grappled with in my reading of *Ulysses*. Herein lies the essence of the Joycean encounter with futurity: the production of blindness and the negation of the world which appears to us in order to "feel a gap"—a gap through which the shadows of the future enter back into the present, the gap through which Elijah's presence is made possible.

## Conclusion: The Task of Annunciation

In his chapter from *Joyce in Trieste*, Hugo Azérad writes, "*Finnegans Wake* is like an immense dialectical image… which can fan the sparks of hope still buried within the ashes of the biggest bonfire of utopias we could imagine."[193] Looking at all the ways in which *Ulysses* mocks messiahs and false prophets, not to mention its suspicion of the genuine emancipatory power of

[193] Azérad, *Joyce in Trieste*, 112.

any kind of vision of the future, we might be tempted to say it is simply a "bonfire of utopias." However, as I have argued, the "sparks" of messianic potential still suffuse the text. As Paul Saint-Amour puts it in *Tense Future*, "A truly partial work preserves a trace of the whole that it negates, thereby warning us not to misrecognize fragmentariness as a new and self-sufficient totality."[194] *Ulysses* is foundationally partial—fragmented and self-destructive, anticipating its criticisms, readings, and futures, and already incorporating and mocking them. However, the utopian vision it fractures so effectively is never wholly lost; it remains in spaces and is "fe[lt] in gaps," always at the edge of our experience of the text. As much as *Ulysses* presents an archive—of Dublin, of the literary canon, of the English language, of prophecy and premonition—it also represents the destruction of that archive. As I discussed earlier, already within the novel itself is the cataclysmic, messianic Voice which pronounces "Dublin's burning! Dublin's burning! On fire, on fire!" (*U,* 15:4659-60). Taken in one sense, this is an inherent feature of language, knowledge, and encyclopedias. Derrida would say that, just as the "Yes" is embedded within the very structure of all address and communication, an internal rivenness is always already caught up in text, speech, and phenomenological experience. Similarly, Saint-Amour writes that "Catastrophe is not the dark inverse of the encyclopedic project but one of its central self-authorizing narratives; one of its signal traits, too, insofar as catastrophe (etymologically an "overturning") is what awaits most amassed knowledge in time, and is thus the operation both documented and abetted by the project."[195] In this way, negation and blankness are inescapable—and that's part of the point. No matter how powerfully a totalizing narrative is asserted, there are always things left over, always things which are irreconcilable and irreducible. Joyce is eminently aware of this essential openness.

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[194] Saint-Amour, *Tense Future*, 11.
[195] Saint-Amour, *Tense Future*, 199.

However, the power of Joycean ethics extends beyond that which is essential and unalterable, becoming an active ethical demand which begins to more closely parallel Nietzsche's radical affirmation than Derrida's ubiquitous one. As Saint-Amour continues to explore the figure of the archive, he contemplates Diderot's famous *Encyclopédie*. He writes, "The *Encyclopédie*'s embrace of volatility was the fire at its heart."[196] What makes the creation of the *Encyclopédie* so fascinating is that destruction and burning is already built into its core—and not just as an acceptable though lamentable feature. What the *Encyclopédie* reveals is that one cannot build an archive without, in some sense, participating in its destruction: that is, to "Catalogue these books" (*U,* 17:1361) and then "sen[d]" them "to all the great libraries of the world, including Alexandria" (*U,* 3:141-4). The present may already be fractured, structured by its *aporias* and negative spaces as much as by its assertions and affirmations, but what Joyce undertakes is a process of self-burning and intentional negation which allows us to "feel a gap" (*U,* 8:1109-11)—to invite and embrace the "coming events" which "cast their shadows before" (*U,* 8:525-6) rather than waiting for them. Ultimately, this is what I mean by a Joycean temporal ethics which takes seriously the Elijaic role of annunciation—and why I talk about "*affirmative negation*" rather than pure negativity.

As the novel nears its end, Stephen seems to provide a very Bloomian defense of the meaningfulness of human existence, invoking the comforting fantasy of a linear path from the known to the unknown, from the past to the future, from the present to the "Paradisiacal Era" (*U,* 15:1632): "He affirmed his significance as a conscious rational animal proceeding syllogistically from the known to the unknown and a conscious rational reagent between a micro and a macrocosm ineluctably constructed upon the incertitude of the void" (*U,* 17:1012-5). Bloom, at least at first, agrees with this assessment, progressive and humanist as ever: "Was this affirmation apprehended by

[196] Saint-Amour, *Tense Future*, 199.

Bloom? / Not verbally. Substantially" (*U,* 17:1016-7). However, we cannot help but note that this fantasy is portrayed as just that: "constructed upon the incertitude of the void," but never escaping it. Later, as Bloom considers the constellations above, and, importantly, "the problem of possible redemption" (*U,* 17:1101), Joyce writes, "His (Bloom's) logical conclusion, having weighed the matter and allowing for possible error? / That it was not a heaventree, not a heavengrot, not a heavenbeast, not a heavenman. That it was a Utopia, there being no known method from the known to the unknown" (*U,* 17:1137-41). Ultimately, for Joyce, there is no clear path from the present to the future—and anything which claims to be is fraudulent or misguided. However, this does not mean that "Utopia" is wholly unrecognizable, as Bloom makes clear. Saint-Amour points out that we might see "literature as an encyclopedia of not yet completed futures, one that seeks ways of changing literature into a literature of changing the world. Reviving mothballed forms and dormant emplotments, checking for a pulse among left-for-dead texts—that would be a rereading very different from striving to catch up to a work deemed, as Joyce's book has so often been, ahead of its time. We have a great future behind us, and one of its names is *Ulysses*."[197]

In the novel's final episode, Molly becomes a prophet in her own right—the light in the window which signals to Bloom the Promised Land is put out, leaving Molly to reflect in darkness. She asserts, "Ill wipe him off me just like a business his omission" (*U,* 18:1538). Here, we have arrived at the full formulation of Joyce's ethical act: the climactic, affirmative, (pro)creative "emission," which has been the theme of so much of the novel, from Stephen's epiphany in "Proteus," to Bloom's voyeuristic masturbation in "Nausicaa," to the orgasmic drama of "Circe," and even to the final lines of "Penelope," is replaced by a blank, a shadow, a gap: an *omission*. She is furthermore the direct author of this omission, insofar as she will "wipe him off." This is the opening

[197] Saint-Amour, *Tense Future*, 246.

of Joycean futurity—the replacement of the false future and false utopia with a tangible, powerful negative space, a replacement which demands the recognition and destruction of what is already present. Only then can the image of Elijah become an ethical model: one which directly enters into heaven with a whirlwind of flames, and, while always refusing to determine or fix the future, nonetheless promises its arrival and announces its presence—a presence which is seen only in absences, openings, and blinds. Only in this way can we call forth the future.

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