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SHARED EXPERIENCE – SHARED CONSOLATION? Fictional Perspective-Taking and Existential Stances in Literature

> I used to write cheerful poems, happy and life-affirming,
> But my eyes are wet with tears and the poems are those
> That only grieving Muses would prompt me to compose,
> Heart-breaking verse from a suffering, heartbroken man,
> But these woeful songs turn out to be my consoling
> companions.
>
> Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*.

Enforced suffering, grief, mourning, and the need of consolation are existential predicaments of every living soul ever since the first breath of life. Consolation is also a subject with a long history. From the biblical psalms of consolation – stretching through thousands of years of religious and literary history – and in ancient texts as *Gilgamesh*, and the *Iliad* over classics such as the above quoted Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, and Thomas More's *Dialogue of Comfort*, to all kinds of contemporary literary expressions of consolation. The subject could also be seen from different angles: the reading of consolation, and the consolations of writing. These activities are often intertwined. The consolations of writing when published might become consoling for the reader. The communication of consoling is in other words also deeply reciprocal and dialogical. What kind of texts that will give a reading and distressed subject comfort or release can't be decided by anyone but the sole reader. Moreover, the subject seems to be limitless. Consolation is a truly manifold and interdisciplinary subject. This volume of essays is an excellent proof of this.

This work began some years ago at the Department of Literature, History of Ideas, and Religion. A group of interdisciplinary researchers developed ideas and research-plans on the topic of consolation, and this anthology is a manifestation of that highly interesting and promising project. As a result of the mutual interests in literature and religion among many of the researchers at the department and due to a propitious academic milieu, the Network for Literature and Religion was established in 2012 at the Department of Literature, History of Ideas, and Religion (LIR). During the last years a promising collaboration with the Centre for the Study of Literature, Theology & the Arts at the University of Glasgow has developed, and these essays are the first proof in print of this international cooperation.

The present essays were first presented as speeches at the conference »Consolation – Literary and Religious Perspectives«, held at the University of Gothenburg and arranged by The Network for Literature and Religion at the Department of Literature, History of Ideas, and Religion (LIR). The focus of the conference was on the tradition of consolation as expressed in

literary and religious texts. This focus, however, is part of a wide field including cultural and historical contexts as well as conceptual studies, sociological and psychological investigations, and phenomenological perspectives. Therefore the conference was free for all kinds of perspectives within the complex of literary/religious consolation. That perspectival freedom within a thematic unity is preserved in this collection of essays.

—— Consolation was a basic element in ancient philosophy. A good example is Seneca who was arguing for a stoic form of consolation. Stern and severe, and with the Christian hope excluded, the consolation offered by Stoicism was unlike Christian consolation. Stoic arguments have nevertheless seen a revival in modern coach literature, where »acceptance«, focus on the present, »carpe diem«, and mindfulness are current words of prestige, as Bo Lindberg observes in his essay.

The consoling text does not remove the suffering or the causes of suffering, but might change the sufferer's perception of and attitude to his or her suffering and its causes. Thus, the experience of consolation involves a shift of horizon that momentarily can change the sufferer's life-world. Focusing on the textual traditions of consolation, and with a wide range of examples – from Homer to Derrida –, Beata Agrell investigates the relationship between this textual rhetoric in the Western world and the phenomenology of consolation.

The crucial question of reading as a consoling act is scrutinized in Torsten Pettersson's essay »Shared Experience – Shared Consolation? Perspective-Taking and Existential Stances in Literature«, in which he discusses a topic of immediate interest, namely the possibilities of book therapy in a secularized present-day Western society where mental illness is becoming the chief reason for early retirement and the use of anti-depressants keeps escalating. He employs concrete textual examples to present some coordinates for book therapy, and they include consolation of three kinds: transcendent and cognitive; immanent and cognitive; and immanent and aesthetic.

A moment in life where consoling practices are enacted is of course »On the Deathbed«, which is the title of Cecilia Rosengrens essay on the 17th century philosopher, dramatist and author Margaret Cavendish, and her »Advice on What to Say in Times of Grief«. The essay highlights a couple of fictitious speeches of dying persons. Relating Cavendish's intervention on this stage to early modern philosophical discussions on emotions and to the rhetorical genre as such, the paper discusses how Cavendish conceived of the concept of grief and consolation in her age.

Contrary to what scholars in general have suggested the Biblical Opera Libretto *Cain und Abel Oder Der verzweifelnde*

Bruder=Mörder (1689), by Christian Heinrich Postel, is not about guilt, moral concern, the rightness of actions, the legitimacy of the self, violence, envy, mystery, the erotic, offerings or murder, but consolation, argues Dag Hedman in his essay. This 17th century opera gives an intriguing example of how the theme is exposed in a piece of art and at the same time have consoling effects on the audience. In spite of the depressing theme of the opera, the spectator/reader finds consolation in the loving trust in God shown on stage and by the thought of the coming Savior, as Hedmans conclusion reads.

The Italian dramatist, novelist, and poet Luigi Pirandello, and his 1926 novel *One, No-one and One Hundred Thousand* is the centre of Ruth Dunster's essay in which she claims that the protagonist Moscarda's journey can been seen as a deeply theological one, and how his ultimate madness is in fact a place of consolation and rebirth. She argues that it becomes an autistic theology when its problematic stance towards relationships is taken into account, and the comfort of Moscarda's ultimate consolation becomes an acceptance of the space where a mystical theology might resonate with a theology of autistic »Mindblindness«, namely, the ultimate failure of human knowledge and communion.

Mystical theology has also for a long time been a theme highlighted among critics and researchers of Tomas Tranströmer's poetry. In accordance with this line of interpretation goes Staffan Olofsson in his essay in which he stresses that in the poetical universe of Tranströmer human beings are not only rational and social beings, but also spiritual and existential beings. When distributed in an inimitable metaphorical language these insights into spiritual aspects of life might have a consoling effect on the reader as well.

Reading – writing – reading. The chain of the consoling activities seems to be endless. Jennifer Reek reads and writes about Ignatius of Loyola, the 16th-century founder of the Society of Jesus, who was reading while recovering from a battle wound in 1521 the only texts available to him, of lives of the saints and Christ. The French thinker Hélène Cixous experienced a comparable consolation in unexpected and life-changing encounters with texts, in her case it was a chance reading of the Brazilian novelist Clarice Lispector in 1978, after years of reading and writing in what she describes as a desert without women companions. In her essay Reek explores the idea of reading as consolation in the work and life of these two disparate yet essentially compatible figures.

To ease the pains of a marginalized group of people different imaginary ideas could be developed within the group. In early Christianity the idea of the end of times includes eschatological themes as the emergence of new heavens and a new earth. This biblical code has been transformed into vast range of

popular culture products. In science fiction literature, a variant on this theme of cosmic regeneration is outlined as the escape to an earth-like planet with the help of an interstellar space ship. An interesting recent case of such an offer of consolation in outer space is the novel *Voyage to Alpha Centauri,* by Michael O'Brien, a contemporary Canadian author. The story is read by Clemens Cavallin as a commentary on the marginalization of traditional, especially Catholic, Christianity, and the growing strength of a liberal secular order.

Consolation might not be found just in outer space, but even in the most trivial domestic objects. Elizabeth Anderson seeks in her essay about Hilda Doolittle's (»H. D.«) writing from the Second World War an answer to the question of how the author's engagement with crafting material things formed a spiritual response to the time of crisis in which she wrote her mature poetry and prose. The French theorist Hélène Cixous's writing on the gift performs the functions of a fruitful framework for the discussion of gift exchange amongst H.D.'s friends as a process of crafting community in the face of trauma. That is how ordinary things become pathways towards healing and consolation.

Objects have obviously been understood to have consolatory functions in Western culture. In her essay, Heather Walton gives a line of examples from the tradition but foremost refers to new Materialist thinking in her discussion on the consolation to be found in human/thing relations. This potential is explored with particular reference to Etty Hillesum's war-time journals which place the consolation of things in a challenging and creative theological frame.

With reference to a wide range of theological, philosophical, and literary sources Carl Reinhold Bråkenhielm argues that religious believers are justified when they draw consolation from their faith. They have a license to hope – and under certain specific conditions – also a license to believe and draw consolation from their faith. But the element of doubt is nevertheless deep-rooted. They have, in short, a quantum of solace and doubt, as Bråkenhielm points out.

Psychoanalysis has seldom occupied itself with the notion of consolation theoretically. Consolation (comfort – solace) is not a psychoanalytic concept. And Per Magnus Johansson points in his essay to the fact that Freud only uses the word once in his general reflections on the human condition. Focusing on Freud's theories about religion Johansson notices that Freud saw religion as an effect of man's infantile need for consolation and compared it with obsessional neuroses. Inspired by the project of Enlightenment Freud was convinced that the spread of thinking influenced by science in the long run will lead to abandonment of religion. In Freud's scientific-ideological attempt at turning psychoanalysis into a scientific discipline, phenomena that are parts of the religious and literary fields

are lost. The human need for consolation is such a phenomenon, as Johansson concludes.

—— Read as an ensemble these essays demonstrate the manifold aspects of the concept of consolation, at the same time as pointing to its fundamental meaning and function. Consolation is always an unexpected gift, received in the deepest despair. Whether it is given or found, and whether the medium is a human act, a material thing, or a spiritual event, consolation infuses some kind of light into darkness. Even a stoic renouncing of consolation may bring a glimpse of this light into a suffering soul: this sudden insight of the harsh truth of life may be somehow consoling. Reading literary or religious texts may give consoling insights, but it may also function as a soothing stroke of an invisible hand. This range of nuances in function is perhaps why consolation is such an intriguing phenomenon for study and so inseparable from human life.

—— Beata Agrell & Håkan Möller

Beata Agrell, »Consolation of Literature as Rhetorical Tradition: Issues and Examples«

ABSTRACT

This article investigates a tradition of consolation in order to explore rhetorical strategies and literary devices of consolatory texts. The aim is to elucidate how the view of consolation has varied through history and the impact of these variations on the motives for and the right to consolation. Issues dealt with are which sufferings that justified consolation, which kind of consolation that was accepted in an individual case, and which rhetorical means that were considered as appropriate.

At first a theoretical and historical introduction will discuss the concept of consolation, its variants in tradition, and different states of mind considered in need of consolation. A special discussion concerns the condition of melancholy. Thereafter a few examples of consolatory rhetoric from various genres and historical periods will be analyzed, from Homer to Derrida.

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Keywords: addressivity, consolation, Boccaccio, Boëthius, Burton Robert, Dagerman Stig, Derrida Jacques, Homer, Levinas Emmanuel, melancholy, Montaigne Michel, rhetorical strategy, Stagnelius Erik

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Beata Agrell

CONSOLATION OF LITERATURE AS RHETORICAL TRADITION: Issues and Examples

Suffering is as old as mankind, and »our need for consolation is insatiable,« as the Swedish modernist Stig Dagerman claimed in a famous essay. »I seek out consolation as a hunter dogging his prey,« he continued.[1] Sometimes words are of no use; only physical presence and bodily closeness will help. Sometimes nothing helps – as in the case of Dagerman, who killed himself at the age of 31. His need for consolation was insatiable, indeed. Yet, he knew that some verbal expressions *do* have a consoling potential, among them religious and literary texts. In the same vein, artist characters in novels sometimes emphasize giving consolation as the main task of the writer.[2]

How, then, can texts give consolation? In this article, I will investigate how some texts are rhetorically and literary structured to mediate consolation, although their actual success depends on how they are read and received. Rhetoric signifies »the craft of speech,« as E. R. Curtius points out, but by inference, also written discourse is included. Thus, rhetoric »teaches how to construct a discourse artistically,« Curtius contends.[3] What is constructed is a dynamic structure progressing through rhetorical strategies, that is, modes or techniques, that help a writer develop and embellish an argument so as to convey a purpose and /or affect the reader.[4] The rhetorical strategies aim at creating a certain reader role prepared for, in this case, consoling modes of reading, but the real reader may refuse this role or misapprehend the strategies.

On the other hand, there are texts that, without this consoling rhetorical structure, may still give consolation to those in need. Sometimes the text is met by a searching and needy attitude, open for consolation. At other times, the real reader is not even aware of a need for consolation; yet, all of a sudden, the text may call forth forgotten sorrows at the same time as mediating consolation. This means that the experience of consolation – like most reader responses – is a personal issue, depending on individuality, situation and context. The most urgent task of a rhetorical strategy therefore is to create an effective *addressivity* that catches the attention and interest of the addressee.[5] To accomplish this, rhetorical strategies and literary devices must cooperate so tightly that the sometimes rigidly upheld distinction between rhetoric and literature is of no use.[6]

This article, however, will mainly pay attention to rhetorical strategies designed for mediating consolation, and my task is

to track variations in a consolatory tradition. The issue is the relation between the rhetoric of texts, literary devices and the phenomenology of consolation. The consolatory tradition in question is huge, so I will proceed by example, and the examples are chosen to be illuminating but not exhaustive. They represent, however, a great number of periods, languages, text-types, and genres of a Western tradition that also includes small literatures and philosophical texts.

The article starts with a discussion of concepts of consolation. It is followed by an overview of the tradition of consolation and the phenomenon of melancholy. Next four sections deal more extensively with some textual examples: archaic, romantic, and modernist / postmodern. Finally some summarizing reflections.

CONCEPTS OF CONSOLATION

The concept of consolation itself is complicated. It refers both to the interpersonal act of mediating consolation and to the resulting personal experience of that act.[7] In this article, I will focus on the former as rhetorical strategies of literary texts, aiming at consolation. But the personal experience still is presupposed and that affects the strategy. Therefore, it must be considered in the analysis of the strategies.

A vital question is: what *kind* of consolation is implied or otherwise involved in this or that strategy? However, a general concept of consolation still underlies this article. Consolation presupposes suffering, and the aim of the consolatory act is relief. Yet, there are different kinds of suffering, and all of them are not in need for consolation; others may be inconsolable. Toothache, for instance, requires painkillers rather than consolation, and the mental state of all-encompassing melancholy or depression often is inconsolable, that is insusceptible to consolation.[8] Typically, consolation is for incurable existential sufferings producing a yearning for relief – like grief and mourning caused by death, loss, fatal illness, broken heart, deceit, and the like. Consolation does not remove the suffering or the causes of suffering, but it may change the sufferer's perception of and attitude to the suffering and its causes.[9] Thus, the experience of consolation involves a shift of horizon that changes the sufferer's life-world.[10] New aspects come to the fore, pertaining to meaning, significance, coherence, potentiality, hope, trust, faith, and suchlike things; yet nothing *outside* this experience has changed, and the worldly future gives no promises. This experience of consolation may be religious, offering a divine care or a better life after death; but it may be secular just as well, for instance connected to a faith in Life, Beauty, Goodness, or Meaning in a context of death and misery. In both cases, the interaction with another (human or divine) being is central, even if this being could be represented by a text. Most impor-

tant: the experience of consolation is not rational and cannot be discursively explained. It may be slow and tough, won after long and painful struggling. It may also be sudden as a conversion, giving peace of mind in the midst of a whirl.

A TRADITION OF CONSOLATION

In religious and literary history, there is a long tradition of consolation built on words and texts: from Antiquity to Modernity and even Postmodernism, but with its heyday in the Renaissance.[11] The traditional *consolatio* pertained to death, exile, bereavement, and loss, and more seldom to melancholy as a condition of chronic sadness, fear, and anxiety. In the modern era, the rhetorical structure of consoling discourse became looser, as happened in all kinds of discourse.[12] Yet, rhetorical strategies of one kind or another remained fundamental because of the recurring task of persuading or otherwise helping the sufferer into consolation and to that end creating a suitable role for the addressee.

As a genre, the *consolatio* is described as »writings of a philosophic bent, whose authors either try to dissuade individuals from grieving in the face of misfortune, or proffer general counsel on overcoming adversity.«[13] Traditional rhetorical consolation conventionally was thought of as *epideictic* in kind – like praising deceased in funeral orations – but most consoling texts are fundamentally of the *deliberative* kind, that is, advising, consulting, and aiming at cure.[14] This task seems to remain even in modern consolatory discourse, although the possible genres are numerous. But already in Antiquity and the Middle-Ages the *consolatio* could use almost any existing genre. The ceremonial oratory form and the letter were common, but so was lyric poetry, often in the form of an elegy. A fountainhead of early religious lyric consolation, however, was – and still is – the Old Testament Psalter, a multiform poetry often itself both describing and performing the process of consolation.[15] Thus, even in archaic times, before the rhetorical system was invented, consolation was an important subject. As we will see below, in an analysis of the *Iliad*, archaic consolation was associated with certain 'proto-rhetoric' strategies that later on were included into the rhetorical system.

Yet, perspectives have varied. Not only are there different ideas of consolation but also of the *justification* of consolation. The Stoics tried to minimize the need for consolation because such needs were incompatible with the stoic philosophy of rationality connected to *apatheia* and contempt of *adiaphora*.[16] Stoic consolation therefore aimed at eliminating the very need of consolation; the aim was education to stoicism. This is also the kind of stoically inspired consolation that Lady Philosophy offers the imprisoned Boëthius, waiting for his death sentence in agony: man cannot have true peace until

wealth, fame, and all external happiness are forsaken. True happiness comes from within and is totally independent of the world. Therefore, having this insight you are in no need for consolation.[17] This message, however, is not presented as a thesis or a lesson, but as a dialogic process between the prisoner and the Lady. The text is a *menippean satire*, that is, a mixture of genres and discourses, where poetry and prose, lyrics, narrative, and discursive argument interact.[18] This multifarious strategy also aims at activating the reader and creating a reflective reception.

Neither did the Protestant Reformist Jean Calvin (1509–1564) see any real need for consolation. He interpreted despair as a divinely sent affliction that furthered virtue, that is, suffering was rather a *gift* than a phenomenon motivating consolation.[19] A more conventional Christian consolatory recommendation was prayer and an intensified religious life in meditative retirement. According to *Der grosse Seelentrost* (The great Consolation for the Soul), a religious tract and *exempla*-collection of the 1400s, the very uttering in faith of the name »Jesus« is a great consolation: this name is like (e.g.) the sweetest honey in your mouth, the sweetest harp music in your ears, a happiness and joy for your heart, a consoling help in all distress, and a hope for all sinners.[20]

Some Christian authorities, on the contrary, recommended an intensified participation in the social world as the best consolation in spiritual distress. Martin Luther (1483–1546), for instance, contended that food, drink and human company were the most adequate consolation for tribulations. Tribulations followed by sadness, he said, on the one hand were »a salutary means of comprehending one's own weakness and a pathology«, but on the other hand they were »a sickness of the soul« sent by the Devil to challenge faith, pushing the believer to ascetic isolation in anguish and doubt.[21] Therefore, according to Luther, in order to protect your faith, you should tease and defy the Devil by doing the opposite to his ascetic temptations.[22] Yet, as argued by Angus Gowland, until the end of the 16th century, protestant physicians and puritan divines – in theory, at least – »upheld a rigorous distinction between, on the one hand, the kind of despair betokening a naturally caused melancholy, and, on the other, that indicating a divinely afflicted conscience.«[23]

The Christian consolatory tradition thus distinguished between »godly sorrow for sin« (*tristitia secundum Deum*) and »worldly grief« (*tristitia saeculi*).[24] Further, the Christian view of suffering was different from the classical and humanist tradition: from a pure Christian point of view suffering was an inescapable consequence of the Fall and thus a natural part of worldly life. Providence imposes suffering upon us »as an ultimately beneficial test of our piety and spiritual endurance«

and consequently as a »redemptive power«.[25] This means that Christian consolation excluded the Classical idea that passions were the cause of melancholia and could be »managed by rational self-discipline.« Instead, the sufferer should learn to welcome his suffering as a sign of divine presence and care.[26] After the Reformation, Luther problematized this view, while Calvin reinforced it – as already said above.

Even when the need for consolation was acknowledged, the approved kinds of consolation diverged. The humanist *consolatio* was partly Stoic in nature but rejected the Stoic ideal of *apatheia* in favour of Christian teachings and *exempla*.[27] The aim of the humanist *consolatio* was, according to Gowland, »to alleviate and disperse the psychological pain experienced by individuals by means of philosophical wisdom and spiritual guidance, applied humanistically with the assistance of rhetorical eloquence and poetic expression.«[28] Here consolation should operate not only on the intellect but also on the imagination. Therefore, in order to open all of the sufferer's senses to receiving consolation also the rhetorical manner of communication was important. As Gowland points out, by »literary-rhetorical means consolatory philosophical discourse could be addressed not just to the rational faculty of understanding, but also the sensitive power of imagination.«[29]

Such literary-rhetorical devices were obvious in secular Renaissance consolations concerning »worldly grief«, which were important text-types as well. Already Boccaccio (1313–1375) wrote his *Decamerone* (1349–1353) as a consolatory means in his time of pestilence and death.[30] As will be seen below, similiar kinds of »worldly« consolatory rhetoric are fundamental also in early modern experimental genres like Montaigne's *Essays* (1580–1595). Writing the *Essays* was a processing of the pain after a deceased friend but also a diversion in the same vein as Boccaccio's idea of »delectable discourse«.

CONSOLATION AND MELANCHOLY

The relation between consolation and chronic *melancholy* (unlike sorrow and other afflictions) is a special issue. Melancholy is a different condition from grieving, since it has no cause and therefore in much modern psychiatry is seen as inconsolable.[31] Nevertheless, for some periods melancholy became almost a fashion. During early Modernity, melancholy was an assumed European epidemic, but the epidemic in fact was rather the widespread interest in melancholy.[32] Characteristic of melancholy is »dejection, sadness, sorrow«, and tiredness of life, often including feelings of unmotivated guilt or other delusions (false ideas).[33] Sometimes melancholy was related to a deadly sin, that is *acedia*, generating *tristitia* (dejection, sadness, sorrow) and more melancholy. Medical historian Stanley W. Jackson emphasizes that *acedia* is no

synonym of melancholy, but neither is it a synonym of sloth. It is a condition of its own, associated with *tristitia* and melancholy, i.e. »dejection, sadness, sorrow«, and even »despair«.[34] For instance, Petrarch's (1304–1374) »secularized version of the condition« emphasized *acedia* as »grief, sorrow, and dejection.«[35] Further, »dejection about worldly matters, continued to be viewed as a sin and to evolve within the notion of acedia.«[36] In the 15th and 16th centuries *acedia* tended to be more closely related to sloth, but even then »states of dejection which might have been conceived of as acedia during the medieval centuries came to be viewed as melancholy.« Thus, »the continuity between the sorrow-dejection-despair aspect of acedia and the melancholy of the sixteenth century« is unbroken.[37]

On the other hand, both Protestant and Catholic reform movements shared a significantly increased attentiveness to the psychological interior as the location of spiritual health.[38] The writing of consolations had been an important philosophical project for early Italian humanists, but the production of this type of discourse accelerated across the Continent from the later sixteenth century onwards. This was particularly the case in northern Europe after the Reformation, where the spiritual dimension of the consolation became increasingly visible.[39]

The Renaissance has been called »The Golden Age of Melancholy« – with Albrecht Dürer's famous picture »Melencholia« (1514) as its emblem.[40] Yet, as Gowland observes, melancholy is a rare explicit theme in Renaissance *consolationes*. This is because traditional *consolationes* address sufferings from external causes rather than from internal mental or physical conditions. The latter was regarded as problems to be treated within the field of learned medicine, rather than the rhetorical philosophic genre of *consolatio*.[41] The aim of the humanist *consolatio*, as seen above, was to offer moral guidance with rhetorical eloquence and poetic expression. Consolation in these cases meant to correct the delusions or false ideas, by philosophical argument as well as Christian guidance derived from Scripture or doctrine. Philosophy here renders the function of *medicina animi*, medicine for the soul, practiced already by Cicero (106–42 B.C.).[42] But melancholy, according to current Galenic medicine, was a *disease* caused by a surplus of black bile, and disease is cured not by words but by herbs, that is, drugs.[43] Robert Burton, however, in his *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621; 5th ed. 1651), applied both medical and psychological perspectives, but contended that life as a whole was an inescapable misery. Thus, the conclusion of his *consolatio* became a paradoxical praise of the melancholic disease as a »source of virtue, wisdom and (in some sense) happiness.«[44] In his combined medical, psychological and spiritual perspective on melancholia and in his effort to insert melancholy into the tradition of consolation, Burton is an exception of his time.

The Age of Enlightenment was not so fond of melancholy, but the interest heightened during the (Pre-)Romantic period, combining with ideas about the original genius as a necessarily suffering person – so in Edward Young, Thomas Gray, John Keats, Novalis, and even the young Goethe. In fact, it was not until the beginning secularisation of the 18th century that melancholy was regarded as an existential psychological condition in natural need for consolation. By then melancholy could be documented as an existential mood in epic poetry like Edward Young's *The Complaint, or Night Thoughts on Life, Death and Immortality* (1742, 1745) and Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (1751). In these works, however, melancholy is not despair, but rather mindfulness, and the very act of writing seems soothing. In the early Romanticism melancholy almost developed into a fashion and the sign of a creative genius. Likewise, the phenomenon of *spleen* during the *fin de siècle* in the late 1800s and early 1900s was another expression of fashionable melancholy. In those contexts, consolation was less interesting than the suffering and its decadent consequences.

Next, I will more extensively discuss a number of examples.

ARCHAIC CONSOLATION

In archaic times, melancholy was an unknown concept. But suffering and consolation were not. Fundamental devices of the consolatory tradition developed long before both Christianity and Stoicism. Even rhetorical strategies were developed long before the system of rhetoric was invented. Already the *Iliad* deals with sorrow and consolation and thus anticipates the consolatory rhetorical tradition.[45] No Stoic or Christian ideologies are disturbing the lifeworld of that epic; yet, some later on recurring strategies are visible. In this heroic story, death and grieving are frequent, and consolation is adapted to the heroic lifeworld. Heroes are not callous; on the contrary: their emotions are as superhuman and violent as the heroes themselves, and this is presented as exemplary. In the *Iliad* the death of Achilles' friend Patroclus is said to be the »dramatic climax« of this epos, especially with a view to Achilles' violent reaction of grief and despair. Yet, in the context of this article I prefer to comment on another episode.

King Priam is grieving his son Hector, killed by Achilles, whom he asks to deliver the son's maltreated and desecrated body. Achilles harshly refuses, but when the vehemently crying Priam reminds Achilles of his dead father, Achilles himself starts to cry vehemently as well, both for his own dead father and for his killed friend Patroclus; and so the two hero-enemies both are crying oceans.[46] But even heroic crying has its limit: »brilliant Achilles had had his fill of tears,« and further crying is refuted with the argument that tears are useless and pity

must have an end: »Grief for your son will do no good at all. / You will never bring him back to life – .« Instead, the grieving father is recommended to eat, sleep and return to the living – like Niobe did, although she had lost *all* her twelve children.[47]

These arguments would become recurrent topoi in much rhetorical argumentation later on. They are also a material and matter-of-fact kind of consolation that Priam finally accepts.[48] But he insists on getting Hector's dead body back, a request Achilles at last fulfils. His rhetorical strategy in persuading Achilles is *pathos*, that is, appealing to his emotions, as we have seen, especially by calling forth Achilles' similar predicament of latent grief. This is also a strategy of recognition that renders Achilles soft; it paves the way for friendly feelings instead of the hostility that the war naturally evokes. Achilles now not only delivers Hector's body, but also promises hold his troupes back for ten days until the funeral is over.

What in the end seems to be consoling here, however, is not argument or human words, but first, the free play of emotions in a limited moment of human closeness and mutual understanding; and secondly, the joint ritual of burying the body. The ritual is filled with grief, sorrow and mourning but seems to offer some kind of community, order and relief – as if Homer were acquainted with the modern concept of the »labour process« of grieving.[49]

But this is not all. The rhetorical strategies of the Priam-episode not only aim at persuading within the story but also at awakening compassion and even grief on the part of the addressee. For one thing, Priam in his persuasive efforts to reclaim Hector's body reminds Achilles of his dead father and his dead friend. This way he calls forth a repressed sorrow and Achilles starts to cry – and so they are both crying, mourning their dead beloved ones. Thereby he makes Achilles emphatic and compassionate, so that he finally gets what he wants. Now, the narrative itself seems to practice same moving strategy vis-à-vis the addressee. In practice, this is the classic rhetorical strategy of *movere*, applied already in archaic times.

Secondly, the previous narrative of Hector's death is a drawn out depiction of the parent's despair while watching the fatal fight between Hector and Achilles. This depiction in turn is prepared by the detailed description of Hector's farewell to his loving wife and baby son before going to war. This scene pays attention to childish gestures like the boy's playing with the plumes of his father's helmet, and such everyday details renders the scene moving. This way, the addressee is guided into an emphatic role, prepared for a complex response during the narrative process. In the end, the addressee may accept even the unnatural reconciliation between deadly enemies that closes the narrative. The extreme character of their relation is emphasized by Priam's words to Achilles: »I have endured what

no one on earth has ever done before/ I put to my lips the hands of the man who killed my son.«[50] However unnatural, this conciliatory spirit is the consoling lesson of the epic, and the means of teaching (*docere*) anticipates the classic rhetorical tasks, moving and pleasing (*movere*, *delectare*) included.[51]

RENAISSANCE AND EARLY MODERN CONSOLATION

As an archaic anticipation of the rhetorical tradition of consolation the *Iliad* prefigures several consolatory *topoi* and arguments that in the classic era was incorporated into the system of rhetoric. As seen above, medieval consolatory rhetoric adapted the classic tradition to Christian motivations. This tendency remained and was strengthened with the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. But in the Renaissance, also worldly consolatory strategies were developed. This section deals with such strategies in Boccaccio and Montaigne.

In his rhetorically embellished preface to the *Decameron*, Boccaccio emphasizes the general importance of compassion [*compassione*] and consolation [*consolazione*; *conforto*= comfort], not least, if you yourself have received it from others. The suffering here is the passion of love:[52]

> 'Tis humane to have compassion on the afflicted; and as it shews well in all, so it is especially demanded of those who have had need of comfort [*conforto*] and have found it in others: among whom, if any had ever need thereof or found it precious or delectable [*piacere*], I may be numbered; [---] [Once] I had much praise and high esteem, but nevertheless extreme discomfort and suffering […] through superabundant ardour engendered in the soul by ill-bridled desire; the which, as it allowed me no reasonable period of quiescence, frequently occasioned me an inordinate distress. In which distress so much relief was afforded me by the delectable [*piacevoli*] discourse of a friend and his commendable consolations [*consolazioni*], that I entertain a very solid conviction that to them I owe it that I am not dead.[53]

Because of a friend's »delectable discourse« – his act of *delectare* – the narrator is now consoled and the previously painful love has turned to a delightful memory; yet he has not forgotten the pain nor »the kind offices done me by those who shared by sympathy the burden of my griefs; nor will it ever, I believe, pass from me except by death.«[54] Now is the time for payback to lovesick fellowmen, especially the ladies:

> […] I have resolved, now that I may call myself free, to endeavour, in return for what I have received, to afford, so

far as in me lies, some solace [*conforto*], if not to those who succoured me, and who, perchance, by reason of their good sense or good fortune, need it not, at least to such as may be apt to receive it. And though my support or comfort [*conforto*], so to say, may be of little avail to the needy, nevertheless it seems to me meet to offer it most readily where the need is most apparent, because it will there be most serviceable and also most kindly received. Who will deny, that it should be given, for all that it may be worth, to gentle ladies much rather than to men? Within their soft bosoms, betwixt fear and shame, they harbour secret fires of love, and how much of strength concealment adds to those fires, they know who have proved it.[55]

The payback will be in the form of »one hundred Novels or Fables or Parables or Stories, as we may please to call them,« the narrator contends, »from which stories the said ladies, who shall read them, may derive both pleasure from the entertaining matters set forth therein, and also good counsel [*utile consiglio*], in that they may learn [*cognoscere*] what to shun, and likewise what to pursue.«[56] Here consolation is supposed to be given by fictional texts, which is not too common at the period. Yet, the fictional world of the frame story points to reality, since it is set »in the time of the late mortal pestilence« affecting Boccaccio's contemporaries. That is, love is not the only suffering actualized in his foreword, but also death. Within the fictional world, the stories are told as a consoling diversion and delectation for agonized minds, fearing death. In the real world, the sufferings of a lost love are in focus, but here too the background is the horror of pestilence and death. The task of consolation here also is combined with delectation and learning.

Talking about pleasure and learning, Boccaccio links up with the classic rhetoric tradition and the fundamental tasks of that tradition: to teach and to please (*docere*, *delectare*).[57] A third task is to move (*movere*), and it is naturally built into these love stories: however frivolous they also turn out to be they deal with love's labour; and *recognition* is an important part of their prepared moving function and a condition of their designed consoling effect. However, among the three classical tasks, *delectare* yet seems to be the most important. The current afflictions were inexorable, and the consolation offered by *The Decameron* is the diversion and oblivion that the *delectare* of literature can mediate.

In Montaigne the essay »On Diversion« [De la Diversion] argues explicitly for this combination of distraction and oblivion as consoling:

The same applies everywhere: some painful idea gets hold of me; I find it quicker to change it than to subdue it. If I

> cannot substitute an opposite one for it, I can at least find a different one. Change always solaces [*soulage*] it, dissolves it and dispels it. If I cannot fight it, I flee it; and by my flight I made a diversion [*diversion*] and use craft; by changing place, occupation and company I escape from it into the crowd of other pastimes and cogitations, in which it loses all track of me and cannot find me.[58]

Diversion, however, is not always consoling or even possible, according to Montaigne. In him, as in Boccaccio, death is a recurring topic – this inevitable end »which nothing can assuage [*soulager*]«.[59] Death frightens [*faict peur*]. Therefore, »let us deprive death of its strangeness,« Montaigne urges, »let us frequent it, let us get used to it; let us have nothing more often in mind than death. At every instant let us evoke it in our imagination under all its aspects.«[60] Writing and reflecting on death like this constituted the indirectly consolatory genre of *memento mori*, which was an exercise in handling death as the fundamental human condition.[61] Writing the *Essays* for Montaigne, among other things, was also a way of handling the death of a close friend.[62]

As for his own death, Montaigne, like many other writers, also found another kind of consolation. The »frailty and short space of this life« is painful, he writes in a letter, but »to think that it is capable of being strengthened and prolonged by fame and reputation« is yet »a great comfort [*consolation*].«[63] In one essay, he also argues for this idea through an example: »When he was dying, even Epicurus found consolation [*se console*] in the eternity and moral usefulness of his writings.«[64] To Montaigne, therefore, writing the essays was a consoling project at the same time as way of overcoming death. This idea of survival in posterity is a well-known topos at least since Horace's (65–27 B.C.) Ode XXX on poetry as a monument more lasting than copper and higher than the pyramids, giving fame, renown, and eternal life to the poet. This possibility of survival through a great work is consolatory, as the poet assures himself: »I shall not wholly die.«[65] In fact, already Homer makes use of the motif, for instance when Helen sings her lament on the dead Hector, making sure »that the memory of Hector will not die with him«, that is, the memory of his heroic deeds.[66] The topos preserved its popularity and consoling function even in the Christian era but was frequent not least during the younger Enlightenment period, when secularisation was growing and the faith in resurrection weakened.[67]

ROMANTIC CONSOLATION

The Renaissance and early Modernity involved the peak of the classic rhetorical system, consolatory rhetoric included. The subsequent weakening of the classic tradition will here be represented by a much later and most beautiful example of

consolatory rhetoric: an elegy by the Swedish Romantic poet Erik Johan Stagnelius (1793–1823). The text is number XX in Stagnelius' collection *Liljor i Saron* (Lilies in Saron) of 1819.[68] As an elegy, it is a poem of sorrow, but this elegy uses a clearly consoling strategy. Here is an English translation:[69]

> Friend, in the desolate time, when your soul is enshrouded in darkness
> When, in a deep abyss, mind and feeling die out,
> Thought diffidently gropes among shadowy forms and illusions
> Heart can no longer sigh; eye is unable to weep;
> When, from your night-clouded soul the wings of fire have fallen
> And you, to nothing, in fright, feel yourself sinking once more,
> Say, who rescues you then? – What kind of comforting angel
> Brings to your innermost soul order and beauty again,
> Building once more your fragmented world, restoring the fallen
> Altar, and when it is raised, lighting the sacred flame? – –
> None but the powerful Being who first from the limitless darkness
> Kissed the seraphs to life; woke all the suns to their dance.
> None but the holy Word calling the worlds: »Let there be!«
> And in whose power the worlds move on their paths to this day.
> Therefore, rejoice, oh friend, and sing in the darkness of sorrow:
> Night is the mother of day, Chaos the neighbour of God.

As you can see, the poem addresses a Friend, a »You,« in deep distress, depicting this distress with the greatest empathy. The poet describes vividly the very physical experience of darkness, emptiness, blindness, dumbness, and suffocation. Through this empathy, he builds up an *ethos* that might make his friend listen. (Alternatively, if the »you« is the poet himself, the same words give expression to his own suffering, which is a comfort in itself.) Even rhythm and meter are here important. The meter is elegiac distitch: the rhythm is falling, and with a few exceptions composed in dactyls – like a lullaby. The consoling strategy, however, is not to eliminate the distress, but to situate it into the pair of contrasts it belongs to. Thus, the poet asks the rhetorical question of a saviour, but the answer is ontological rather than religious: it reminds the suffering you of the original nothingness at the creation of the living world by the Word: »Let there be!« Light was incorporated with darkness, and in the same way distress is incorporated with joy; the extremes hang together: »Night is the mother of day«, and »Chaos the neighbour of God«; and therefore there is reason to »sing in the darkness of sorrow«.

This is the argument. But argument is of little use when it comes to despair. Yet this argument of interdependent contrasts, in fact, is a well-tried cliché of the period: John Keats used it in his »Ode on Melancholy« (1819).[70] Keats connects each positive feeling with its melancholy end. In the spirit of Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), Keats wished his

reader to accept melancholy as a desirable experience: joy and pain are interdependent, and to experience joy fully we must experience sadness or melancholy fully.[71] Melancholy should not be avoided but endured and that would foster the sufferer. Victor Hugo's (1802–1885) aesthetics of the grotesque is built on the same idea: interdependent contrasts lead both life and art.[72]

But within this cliché-argument in Stagnelius, a wink about the power of the »holy Word« is built in. Because of the Biblical allusion, this word could be religious, but since the poet is an »alter Deus« and a »second maker« according to another cliché, it could be profane and poetic as well.[73] In this second case, the Stagnelian poem may also be referring to itself and the consoling power of its own words. This power, in fact, must not always derive from argument or even words, but from artistic devices beyond words and meanings. Yet, according to classical poetics the poetic power must be built into an argumentative structure.

Argument is a rhetorical device that according to classical tradition was supposed to structure all verbal composition even in Stagnelius' romantic period. But in his time, the rhetorical tradition was weakened, and more individualistic literary devices evolved.[74] In Stagnelius, however, we can see how classical and modern traditions meet. If his elegy is consoling, it is not because of its argument, but because of his way of composing it and using the tradition. Further, the way of reading the poem is decisive. The tradition here is not general rhetoric, but that *special* rhetoric that belongs to the tradition of consolation. This is a tradition of reading as well as a tradition of writing.

MODERNIST AND POSTMODERNIST CONSOLATION

With Romanticism, the classic rhetorical tradition was weakened, and the issue of consolation became more complicated. Yet, many earlier topoi survived and a rhetoric of consolation did develop in various directions. When rhetoric returns in the late 20th century at first it is as philosophy. This rhetoric is argumentative, but topical-inventive rather than logical. That is, a central issue is how to construct new concepts.[75] In the light of this it might be relevant with a glimpse of how a few literary theoreticians and philosophers of our days – post the Holocaust catastrophe – have handled the relation between suffering and consolation. In late modernist times, Theodore Adorno (1903–1969) gives expression to a very pessimistic outlook. »There is nothing innocuous left,« he says in his essays *Minima Moralia* (1951), and the only consolation is negating the present state of things, »holding fast to the possibility of what is better«:

> The little pleasures, expressions of life that seemed exempt from the responsibility of thought, not only have

> an element of defiant silliness, of callous refusal to see, but directly serve their diametrical opposite. Even the blossoming tree lies the moment its bloom is seen without the shadow of terror; even the innocent 'How lovely!' becomes an excuse for an existence outrageously unlovely, and there is no longer beauty or consolation except in the gaze falling on horror, withstanding it, and in unalleviated consciousness of negativity holding fast to the possibility of what is better.[76]

Consolation is not in anything given, not even in a blossoming tree, since it is hiding its »shadow of terror,« he argues. Instead consolation should be sought »in the gaze falling on horror,« while simultaneously »withstanding it«. As you can see, Adorno here uses the previous paradigm of interactive opposites, but inverting the mood. To him the traditional consolatory *topos* of the closeness of opposites has turned into a constant threat: darkness is the mother of light, all right, but light in its turn is the mother of darkness, and that is what counts in Adorno's life-world. Thus, there is no other consolation than awareness of this sinister fact and courage to gaze straight upon it, ready to fight it. Not even art in this era of culture industry could or should offer consolation: »The comfort that flows from great works of art lies less in what they express than in the fact that they have managed to struggle out our existence [*Dasein*]. Hope is soonest found among the comfortless.«[77] Yet, this all-encompassing pessimism somehow seems to be its own harsh consolation. This hopeless rhetoric surpasses Stoic heroism, but this excess might seem attractive: no tears but constant criticism and resistance.

Let's finally have a look at postmodernism and consolation. Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) has manifested interest in mourning as well as in the rhetoric of the funeral oration and the obituary. He was educated in the French tradition of classical rhetoric and literature, but his own practice is a personal blending of the two.[78] Here I will comment on a part of his long funeral oration on Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995). Evidently, Levinas was a close friend of Derrida, and here Derrida comments on both the friend and the philosopher. The speech is 'topical-inventive' in the sense mentioned above of trying out new concepts – in this case *adieu* – while at the same time using them in an argumentation.

Derrida starts his speech by hesitating to say *adieu* »before« his now dead friend.[79] But he continues through an argumentative »meditation« on this word, initially asking about who the addressee is. Since the addressee in fact is missing, he is no one and the direct address seems to be nothing but an expression of the end of words. Or perhaps the addressee is the mourning community for whom the address constitutes the

first part of »the work of mourning« – as it is called »in a confused and terrible expression«?[80] This way, the *adieu* that starts the mourning process might also mediate the consolation needed. Yet, mourning is indecent, and consolation out of place, since that directs attention towards the mourning self instead of the deceased Other.[81] This is important, for the funeral is a rite of passage within which the deceased is somehow present. In this short moment, death has not entirely finished its work. The funeral offers the last possibility to speak directly to the deceased.

Therefore, Derrida has another idea of the *adieu*-function, not associated with mourning. His speech is related to the *oeuvre* that the dead friend left behind, reviving his own words, in this case the words of Levinas. This means that death does not »have the last word, or the first one«.[82] According to Derrida, the funeral task is to speak both *to* and *for* the other, *for* the deceased beloved – »before speaking *of* him,« – with *uprightness* or *straightforwardness* [*droiture*]. This is a central concept for Levinas, who called it »stronger than death«.[83] But it is not a »consolation« for death. Uprightness is »absolute self-criticism read in the eyes of the other who is the goal of my uprightness and whose look calls me into question,« Levinas writes in his »Four Talmudic Readings.« Derrida continues the quotation: »It is a movement toward the other […] beyond anxiety« and only in this sense »stronger than death.«[84] Thus, uprightness is more than justness and honesty; it is a deep existential force of human respect, reverence and even awe, a force that takes possession of your entire being in front of the other. This is »ethics before and beyond ontology, the State, or politics, but also ethics beyond ethics.«[85] It is *holiness*, and holy is what the other person truly is. In fact, Derrida tells us, in a private conversation Levinas declared that his main issue was not ethics »but the holy, the holiness of the holy,« especially »the holiness of the Other.«[86] Uprightness is »a Law« in life, and as »stronger than death« it holds even in death.

Uprightness therefore is also connected to the »unlimited responsibility« for the Other that, in Levinas, »exceeds and precedes my freedom« and is my human predicament: »the absolute anteriority of the face of the Other.«[87] This responsibility emerges as a silent call from the naked look of the other's face that you cannot escape, not even in death. It emphasizes the infinite value of the Other in his very otherness. This means that death is an irreplaceable loss with no room for consolation, but it brings a task instead. Death, according to Levinas, is not nothingness but a certain experience for the survivor, Derrida reminds us: it is the experience of »non-response« for the survivor, but therefore also of »*entrusted* responsibility« – for the continuing inner dialogue with the silenced Other.[88] Derrida describes his own still on-going

dialogue with Levinas' work, as well as the kind of musing that Levinas calls »question-prayer« and that »would be anterior to all dialogue«.[89]

Here Derrida gives a hint of the kind of task that the entrusted responsibility after death implies: to keep the dialogue with the Other's oeuvre alive, to care for his memory and rumour, for his after-life in posterity and the spreading of his ideas. This is what he is doing already in this funeral oration. He is not only repeating Levinas' words but also reflecting on them, telling us their great significance, himself being »overwhelmed by gratitude and admiration.«[90] Thus, the funeral oration also is a *eulogy*, an epideictic genre, in fact originally giving birth to funeral orations and obituaries.[91] Derrida refutes consolation, but as we have seen, this idea of after-life in the posterity is a traditional consolatory topos, well-tried since both Homer, Horace and Montaigne. But in Derrida – and perhaps indirectly the Levinas he appeals to – this topos does not refer to a self-generating process but to an active effort and task. Even if Derrida holds the concept of consolation back, it in fact becomes activated in the idea of the »entrusted responsibility« that mediates a task. Doing something for the silenced Other is better than mourning, and, as again Montaigne pointed out (above): by *doing*, the mourning is distracted.

FINAL DISCUSSION

In this article, I have presented some examples of a manifold consolatory tradition with some recurring topoi. The main issue concerning the relation between the rhetoric of texts, literary devices, and the phenomenology of consolation has been processed by my commenting on the different kinds of consolation that various topics, devices and strategies are connected to. As we have seen, the current idea of consolation as emotional relief, mediated by empathy and compassion, is relatively late. The classical tradition of consolation is mainly argumentative and didactic, appealing to the intellect rather than the feelings. This partly depends on the view of the suffering involved. Some earlier authorities regard suffering as a condition to endure and even accept with thankfulness. Others regard suffering as an irrational condition based on a delusion or misunderstanding of the human predicament. Most complex is the discourse on the suffering of melancholy. The span is extensive: from melancholy as a sin (*acedia*), an illness or insanity to a condition of the true genius and the poet as a second creator. In modern and postmodern ethical and philosophical discourses, the idea of an all-embracing suffering tends to take over the possibility or relevance of consolation. Yet, indirectly some relief seems to be mediated by either uncompromising awareness of suffering or an entrusted task.

In sum: suffering is as old as mankind, but ideas of suffering

vary with time and culture. Likewise, also ideas of consolation vary, as well as ideas of the need and relevance of consolation. Yet, some fundamental topoi are recurring. In this diverse context, some final reflections on Stig Dagerman's argument for the insatiable need for consolation might be productive. What does it mean – *insatiable*? Dagerman does not tell. What he seeks is »confirmation that my words have touched the world's heart«, but that is »something I can never have.«[92] Therefore, he argues, his talent is no more than »a consolation for my solitude«, that is no consolation at all, since his talent by *not* touching the world's heart should rather reinforce his solitude. At the same time he sees his individual freedom as the only authentic consolation in the misery of Life. »And so my search for freedom forever enslaves me.«[93] But yearning for freedom and loathing for solitude collide, and that opposition generates more suffering. His suffering, thus, seems existential and an inconsolably melancholy.[94] In this perspective, Dagerman's famous dictum in itself invites pondering.

If indeed insatiable, the melancholy need for consolation might not even be connected to a specified suffering. On the contrary, the need might precede the suffering. If so, the suffering emerges with the consolation and legitimizes the comfort. *Qua* insatiable the need for consolation might even be the suffering itself. This is no paradox but a sign of a similarly insatiable need for acceptance, empathy, closeness, and embodied existential relations. All this the consolatory act may initiate in words or gestures. Thus, the insatiable need for consolation might be a detour directed at fulfilment of this insatiable need for existential closeness – a condition that also threatens the likewise insatiable need for freedom.

Yet, a problem is lurking here. You may feel lonely, but in this world, you are not alone, for better and for worse. You may feel enslaved, but there is always something you, and just you, can do. Remember the unlimited responsibility for the Other that Derrida emphasized in his *Adieu* to Levinas. This responsibility, as said above, emerges as a silent call from the naked look of the other's face that you cannot escape. You are subordinated »to the absolute anteriority of the face of the Other« in Derrida's formulation. If so, you are always enslaved as a human being. This is harsh. In the context of Derrida's Levinas, it means that my insatiable need for consolation is subordinated to yours. Who can live in such self-effacement? Certainly not Stig Dagerman. But maybe an insatiable need for consolation could be converted into an insatiable need for *consoling* the Other. When you forget yourself, you might regain your freedom, finding yourself in the Other, without knowing whom you meet. This is no win-win, but an existential predicament. Fundamentally, our insatiable need for consolation might be not private but a yearning for the Other and our otherness.

ENDNOTES

1 Stig Dagerman: »Vårt behov av tröst« in Olof Lagercrantz (ed.): *Prosa och poesi.* (Stockholm, 1963 [1955]), 285. Trans. as »Our Need for Consolation is Insatiable« by Steven Hartman in *Little Star* 5:5 (2014), 301.

2 See e.g. the Swedish novelist Sven Delblanc in *Prästkappan. En heroisk berättelse* [The Clergyman's Gown. A Heroic Story] (Stockholm, 1963): »Nej, inte sagor. Stjärnbilder. Dessa berättelser är oss givna för att vara oss till hjälp. De hjälper oss att dikta in en mening i vårt kaos. De är varpen där vi kan fästa vår väft av futtighet och kaos, så att ett mönster äntligen träder fram. Ja, för några är de mer än sagor, långt mera. De meddelar en kunskap, en insikt, en tröst kanhända … Ett igenkännande om man så vill« [No, not fairy-tales. Star constellations. These narratives are given to us to be of help. They help us to create a meaning in our chaos. They are the warp where we can attach our weft of futility and chaos, so that a pattern at last will emerge. Yes, for some of us they are more than fairy-tales, much more. They communicate knowledge, an insight, a consolation, perhaps … A recognition if you like.] (84). Also his *Samuels bok* [The Book of Samuel] (Stockholm, 1981): »Sorg är diktens väsen, medkänsla dess uttryck. Lindra livet, trösta döden, tala sanning om vårt elände: detta är skaldens uppdrag. Allt annat är tomt pladder och ett missbruk av diktens heliga gåva.« [Sorrow is the essence of poetry, compassion is its expression. Relieve life, console death, tell the truth of our misery: this is the mission of the poet. Everything else is empty chatter and abuse of the holy gift of poetry.], (269f.). The Romantic poet John Keats was of the same opinion; see Michael E. Holstein: »Keats: The Poet-Healer and the Problem of Pain« in *Keats-Shelley Journal* 36 (1987), 32–49.

3 Ernst Robert Curtius: *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (Ger. orig. 1948), trans. Williard R. Trask (1953), (London & Henley, 1979), 64.

4 Cf. e.g. The Norton Reader Toolbar, »Rhetorical Strategies,« http://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/write/read12/toolbar/set02.aspx, access March 1, 2016.

5 For *addressivity* see Michail M. Bakhtin: »The Problem of Speech Genres« in M. M. Bakhtin: *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, eds. Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin, 1986), 95–99.

6 See George A. Kennedy: *Classical Rhetoric and its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill and London, 1999). Kennedy emphasizes that »Overall, poetics can be regarded as parallel to and overlapping with rhetoric. Both share a concern with style, including word choice, tropes, figures, sentence structure, and rhythm.« (136) On the (modern) opposition between rhetoric and literature, see Michel Beaujour: »Rhetoric and Literature« in Michel Meyer

(ed.): *From Metaphysics to Rhetoric*, Synthese Library, ed. Jaakkko Hintikka, vol. 202 (Dordrecht, Boston, London, 1989), 152–168. Beaujour describes the divorce in terms of the opposition between two cultural systems, built on the inherited and collective on the one hand, and the new and individual on the other (153f.). Yet he argues for the close relationship between the two arts: all literary texts have a rhetorical aspect, just as all rhetorical texts have a literary aspect (152). Without the rhetorical aspect literature would be reduced »to that which is uttered in anguish, verging on the ineffable and the incommunicable.« (155) Rhetoric without literary (poetic) aspects, in its turn, would be dull and dysfunctional (152). Beaujour also emphasizes that »a great portion of the literary production nowadays remains persuasive« but without the writers knowing it. Thus, there is a »'forgetting' of rhetoric« in literature, in spite of a continuing »rhetorical or pararhetorical« practice (156f., 159). This tendency is also evident in the fact that many »contemporary argumentative texts […] acknowledge themselves to be 'literary'« (163). Rhetoric, in fact »is everywhere«! (165) Cf. Anthony J. Cascardi: »Arts of Persuasion and Judgment: Rhetoric and Aesthetics« in Walter Jost and Wendy Olmsted (eds.): *A Companion to Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism*, Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture (Malden, Oxford, Carlton, 2004), 204–310, mainly dealing with Kant's rejecting rhetoric, but also with modern continuations, like rhetorically grounded theories of reader response.

7 On the concept of consolation, cf. Åsa Roxberg *et. al.*: »The Meaning of Consolation as Experienced by Nurses in a Home-Care setting« in *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, no 17.8 (2008), 1080f.

8 Serious depression may include various catatonic states and even stupor, meaning that the patient is stiff and entirely insusceptible to contact: »the patient remains completely mute and immobile, with staring expression, gaze fixed into space, with an apparent complete loss of will, no reaction to sensory stimuli, sometimes with the symptom of waxy flexibility completely developed, as in catalepsy, sometimes of a mild degree, but clearly recognisable,« (Sergio E. Starkstein *et. al.*: »Catatonia in Depression. Prevalence, Clinical Correlates, and Validation of a Scale« in *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery, and Psychiatry* 60:3 [1996], 326; cf. 331).

9 See Astrid Norberg, Monica Bergsten & Berit Lundman: »A Model of Consolation« in *Nursing Ethics* VIII:6 (2000): »a changed perception of the world in suffering persons that will set their suffering 'within a pattern of meaning'« (544f.).

10 For the phenomenological concepts of *horizon* and *life-world*, see H. G. Gadamer: *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., rev. trans. Joel Weinsheimer & Donald G. Marshall (London & New York, 2006 [1975; German orig. 1960]): »The horizon is the

range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. Applying this to the thinking mind, we speak of narrowness of horizon, of the possible expansion of horizon, of the opening up of new horizons, and so.« (301); »To acquire a horizon means that one learns to look beyond what is close at hand – not in order to look away from it but to see it better, within a larger whole and in truer proportion.« (304) The *life-world* is »the world in which we are immersed in the natural attitude that never becomes an object as such for us, but that represents the pregiven basis of all experience. [---] As a horizon phenomenon 'world' is essentially related to subjectivity, and this relation means also that it 'exists in transiency.' The life-world exists in a constant movement of relative validity.« (239)

11 Angus Gowland: »Consolations for Melancholy in Renaissance Humanism« in *Society and Politics* VI:1 (2012), 11f.

12 Manfred Kern: »Consolation Literature« in *Brill's New Pauly*. Antiquity volumes, (eds.) Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider, Brill Online, 2015, Gothenburg University Library, http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/brill-s-new-pauly/consolation-literature-ct-e1410070, access March 10, 2015, section 2 and 3. First appeared online: 2006, first print edition: 2011.

13 Wilhelm Kierdorf: »Consolatio as a Literary Genre« in *Brill's New Pauly*. Gothenburg University Library, http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/brill-s-new-pauly/consolatio-as-a-literary-genre-e619600, access March, 10, 2015, section A.

14 See Curtius: *European Literature*, 69, on consolatory orations as deliberative. Also Kennedy: *Classical Rhetoric*: »A great deal of what is commonly called epideictic oratory is deliberative, written in an epideictic style.« (87f.) For cure, see Anna Carrdus: »Consolation Arguments and Maternal Grief in Seventeenth-Century Verse. The Example of Margarethe Susanna von Kuntschl« in *German Life and Letters* (1994) 47:2: »All consolatory writing follow a medical model, whether explicitly or implicitly, with the roles of patient and physician filled by the bereaved person and a sympathetic comforter.« (136)

15 See e.g. Ps. 94, starting in despair, »O LORD, how long shall the wicked, / how long shall the wicked exult?« (3), describing the atrocities of these evildoers and the sufferings they cause, but finally praising the Lord for his »consolation«, i.e. his promise to »wipe them out for their wickedness« (New Revised standard Version, 23). Thus, the poem simultaneously describes and performs the consoling process.

16 See further Bo Lindberg's article on consolation and Stoicism in this book.

17 Ancius Manlius Severinus Boethius: *Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. Joel C. Reliahan (Indianapolis/Cambridge,

2001), e.g. Book I, Meter 4:13–18, Meter 7:25–30, Book II, Prose 4:18, 21–23.

18 Thomas F. Curley: »The Consolation of Philosophy as a Work of Literature« in *The American Journal of Philology* 108:2 (1987), 343f., 355f.

19 Angus Gowland: »The Problem of Early Modern Melancholy« in *Past & Present*, no 161 (May, 2006), 104: »for Calvin, despair had a necessary and unequivocally positive eschatological function. Properly interpreted, it was a sign of the working of divine providence, part of the punishment preceding redemption that manifested itself in the afflicted conscience.« (cf. 161).

20 »[…] eyn sote honich seim in dem munde vnde eyn sote seyden klangk in den oren, eyn gheystlijk vraude in deme herten, eyn trostlijk hulpe in allen noden, […] eyn hopenunge aller sundere […].« In Margarete Schmitt (hg.): *Der grosse Seelentrost. Ein niederdeutsches Erbauungsbuch des vierzehnten Jahres* [The Great Consolation for the Soul. A Low-German Religious Tract of the 1400s], Niederdeutsche Studien, hg. William Foerste, Band 5 (Köln, Graz, 1959), 44f.

21 See Gowland: »The Problem,« 104.

22 See Birgit Stolt: »Joy, Love, and Trust. Basic Ingredients in Martin Luther's Theology of the Faith of the Heart«, Luther Colloquy Lectures 2001, October 31, 2001, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, http://www.soundshoremedia.com/joy-love-and-trust-basic-ingredients-in-luthers-theology-of-the-faith-of-the-heart-by-birgit-stolt/, access Febr. 20, 2014.

23 Gowland: »The Problem,« 18, 106.

24 Gowland: »Consolations,« 15. »godly sorrow for sin« is Gowland's wording, although »for sin« is not literally included in the Latin formula.

25 Gowland: »Consolations,« 15.

26 Gowland: »Consolations,« 16.

27 Gowland: »Consolations,« 12.

28 Gowland: »Consolations,« 11.

29 Gowland: »Consolations,« 13.

30 Brenda Deen Schildgen: »Boethius and the Consolation of Literature in Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*« in Leonard Michael Koff & Brenda Deen Schildgen (eds.): *Decameron and the Canterbury Tales: New Essays on an Old Question* (Cranbury, London & Ontario, 2000), 115–121.

31 Se e.g. Starkstein et al.: »Catatonia in Depression«, 326, 326; cf. note 8 above.

32 Gowland: »The Problem,« 83f.

33 See Stanley W. Jackson: »Acedia the Sin and Its Relationship to Sorrow and Melancholia« in Arthur Kleinman & Byron Good (eds.), *Culture and Depression. Studies in the Anthropology and Cross-Cultural Psychiatry of Affect and Disorder* (London, 1985), 44, 54.

34 Jackson: »Acedia,« 45; also 54.

35 Jackson: »Acedia,« 51.

36 Jackson: »Acedia,« 53.

37 Jackson: »Acedia,« 55, 56.

38 Gowland: »The Problem,« 103. Emphasized also in Jackson: »Acedia,« 58.

39 Gowland: »The Problem,« 102.

40 Jean Starobinski: *A History of the Treatment of Melancholy from Earliest Times to 1900* (Basle, 1962), 38.

41 Gowland: »Consolations,« 17.

42 Gowland: »Consolations,« 11.

43 Gowland: »Consolations,« 18.

44 Gowland: »Consolations,« 27.

45 See Kennedy: *Classical Rhetoric*, chapter »Rhetoric in Homeric Poems,« 5–12. Kennedy emphasizes Homer's rhetorical strategies as anticipating the classic system of rhetoric: »Many devices of invention, arrangement, and style were clearly in use long before they were identified and named.« (11; also 8 on consolation)

46 See Sabine Föllinger: »Tears and Crying in Archaic Greek Poetry (especially Homer)« in Thorsten Fögen (ed.): *Tears in the Greco-Roman World* (Berlin, 2009), 25–27.

47 Homer: *The Iliad*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York, Toronto & London, 1990), verses 610–612, 644–645, 707. See commentary in Malcolm Davies: »'Self-Consolation' in the *Iliad*« in *Classical Quarterly* 56.2 (2006), 583.

48 See the expanded discussion in Roland Baumgarten: »Dangerous tears? Platonic Provocations and Aristotelic Answers« in *Tears in the Greco-Roman World*, 102.

49 See Pantelia: »Helen,« 23–26, on the function of the Greek funeral ritual.

50 Homer: *The Iliad*: verses 590–591. See further commentary on this Greek mentality (*oiktos* and *eleos*) by Mary Scott: »Pity and Pathos in Homer« in *Acta Classica* 22 (1980), 7f., 11f.

51 See further analysis in R. B. Rutherford: »Form and Feeling in the Iliad« in *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 102 (1982), 158.

52 Boccaccio's idea of the passion of love as the main suffering in need of consolation derives from Ovid's foreword to his *Amores*, according to Robert Hollander: »The Decameron Proem« in Elissa B. Weaver (ed.): *The Decameron. First Day in Perspective* (Toronto, 2004), 15f. Hollander argues that Boccaccio's Proem closely imitates the consoling and curing role of Ovid's rhetorical subject (19–22). In fact, she points out, Boccacio's aim is medical rather than moral – a point connecting to my discussion of medical aspects of consolation in other parts of this article.

53 Giovanni Boccaccio: *The Decameron*, trans. J. M. Rigg, Vol. I (London 1903 [1353]), 1. The Italian words derive from V. Branca's critical Einaudi edition (1992). See the Decameron

Web, http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/dweb/texts/, access July 7, 2015. Thanks to Ph.D. Ulla Åkerström, Gothenburg University, for professional help with the Italian text.

54 Boccaccio: *Decameron*, 2.

55 Boccaccio: *Decameron*, 2.

56 Boccaccio: *Decameron*, 3.

57 See Nancy Worman: »Fighting Words: Verbal Contest in Archaic Poetry« in Erik Gunderson (ed.): *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Rhetoric* (New York, 2009), 30. See also Pier Massimo Forni: *Adventures in Speech. Rhetoric and Narration in Boccaccio's Decamerone* (Philadelphia, 1996), 5, on Boccaccio here »following the norms of ancient and medieval rhetoric and poetics« in coupling »*docere* with *delectare*.« – »A didactic, eudaimonistic program informs the project [*Decameron*]«, Forni contends; it is »a book that will address serious concerns with the intention of bettering the mental state of its readers.«

58 Michel de Montaigne: »On Diversion« in *The Complete Essays*, Book III, no 4, in M. A. Screech (ed. and trans.): *The Complete Essays* (London 2003 [1987]). Cf. the original French, esp. the phrase »Tousjours la variation soulage, dissout et dissipe« in *Les Essais*, the Bordeaux Copy, ed. P. Villey & Verdun L. Saulnier, p. 836, »The Montaigne Project,« http://artflsrv02.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/getobject.pl?c.0:4:3.montaigne, access March 11, 2015.

59 Montaigne: »That to Philosophize is to learn how to die« in *The Complete Essays*, Book I, no 20. Cf. *Les Essais*, the Villey-Saulnier edition, p. 83, http://artflsrv02.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/getobject.pl?c.0:2:20.montaigne, access March 14, 2015.

60 Cf. *Les Essais*, the Villey-Saulnier edition, Book I, No. 20, p. 86.

61 Dorothea B. Heitsch: »Approaching Death by Writing: Montaigne's Essays and the Literature of Consolation« in *Literature and Medicine* 19:1 (2000), 97.

62 Heitsch: »Approaching Death,« 97, 101–103.

63 Montaigne immediately adds: »I most heartily give in to so pleasant and favourable an opinion, which is innate in us, without a curious inquiry into the how or the wherefore.« See Montaigne: »The Letters of Montaigne, IV« to Monsieur de Mesmes, Lord of Roissy and Malassize, Privy Councillor to the King in *Works of Michel de Montaigne*, IV, trans. W. Hazlitt, ed. O. W. Wight, rev. ed. (New York, 1864 [1859]), 484. Cf the French original in *Essais de Michel de Montaigne avec des notes* (Paris, 1834), 675. Cf. also Montaigne's criticism of the same idea in e.g. »On not sharing One's Fame« in *The Complete Essays*, Book I, no 41.

64 Montaigne: »On Diversion« in *The Complete Essays*, Book III, no 4. Cf. *Les Essais*, the Villey-Saulnier edition, p. 834.

65 Horace: *The Odes of Horace*, Book III.30, trans. John Conington, The Latin Library, http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/Horace_Odes/a/Book-III-30-Of-The-Odes-And-Carmen-Saeculare-Of-Horace.htm, access March 2, 2014.

66 Maria C. Pantelia: »Helen and the Last Song for Hector« in *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 132:1 (2002), 26.

67 See e.g. Arnold Ages: »Diderot, Falconet and the Theology of Art: The Testimony of the Correspondence« in *Orbis Litterarum* 45 (1990), 214.

68 The Swedish original in Erik Johan Stagnelius: *Samlade skrifter. Andra delen. Lyriska dikter efter tiden omkring 1818. Liljor i Saron*, ed. Fredrik Böök (Malmö, 1957 [1913]), 54:

Vän! I förödelsens stund, när ditt inre af mörker betäckes,
När i ett afgrundsdjup minne och aning förgå,
Tanken famlar försagd bland skuggestalter och irrbloss,
Hjertat ej sucka kan, ögat ej gråta förmår;
När från din nattomtöcknade själ eldvingarne falla,
Och du till intet, med skräck, känner dig sjunka på nytt,
Säg, hvem räddar dig då? – Hvem är den vänliga ängel,
Som åt ditt inre ger ordning och skönhet igen,
Bygger på nytt din störtade verld, uppreser det fallna
Altaret, tändande der flamman med presterlig hand? –
Endast det mägtiga Väsen, som först ur den eviga natten
Kysste serafen till lif, solarne väckte till dans.
Endast det heliga Ord, som ropte åt verldarne: »Blifven!«
Och i hvars lefvande kraft verldarne röras ännu.
Därföre gläds, o vän, och sjung i bedröfvelsens mörker:
Natten är dagens mor, Kaos är granne med Gud.

69 Trans. Bill Coyle (but somewhat improved by me, BA) in *First Things*, May 2003, http://www.firstthings.com/article/2003/05/friend-in-the-desolate-time, access May 16, 2014. Cf. John Swedenmark's literal translation, independent of meter and rhythm, in Stephen Prickett & Simon Haines (eds.): *European Romanticism: A Reader* (London, 2010), 423.

70 John Keats: »Ode on Melancholy«: »Ay, in the very temple of Delight / Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine« (in Jim Manor [ed.]: *Keats' Poetry: 4 Books* [Pennsylvania, 2012]), 314, www2.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/keats/keats6x9.pdf, access Febr. 20, 2014.

71 »There emerges from the clash of opposites an implicitly equal valuation of positive and negative,« according to Jeffrey Baker: »Nightingale and Melancholy« in Harold Bloom (ed.): *John Keats: Updated Edition* (New York, 2007), 63. In Burton, »everything in this shadowy world could be seen as an inversion of the luminous world beyond«, according to Angus Gowland: »Consolations,« 28.

72 Victor Hugo: »Preface to Cromwell« in E. H. & A, M. Blackmore (ed. & trans.), *The Essential Victor Hugo* (Oxford, 2004), 23f., 27f.

73 See E. N. Tigerstedt: »The Poet as Creator: Origins of a Metaphor« in *Comparative Literature Studies* 5:4 (1968), 455–488.

74 T. V. F. Brogan: »Rhetoric and Poetry« in Alex Preminger & T. V. F. Brogan (eds.), *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1993), 1049f.

75 See also James Crosswhite: »Rhetoric in the Wilderness. The Deep Rhetoric of the Late Twentieth Century« in Walter Jost and Wendy Olmsted (eds.): *A Companion to Rhetoric*, 373, 374, and 375.

76 Theodore Adorno: *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London & New York, 2005 [Ger. Orig. 1974]), §5, p. 25.

77 Adorno: *Minima Moralia*, §143, p. 223.

78 Kennedy: *Classical Rhetoric* describes Derrida as »a powerful thinker, well versed in classical Greek language, literature, and rhetoric.« (298)

79 Jacques Derrida: »Adieu« in Pascale-Anne Brault & Michael Naas (eds. & trans.), *The Work of Mourning* (Chicago & London, 2001 [Fr. orig. 1995]), 200.

80 Derrida: »Adieu,« 200.

81 Derrida: »Adieu,« 200.

82 Derrida, »Adieu,« 201.

83 Derrida: »Adieu,« 200f. Since my task is not exegesis of Levinas, my comments below keep to Derrida's exposition of Levinas without corrections.

84 Quoted by Derrida in »Adieu,« 201.

85 Derrida: »Adieu,« 202.

86 Derrida: »Adieu,« 202.

87 Derrida: »Adieu,« 202.

88 Derrida: »Adieu,« 203.

89 Derrida: »Adieu,« 204, 206, 209.

90 Derrida: »Adieu,« 206.

91 Kennedy: *Classical Rhetoric*, 87.

92 Dagerman, trans. Hartman: »Our Need,« 303.

93 Dagerman, trans. Hartman: »Our Need,« 304.

94 For Dagerman's melancholy and depression from an existential analytic point of view, see Johan Cullberg: *Skapar-kriser: Strindbergs inferno och Dagermans* [Crises of Creation: Strindberg's and Dagerman's Inferno] (Stockholm, 1994 [1992]).

Clemens Cavallin, »Consolations of a New Earth«

ABSTRACT

In a marginalized group, personal suffering is inescapably united to excluding social and political structures and situations. To provide consolation to an individual then also involves showing a way of how the group can escape its painful predicament, which in early Christianity took the form of an end times confrontation between good and evil; and the emergence of new heavens and a new earth. In science fiction literature, a variant on this theme of cosmic regeneration is the escape to an earth-like planet with the help of an interstellar space ship. An interesting recent case of such an offer of consolation in outer space is the novel, *Voyage to Alpha Centauri,* by Michael O'Brien, a contemporary Canadian author. The story is a commentary on the marginalization of traditional, especially Catholic, Christianity, and the growing strength of a liberal secular order.

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Keywords: science fiction, Catholicism, New Earth and New Heavens, escatology

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Clemens Cavallin

CONSOLATIONS OF A NEW EARTH: The Benefits of Science fiction for Christian Imagination

THE REDEMPTION OF BODY AND WORLD

In a marginalized group, personal suffering is intrinsically united to particular social and political structures and situations. To provide consolation to an individual then also involves showing a way of how the group can escape its painful predicament, or at least includes indicating how he or she can create a stable *modus vivendi* in the midst of it all. Contemporary Christians in Mosul or Palestinians on the Gaza strip experience their individual sufferings also on a social level. Of course, this is not equally true of all sufferings or discomforts, but when marginalization and deprivation is severe few of the more serious causes of individual pain are without connection to this basic social distress.

In such situations, religions offer some particular solutions and consolations. In the midst of persecutions and martyrdom, the belief in a Hereafter directs the attention to a permanent shelter, which no sorrow can reach. The roadmap for the individual is then to proceed from the Church militant on earth to the Church triumphant of eternal beatitude. In contrast, a secular political or psychological solution has to focus on achieving a better situation here and now; and cannot refer the citizens to such a transcendent bliss.

Despite the proclivity for supernatural solutions, most religions are not so otherworldly that they leave the terrestrial societies free to form themselves at their own discretion, but include, if not a way to redeem human social life, then at least an ideal order to which society ought to adhere; for example, the Torah, Sharia or Dharma. Such a set of rules and role models function as a blueprint also for political action, including the revolutionary type as in contemporary militant Islamist movements such as ISIS.

In Christianity, in contrast to, for example, Hinduism and Buddhism, material reality is to be redeemed, not merely left behind by the one who has achieved enlightenment.[1] This comes to the fore in the notion of the resurrection of the material body, which implies an idea of the human person as consisting of a unity of matter and spirit. In, for example, The Letter of Paul to the Romans, we can see how the author con-

nects this idea of the redemption of the individual body to the fate of the whole of creation.

> We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now, and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.[2]

In traditional Christian cosmology, God thus redeems the whole of the material realm at the end of times; that is, through a kind of re-creation it is made perfect again. The Book of Revelation describes this as the appearance of a new heaven and a new earth:

> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away; and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying.

> See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.[3]

It is important for the theme of this article to note how God according to these Biblical texts consoles the faithful in connection with the recreation of cosmos. The text addresses humanity primarily on a social level, as the New Jerusalem, as a *polis*, and not as discrete individuals – though the tears are signs of personal sufferings. When this is combined with a postmillennial interpretation of the Book of Revelation, according to which human agency gradually perfects the earth, it can lead to an emphasis on mainly political action.[4] In the Catechism of the Catholic Church, on the other hand, it is maintained that this renewal of the material world only comes after a most serious crisis for humanity and the Church. The final fulfilment of the eschatological hope is described as due to divine agency acting even in opposition to the main direction of human societies at that time.[5]

The idea of an end of history, according to which salvation encompasses also the material ever changing world, can be compared with Hinduism and Buddhism that operate within a cosmological framework of ages, which proceeds from the ideal to the increasingly worse, until, after a final destruction of the whole of cosmos, or only a part of it: the cycle begins again. An

individual achieves permanent salvation only by escaping reincarnation into this vicious cosmic circle.[6]

Furthermore, one more consequence of the radical transcending of material reality in Indian religions, at least in most of their philosophical formulations, is a peculiar relation between individuality and collectivity in the ultimate redeemed condition.[7] In both the Hindu philosophical schools of Samkhya and Advaita Vedanta, the spirit loses all individuality; as there is no material, individuating factor left after final liberation. All souls are completely alike; they constitute a perfectly pure consciousness. In Advaita this has the consequence that there is really only one spirit; and in Samkhya, which upholds a multitude of spirits, their essential identity makes it very difficult to imagine their interrelationship.[8]

By this comparison, we can understand that the Christian idea of the resurrection of the body and of the cosmos provides its understanding of the end of history with both a marked individual and social character. It was this basic issue of personality and individuation that led Thomas Aquinas to consider each angel as a unique species, as they have no material bodies.[9] The material body, at least, in such an Aristotelian metaphysics, is a prerequisite for individuality, and consequently necessary for the idea of a human society after the redemption of the cosmos.[10]

The comparison with the ideal state of the perfect consciousness in classical Hindu philosophy provides us with an insight into an alternative vision of salvation; it is illustrative that the final destiny of the yoga practitioner, according to the yoga sūtras, is named *kaivalya*, isolation.[11]

In the eschatology put forward in the Book of Revelation, the persecuted flock of the faithful can, after a series of very intense sufferings, plagues, persecutions and catastrophes, enter a resurrected cosmos. This means that when the worldly situation for committed Christians seriously deteriorates, it is natural for them, at least for those aware of the biblical eschatological narrative, to think that now we perhaps live in the end times and that there is hope for an imminent solution. In an American Evangelical context, the astonishing success of the Left Behind-series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins (1995–2007) is a clear sign that an apocalyptic understanding of contemporary events is striking a chord with a large number of Christians.[12]

SPACE TRAVEL AND A NEW EARTH

In science fiction literature, a variant on the theme of cosmic regeneration is the escape by space travel to a new earth. The dream is to find a hospitable exoplanet circling a sun in a galaxy not too far away from us. This idea, however, is no longer only a theme in fiction, as astronomers are actively

searching for earth-like planets and maintain that they have actually already found some which are similar to Earth, at least when it comes to mass and distance from their suns.[13]

If we would find a Twin Earth in a natural and welcoming condition, humanity could start all over again. This is similar to the fantasy of being shipwrecked on a paradise island in the Pacific Ocean and thus forced by circumstances to restart civilization as in the Robinson Crusoe novel.[14] In the will to let society begin again, to have a fresh start, this fantasy is similar to and at the same time different from the French and Russian Revolutions, which tried to violently destroy the *ancien régime* and to create a new society and a new type of human person from a clean but bloody slate. On another planet, as on the paradise island, we could just start all over again without any need for guillotines.

However, such a dream presupposes that the human persons colonizing the new planet do not carry with them seeds of the destructive forces that produced suffering on Earth in the first place. In Christian terminology, it becomes a question of original sin and its consequences.[15]

The idea of leaving the present society altogether due to religious persecutions and going to a new world was, for example, a strong motivating factor in the colonization of America. However, when the new world is already inhabited, the creation of a new society presents moral dilemmas, as brought to the big screen in the popular movie *Avatar*, in which the planet Pandora with its inhabitants is almost destroyed by greedy capitalists from Earth.[16]

The notion of leaving for a new start in the form provided by space travel also opens up interesting possibilities for Christians to think about the end times and about consolation in the face of suffering brought about through marginalization and persecution. The basic idea is a longstanding one, that is, not to stay and act as leaven invigorating the pagan or secular society, but to leave and found a new city, the New Jerusalem. In the Old Testament, this option is powerfully described in the stories of the flight of Abraham from Sodom and Gomorrah before these cities are destroyed; or the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and their long travel to the Promised Land.

Interstellar space travel opens up interesting new ways to imagine such a modern Exodus. No longer is there a need for the Promised Land to be a place on this Earth; nor do the new heavens and the new earth have to be *this* earth transfigured.

C S Lewis explored these potentialities in his space trilogy (1951–55), where Mars and Venus are inhabited planets with intelligent creatures not touched by original sin. The planet Earth is though the »silent planet« due to its fallen nature.[17] On the other hand, the Swedish author Harry Martinson described a dystopian variant in his space-epos *Aniara* (1956): in which a

spaceship, leaving the destroyed Earth for Mars and Venus, by accident deviates from its course and runs out of control, continuing its journey into the unknown, without goal or end.[18]

Advances in astronomy make the setting of such a fictional theme in our own solar system not plausible anymore, and the author needs to place the earthlike planet much farther away, perhaps in a different galaxy even. Despite travel to such a planet is not technologically possible at present, it is not impossible in principle, yet such a journey would take a very long time.

Though the present article focuses on fictional writing, we have to mention that also within Christian theology there are attempts at reconciling the cosmos as explored by modern science with Christian eschatology. However, there has been a lack of interest in the question, as David Wilkinson in his book *Christian Eschatology and the Physical Universe* remarks »this lack of consideration of the end of the Physical Universe is a serious problem for theology. However much we want to stress the goodness of creation, we need to think seriously about the end.«[19] As the secular imagination seems to dwell increasingly on post-apocalyptic imagery, we should expect this to change, and, of course, Wilkinson's work is part of such a tendency.

VOYAGE TO ALPHA CENTAURI

An interesting recent case of a combination of a critique of modernity and the offer of consolation in outer space is the latest novel of Michael O'Brien, a contemporary Catholic Canadian writer, best known for his series *Children of the Last Days* in which the end-times clearly take place on this Earth. In one of those novels, for example, the Canadian wilderness in the North functions as a refuge for social regeneration.[20] In *Voyage to Alpha Centauri*, on the other hand, he takes on the science fiction genre for the first time.[21] He describes the Earth as a secular dystopian society with no room for religion, managed by a totalitarian world regime, which is also in charge on the large spaceship, The *Kosmos*, on its way to the newly discovered planet, named *Nova*. A small group of passengers only slowly discovers the secret on board control and surveillance system; later, the reader understands that many of these more attentive space travelers are part of a Christian underground movement on the ship, which includes even a clandestine bishop. This is a result of that the underground church on Earth was transplanted to the ship without the knowledge of the authorities. The long journey to the Alpha Centauri star system, is described through the journal of the agnostic scientist Neil de Hoyos, who despite his lack of faith had a Catholic upbringing in poor circumstances in New Mexico.

The ideal society planned to be created on the new earth, is firmly under the control of the secular powers, with a sinister

secret police operating beneath the surface, but, of course, the Christian underground has its ideas of how to use this unprecedented opportunity as well. The confrontation of Hoyos with the authorities on board provides the basic plot until the arrival at the planet, but O'Brien weaves into it conversations with other passengers on many topics that together make up a mosaic of various reflections on Western Civilization. Through the influence of his friends and through emerging memories from his childhood, Hoyos slowly moves toward an increased appreciation of the Christian religion. Nevertheless, even toward the end of the novel, he keeps his skeptical stance:

> »Where was God when Xue was burned to death and shattered on the pavement?«
> »He was with him … and in him.«
> I frowned thinking to myself that his theology or philosophy was a version of the endless variety of consolations humans clutch onto when the unthinkable occurs. I had mine, he had his.[22]

However, in the end through the sudden and unexpected reconnection to a central childhood memory, when faced with the seemingly unavoidable fact that the ship will crash into Earth, Hoyos goes through a conversion experience, on the very last pages of the journal.[23] That is, in the face of Death, perspectives change.

After the discovery of a larger cosmos than that of the medieval period – thus opening up a dizzying seemingly infinite vista containing a multitude of earthlike planets – one crucial question for Christian theology is the significance of possible intelligent beings on such a planet for the salvation economy. Did Christ die for them too? Did original sin afflict them or do they still live in so many gardens of Eden? If they do, would not the arrival of earthlings only destroy this part of paradise as well? This is parallel to the discovery of new continents in the 15th century and the decisions made about the status of those living there. Were they even human beings? These new questions, which arise in the interaction between modern scientific cosmology and Christian theology, has prompted the theologian Ted Peters to propose a new field, that of astrotheology, which mainly is a theological reflection on the findings of astrobiology.[24] The ethical dilemmas when confronting new intelligent species even requires, according to Peters, its own discipline; that of astroethics.[25]

O'Brien in a first stage makes the new earth appear to be uninhabited, which thus for a Christian understanding merely puts it on the same level as the discovery of a new island in the Pacific ocean on which no human being before has set foot. As the narrative develops, however, remnants of an ancient

civilization are uncovered, which raises the above mentioned astrotheological questions. Nevertheless, O'Brien introduces a plot twist, which defuses this question, when Hoyos reports the discovery that the ancient inhabitants of the new earth actually were antediluvian human beings from Earth, who came before the flood to this planet, but due to their radical *thanatos* drive their civilization eventually died out.

The ancient space travelers brought with them to this paradise snakes that kill some of the crew of the *Kosmos*; the snakes make up a clearly spiritually invasive species, as no other animals on the planet seem to be carnivores, or even aggressive. Though the ruling ideology of the space ship and on earth is clearly materialist, O'Brien hints in his novel that there is a strange preference for the occult in modernity: a kind of Faustian bargain. On this new earth, when the space travelers have discovered the ancient pagan culture that relied on human sacrifices on a massive scale, they thus create new rituals that symbolically connect back to the antediluvian civilization.[26]

Nonetheless, the ancient earthlings had made a huge trap for the space travelers, which in the end destroyed a large part of the company. The surviving rest had to return quickly to Earth. At the same time, a group from the underground movement managed to smuggle themselves onto the planet and stay there to build a new society on Christian foundations. Tragically, the space ship with the other survivors never reaches earth but returns to orbit Nova until all its passengers die.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

In one way, the novel *Voyage to Alpha Centauri* by Michael O'Brien is a commentary on the present marginalization of traditional Christianity, primarily in the west, and the growing strength of a liberal secular order. Such an analysis and the prospect of a total victory for a new atheist totalitarian world order, with nonetheless some neopagan affinities – in which Christianity has been forced to move underground – is obviously not in itself a piece of consolation. Far from it: this part of the narrative is a dystopian reflection on the road we are now travelling. However, the idea of a new earth, of a new beginning, in which modernity, even in its technological aspects, is undone, holds out a particular form of consolation. We can see similar ideals of a return to simplicity in the Old Order Amish or in the environmental movement.

A Christianity that has lost its belief in eschatology cannot provide consolation in the form of a divine re-creation. The alternatives are then primarily social work in combination with political action or interior piety. However, the first without a notion of sacred history increases secularization, as of course God becomes a Laplacian hypothesis of no consequence. Moreover, the second option of interior spirituality and indi-

vidual transition to eternal life does not really address the social situation, which is the main cause of suffering.

Eschatology in the sense of sacred history is thus crucial for consolation when the Christian way of life and even existence as a group is in danger, as in Mosul in 2014, or in the Roman empire of the first two centuries. A New Earth is part of the futurology of traditional Christianity and stands in marked contrast to religions that see salvation solely in the form of individual spiritual liberation, or those millenarian movements that believe that through human agency we can actually create a perfect society.

My interpretation of O'Brien's use of space travel to a new earth is that it constitutes an attempt to both imagine what an exodus from modernity could look like and how the eschatological idea of the recreation of the cosmos can be presented within the limits of the modern cosmos. In this way, the dichotomy between the alternatives of being *in* the world and not being *of* it,[27] or to create a small world within the larger society is transcended. Not merely the world, but also the earth is left behind.

Perhaps such an exercise in utopology[28] is a fruitful way to think through the rapidly changing social milieu of traditional Christianity. In Europe, the decoupling of national identities (mediated through ethnically related religiosity) from the old Christian churches is continuing as an unrelenting juggernaut, seemingly impossible to stop. The logical result of such a development is the reduction of former national churches to small religious associations with little impact on the political or cultural scene. The situation right now for these ethnic churches is like giant balloons with a thin skin, but without much substance within, maintained primarily through state subsidies or the taxation of passive members. The situation in, for example, Lutheran Sweden and Catholic France or Italy is similar though of course different in many ways. When these churches will have to rely solely on the active contributions of their committed members, which presently is not above 10% and shrinking, these balloons will burst and there will be an acute demand for consolation and rethinking of the relation between church and state. Perhaps a sojourn on the *Kosmos* will then be a fruitful means to meet this new social and cultural reality.

ENDNOTES

1 At the same time, Hinduism is very much a religion of the law in meticulously regulating individual behavior, but its notion of salvation transcends such regulations, epitomized by the ascetic who leaves society for a single-minded focus on spiritual salvation. This ideal of renunciation exists in a fruitful tension with the ideal of dharmic life in society. See, e.g., Patrick Olivelle: *Saṃnyāsa Upaniṣads: Hindu scriptures on asceticism and renunciation* (New York, 1992), 78–81.

2 The Letter of Paul to the Romans, 8:22–23. *The New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition: Anglicized Text* (London, 2005). For an overview of the development of the understanding of the resurrection of the body until the 14th century see Caroline Bynum: *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200 – 1336* (New York, 1995).

3 The Revelation to John, 21:1–4. *The New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition.*

4 The point of departure during the 20th century seems to be Jürgen Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* which appeared in English in 1967. For a discussion see, Stephen Webb: »Eschatology and Politics« in Jerry Walls (ed.): *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology* (Oxford, 2008), 500–517 and Jakob Wirén: *Hope and otherness, Christian eschatology in an interreligious context* (Lund, 2013), 110–124.

5 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London, 1994), 238f.

6 See, for example, Karl Potter's discussion of Karma and liberation in Indian philosophy, Karl Potter: »The karma theory and its interpretation in some Indian philosophical systems« in Wendy Doniger (ed.): *Karma and rebirth in classical Indian traditions*, Indian ed. (Delhi, 1983), 241–267. There is though a wide variety on this theme within Hinduism and Buddhism. For example, in Mahayana Buddhism, the idea of Heavenly Pure Lands of Buddhas comes into soteriological focus; and with the bhakti movement in Hinduism the perfect state of bliss is also directed to the heaven of a particular God. However, the belief in transmigration makes a particular body merely a temporary dwelling of the body or the karmic process. See, for example, James Foard, Michael Solomon, and Richard K. Payne (ed.): *The Pure Land Tradition, History and Development* (Freemont, 1996) and David Knipe: »Hindu Eschatology« in Jerry Walls (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology* (Oxford, 2008), 170–190.

7 With the increasing importance and influence of bhakti to a personal god in India, the distinction between god and devotee was emphasized. See, for example, the theology of Ramanuja (12th century), in which the souls are even given new bodies in the redeemed condition. Jan Brzezinski: »Rāmānuja« in Edward Craig (ed.) *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London, 1998), 42–44.

8 For a presentation of the Samkhya philosophical system see Gerald James Larson: *Classical Sāṃkhya: an interpretation of its history and meaning*, 2. rev. ed. (Delhi, 1979); and for Advaita Vedanta, Karl H. Potter (ed.): *Advaita Vedānta up to Śaṃkara and his pupils* (Princeton, 1981).

9 F. C. Coplestone: *Aquinas* (London, 1955), 95.

10 Nevertheless, the problem presents itself again between the point of time when a person dies and when he or she is reunited with the body. Are there, thus, no individuals

in the heavenly state, that is, until the resurrection of the dead, which the Averroists claimed? Aquinas solves this by maintaining that the souls retain a special kind of quality of informing a body, and thus individuality, while the Scotists claimed that the souls was an individual by itself, by having a special this-ness. Udo Thiel: *The Early Modern Subject: Self-Consciousness and Personal Identity from Descartes to Hume* (Oxford, 2011), 19–21.

11 For example, Yoga sūtra 4.26. Georg Feuerstein: The Yoga-Sūtra of Patañjali (Adyar, 1979).

12 This has of course generated a substantial body of scholarly reflection see, for example,

Amy Johnson Frykholm: *Rapture culture: Left Behind in Evangelical America* (New York, Oxford, 2004); Mervyn F. Bendle: »The Apocalyptic Imagination and popular culture« in *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 11 (2005); Tom Doyle: »Christian apocalyptic fiction« Strange Horizons (2002); Christopher McMahon, »Imaginative faith: Apocalyptic, Science Fiction theory, and theology«, in *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 47:3 (2008). For an overview see Lorenzo DiTommaso: »Apocalypticism and popular culture« in Oxford Handbooks Online. 7 Jan. 2015. DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199856497.013.028.

13 See, for example, the SETI project: www.seti.org, or www.space.com/19157-billions-earth-size-alien-planets-aas221.html.

14 It is interesting that Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) is the only novel to be read by children before the age of twelve according to Rousseau in his *Emile: or, on education*. Jean-Jacques Rousseau: *Émile, ou De l'éducation* (Amsterdam, 1762).

15 Cf. William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies* (1954). For an attempt to interpret the plot as influenced by Egyptian mythology see John Fitzgerald and John Kayser: »Golding's 'Lord of the Flies': Pride as original sin« in *Studies in the novel* 24.1 (1992), 78–88.

16 Bron Taylor (ed.) *Avatar and nature spirituality* (Waterloo, 2013).

17 C. S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet* (London, 1956[1952]); C. S. Lewis, *Perelandra* (London, 1951); C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* (London, 1955). For a look at the Science Fiction genre and the connections to religion, see Paul Nahin: *Holy sci-fi! Where science fiction and religion intersect* (New York, 2014); James McGrath (ed.): *Religion and Science Fiction* (Cambridge, 2012).

18 Harry Martinson: *Aniara. En revy om människan i tid och rum* (Stockholm, 1956); *Aniara: a Review of man in time and space* (Södra Sandby, 1991).

19 David Wilkinson: *Christian Eschatology and the Physical Universe* (London, 2010), 26.

20 Michael D. O’Brien: *Eclipse of the Sun* (San Francisco, 1998).

21 Michael D. O’Brien: *Voyage to Alpha Centauri* (San Francisco, 2013).

22 O’Brien: *Voyage to Alpha Centauri*, 485.

23 O’Brien: *Voyage to Alpha Centauri*, 534–25.

24 Ted Peters: »Astrotheology: a constructive proposal« *Zygon* 49 (2014).

25 Ted Peters: »Astroethics: Engaging Extraterrestrial Intelligent Life-Forms.« in Chris Impey, Anna Spitz, and William Stoeger (eds.): *Encountering Life in the Universe* (Tucson, 2013), 200–21.

26 See especially the dance described on page 418 in O’Brien: *Voyage to Alpha Centauri*.

27 John 17:15–16. *The New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition*

28 If someone thought that I mischievously had created a neologism, I would like to point out that there are actually courses in utopology, see www.yorku.ca/gradhuma/courses/Utopology.htm.

Dag Hedman, »Consolation in Christian Heinrich Postel's Biblical Opera Libretto«

ABSTRACT

This essay discusses the prominence of the consolation theme in Christian Heinrich Postel's biblical opera libretto *Cain und Abel Oder Der verzweifelnde Bruder=Mörder* (Hamburg, 1689). It is shown that in this drama the theme is relevant not only to the persons in the drama, but to the audience as well. This result stands in contrast to earlier research, which incorrectly has pointed out different other subjects as the main themes of the opera.

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Keywords: Consolation, Christian Heinrich Postel, Cain and Abel, libretto, Hamburg

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CONSOLATION IN CHRISTIAN HEINRICH POSTEL'S BIBLICAL OPERA LIBRETTO CAIN UND ABEL ODER DER VERZWEIFELNDE BRUDER=MÖRDER (1689)[1]

»The story of Cain-Abel is beset by guilt and moral concern; its arena of debate addresses the rightness of actions and finally the legitimation of the self.«[2] This may not automatically sound like the perfect story for an opera libretto. So why did the directors of the Hamburgische Schauplatz am Gänsemarkt commission Christian Heinrich Postel (1658–1705) to write an opera on a theme as depressing as this, and why opt for an Old Testament theme anyway in a place that most people automatically associate with pleasure and recreation? How was it possible that a Biblical opera – a genre closely associated with Catholicism, and in Postel's days especially with the Jesuits[3] – could be performed in a profoundly Protestant city-state like Hamburg? And what on Earth does all this have to do with consolation?

In 1678, the first commercial opera house north of the Alps was opened in Hamburg with Christian Richters (?–1690) *Der erschaffene, gefallene und aufgerichtete Mensch*.[4] The story of Adam and Eve and their banishment from the Garden of Eden was chosen for the inauguration to appease the city clergy, who were wary of the enterprise as a possible Temple of Sin. In the 1680's the clergymen Anton Reiser (1628–86) and Hinrich Elmenhorst (1632–1704) were the main combattants in an Opera battle, in which Reiser attacked the Sing-Spiele, as the operas were called in Hamburg, and Elmenhorst defended them.[5]

In the period 1678–1689, six operas with Biblical stories and two about Christian saints were performed in Hamburg. The two last of these, *Die heilige Eugenia Oder Die Bekehrung der Stadt Alexandria zum Christentum* (1688; Saint Eugenia or The Conversion of the City of Alexandria to the Christian Faith) and *Cain und Abel Oder Der verzweifelnde Bruder=Mörder* (1689; Cain and Abel or The Despairing Fratricide) were both written by Christian Heinrich Postel, generally considered to be the most skilled of the 17th century Hamburg librettists.[6] The majority of the Hamburg operas in the 17th century were mythological or historical.[7] Postel's *Die heilige Eugenia* and *Cain und Abel* were the last religious operas written in Hamburg. Using material from Genesis, chapter 4, Postel actually

conceived *Cain und Abel* as a sequel to Richter's *Der erschaffene, gefallene und aufgerichtete Mensch*, which was based on Genesis 1–3.[8]

Postel's task was not only to make the clergy happy, but also the audience and thus also the directors of the opera house. The audience consisted of a wide assortment of residents and foreigners: noblemen as well as members of the middle and lower classes.[9] Postel's text had to appeal to a paying audience, demanding value for money. This called for refunctionalisation of Genesis 4. In *Cain und Abel*, Postel showed considerable skill in producing a moving and entertaining play, with ample possibilities for magnificent production (spectacular views of Heaven and Hell, changes of scenography, a flying demon-wagon pulled by snakes, ballets etc.), which also served as the basis for Johann Philipp Förtsch's (1652–1732) music (lost).[10] It is not known if the choice of Genesis 4 initially was done by the author or by the directors of the opera. However, as Ricardo J. Quinones points out, »The actions themselves, murder and banishment, are highly dramatic and the issues they provoke are compelling.«[11] Quinones identifies »*violence, envy,* and *mystery*« as central elements in the Cain and Abel story,[12] and it is easy to see that this would be appealing to any dramatist, and indeed the more so the more the text verges towards the melodramatic.

It seems that parts of the clergy were offended by Christian Richter's use of Jehova and Lucifer on stage in *Der erschaffene, gefallene und aufgerichtete Mensch*. In his preface, Postel carefully points out: »Was den Himmel anbelanget/ so hat man sich des Nahmens oder der Persohn des Jehova als eines Nominis essentialis Dei, nicht/ sondern an dessen Stelle der Göttlichen Liebe oder der Göttlichen Gerechtigkeit bedienet. In der Hölle hat man gleichfals/ da sonst der Lucifer hätte sollen auffgeführet werden/ aus gewissen Ursachen/ den Hochmuth gesetzet.«[13] Other devils were substituted by Zorn (Wrath), List (Cunning) and Mißgunst (Envy).

Briefly, this is what happens in *Cain und Abel*: After a prologue, sung by the South, West, East, and North Wind,[14] where they briefly introduce the theme of the drama and start off the meteorological metaphors that pervade Postel's libretto,[15] Act I begins with a grand *theophany*, showing not only Adam, Eva, Abel and his sister/betrothed Debora kneeling in front of an altar in a forest, but also Gottesfurcht (Godliness) surrounded by »vielen Engeln« (»many angels«) in Heaven. Abel and Debora swear each other eternal love, Eva muses on the problem of vanity, which actually is pertinent to her son Cain, even if the viewer/reader does not realize this at the moment (I:3).[16] Adam and Eva have a love scene, where Eva gives vent to her misgivings about their sons (I:4). In a soliloquy, Cain reveals his over-appreciation of himself and envy towards his younger

brother (I:5), and when his wife/sister Calmana and son Hanoch enter and try to establish contact with him, he is lost in egocentricity (I:6). The scene changes to Hell, and Hochmuth, List, Zorn and a Chor der Geister (Chorus of Ghosts) complain that Mankind has not continued on its downward path that began in Genesis 3, after which they elaborate on different schemes that might lead to the downfall of Mankind, and decide that the help of Mißgunst is needed to achieve this goal (I:7–10).

Act II begins with Cain not only complaining about his lot in life, but also showing the ambition to become ruler of the world. Calmana coerces her husband into promising to offer to God, in spite of Cain's openly professed atheism and blasphemies (II:2). In a second theophany, Göttliche Liebe (Love of God) gives comfort to Adam and Eva, who are broken-hearted over Cain's attitude (II:4). Adam and Eva promise Debora that her union with Abel is approaching (II:5), and she jubilantly hurries to her brother/beloved with the good news (II:7). The sets change into a forest with the altars of the two brothers (II:9). The offering scene is given as in Genesis 4, i.e. with the Lord accepting Abel's offering, but rejecting Cain's. The latter, upset, calls on the forces of Hell and contemplates murder for revenge. He is rebuked by Göttliche Liebe in a short theophany (II:10). List, Zorn and Mißgunst appear on the scene and resume their plans for the downfall of Mankind. They realise that their last and only hope is Cain (II:11).

In Act III, Adam tells Eva, Calmana and Debora the outcome of the offering scene (III:2). A spiral of increasingly heated arguments between Cain and Abel escalates into open violence (III:4), gleefully hailed by Zorn, List and Mißgunst (III:5). The set changes into a barren field, in which Cain murders Abel (III:6). This unpleasant scene shows us Abel begging for his life and Cain striking him repeatedly at intervals.[17] Zorn, List and Mißgunst exult (III:7), and Abel dies in the arms of Debora (III:8). The set changes into Hell, where the three jubilant devils report the good news to Hochmuth (III:9–10). A new set change brings us back to a forest, where the scene between Göttliche Gerechtigkeit and Cain from Genesis 4 is enacted, i.e. God confronts Cain with his crime and pronounces his sentence (III:11).[18] Cain is defeated; he has overcome his pride, wrath, cunning and envy, and leaves in despair with Calmana and Hanoch (III:12–13. Adam, Eva and Debora, downcast, are comforted by Göttliche Liebe (III:14–15), and the finale of the opera is an elaborate theophany involving the three humans, Gottesfurcht and the Chorus of Angels, mirroring the first scene of Act I, thus giving the libretto a symmetrical structure (III:16).

In his preface to *Cain und Abel*, Postel discussed the addition of the two daughters, missing in the *Bible*.[19] Postel wouldn't have been Postel if he had missed this opportunity.[20]

He added two more women, and there was no way around the fact that these also had to be children of Adam and Eva. This incestuous theme enraged Julius Elias, who wrote the article about Postel in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*. Elias was disgusted with the liberties Postel took with his stories in general when adapting them to the stage: in *Cain und Abel* »finden wir gar ein widerliches Liebesverhältniss zwischen Bruder und Schwester, welches der Verfasser in einer gelehrten Einleitung zu rechtfertigen sucht«.[21] True: Postel quotes several authorities, and is especially triumphant when he pulls Martin Luther from his sleeve (pp. [2, 4, 5]). The names Calmana and Debora are authorized by Luther in his Commentaries to Genesis 4:17. Postel ends his lengthy deliberations with the flippant remark: »Weil aber alle diese Sachen in blossen Muthmassungen bestehn/ stehet einem jedweden frey davon zu halten und zu glauben/ was ihm beliebet/ es befo[r]dert und verhindert die Seeligkeit nicht.«[22]

Interestingly, the main theme in Postel's *Cain und Abel* is *not* guilt, moral concern, the rightness of actions, the legitimation of the self, violence, envy, or mystery (all suggested by Ricardo J. Quinones), the erotic (suggested by Auguste Brieger) or offerings and murder (suggested by Solveig Olsen). Rather, this opera is about consolation.[23] In the first sentence of the first recitative of the opera, Abel calls his beloved Debora »mein Trost« (I:2; »my comfort«), a rather peculiar epithet if it were not seen as a hint. Soon enough, Eva vividly and bitterly recapitulates her guilt concerning the eviction from the Garden of Eden and her husband's tribulations.

> Ach meine Schuld hat dich auch mit getroffen.
> Das Paradies ist nur um mich verschertzt.
> Der saure Schweiß den du must lassen fliessen/
> Den Acker zu begiessen/
> Von dem doch nichts als Dörner nur zu hoffen/
> Durchs höchsten Fluch; Dringt mir der Thränen Tropffen/
> Mit bangen Hertzen=Klopffen
> Zum Augen aus. Diß ist der Schmertz
> Der mich am meisten schmertzt. (I:4)[24]

Adam immediately tries to give her consolation by saying: »Getrost mein ander Hertz!« (»Be comforted, my second heart!«) He carefully avoids taking up her role in the story, and instead tactfully concentrates on himself, ending his reply by telling her that even if his present life is full of hardships, he still has Paradise in her. He then sings an aria, in which he comforts Eva with the certainty that God always takes care of you. There is a similar scene at the beginning of Act II, where Adam and Eva ask God for comfort:

Aria.

1.

Grosser Schöpffer aller Erden/
Wann sol abgewendet werden/
Was dein' arme Kinder drückt?
Wann geschicht es daß die deinen/
Nach dem trüben Trauer=Weinen/
Gnädig werden angeblickt?

2.

Aber sind wir nicht zu wenig/
Frommer Vater/ ewger König
Daß wenn dein Geschöpffe schreit/
Deine Güte sich läst sehen
Und auff seuffzer=reiches Flehen
Rath und Hülffe hat bereit. (II:4)[25]

Göttliche Liebe is revealed sitting on a cloud, and gives them consolation in an aria, which ends in a promise of the coming of The Saviour.[26] Adam and Eva sing an »Aria à 2« (a duet), in which they show their relief at the mercy of Göttliche Liebe. When their daughter Debora appears in the next scene they tell her about this and Debora exclaims: »O süsser Trost/ wenn GOtt in Noth bereit!« (II:5; »O sweet consolation, when GOd is there in [the hour of] distress!«) The discussion then follows a new course, when Adam and Eva promise Debora that she will soon be united with her brother/beloved Abel, and she rejoices at this comforting news:

Weg Traurigkeit/
Weg Hertzeleid/
Ihr habt mich lang genug gebunden/
Weil Hoffnung meinen Geist erfreut/
Ist alle Furcht verschwunden/ (II:5).[27]

If Debora has found comfort, her mother Eva is full of Weltschmerz, and clearly in need of consolation (II:8). She vents her thoughts in a typically Baroque *vanitas*-aria:

Was sind doch die flüchtigen Freuden der Erden?
Ein nichtiger Schaum/
Ein Schatten/ ein Traum.
Offt füllet das Schertzen
Mit Schmertzen
Die Brust/
Verdrießlichkeit folget auff Lachen und Lust.
Das Unglück läst Blitzen aus Sonnenschein werden/
Was Fröligkeit heisset erfähret man kaum.
Was sind doch die flüchtigen Freuden der Erden?
Ein nichtiger Schaum/
Ein Schatten/ ein Traum.[28]

She has to wait for comfort, though, since dramatic events interrupt. In the offering scene (II:9), Abel sings an aria to God, in which he asks Him for comfort and support. »Sey mein Trost auff dieser Erden« (»Be Thou my comfort in this world«) is one of his humble wishes, which stand in stark contrast to Cain's preceding aria, where he only asked for God to ignite his offering with a flash of lightning, »Daß man daraus verspühren kan/ Ob wir von dir herstammen« (»So that we can see, if we are Thine offspring«), typical for Cain's vanity and obsession with dynastic questions. As we know, God only ignites Abel's offering, thus confirming that He indeed is Abel's comfort, but does not endorse Cain's claims as ruler of the world by birthright.[29] Left without any sign of heavenly sympathy, Cain now turns to the forces of Hell in an incantation scene and asks for fire, but is rebuked by the suddenly appearing Göttliche Liebe (II:10). Calmana volunteers to give Cain consolation (III:2). Debora sings of the comfort of Love as shared pain (III:3) and Abel of fortitude and steadfastness, which he sees as the road to heavenly protection; in front of Cain he claims to be surrounded by an army of angels, a consoling thought that Cain ridicules (III:4).[30] After Abel's death, Debora seeks consolation in the thought of her own death (III:8). In a recitative in III:10 we encounter a rather surprising representation of the need for consolation. Of all persons, it is Hochmuth who seeks comfort and receives it from List and Zorn: Hochmuth is depressed because of the failure of Hell to undo Mankind, and List and Zorn maintain that »Der Mensch/ der Sünden=Knecht Wird doch den Gifft des Apfels stets bewahren/ Und also mehr zur Höllen=Nacht/ Als in den Himmel fahren.« (»Man, the slave of sin, will always retain the apple's poison, and thus go more to the night of Hell, than to Heaven.«) The scene is quite funny, with List, Zorn and Mißgunst arriving in Hell in high spirits in the snake wagon of Mißgunst, after their mission has been completed and Cain has committed the ultimate sin. Hochmuth, morose, is disappointed and cannot see that they have accomplished anything. He wants Mankind wiped out from the face of the Earth and locked up in Hell. His three assistants, however, are so pleased with themselves and their day's work, that their efforts are rewarded and Hochmuth is comforted: all four of them burst out in a gleeful and mocking »Aria à 4« (quartett) that finishes III:10. In Postel's drama, not even the Prince of Darkness can do without consolation. In III:12 Göttliche Liebe at last offers Cain consolation in the promise, that his mark will prevent others from killing him. At last, Cain becomes the »verzweiffelnder« (»despairing«) individual of the title, in need of consolation, not for the futility of his vain dreams, but for his guilt and shame (III:13). After he has left with wife and son, the others are crushed (III:14), but Göttliche Liebe arrives on a cloud in III:15 and offers comfort in an aria:

Last allen Kummer übergehen
Weil eures Abels Seele lebt.
Wird gleich sein Leib ein Theil der Erden/
Und euren Augen weggerafft/
Sol euch an seiner Stelle werden/
Ein ander der euch Freude schafft/
Aus dessen Stamm die Welt wird sehen/
Den/ der der Sünden=Last auffhebt/
Last allen Kummer übergehen
Weil eures Abels Seele lebt.[31]

After this, Gottesfurcht enters and exclaims: »Adam, Adam sey getrost!« (»Adam, Adam be comforted!«) and Adam, Eva and Debora rejoice at the thought of the promised third son Seth and The Saviour: »Freue dich du Kreiß der Erden/ GOTT wil dein Erlöser werden!« (»Rejoice all the world/ GOD will be thy Redeemer!«), thus ending the opera acknowledging their consolation by God.

Several times in the text, Cain gives vent to feelings of being unfairly treated by Fate (I:5–6, II:1, 10). In his preface to the libretto, Postel described Cain as »einen Gottvergessenen/ ruchlosen und Epicurischen Menschen/ welcher sich auff sein trotziges Gemüth und das Recht der Erst-Gebuhrt verlassen/ daher er auch [...] als Erstgebohrner sich einen König des gantzen Geschlechts eingebildet« (p. [3]).[32] Friedrich Chrysander calls Cain »ein ungerathener Sohn in einem schwächlichen Hauswesen«.[33] Postel's vain Cain corresponds well to Ricardo J. Quinones description of him in the mystery plays of the Middle Ages: »Cain as the profane other, the other that is not only in our midst, but within us as well, the *homo profanus*, overzealous in the pursuit of vulgarity, shows all the aggressiveness of the new *homo economicus*.«[34] In fact, it is clear that Cain is a person in need of consolation and therapy: as we remember, the subtitle of the opera is *Der verzweifelnde Bruder=Mörder*, The Despairing Fratricide.

Staffan Olofsson has analysed Adam's and Eve's family as a dysfunctional family.[35] This dysfunctionality is exploited by Postel in I:6, when Calmana and Hanoch in vain try to make verbal contact with the monomaniacally egocentric Cain. This is treated in the following way. Cain sings an aria, in which every line is interrupted by either Calmana or Hanoch singing a line of recitative.

Cain. [*Aria*] Hoher Geist/ was kan dich binden?
Calm[ana]. [Recitative] Mein Bruder/ hörstu nicht?
Cain. [*Aria*] Freyer Sinn was schrenckt dich ein?
Han[och]. [Recitative] Mein Vater/ was ist diß?
Cain. [*Aria*] Solten Felsen/ sanften Winden/
Calm. [Recitative] Dein Angesicht/

Mein Liebster ist verstelt.
Cain. [*Aria*] Stoltze Zedern/ schwachen Linden/
Han. [Recitative] Er schau doch an
Sein liebstes Kind.
Cain. [*Aria*] Hohe Berge/ tieffen Gründen/
Schändlich unterworffen sein?
Cal. [Recitative] Mein Licht/ was kan
Die Geister so verstöhren?
Cain. [*Aria*] Nein ach nein.
Han. [Recitative] Wil er den nicht sein Kind/ mein Vater hören?
Cain. [*Aria*] Hoher Geist was kan dich binden?
Frecher Sinn/ was schrenckt dich ein?[36]

Both verbally and musically this gives a disharmonious and disconnected impression which effectively shows that this is indeed not a happy family with a functioning intercommunication.

It is obvious that consolation is two layered in *Cain und Abel*: it involves the characters in Postel's drama and it involves the audience. Adam and Eva are happy to be comforted, Abel does not need any comfort, since he is a content person,[37] Debora is consoled by the promise of coming nuptial bliss, but Cain is inaccessible to consolation in spite of his desperation, simply because he is too egocentric.

Using Hans-Jürgen Schings as a vantage point, Bernhard Jahn has discussed *atrocitas*, i.e. »die Anhäufung von Greuel und Schrecken« (»the accumulation of horror and terror«), as one of the main poetological ingredients of Baroque tragedy, which the authors serve to their audiences to make them accustomed to the adversities of Fate (*assuetudo*) and for comfort and relief (*consolatio*).[38] We see Christian Heinrich Postel handling this part of his text with great skill: he exploits the murder motif extensively, with several forebodings and foreshadowing (the prologue, I:3–5, II:4, II:10–11, III:2), then Cain's increasing aggressiveness towards Abel (III:4), his failed attempt on his younger brother's life (ibid.), retardation by way of Zorn, List and Mißgunst excitedly planning to fan Cain's wrath (III:5),[39] the murder itself (III:6), the triumph of Zorn, List and Mißgunst after the crime (III:7), and finally Abel's lingering and death in Debora's arms (III:8). Also the punishment and subsequent breaking down of Cain (III:11–12) has this poetological function.

Several other parts of the 1689 performance would have a consolatory effect on the audience. We are now looking at pure »feel-good« effects. One is *il meraviglioso* (the marvellous), which has a central position within Baroque theatre æsthetics: changes of scenography in full view of the audience (*changements à vue*; I:7, II:9, III:9, III:11), theophanies (I:1, II:4, II:10,

III:11–12, III:15–16), Mißgunst's flying wagon pulled by snakes (I:10, III:7, III:10),[40] the flash of lightning on Abel's altar (II:9), echo effects (III:8) and such.[41] All of this aimed at achieving one of Baroque literature's and theatre's central goals: inspiring astonishment, surprise, wonder.

Dancing plays an important role in Postel's libretto and should definitely also be regarded in the same vein as a part of the work's consolatory strategems. There is no dancing in the parts of the libretto taken from the *Bible*, only in Postel's extrapolations in the prologue and in Hell. The first ballet, performed by the four Winds, ends the prologue (»Folget ein Tantz von vier Winden«), and devils bring Acts I and II to climactic ends with singing and dancing (I:10, II:11). It is noteworthy that Postel dispensed with dancing in the grand finale of Act III. This is in accordance with the absence of ballets in Christian Richter's *Der erschaffene, gefallene und aufgerichtete Mensch*. Obviously, dancing in the presence of Gottesfurcht (Godliness) and the Chorus of Angels was out of the question.[42]

It is significant that Postel – just like Christian Richter – refrained from introducing a »Lustige Person« (Jester) into the text. The Lustige Person, normally a servant, would comment cynically on the other persons of the play and their doings, and would allude satirically to topical subjects. He would sing drinking-songs and street-ballads of the day. The Lustige Person was not only there for comic relief, but also as a contrast to the mythological, royal und noble persons. In short, he (for it was almost always a man) kept the tradition from Plautus and Terence and the Venetian 17th century opera alive.[43] Abstaining from the Lustige Person in *Cain und Abel* was not only a good idea in front of the clergy of Hamburg,[44] but also for pure textual reasons: it contributes to the claustrophobic quality of the text.

It would seem that *Cain und Abel* was only a limited success in 1689. It was only performed during one season, and there is only one printed edition of the libretto preserved. However, this may not have depended on Postel's text. It might just as well have been caused by Johann Philipp Förtsch's music or the production. Then again, the Church may have reacted unfavorably, thus forestalling further performances in Hamburg. Hellmuth Christian Wolff does note that Postel's text was later staged as a play (without Förtsch's music).[45] A contemporary of Postel's, Nicolaus Wilckens (1676–1724), maintained that *Cain und Abel Oder Der verzweifelnde Bruder=Mörder* without doubt was one of Postel's three finest librettos.[46] The great Handel scholar Friedrich Chrysander wrote that this libretto shows »dass Postel das dramatisch Wirksame immer richtig heraus zu fühlen weiss«: *Cain und Abel* demonstrates »dramatischen Verstand, Sprachfähigkeit und wirksame Verknüpfung der Scenen; in dieser Hinsicht war er seinen biblisch-drama-

tischen Vorgängern ebenso überlegen, wie den übrigen Librettisten, die sich an dieser Bühne neben ihm hervorthaten«.[47] Chrysander enthusiastically writes of Postel's libretto: »An Selbstständigkeit und Einheit ist dieses Stück von allen deutsch-biblischen das beste«.[48]

Due to its consequential focus on the consolation theme, verbally as well as in action, and 'therapeutical' effects resulting from this (e.g. the pleasure of being reminded of God's omnipresence and benevolence), it seems clear that *Cain und Abel* is indeed an opera about consolation.

ENDNOTES

1 Sincere thanks are due to Robert Lyons, Ph. D., of the University of Gothenburg, for his advice on stylistic aspects of the text.

2 Ricardo J. Quinones: *The Changes of Cain. Violence and the Lost Brother in Cain and Abel Literature* (Princeton, N.J., 1991) p. 6.

3 Cf. Willi Flemming: *Geschichte des Jesuitentheaters in den Landen deutscher Zunge* (*Schriften der Gesellschaft für Theatergeschichte* 32. Berlin, 1923) and Johannes Müller: *Das Jesuitendrama in den Ländern deutscher Zunge vom Anfang (1555) bis zur Hochbarock (1665).* Vol. 1 (*Schriften zur deutschen Literatur* 7. Augsburg, 1930). According to Auguste Brieger: *Kain und Abel in der deutschen Dichtung* (*Stoff- und Motivgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* 14. Berlin & Leipzig, 1934) there were six German Jesuit dramas in the 17th century about Cain and Abel (p. 74).

4 The music by Johann Theile (1646–1724) is lost.

5 Cf. Anne-Rose Bittmann: *Die Kategorie der Unwahrscheinlichkeit im opernästhetischen Schrifttum des 18. Jahrhunderts* (*Europäische Hochschulschriften. Reihe XXXVI: Musikwissenschaft* 85. Frankfurt am Main etc., 1992 [orig. Diss., Bonn, 1991]), pp. 101f, and Reinholt Quandt (ed.): *Quellentexte zur Konzeption der europäischen Oper im 17. Jahrhundert.* Kassel etc., 1981, pp. 171–191. Different sources give Elmenhorsts Christian name as »Heinrich« and »Hinrich« alternatively.

6 Cf Menantes [Christian Friedrich Hunold]: *Theatralische, Galante Und Geistliche Gedichte* (Hamburg, 1722 [orig. 1706]) pp. 94f, Feodor Wehl: *Hamburgs Literaturleben im achtzehnten Jahrhundert* (Leipzig, 1856) p. 37f, Chr. [Friedrich Chrysander]: »Die zweite Periode der Hamburger Oper von 1682 bis 1694, oder vom Theaterstreit bis zur Direction Kusser's« in *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* (Leipzig, 1878) column 341. Hellmuth Christian Wolff has written about these Biblical operas in *Die Barockoper in Hamburg (1678–1738)*, vol. 1 (Wolfenbüttel, 1957 [orig. Diss. Kiel, 1942]) pp. 22–38, and about Postel's *Cain und Abel* on pp. 32f.

7 After Postel’s death in 1705 there was a sharp decline in mythological operas in Hamburg.

8 [Christian Heinrich Postel]: *Cain und Abel Oder Der verzweifelnde Bruder=Mörder. In einem Sing=Spiel vorgestellet* [Hamburg, 1689]: »daß man gesehen/ daß die allhier/ schon öffters præsentirte Opera von der Erschaffung/ viele gefallen/ hat man wegen Connexität der Historien dieses Stück wollen hinzufügen« (p. [7]; »since the often produced opera on the Creation has met with the appreciation of many, this play has been added because of the connection of the stories«). The first edition of the libretto is quoted from the facsimile at http://www.sub.uni-hamburg.de/recherche/digitalisierte-bestaende/trefferliste/seitenansicht.html?tx_dlf[id]=868&tx_dlf[page]=1&tx_dlf[pointer]=0.

Brieger: *Kain und Abel in der deutschen Dichtung* lists Postel’s drama as the eleventh literary work about Cain and Abel in German in the 17th century (p. 74). »Out of the vast repertoire of Western myth, one myth stands apart for the extraordinary longevity and variousness of its appeal. This is the Cain-Abel story, which has been present to the Western consciousness since the biblical era as one of the defining myths of our culture. The dramatic elements of the story are powerful enough – the first murder, banishment, the first city – but as we probe the inner resources of the story, we find many other qualities that account for the proliferating and enduring strength of the theme.« (Quinones: *The Changes of Cain* p. 3.) Even modern popular fiction contributes to keeping the myth alive: in Ian Fleming’s agent novel *Goldfinger* (1959), the big time American crook Jed Midnight acknowledges Goldfinger’s status with the words: »you are undoubtedly the greatest thing in crime since Cain invented murder and used it on Abel« (reprint ed., London, 1961) p. 181. In *The Sandman* (1988–96), Neil Gaiman uses Cain and Abel as recurring figures through the whole 10 volume work. Postels drama is presented in Dian Igor Lindberg: *Literary Aspects of German Baroque Opera: History, Theory, and Practice (Christian H. Postel and Barthold Feind)* (Diss., Los Angeles, 1964) pp. 192–202, and in Solveig Olsen: *Christian Heinrich Postels Beitrag zur deutschen Literatur des späten 17. Jahrhunderts* (Diss., Houston, Texas, 1968) pp. 52–61, but none of them uses the perspectives of the present paper.

9 »Ein bürgerlich-städtisches Publikum, zu dem auch die unteren sozialen Schichten zählten, bestimmte den Charakter des grössten Kunstinstituts seiner Stadt. Dass dieser Hamburger Bürgergeschmack sich selbst in der mythologischen Oper durchsetzte, ist der klarste Beweis für seine nachhaltige Kraft und Wirkung.« (Eberhard Haufe: *Die Behandlung der antiken Mythologie in den Textbüchern der Hamburger Oper 1678–1738* (*Mikrokosmos. Beiträge zur Literaturwissenschaft und Bedeutungsforschung* 37. Frankfurt am Main etc., 1994

[orig. Diss., Jena, 1964] p. 263; »A bourgeois-civic audience, comprising even the lower social layers, determined the character of the largest cultural institution of the city. That the taste of the Hamburg bourgeoisie even ruled the mythological opera, is the clearest evidence of its prolonged force and effect.«)

10 The melody of one single aria (sung by Abel in II:6) has been preserved in Hellmuth Christian Wolff: *Die Barockoper in Hamburg (1678–1738)*, vol. 2 (Wolfenbüttel, 1957 [orig. Diss. Kiel, 1942]) p. 55.

11 Ricardo J. Quinones: *The Changes of Cain* p. 8.

12 Ricardo J. Quinones: *The Changes of Cain* p. 9.

13 [Postel]: *Cain und Abel* p. [3f]. (»Concerning Heaven, we have not used the name or person of Jehova as an essential name of God, but instead the Love of God or the Justice of God. In Hell, we have accordingly, for certain reasons, put Pride on stage, since Lucifer would otherwise have been shown.«) – The punctuation mark »/« is equivalent to a modern comma. The printed libretto lacks pagination. In this essay, pagination is inserted in brackets in the preface, while references to the text of the opera proper are given by specification of act and scene with Roman and Arabic numerals: thus I:1 means Act I, scene 1.

14 The four winds correspond to Christian Richter's four elements in the prologue to *Der erschaffene, gefallene und aufgerichtete Mensch.* The winds actually begin Postel's libretto by connecting to Richter's opera by mentioning each of the four elements. There are constant allusions to the material of Richter's text in *Cain und Abel* (e.g. I:3–4, I:6, I:8–9, III:10).

15 The important words here are Himmel, Blitz, Wolcke, Wind, Sonne, Stern (sky, lightning, cloud, wind, sun, star). Connected with these are the motives of looking up into the sky and looking down at the earth.

16 Cf. Solveig Olsen: *Christian Heinrich Postels Beitrag zur deutschen Literatur des späten 17. Jahrhunderts* p. 61.

17 »*Abel.* Betrachte doch mich armen/ Der dir auf seinen Knien fleht/ Wenn dir ein Bruder nicht zu Hertzen geht. *Cain.* Was arm? was flehn? was Bruder? du must sterben.« (III:6. »*Abel.* Do look upon a wretch, begging on his knees, if [the sight of] a brother does not soften your heart. *Cain.* What do you mean wretch? what do you mean beg? what do you mean brother? you must die.«) It is typical for Postel, that he devotes a long passage in his preface to discussing the lack of evidence regarding the murder weapon, musing over alternative possibilities given by Christian and Jewish authorities. In the end he sides up with those that advocate a branch from a tree (*Cain und Abel* p. [6]). Cf. the author's deliberations on Cain's mark (p. [6f]).

18 The caption has »Göttliche Liebe«, but all cues have »Göttl. Gerechtigk.«.

19 *Cain und Abel* p. [1]. It is typical for Postel, that this preface fills seven and a half pages and is full of references to relevant authorities.

20 About Postel's life and literary output, cf. Olsen: *Christian Heinrich Postels Beitrag zur deutschen Literatur des späten 17. Jahrhunderts* and Dag Hedman: »Ariadne rediviva. Zur Bearbeitung Christian Heinrich Postels des antiken Ariadnethemas für die Hamburger Oper« (Annie Bourguignon, Konrad Harrer & Franz Hintereder-Emde [eds.]: *Hohe und niedere Literatur. Tendenzen zur Ausgrenzung, Vereinnahmung und Mischung im deutschsprachigen Raum* [Berlin, 2015]). A more detailed version can be accessed at http://www.pop-zeitschrift.de/aufsatze/.

21 Julius Elias: »Postel, Christian Henrich« in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, Band 26 (Leipzig, 1888) p. 469. (Different sources give Postel's middle name alternately as »Heinrich« and »Henrich«.) (»[In *Cain und Abel*] we even find a repulsive love relation between brother and sister, which the author tries to justify in a learned preface.«)

22 *Cain und Abel* p. [2]. (»Since all this only consists of mere conjunctures, everybody is free to think and believe what they want; it neither aids nor prevents salvation.«)

23 Olsen is the first person even to mention »Trost« in connection with *Cain und Abel*, but she does not recognize the significance of this theme. Cf Olsen: *Christian Heinrich Postels Beitrag zur deutschen Literatur des späten 17. Jahrhunderts* pp. 53 and 58f.

24 »Alas, my sin has also affected you. Because of me Paradise has been lost. Your laboured sweat, with which you water the field, from which you can only expect thorns, because of the curse of the Lord, makes my tears flow from mine eyes with timid heart beats. This is the pain which gives me most pain.«

25 »Aria. 1. Great Maker of the Earth, when will the burdens of Thy children be averted? When will Thy offspring after pitiful and doleful crying be looked upon with mercy again? 2. But are we not too slight, righteous Father, eternal King, for Thy goodness to be seen when Thy creatures cry, and for us to receive advice and help after supplication full of sighing.«

26 This is one of several instances where Christ is mentioned in Postel's libretto, rather surprising from a chronological point of view, but naturally an important *persuasio* in relation to the Hamburg clergy and to the spectators (I:9, II:9, III:15–16).

27 »Away sorrows, away pangs, you have fettered me long enough. Since hope delights my spirit, all fear is gone«.

28 »What are the fleeting causes for rejoicing on Earth? A vain foam, a shadow, a dream. Often levity fills your breast with pain, low spirits come after laughing and frolicking. Misfortune makes lightning from sunshine, you hardly know

what happiness is. What are the fleeting causes for rejoicing on Earth? A vain foam, a shadow, a dream.«

29 »Dieweil Abel den letzten Verß singet/ fähret ein Strahl vom Himmel und zündet sein Opffer an/ welches wehrendem Ritornel brennet.« (»Whilst Abel sings the last verse, a ray falls from Heaven and ignites his offering/ which burns during the ritornel [orchestral interlude].«)

30 »*Cain.* Mein Bruder! so allein? *Abel.* Der von dem Heer der Engel ist ümgeben Kan nie alleine sein. *Cain.* Einfältigkeit! wer wolte sie dir senden?« (»*Cain.* My brother! all alone? *Abel.* He who is surrounded by the host of angels can never be alone. *Cain.* Foolishness! Who would send them to you?«)

31 »Let all your sorrows pass, for the soul of your Abel lives. Even though his body will soon be a part of the Earth and snatched away from your eyes, another will come in his stead, who will bring you joy, and from whose lineage the world will behold Him, who abolishes the burden of sin. Let all your sorrows pass, for the soul of your Abel lives.«

32 »a godless, vile, sensual being, confiding in his defiant disposition and rights as a first-born, which makes him […] believe that as a first-born he is the King of all Mankind.« It is tempting to compare Postel's Cain with Dostoyevsky's Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* (1866). Just as the latter wanted to prove that he was not »a louse« but »a Napoleon«, Cain has ideas about himself as someone better and more important than the rest of Mankind. Cf. his aria in III:11: »Wer auff dem Kreiß der Erden/ Wil hoch erhaben werden/ Kan keinen gleichen sehn. Er muß von Flammen lernen/ Die nach dem Sitz der Sternen/ Zu ihrem Ursprung gehn.« (»He who would be master of the World, cannot allow any equal. He must learn from the flames, who would rise to the stars, their origin.«)

33 Chrysander: »Die zweite Periode der Hamburger Oper« column 341 (»a depraved son in an ailing household«).

34 Ricardo J. Quinones: *The Changes of Cain* p. 55. Postel chooses to use devils as allegories of Cain's constitutive faults of character: the head-devil is called Hochmuth (Pride), since this is Cain's main fault of character, from which all other problems emanate. The other devils are List (Cunning), Zorn (Wrath), and Mißgunst (Envy), Cain's other character flaws.

35 Staffan Olofsson: »Skammens styrka. Kain och Abel som barn i en dysfunktionell familj« in *Arche* 2014:2.

36 In the original, the recitative lines are printed in smaller type that the aria lines, and thus easily distinguishable. (»Cain. [*Aria*] High spirit, what could fetter thee? Calm[ana]. [Recitative] My brother, can't you hear? Cain. [*Aria*] Free spirit, what restricts thee? Han[och]. [Recitative] My father, what is this? Cain. [*Aria*] Could rocks, gentle winds … Calm. [Recitative] Your face, my love, is distorted. Cain. [*Aria*] Proud cedars/ supple limetrees… Han. [Recitative] Pray, look at thy

beloved child. Cain. [*Aria*] High mountains/ deep chasms/ To be infamously subjected? Cal. [Recitative] My light/ what can disturb your spirits thus? Cain. [*Aria*] No, oh, no. Han. [Recitative] Will you not, my father/ listen to your child? Cain. [*Aria*] High spirit, what could fetter thee? Audacious spirit, what restricts thee?«)

37 II:6 is all about this and Abel sings the words »vergnüget«, »Vergnügtheit« and »zu frieden« (all mean »content«) no less than seven times in spite of the scene's brevity.

38 Bernhard Jahn: »Christian Heinrich Postels *Verstöhrung Jerusalem* (1692). Zur Konfrontation divergierender barocker Poetiken und ihrer Destruktion im Opernlibretto« in *Compar(a)ison* 1994:2 p. 133. He is indebted to Hans-Jürgen Schings: »Consolatio Tragoediæ. Zur Theorie des barocken Trauerspiels« in Reinhold Grimm (ed.): *Deutsche Dramentheorien. Beiträge zu einer historischen Poetik des Dramas in Deutschland* (Frankfurt am Main, 1971) p. 12f and 19. Jahn points out that scenes of *atrocitas* normally are contrasted with scenes of gallantry, love or pomp for the sake of contrast and relief, which is clearly signalled by the scenography (p. 148). This is not the case in Postel's *Cain und Abel*, where the audience's knowledge of Abel's pending fate tinges the love scenes between Abel and Debora with melancholy, thus unifying rather than contrasting the scenes, in spite of the scenography (barren field vs. lovely forest etc.). Some of the scenes with the devils in Hell and on Earth bring a certain relief because they display spectacular scenic devises like Mißgunst's flying snake-pulled wagon (I:10, III:7, III:10), but some of them are tightly bound to the atmosphere of the main plot, since we see the devils scheming against Mankind in general or Cain specifically (III:5, III:7).

39 This is a type of scene in which Postel really shows his strength as a dramatist, always successful in exploiting the bizarre and the perverse. »*Zorn.* Nun ist es Zeit/ den Cain anzuhetzen. Ihr Freund' auf/ auf/ nun muß der Schlag geschehn. *List.* Wir müssen itzt mit Macht ansetzen. *Mißg.* Nun können wir das Werck vollendet sehn. *List.* So kan ich Abels Ehe trennen. *Zorn.* Und ich Verderben richten an. *Mißg.* So muß man mir den Ruhm vergönnen/ Daß ich auch Brüder zwingen kann. *Mißg./List./Zorn. à 3.* Nur fort/ hier ist nicht zu verweilen/ Die Zeit ist da/ wir müssen eilen. (*Folgen dem Cain nach.*)« (»*Zorn.* Now is the time/ to goad Cain. Friends away/ away/ the blow must come. *List.* Now we must stick to our task with might. *Mißg.* Now we can have the work completed. *List.* Thus I can ruin Abel's marriage. *Zorn.* And I can do mischief. *Mißg.* No one can deny me the honor/ That I even can coerce brothers. *Mißg./List./Zorn. à 3.* Away/ no rest/ The time has come/ make haste. (*They follow Cain.*«))

40 Chrysander: »um den Zuschauern einen vergnüglichen

Schrecken einzujagen« (column 341; »for the purpose of striking some enjoyable terror into the hearts of the audience«), Olsen: »eine bühnenwirksame diabolische Dynamik« (p. 57; »stage-effective diabolical dynamics«).

41 For a discussion of the interaction between text and scenography in 17th century opera in general, cf. Dag Hedman: »Trädgårdar i 1600-talslibretti« (in the forthcoming conference volume *Det återvunna paradiset. Tidigmoderna trädgårdar i fiktion och verklighet, teori och praktik* from the Department of Literature, History of Ideas und Religion at the University of Gothenburg). – Echo effects were popular and had been used frequently in operas right through the 17th century since Ottavio Rinuccini's *La rappresentazione di Dafne* (Florence, 1594). Cf. Dag Hedman: »Io che quasi pastor tra questi boschi. En diskussion av två favola in musica-prologer av Ottavio Rinuccini« in *Tidskrift för Litteraturvetenskap* 2012:2–3 pp. 111–123.

42 Here Dian Igor Lindberg: *Literary Aspects of German Baroque Opera* must be corrected, where the author writes about »the simplicity of its [*Cain und Abel*'s] stage settings. The story afforded no opportunity for splendid decorations […]. There is thus a total absence of that pomp and circumstance so dear to the heart of the Baroque opera audience.« (p. 201) As we have seen, the very opposite is the truth. Lindberg quite logically has to retreat from this position: »On the other hand considerable use is made of the customary flying machines. Not only do allegorical figures descend from the clouds on several occasions[,] but the devils repeatedly travel through the air […]. There are also the usual ballets: a dance of evil spirits at the end of the first act and a dance of Furies at the end of the second.« (pp. 201f) It is not clear how Lindberg is able to conciliate the assertations of the first quotation with the facts in the second.

43 For information on the »Lustige Person«, cf. Hellmuth Christian Wolff: *Die Barockoper in Hamburg (1678–1738)*, vol. 1 (Wolfenbüttel, 1957 [orig. Diss. Kiel, 1942]) pp. 132–182 and Reinhart Meyer: »Hanswurst und Harlekin oder Der Narr als Gattungsschöpfer. Versuch einer Analyse des komischen Spiels in den Staatsaktionen des Musik- und Spechtheaters im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert« in *Théâtre, nation et société en Allemagne au XVIIIe siècle* (eds.: J.–M. Valentin and R. Krebs. Nancy, 1990) pp. 13–39.

44 »Eine weitere Folge des Bestrebens, mit dem heiligen Gegenstande möglichst vorsichtig und würdig zu verfahren, war die Ausschliessung des Hanswurstes, welcher doch seit dem Mittelalter in den geistlichen Spielen eine legitime Persönlichkeit ist.« (Chrysander: »Die zweite Periode der Hamburger Oper von 1682 bis 1694« column 340. »Another consequence of the effort to handle the sacred subject with as much caution and dignity as possible, was the exclusion of the

jester, who actually had been a legitimate person in religious plays since the Middle Ages.«)

45 Wolff: *Die Barockoper in Hamburg* p. 30, quoting Johannes Bolte: *Von Wanderkomödianten und Hantwerkerspielen des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts* (1934) p. 476.

46 The other two were *Die Wunderbar=errettete Iphigenia* (1699; The Miraculously Saved Iphigenia) and *Die Wunder=schöne Psyche* (1701; The Wonderfully Beauteous Psyche). Nicolaus Wilckens: »Christian Heinrich Postel, J. U. L.« in *Hamburgischer Ehren=Tempel* (published posthumously: Hamburg, 1770) p. 701.

47 Chrysander: »Die zweite Periode der Hamburger Oper von 1682 bis 1694« column 340f (»that Postel always finds what is dramatically effective by intuition«, »dramatic know-how, stylistic brilliance and skilled handling of the plot; in this he excelled over his biblical-dramatical predecessors as much as over the librettists of his own day, who were his rivals [at the Hamburg Opera house]«).

48 Ibid. column 341 (»Of all German biblical plays this is the best when it comes to originality and unity«).

Per Magnus Johansson, »Consolation and Psychoanalysis«

ABSTRACT

Psychoanalysis has seldom concerned itself with the notion of consolation at the theoretical level. Consolation (or comfort or solace) is not a psychoanalytic concept. Freud only uses the word once in his general reflections on the human condition.

Freud saw religion as an effect of man's infantile need for consolation, and compared it with obsessional neuroses. His reflections on the matter led Freud to the conclusion that religion is an illusion. The more people who gain access to thinking influenced by science, the more people will abandon their belief in the religious message.

In Freud's scientific-ideological attempt at turning psychoanalysis into a scientific discipline, phenomena which are parts of the religious and literary fields are lost. The human need for consolation is such a phenomenon.

Donald W. Winnicott's concept of the transitional object must be considered in this context. According to Winnicott, the transitional object is on the border between psychic, subjective reality, and external, objective reality. It is usually used by the child of the age of four to twelve months. The transitional object is a compensation which has the function of consoling the individual.

In Sweden, as in many other European countries, the psychodynamic tradition that arose was to a greater extent concerned with fulfilling man's need for consolation, as compared with pursuing an ideal that was influenced by the natural sciences. The psychotherapists in this tradition attended to man's need for consolation, and the treatment was called pastoral cure.

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Keywords: Psychoanalysis, Consolation, Natural science, Religion, The Swedish Psychoanalytical Association, Sigmund Freud, St. Lukas, Göte Bergsten, Stig Dagerman, Donald Winnicott

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Per Magnus Johansson

CONSOLATION AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

The relationship between psychoanalysis, the psychodynamic tradition, and mankind's need for consolation is complex and multifaceted. Sigmund Freud's position was that psychoanalysis belonged among the sciences, by which he meant, more precisely, the natural sciences. In Sweden, as in many other European countries, the psychodynamic tradition that arose was to a greater extent concerned with fulfilling man's need for consolation, compared to pursuing an ideal that was influenced by the natural sciences. The psychotherapists in this tradition attended to man's need for consolation and the treatment was called pastoral cure. These aspects of psychoanalysis are considered in the text. Moreover, the way in which the psychoanalyst Donald W. Winnicott introduced the concept of the transitional object is touched upon, specifically how this allowed him to address some of the issues that arose in the intersection between the psychotherapeutic ambition, the basic attitude of natural science, and the clinical experience that human beings never completely free themselves from the need for consolation.

In 1930, Freud wrote the following:

> For a wide variety of reasons, it is very far from my intention to express an opinion upon the value of human civilization. I have endeavoured to guard myself against the enthusiastic prejudice which holds that our civilization is the most precious thing that we possess or could acquire and that its path will necessarily lead to heights of unimagined perfection. I can at least listen without indignation to the critic who is of the opinion that when one surveys the aims of cultural endeavour and the means it employs, one is bound to come to the conclusion that the whole effort is not worth the trouble, and that the outcome of it can only be a state of affairs which the individual will be unable to tolerate. My impartiality is made all the easier to me by my knowing very little about all these things. One thing only do I know for certain and that is that man's judgements of value follow directly his wishes for happiness – that, accordingly, they are an attempt to support his illusions with arguments. I should find it very understandable if someone were to point out the obligatory nature of the course of human civilization and were to say, for instance, that the tendencies to a restriction of sexual life or to the institution of a humanitarian ideal

at the expense of natural selection were developmental trends which cannot be adverted or turned aside and to which it is best for us to yield as though they were necessities of nature. I know, too, the objection that can be made against this, to the effect that in the history of mankind, trends such as these, which were considered insurmountable, have often been thrown aside and replaced by other trends. Thus I have not the courage to rise up before my fellow-men as a prophet, and I bow to their reproach that I can offer them no consolation [German *Trost*]: for at bottom that is what they are all demanding – the wildest revolutionaries no less passionately than the most virtuous believers.[1]

In this paragraph, one could say that Freud reminds us of Stig Dagerman's condensed text and his claim that »Our need for consolation is insatiable«[2]. He wrote his text 22 years after Freud used the word consolation. I believe that Freud would have agreed with Dagerman that »consolation is as brief as the breeze, blowing through the crown of a tree«. He would probably share Stig Dagerman's view, that money lends no consolation – or, more precisely – that he, like Dagerman, doesn't care about money. Freud maintained that only the recurrence of a childhood wish could give genuine consolation or be a satisfying experience.

According to Freud, the craving for money is not a wish stemming from childhood, but rather a wish that the individual acquires later in life, in a society that very much values money and what money can buy. However, Freud would not see eye to eye with Stig Dagerman when the latter claims not to value whether he contributes to the improvement of literature or not. For Freud, the idea of being one of the group of important scientific authors who contributed to solving the crucial and challenging enigmas of life was deeply meaningful. That may well have been the most important driving force in his life, and he found meaning and consolation in his intellectual work. It was a reason for living.

The reason for living that Stig Dagerman seeks in his text »Our need for consolation is insatiable …« – and which he sought in his life – carries with it an impossibility, which, one could say, led him to a life of searching without ever really finding. His wounded soul remained inconsolable and, at the same time, the inconsolable part of him made him capable of writing one of the most beautiful texts in the history of literature on man's need for consolation.

—— Psychoanalysis has seldom occupied itself with the notion of consolation theoretically, and there is little written on the subject. The category itself – the word, term or concept – is

not a part of the obvious theoretical canon for psychoanalysts or writers within the psychoanalytic tradition.

Freud uses the word *Trost* only once, in the passage quoted above.[3] There, as we noticed, it is used in the context of pointing out that the need for consolation is a deeply rooted, ever-present human need. Hence, it is in his general reflections on the human condition that the word 'consolation' comes to the fore, not in connection with the key concepts that constitute psychoanalytic theory. And Freud did not develop his once stated idea that the need for consolation is a deeply rooted, ever-present human need.

In other words consolation, or comfort or soothing or solace, is not a psychoanalytic concept. None of them are mentioned in the fundamental work, *The Language of Psycho-analysis*, by J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, published in English in 1973. Likewise, it doesn't figure in Elisabeth Roudinesco's and Michel Plon's *Dictionnaire de la Psychanalyse* (1997/2013). Neither can you find it in Alain de Mijolla's *Dictionnaire international de la psychanalyse* (2002, 2013).

Why is that? It has to do with reasons that are part of the problem, and that contribute to making the question a difficult one to answer; partly it is a symptom within the psychoanalytic theory and movement. But I'll try to give a hint of an answer.

For the founder of psychoanalysis, the phenomenon behind words like 'consolation', 'soothing', 'solace' or 'comfort', is connected to a deeply rooted human need. Thus, the word, which has never reached the status of a term, or a concept, doesn't figure in accounts of the psychoanalytical practice as it is described in the technical writings, which Freud published between the years 1904 and 1937.

A psychoanalysis is supposed to make a person less infantile and more aware, more conscious of his or her motives and incentives. The psychoanalytical effort is meant to make the individual's unconscious conscious, make him or her mend and bridge memory gaps, give the ego access to parts of the id, lessen the power of the superego, and rid the mind of incestuous ties. It aims to make it possible for an individual human being to be able to love and to work, to have a sexual life which combines pleasure and tenderness, to release psychological energy in constructive activities, to find a way to reconciliation with his or her personal history and destiny, and not be locked in destructive repetition and/or psychopathology.

In this work, there is no priority given to the notion that what the analysand[4] needs or should be provided with is consolation. The analysand is described as a potentially rational being who, through the analytical work, becomes wiser, gains more knowledge about him- or herself, and whose actions as a result will be less limited. Or, to use a term from the French tradition – the individual learns to recognize his or her desire.

We know, if we stay close to both Freud's point of view and that of French psychoanalysis, that what an analysis is about is the following: the analysand is given permission to talk about his or her irrational side. In other words, about that part of an individual's psyche that drives him or her to actions, thoughts or decisions, whose unwanted consequences may in turn make the individual seek analysis.

The analysand needs to trust his psychoanalyst and submit to the task of working together with the latter, so that he or she can gain new knowledge. The analysand's task – and seen from another point of view, also that of the psychoanalyst – is reminiscent of the work of a researcher or a scholar, whose task is to carry out his or her project; in other words, he or she shouldn't abandon the striving to find new and more profound knowledge. It's the first priority.

In accordance with the Gospel of John, it is in the truth we will find liberation. In this regard, Freud is part of the Enlightenment, the project in which prejudice, religious ideas and religious faith will be replaced with rational thought and empirical investigation, aiming for the truth. With that as a point of departure, the word consolation becomes incompatible with the psychoanalytic theory. Consolation is too much a part of the infantile register, and religion is, according to psychoanalytic tradition, tainted by this register. At the same time, we must point out that it is precisely this aspect, the far reaching effects of the infantile register, which in the history of ideas is one of Freud's essential contributions; he studied the child in and within the adult, and how this infantile residue continued to affect the person's life.

But what about the psychoanalytic practice? What do people expect and what does an analytic experience entail? It's hard to imagine that a person who goes through a lengthy psychoanalysis would not come into contact with parts of his or her childhood, including feelings, wishes and needs which are normally repressed in daily life. He or she would want to be in contact with, and express, these sides to a larger extent than before. But expressing these sides also means risking problems. Making an analytic journey is the same as making a journey in time, to access and acquaint oneself with the infantile side of one's personality, the regressive part of oneself.

A fundamental psychoanalytic idea is that some of the so-called psychopathological manifestations are the result of an inner grief which has not been allowed expression. You could also say that the person in question has not received consolation or comfort in any fundamental or meaningful way. Or that the consolation has failed to bring a real and lasting consolation. The inconsolable one, the one who disconsolately seeks consolation, has not been reconciled with his or her destiny, or has been incapable of dealing with his or her disillusionment.

The person who is inconsolable has not been able to surmount his or her disappointments. As a consequence that person is forced to create and will create some form of psychopathology or psychological suffering. In this process it's not unreasonable to assume that disconsolate patients in psychoanalysis are looking for consolation, even though – on a manifest level – they wouldn't explicitly express themselves that way, most of them expecting their psychoanalyst to have nothing or little to share with his or her analysand with regard to the question of consolation. But failing to express a wish to be comforted should not be taken as proof that they have nothing to say about consolation or comfort, or that they are saying everything that's on their minds with regard to consolation or comfort, and therefore are not seeking consolation.

Freud has a fundamental thought: man must abstain. It is by abstaining that man becomes human. By abstaining man is forced to partly compensate through fantasy. From one point of view you might say that fantasies, like dreams, provide consolation. In fantasy you are compensated for what you're forced to forgo in real life, and it will provide consolation. To be disconsolate is man's predicament. Here we may think of Stig Dagerman, when he wrote that in a situation that offers no consolation, the need for consolation may seem infinite. Man is by definition doomed to find substitute activities and, from one point of view, it is not unreasonable to regard these substitute activities as attempts to find consolation.

In other words, within the psychoanalytic tradition we must distinguish between, on the one hand, the use of the word consolation, and on the other hand, seeking consolation without recognizing that search for what it is.

The question is rather: what place is given to consolation in psychoanalytic thinking and in the psychoanalytic practice? There are a few signs of older date than *Totem and Taboo* (1912-1913), indicating Freud's interest in the question of religion, not least in an article from 1907 about compulsive acts and religious practice. But there's a key statement, which points forward towards *Totem and Taboo*; it can be found in a letter to Sándor Ferenczi from New Years Day, 1910. In that letter Freud writes that religion is ultimately founded on man's sense of infantile helplessness. Let that be our point of departure.

PSYCHOANALYSIS, SCIENCE, AND RELIGION

Freud's most important text on the question of religion and his own way of relating to religion is his work, *Die Zukunft einer Illusion*, published in 1927. In this work we find a description of the specific characteristics of science and an analysis of religion, where the latter is compared with science. His

analysis leads him to the conclusion that religion must be regarded as an illusion.

While discussing the reproach – real as well as imagined – which has already befallen other strong criticism of religion and which might befall the adamant criticism that he himself is delivering, he also clarifies the nature of psychoanalysis. In the first chapter, where he lays down the general outline of his text, Freud also defines the place that, in his mind, 'science' occupies. In his analysis of religion, he consistently uses the category 'science' as a concept which is possible to place in opposition to the concept 'religion', and he does not divide science into different disciplines or categories, like, for example the natural sciences, the social sciences and the human sciences.

Religion is characterized as an illusion and an expression of the wishful thinking helpless humans are known to engage in. His text, Freud tells us, aims at showing the necessity of taking a step out into reality, which for him means abandoning religion, and taking on what he calls the hostile reality, and approaching things rationally and scientifically. However, science too has its limits, he claims. It will not provide us with answers to the mystery of the Universe. Also, scientific research is a slow process. Scientific work is nevertheless the only road which will take us to knowledge about the reality of the world that surrounds us.[5]

The scientific approach is forced to rely on observations and reflective thinking. Freud takes another step and claims that nothing shall stop psychoanalytic research from turning our powers of observation towards our own being or from criticizing ourselves. This perspective opens up to the possibility of building an outlook on life, a world view.[6]

Freud's view is that the influence of religion on human beings is diminishing compared to how it used to be. The reason for this must be sought, according to Freud, in the strengthening of the scientific spirit in individuals from what Freud calls the upper strata of society, something that will, among other things, make the promises of religion less credible to them. The criticism has weakened the validity of the religious documents as evidence, according to Freud.[7] This process will come naturally, and there is no reason for educated people and intellectuals to fear it. It is, on the other hand, understandable if the large masses of uneducated and oppressed people will fear such a change: since they have not themselves undergone this process of change, they are consequently not ready to accept the results of scientific thinking.

In the final chapter of the book, the consequences of the controversy with religion are discussed and certain reservations are added. These reservations show traces of doubts regarding the faith in science, stated earlier in the book. Freud

concedes that, possibly, also his own thoughts about the future and the place he gives science could be of an illusory nature. In that case, it is a kind of illusion with a decisive advantage; it can be corrected if experience tells us that a mistake has been made.

Both the idea that religion resembles a childhood neurosis, and the assumption that humanity will overcome this neurotic period in the same manner that many children grow out of their childhood neurosis all by themselves, will be tested by time. If, in time, these assumptions should prove inaccurate, they will have to be relinquished.

The insights from individual psychology, Freud tells us, are possibly incomplete, and their application on humanity not defendable.[8] We have here, he states, a large degree of uncertainty, but this uncertainty – and that is the important thing – does not make religion more credible. In this analysis human intellect and human instincts are opposed. Despite the fact that the intellect is weak compared to the instincts, its voice keeps insisting to be heard. It won't cease until it has reached its goal. According to Freud, this is cause for optimism.

He takes this thought to its extreme and claims: in the end, nothing can resist reason and experience, and the extent to which religion goes against both is all too evident.[9] Freud claims in this context to have one god, Logos, and he relates this god of his to Ananke, i.e. necessity. True, Logos is not omnipotent, but Freud still believes in the possibility of exploring and finding out about the world, and that scientific work can bring clarity about the things of this world. In that way humanity will have more power over the world, and it can choose which way to go accordingly.

This is his opinion, and to the extent that this opinion could be an illusion, the scientist and those who trust in the results of science find themselves in the same situation as those who believe in religion. But he insists that science through external, numerous and important results has proven not to be an illusion.[10]

Science has many open and even more secret enemies because it has criticized religion and threatened to destroy its dominance. Science is accused of having achieved so little and left so much unsolved and in obscurity. That amounts to forgetting that the beginnings have been difficult, and that science is still young, and that the time during which the human intellect has been occupied with scientific tasks is short. Changes of scientific opinions happen through evolution and progress, not through revolution. An incomplete approximation of the truth will be replaced by a more accurate one. In some areas, scientific research has not yet passed the phase where some fundamental assumptions have to be abandoned, but within other fields, research has gained a stable nucleus.[11]

Freud also addresses the accusation against science that its results can only ever be subjective, while the real nature of things remains inaccessible. This is also an erroneous way of looking at things, since the psychological apparatus develops through striving for knowledge about the external world.

Following this line of thought, Freud goes on to the conclusion that the problem with discussing the nature of the world without taking the mental apparatus into account is nothing but an empty abstraction without practical value.[12] In Freud's analysis of religion, science, because of its characteristics, is placed in opposition to the latter, in comparison with which it appears like a negative. In this context it is – with regard to Freud's way of using the term science – possible to replace it with psychoanalysis. Science and psychoanalysis are in the same situation. They have common methods and common interests, he writes.

—— Religion is given the status of a phenomenon reminiscent of a delusion; it is therefore possible to analyze and thus also possible to connect to the three fundamental psychoanalytic concepts. Science, on the other hand, is not possible to analyze under similar premises. Religion is not an individual but a shared neurosis, and it is tied to a complex of problems typical of one of the two main types of neuroses that Freud studied during the better part of his productive life, namely the obsessional neurosis. The adult religious believer resembles a big child, not daring to leave its original family, choosing instead to cling to it.

There is also the possibility, he writes, that the promises of science are exaggerated. To the extent that science is an illusion – which Freud claims religion to be, according to the evidence – experience will provide the evidence that will prove certain assumptions illusory, and the consequence will be the abandonment – as self-evident as necessary – of those faulty assumptions.

However, science has only been around for a relatively short period of time, and one may reasonably hold hopes for the future. The intellect can temporarily prove to be weaker than the instincts or the drives[13]; in the long run, however, the intellect will prevail, since its insistence has a kind unrelenting quality; it will continue to insist even in the face of resistance. This is a text in which Freud holds the idea that knowledge grows slowly, continuously, and that it accumulates. This process will, among other things, erode the credibility of religion.

It's of interest that Freud couples his text on lay analysis with the one on religion as an illusion.

In a letter to Oskar Pfister, dated November 25 1928, he writes that there is a connection between *Die Frage der Laienanalyse* (1926) and *Die Zukunft einer Illusion*, one written to

protect psychoanalysis from the doctors, and the other one written to protect it from the clergy. Both standpoints, held by the founder of psychoanalysis, created problems. We will now analyze and understand how the above described conflict was present in the Swedish psychotherapeutic landscape.

THE SWEDISH PSYCHOANALYTICAL ASSOCIATION AND ST. LUKAS

The Swedish Psychoanalytic Society, associated with the International Psychoanalytical Association (IPA) was created and has been located in Stockholm since 1934.[14] Five years later, in 1939, again in Stockholm, St. Lukas was founded. To be precise, the foundation 'Serenity and Strength' was founded in Stockholm in March 1939, and in November 1940, it changed its name to the St. Lukas foundation. St. Lukas started its first local branch in 1946, in Gothenburg. It has been, and is still, an association that has trained psychodynamic psychotherapists. It also offers psychotherapeutic treatment. St. Lukas has had great importance for the psychodynamic tradition in Sweden; at present it has more than 30 local branches all over Sweden. Moreover, it is characterized by a large interest in existential, religious and philosophical questions. Today, St. Lukas tries to be up-dated from an academic standpoint.

In their book, *Själens vård och psykologin* (1996) [Pastoral cure and psychology], Carl-Erik Brattemo and Sixten Lundgren describe, among other things, the original purpose of St. Lukas, which also was »to guide, in different ways, both the healthy and the ailing towards a better understanding of the importance of spiritual factors for bodily and spiritual health«.[15] Within the group of Christian doctors who took part in the foundation of St. Lukas were the neurologist Richard Eeg-Olofsson, the psychiatrist Curt Åmark, and the lung specialist Gösta Birath. Furthermore, the Methodist pastor and psychotherapist Göte Bergsten, as well as the trained social worker and author Ebba Pauli (1873–1941), would have a decisive importance for the creation of the foundation. Bergsten was the first director and superintendent of St. Lukas.[16]

In May, 1944, the purpose of St. Lukas developed further into the following:

> The main purpose of St. Lukas, which is a Christian ecumenical association of clergymen, doctors and laymen, is to provide care for the needy sick, particularly those whose ailments have their roots in states of psychological conflict and weakness. For that purpose the Foundation wants to establish and run institutes for pastoral cure and psychological counseling, and also acquire, own and run hostels and nursing homes.

On the first of August, 1944, on Ordenstrappan in Stockholm, St. Lukas opened the first of its institutes.[17] The foundation would, according to Bergsten, provide pastoral cure »founded on modern psychology, while at the same time maintaining the essential elements of Christian pastoral cure«. St. Lukas was open to doctors, clergy, psychologists and trained social workers. In his book, *Psykologin och själens vård* (1945) [Psychology and cure of souls], Bergsten has an open attitude towards the psychoanalytical ideas, but his openness is one with reservations. The book – of more than 400 pages – drew a lot of attention and was also published in Norway, England, and the USA.

The text is profound and the author's attitude is problematizing with an intellectual touch. You could argue that St. Lukas was founded in the wake of the creation of the Swedish Psychoanalytic Society and operating in the field that was opened by Freud's psychoanalysis.[18] St. Lukas can perhaps be seen as an example of how the psychoanalytic tradition and practice, through the connection to existential and religious questions, could approach the category of consolation.

St. Lukas was created in an atmosphere of increasing interest in psychoanalysis and psychodynamic theory, but it is important to remember that the Swedish Psychoanalytic Society had a distinctly atheistic stance. There were a number of doctors in Sweden in the middle of the 1930s who had an interest in psychodynamic theory, but didn't feel at home in an atheistic, intellectual and to some extent dogmatic environment. They had religious beliefs themselves, and they had met patients with thoughts and experiences of God and phenomena pertaining to religious issues. They felt the need for a forum where there was room for the kind of questions that they had.

There were also Christian theologians who were genuinely interested in the psychoanalytic and the psychodynamic theory and who needed to meet doctors who had the unquestionable authority to speak on behalf of, and treat, those afflicted by mental suffering. They wanted help to create a psychotherapeutic movement that was more in accordance with their Christian philosophy and belief.

THE TRANSITIONAL OBJECT

As I stated earlier, the question of consolation is not a simple one, and psychoanalysis lacks a clarifying, central concept for what we in everyday life call consolation. From the beginning there was almost no interest at all in understanding the need of consolation. Nonetheless, Donald W. Winnicott's concept of the transitional object must be considered in this context. According to Winnicott, the transitional object is on the border between psychic, subjective reality, and external, objective reality. It is usually used by the child of the age of four to twelve months. The transitional object is oral, in the sense that the

child likes to take it in its mouth, and also suck on it. It functions, according to Winnicott, as part of a normal passage in the child's development. The transitional object has a status between the child's oral relation to the breast, and subsequent object relations; it is on the border between the subjective and the objective. Winnicott proposes that the transitional object functions as an illusion, precisely because it draws its strength both from the inner world of the child and from external reality, worlds which the child cannot clearly distinguish between. It is also an object that the child develops a strong attachment to.

Often, the child will want to have access to the object at bedtime, but its function is also called upon when the child is frustrated or seeking consolation. It would seem that the transitional object has precisely the capacity to give consolation. Traces of the presence of the transitional object can appear in the adult in states such as sadness and depression; it can also be traced as an element in the sexual life of the adult, in the form of a fetish, according to Winnicott.

—— It is important to point out that the concept of the transitional object, when used by psychoanalysts and psychodynamically oriented psychotherapists, tends to become a technical term and a concrete object that fails to capture – in Dagerman's words – mankind's need for consolation. In the worst case, the transitional object is interpreted as though there could be a ritual solution to mankind's need for consolation. It's also important to stress that the transitional object, according to the theory, is closely related to the child's separation from the mother. The concept is included in the theory of the child's psychological development, and its striving after autonomy.

CONCLUSION

In Freud's scientific-ideological attempt at turning psychoanalysis into a pure scientific discipline, phenomena that were, and to a large extent still are, parts of a kind of thinking belonging to the religious or literary fields, are lost. The human need of consolation is such a phenomenon. But this phenomenon, the need of consolation, doesn't disappear as a result of a failure to conceptualize it, and thus exclude it from the psychoanalytic conceptual framework.[19]

The practicing psychoanalyst, who regularly meets the child in the adult, will, however, in the course of this thorough and lasting work encounter the human need for consolation, a need that can show itself in different guises; it can be denied, foreclosed/rejected, repressed, or acknowledged by the individual.

It is probably an illusion to think that an adult – even the well analyzed and mature adult – would be able to walk through life without ever being reacquainted with the child's unappeasable need for consolation. Freud was well aware of the implications

of the quote with which I opened this paper. But his belief in the need to rid psychoanalysis of all religious influences made him unwilling to take any other stance with regard to humans' more or less eternal need for consolation than the one he chose.

Freud took his own adversities and misfortunes in life stoically – the death of one of his children; the death of his grandchild; the recurring offences to which he was subjected due to his Jewish origin and affinity, being forced into exile in June 1938; the fact that he was stricken with grave illness, a cancer of the jaw; and the fact that, like all of us, he lived with the disappointments of ordinary life. And he did not write about the need for consolation. Maybe he did not dare to think and write about what he once stated; that fundamentally, consolation is what we are all demanding – »the wildest revolutionaries no less passionately than the most virtuous believers«.

ENDNOTES

1 Sigmund Freud: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (SE) XXI (London [1961] 1978), 144–145.

2 Stig Dagerman: »Vårt behov av tröst är omättligt …« (*Husmodern* 13, 1952).

3 His English translator chooses the term 'consolation'.

4 The term in German is *der Analysierte.* Sigmund Freud used this term irregularly for his patients. I have chosen to use the word analysand in the article.

5 Freud: SE XXI, 31.

6 Freud: SE XXI, 34–37. The German term for »world view« is *Weltanshauung*.

7 Freud: SE XXI, 38.

8 Freud: SE XXI, 53.

9 Freud: SE XXI, 54.

10 Freud: SE XXI, 55.

11 Freud: SE XXI, 55.

12 Freud: SE XXI, 56.

13 Freud uses the German word *Trieb,* and two English words – instinct and drive – have been used for the German word *Trieb.*

14 The same year and in the same city, the Erica Foundation was born. The function of this institution, operating in Stockholm, was, and still is, to train child psychotherapists within a psychodynamic tradition.

15 Its first president was the Professor of Surgery, Knut Harald Giertz.

16 He was the one who was associated with the foundation of the institution, and he was also the publicly most noted of the founders of St. Lukas.

17 Göte Bergsten became its director, spiritual adviser and therapist.

18 It did however take a course of its own.

19 The need for consolation doesn’t reach the status of an idea, or a term, and even less the status of a concept.

—— Thanks to Anders Holme, Johannes Nordholm and Ingrid Rosén.

Bo Lindberg, »Stoicism and Consolation«

ABSTRACT

In this essay, Stoic consolation is presented by help of Seneca and his treatises on consolation addressed to two women, his mother Helvia and his relative Marcia. Consolation according to Seneca consists in arguments taken from the rhetorical genre of consolation embedded in Stoic philosophy. By excluding the passions and effects from the philosophical soul, by criticizing conventional opinion of what is important in life, and by accepting determinism, Stoic consolation aimed at preventing grief from invading the mind of the mourner. It was a proactive strategy, preparing the soul for hardship rather than mitigating grief after misfortune has hit the individual. In theory, the Stoic would be in no need of consolation. In practice, however, as in the cases of Helvia and Marcia, the consolatory arguments are applied after the calamity. Stoic consolation differs from Christian consolation in that the category of hope is excluded. Since affects are ruled out, compassion and pity on the part of the consoler are excluded as well. Stern and severe, Stoicism has not made itself popular in history; however, Stoic arguments are recognized in modern coach literature, where »acceptance«, focus on the present, »carpe diem«, and mindfulness are current prestige words.

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Keywords: therapy, adiaphora, preparation of the soul, fate, death, amor fati

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STOICISM AND CONSOLATION

In antiquity, consolation was a rhetorical genre, developed by Greek sophists and philosophers during the Hellenistic era. Crantor, who lived around 300 BC, is said to have set the genre. Only fragments of pre Roman consolations are extant; surviving consolations belong to Roman antiquity. Cicero introduced consolation in Latin language, other important texts are by Seneca, Plutarch (in Greek), and the Christian Boethius who wrote his famous *De consolatione philosophiae* in jail, facing his death by execution in 524 AD.

As a rhetorical genre, consolation had a number of recurrent topics, in the strict rhetorical sense of that word, which were taught at school. Fortuna is not to be trusted; be prepared to meet her strikes. All men are mortal; the important thing is to have led a virtuous life. Time heals all ills. Everything, persons and goods, are lent; be happy you had them. Death is the end to all ills. The gods shelter you from ills after death.[1]

So consolation was a well-established concept in ancient rhetoric. It infiltrated philosophy too. In fact, the aim of philosophy had much to do with consolation. Modern historians of philosophy have emphasised the therapeutic aim of ancient philosophy, i.e. to alleviate human shortcomings and agony and facilitate the good life. That this was the ambition of practical philosophy is well known but it has been obscured by the dominant interest of historians in the issues of epistemology, logic and metaphysics that belong to theoretical philosophy. Not least did the Stoics endeavour to »lead the soul« to a better way of living.[2]

STOIC FRAMEWORK OF CONSOLATION

There were Stoic philosophers from about 300 BC to the end of antiquity, but not so much of their texts are extant, especially not of the writings of the first Stoic philosophers in Greece. Here, I will let Stoicism be represented by the Roman politician and philosopher Lucius Annaeus Seneca, who committed suicide in 65 AD by order of Nero. He was a fluent, mostly likable proponent of Stoicism, in writings full of short sentences suitable for quoting.[3]

In many respects, Stoic philosophy preconceived modern positions and topics. The Stoics were rationalists, believing in reason as opposed to superstition and prejudice. They criticized conventional values and institutions, partly using a constructivist approach by distinguishing between the thing itself and the concept of it. Furthermore, they were universalistic, believ-

ing in the unity of mankind and the equality of human beings by virtue of their common reason. Important ideas and topics in the Western tradition, not least cherished in our time, can be traced back to Stoicism: natural law and natural rights, criticism of slavery, equality between the sexes, and cosmopolitanism.

But these embryos of modern thought were secondary in Stoic philosophy, or at least embedded in a context that differs fundamentally from that of the modern world. Seneca's aim was not to change the world but to harmonize man with the deterministic order of the universe called Logos, i.e. Reason. The target of his criticism was only indirectly the social order; instead it aimed at neutralizing the emotions that cause the misery of life and promote the integration of man in the rational order of the universe. As for universalism, Seneca talked of the brotherhood of all men and played down the importance of patriotic love for one's country. But his cosmopolitanism tended to be transcendent and metaphysical, referring rather to a cosmic citizenship together with divine entities in the universe than with fellow human beings on the earth.

The immediate aim of Stoic philosophic therapy was to make reason control the affects and passions that emerge out of fear and desire. From the Stoic point of view, anger, greed, envy, grief, anxiety and fear of death were deleterious passions, and so were hope and compassion too, together with feelings of unclear origin like boredom and nausea. The method to prevent the passions from entering one's mind was the critique of our conventional rating of pleasure and pain. Money, career, corporeal pleasures that arouse emotions of longing and hope are indifferent things (*adiaphora*). The same holds true for those things you fear and shun: the loss of friends, relatives, social position and life. By help of critical reasoning you can see through the appearances and the conventional connotations of words, gradually understanding that what you desire and fear is only the concepts of things, not the things themselves. It is not the facts, for instance that of death, that make people worried, it is the opinions about them.[4] He who manages to keep out the passions in this way acquires Stoic calmness that makes him capable of mastering envious Fortuna and meeting the agonies and vicissitudes of life, including, *nota bene*, cases of deceptive triumph and prosperity which cause immodest exultation that is doomed to be followed by disappointment and adversity. The complete Stoic is liberated from fear but also from the emotional disturbance caused by expectations on the future. He is free from hope and fear.[5] He is also virtuous, which means that he practices virtue for the sake of virtue itself and without regard to strategic motives. Few human beings, if any, reach Stoic perfection; at best, they are sedulous adepts, while the majority are fools.

SENECA ON CONSOLATION

Much of Seneca's advice and precepts aim at teaching the Stoic adept how to endure the disappointments and misfortunes of life and how to face death. Indirectly, such passages deal with consolation since the aim of his philosophy is to eliminate the need for it. The word consolation is not particularly frequent, but three of his texts deal explicitly with consolation and are addressed to particular persons. Two of these are women: his mother Helvia, and a woman called Marcia. The third is written for Polybius, an official in the service of Emperor Claudius.[6] It is probably significant that two of them are addressed to women, who conventionally were considered to be weak and more given to protracted grief. The following outline of Seneca's thought about consolation is based on these treatises on consolation and on some of his other writings, especially his letters to his friend Lucilius, the procurator and possibly also the governor of Sicily.

Considering that grief is an affect, one cannot expect it to be held in esteem in Stoic philosophy. Seneca does not want to be hard-hearted and accepts that a man sheds tears immediately after the death of a friend or a relative. But to grief (*lugere*), meaning that the affect is allowed to occupy one's mind for a longer time, is definitely a reprehensible weakness. At least in males, with women it is a bit different; they are expected to mourn for a longer time. But they too should control their emotion, and it is Seneca's conviction that Helvia and Marcia, the two women he consoles, are able to rise above their sex and defeat their affect.[7] Grief is not natural, Seneca argues referring not to rational nature, as is usually the case in Stoic argument, but to animal nature. It is natural to miss a lost son, but only for a short time. Animals do that, which is natural; only human beings persist in longing for their relatives in an unnatural way. Grief is the effect of opinion, Seneca holds, applying Stoic critical analysis, that is, it is a constructed emotion going beyond the natural instinct.[8]

It should be noted that consolation is needed *after* a misfortune has struck someone. Marcia and Helvia have experienced adversities. Marcia has lost her young son, and Helvia has been hit by the calamity that her son Seneca has been exiled by the emperor and sent to Corsica. However, as just mentioned, most of the consoling arguments presented by Seneca are philosophical precepts which aim to *prepare* the Stoic adept for adversity and make him or her capable to prevent the passion of grief from overwhelming him. Strictly speaking, the aim of Stoic philosophy is to make the soul immune against deleterious passions and strong enough to confront the difficulties of life, thus eliminating the very need for consolation. In practice, however, Stoic therapy is applied on persons who have already experienced something evil and need to be cured from it.[9]

FORTUNA

To Seneca, the uncertainty and unpredictability of life is represented by Fortuna, who is a deceptive, cunning, envious female entity with whom the individual is in constant war. Fortuna strikes the individual when he suspects it the least. Towards Fortuna, Seneca's attitude is remarkably pugnacious. The defence against her designs is constant *praemeditatio*, that is, to think in advance what might happen and prepare for whatever might happen so that one is invulnerable when calamity comes.[10] It is not so much about taking practical measures to prevent mishaps – the possibility of doing so was comparably small in antiquity – as about mental readiness. When Fortuna hits you, you must not say »I couldn't think that would happen.«[11] He who has experienced prolonged prosperity is usually lulled into effeminate softness and unable to resist the strike of Fortuna. An unbroken soul, on the other hand, endures both triumph and misfortune.[12] The consolatory strategy of *praemeditatio* is a development of the rhetorical topic that everything we have is lent. In its Stoic setting, it implies an attitude of distance. Commenting on the risk of losing friends and relatives, Seneca remarks: »I have them as if I were going to lose them and lose them as if I had them.«[13] The rationalistic or rather metaphysical attitude makes the sensual and corporeal presence of people less important. The difference between death and temporal absence is not that big. Let's imagine, he suggests, that the dead are just absent, indeed let us deceive ourselves that we have sent them in advance and will soon come after.[14] Seneca applies the same kind of abstraction talking about friendship. Friendship is important in Stoic philosophy – more important than family, actually – but it is not necessary to be together with a friend. Seneca can enjoy friendship with someone distant; indeed, friendship persists after the friend has deceased.[15]

ADIAPHORA

The argument of *praemeditatio* and Seneca's fighting spirit against Fortuna indicate that the strikes of Fortuna are really bad things. But according to the idea of *adiaphora*, they are not. For the losses of property, relatives, position and the like that might fall upon you are indifferent. You can have those conventionally good things but you do not need them. They are not essential for your moral welfare. An example of this kind of neutralizing reverses is Seneca's comments on his exile in Corsica, the cause of his mother's grief. Exile is really no misfortune, he declares. Exile is nothing extraordinary, Rome is full of immigrants, no country has its original population, and what was Aeneas, the founder of Rome, if not an immigrant? These arguments seem quite modern in their relativizing of nationhood but they are wrapped in the typical Stoic spiritual

cosmopolitanism. You cannot be dispossessed of the best thing in man, that is, virtue, and the common human nature. The common nature of man constitutes a community that is rather heavenly than human. As long as Seneca can contemplate the moon, the sun, the planets and the stars and their movements, as long as he can associate with them, it is irrelevant where he resides; to the wise man every place is his fatherland. Thus, exile is no problem for Seneca, nor is the ensuing poverty; by consequence, mother Helvia has no reason to grieve for him.[16]

The argument about the indifference of exile has a double function. To Seneca, it is not really consolatory. It is an ingredient in the Stoic repertoire that gave him the strength to resist depression when exile hit him; he was prepared. To Helvia, who is a brave character above female frailty and tears but not a Stoic trainee – regrettably her husband was too conservative to let her study philosophy[17]– it is a consolatory argument, applied to alleviate the grief that has befallen her because of Seneca's exile.

FATE

Another consolatory argument, related to the metaphysical character of the cosmopolitanism just mentioned, is based on determinism. What happens occurs by inexorable Fate. Determined Fate is paradoxically connected to unpredictable Fortuna; in fact, fate is Fortuna elevated to serene and rational necessity. In Stoic theory, the universe runs through a cycle of 70.000 years, where every single moment of natural or human activity is predetermined. This poses a problem to the idea of free will that the Stoics did not want to abandon completely, but I will not go into that. From the point of view of consolation, determinism may alleviate grief, considering that what happened could not be avoided. Marcia's son lived as long as he should, nobody dies too early; Fate does its job.[18] Whatever happens, one should endure it as if one had wanted it to happen.[19] To accept the inevitable is a part of Stoic wisdom, according to the famous saying that »the fates lead the willing and drag the unwilling.«[20] In fact, accepting necessity, that is, the rational law of the universe, is freedom; we live in a monarchy, says Seneca, to obey God is freedom.[21] The wise man should submit to Fate; indeed it is a great solace to be carried away by the universe.[22] In so far as determined events appear to be disasters like the destruction of a town or the downfall of an empire, they are explained as effects of the constant circular processes of ascending and declining that maintain the balance of the universe; Stoic thought harbours a ferment of ecological balance in the Universe. The world is always in change, but it is a salutary change although the individual with limited perspective does not see that. »Inter peritura vivimus,« we live among things doomed to perish, Seneca

observes, consoling a friend on account of the conflagration of Lyon in Gaul.[23]

VIRTUE

The strategy of Seneca's consolation is usually to show that what is apparently bad and deplorable is not really so. There are, however, some arguments that do not hide the negative character of misfortunes. One is the not very encouraging remark that one gets used to calamities. Protracted adversity gradually makes a person accustomed to suffering; mother Helvia has already suffered so many reverses that Seneca's exile is comparably easy to endure.[24] Less resigned and more Stoic in spirit is the assertion that misfortune gives an opportunity to show virtue. »Calamitas virtutis occasio est,« is one of Seneca's efficient one-liners.[25] Since virtue is an overarching value – *summum bonum* – in Stoic philosophy, reverses are acceptable or even desirable to the Stoic adept. »Virtue is avid for peril,«[26] says Seneca; several times he refers to intrepid gladiators.

DEATH

Finally, the big issue in Stoic consolation – and in ancient philosophic therapy in general – is death. To cure fear of death, and prevent undue mourning for it, is first priority. Seneca regards death as essentially an indifferent thing, although a serious one that causes much anxiety. Seneca's answers are not quite unequivocal. He is positive about one thing, however: the horrific tales of the realm of Death that have been produced by poets are false: there is no darkness, no streams of fire, no river of Lethe.[27] There is nothing to fear. An early death is not to deplore. Death is only the dissolution of all our pains, Fortuna has no power anymore; we evade misfortunes, greed for riches, sensual temptations, anxiety for the future. Nothing is as dangerous and insidious as life. In fact, Marcia's son is fortunate to have passed away so young, escaping all the misery that is inherent in life. Seneca alludes to the sentence of Sophocles that the best thing is never to be born, the second best to die a youth. He adds, however, that such an early death is a return to one's original state.[28] That suggests some kind of celestial existence before life on earth. Seneca does not expand on the topic. The Stoics were ambiguous about extra mundane existence. Their metaphysic was half materialistic which made them assume that both body and soul are dissolved after death. But there was also a transcendent strain in their thought that opened for the persistence of the soul in celestial regions; unclear however, whether it retained its individuality or just joined an immaterial sphere. Seneca's cosmopolitanism that consists in contemplation of the celestial phenomena is related to this idea that the real abode of man is transcendent and that

death means a restitution of man in a pre-mundane condition. He holds out that prospect for Marcia's son and envisages for himself an existence out in the universe among the gods.[29] However, he is not positive about this and declares that he himself does not need that hope and that he is content with the alternative that death is the dissolution of body and soul and does not mean that the individual can survive.[30]

In so far as he takes that position, Seneca lives up to the proud and noble attitude that has caused philosophers to admire ancient philosophy as compared with Christian religion: there is no need for a post-existence as the ultimate consolation. This is an important point. Doubts about post-existence go along with the less ambiguous Stoic distrust in expectations and hopes for the future. Christian consolation has a forward-looking dimension that is absent in Stoic therapy.[31] To the Stoics, leading a virtuous life is enough. It is a secularist position, although not completely modern, since a rational metaphysical order of the universe is presupposed. Nor is it modern, if we ascribe to modern secularism the endeavour to improve the existing world here and now while paying less attention to eternity. The Stoics did not believe that the external conditions of life could be much improved. In that respect they were realists, not to say pessimists, considering how they elated death as compared to life. Their Utopia was internal, located in the soul of man, liberated from fear, hope and passions and open for virtue.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Stoic philosophy has a stern and pessimistic outlook, especially when accounted for under the heading of consolation.[32] The endless struggle with Fortuna, the permanent readiness for adversities and the denial of the right to relax in moments of prosperity, gives a gloomy picture of human existence. Seneca states that life is not easy, it is permanent military service.[33] Stoic rejection of passions and affects confirms the severe impression; not least their critique of pity and compassion that has shocked people ever since antiquity. Likewise, their distrust in expectations and plans for the future seems to question a fundamental element in human nature, that is, hope.[34] True, the internal utopia of the soul, including the uncertain post-existence of the soul in the universe, is something to hope for, but it is an exclusive bliss obtained not by divine grace but by hard and constant effort. Is consolation efficient, or even possible if it is given without hope and compassion, or as we say today, empathy? Perhaps without hope, for much consolation is practiced with people facing death, who have nothing to hope for (unless they believe in a life *post mortem*). But less likely without empathy; Stoic rationalism not only rejects strong feelings and sharing the feelings of

others, it is also concerned with abstract and universal categories that leave no space for the particular condition of the individual. One might ask whether consolation at all is possible without an emotional relation to him or her who is to be comforted. I come back to the observation above that Stoic therapy focuses on strengthening the soul in advance of misfortunes, whereas consolation is basically therapy for the distressed. Stoics may be good at the former but they do not convince as consolers. On the contrary, as pointed out above, their aim is to eliminate the very need of consolation.

To the modern reader, Seneca's consolatory efforts run the risk of sounding presumptuous in their heroic style and male frame of reference. On the other hand, time-bound hyperboles and the underlying metaphysic set apart, Stoic fatalism that demands that one should acquiesce and reconcile oneself with the unavoidable is a noble, unsentimental attitude that could meet with the approval of the modern mind. Famous heralds of modernity have felt the attraction. Nietzsche's coinage *amor fati*, the love of fate, is the Stoic idea of accepting fate carried to the limit of the absurd. Freud thought that science would at length liberate us from religion's childish promise of heavenly bliss and leave us facing the insight that there is nothing after death. That is an application of Stoic fatalism.

Stoic language of aristocratic virtue makes the modern mind uneasy. The wise man holds the world in contempt; being independent on the indifferent things around him, he is self-sufficient and self-confident. To the Stoic, self-sufficiency is something to strive for; to a modern democrat it connotes indifference to one's fellow human beings. Furthermore, today, when religion seemingly comes back, when reason is challenged by emotions, when empathy and human vulnerability are prestige words, and when male supremacy is eroded by feminism, Stoic heroism appears to be out-dated.

On the other hand, the Stoic attitude is not unequivocally repelling. It is aristocratic with dignity and modesty. It is not bosting and bragging, but modest, lacking grand airs. It is not morally indifferent. Stoicism may be practised in noble retreat but also in unpretentious action, fulfilling obligations in the service of others. The Stoic is helpful without fuss. And indeed, if we turn to the field of individual psychic well-being, Stoic therapeutic measures do not seem out of fashion at all. Today's handbooks for a better life exhort people to concentrate on what is present, not to worry so much about the future, to modify their expectations and to learn to accept what is here and now. Adversity intelligence is a cognitively founded method of preparing oneself for misfortunes. Immediacy, mindfulness, slowness, and *carpe diem* are other keywords reminding of Stoic strategies for a better life.

These recommendations are adapted to the modern world of

chased consumers and risk-running entrepreneurs rather than Roman politicians in retreat, and the contempt of the world they perchance may bring about is not of the modest, Stoic sort. Nevertheless, the basic endeavour is the same, persistent over the millennia. Obviously, Stoic topics and methods, due to their universal applicability, have a potential for re-use and re-cycling.

ENDNOTES

1 *Oxford Classical Dictionary*,[1949] Oxford 1966 p 226.

2 This interpretation has been proposed in particular by Pierre Hadot, *What is ancient philosophy* (Cambridge Mass. 2002). See also Ilsetraut Hadot, *Seneca und die griechisch-römische Tradition der Seelenleitung* (Berlin 1969) and Martha Nussbaum, *The therapy of desire: theory and practice in Hellenistic ethics*(Princeton 1994);

3 Works on Seneca are of course legio. On Seneca in political context, see Miriam Griffin, *Seneca. A philosopher in politics* (Oxford 1976). Focusing on Seneca as original philosopher is Brad Inwood, *Reading Seneca. Stoic philosophy at Rome* (Oxford 2005). Shorter accounts are Paul Veyne, *Seneca: the life of a Stoic* (New York 2003), and my own *Seneca. Människosläktets lärare* (Seneca – teacher of mankind) (Stockholm 2010).

4 Epictetus, *Encheiridion* ed. G.J. Boter (Berlin 2007), chap 5 a. Cf. Seneca, Epistle 30: »Non mortem timemus, sed cogitationem mortis« , in *Epistulae morales* vol. I, Loeb classical library (London 1953).

5 »…spei metusque liber.« *Hippolytos* verse 492, in *Seneca's Tragedies*, vol. I, Loeb classical library (London 1953).

6 Ad Helviam matrem de consolatione, Ad Marciam de consolatione; Ad Polybium de consolatione, In Seneca, *Moral essays*, vol. II, Loeb classical library (London 1951).

7 Not surprisingly, there is a male bias in Seneca's texts, in spite of the recognition that women and slaves in principle are capable of being virtuous. Friends, who are always men, are obviously more important than wives and the loss of sons is worse than that of daughters. Furthermore, he takes it for granted that women are more deeply hurt by grief then men, barbarians more than cultivated nations, and uneducated people more than educated (Ad Marciam chap. 7:4).

8 Ad Marciam chap. 7:1–2.

9 Still, I think this difference within the concept of consolation is noteworthy. A more rational and proactive therapy differs from an emotional cure that is applied on him who has already been struck by calamity. Etymology may shed some light on this. *Consolatio* is related to words meaning solid, firm, unbroken (*solidus, sollus*; see Lewis & Short, *A Latin dictionary*, [1879] (London 1984), 1719), which is in accordance with the proactive Stoic strategy to prepare the individual for

misfortunes. In comparison, the Swedish word *tröst*, German *Trost*, suggests alleviating measures applied *after* a calamity has occurred. Swed. *tröst* and *förtröstan* , like. Germ. *Trost* include *trust*, in the sense of confidence, especially in God, which in turn connotes hope, an affection not approved of by the Stoics. A Stoic may have confidence, but only in himself (*fiducia sui*). On the other hand, *trust* is something that makes you endure expected hardships, which it has in common with Stoic therapy.

10 On meditation, Epistle 99:32; Ad Marciam chap. 9.

11 De tranquillitate animi, chap. XI:9, in *Moral essays* vol. II, Loeb classical library(London 1951).

12 Ad Helviam chap. 5:3–5

13 Epistle 63:7: »Habeo enim illos (sc. amicos) tamquam amissurus, amisi tamquam habeam.«

14 Ad Marciam chap. 19.

15 Epistle 35.

16 Ad Helviam chap. 8:6 and 9:7.

17 Ad Helviam chap. 17:3.

18 Ad Marciam chap 21:4 and 7: »Agunt suum opus fata.«

19 *Quaestiones naturales*, vol. I, Loeb classical library (London 1971), Lib. III Praefatio 12: »… quidquid acciderit, sic ferre, quasi volueris tibi accidere.«

20 Epistle 107:11: »Ducunt volentem fata, nolentem trahunt.«

21 Seneca, De vita beata, in *Moral essays* vol II, chap. 15:7.

22 De providentia, *Moral essays* vol. II, chap. 5:7–8: »Grande solatium est, cum universo rapi.«

23 Epistle 91:12.

24 Ad Helviam chap. 2:3.

25 De providentia chap. 4:6.

26 De providentia chap. 4:4: »Avida est virtus periculi.«

27 Epistle 82:16, Ad Marciam chap. 19. An example of a horrifying poetic account of life after death that Seneca may have had in mind is Virgil's description of Aeneas's descent into the underworld in *Aeneis* VI.

28 Ad Marciam chap. 22:3: »Itaque si felicissimum est non nasci, proximum est, puto, brevitate vitae defunctos cito in integrum restitui.«

29 Ad Marciam 25; Epistle 102.

30 Epistle 71:16 and 93:16.

31 Compare the Christian position in this respect, as described in the article by Cavallin in this volume.

32 Admittedly, Seneca is not done full justice in this essay. Apart from the social aspects of Stoicism – brotherhood of men, humanity, critique of slavery – which surface in his texts as an effect of Stoic virtue, he has quite a lot to say about the therapy of less dramatic misfortunes in life and of boredom and *nausea*; much of that is palatable to the modern reader.

33 Epistle 96:5: »Atqui vivere, Lucili, militare est.« Se also Epistle 107:2.

34 The wise man is happy with the present and heedless of the future (praesentibus laetus, futuri securus); De vita beata, in *Moral essays* vol. II, chap 26:4.

Staffan Olofsson, »Consolation and Empathy in the Religious Worldview of Tomas Tranströmer«

ABSTRACT

The poems of the Nobel laureate Tomas Tranströmer has an introspective quality which alternates intangible between things and events from the exterior world and events from man's inner life. He constantly delves on what it means to be a human being in the world of today and regards insight into spiritual aspects of life as a survival strategy for man, on an individual as well as on a collective level, and something that brings true consolation. In the poetical world of Tranströmer humans are not only rational and social beings but also spiritual and existential beings, and without the latter no authentic life exists. The emphasis in my presentation is on the performative force of Tranströmer's poems for creating consolation and empathy, and the depiction of the religious worldview, conveyed by his poems. I have used the theory of the structuralist semiotician Michael Riffaterre as my main theoretical perspective complemented by the »I and it-relationship« and »I and you-relationship« outlined by the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber. I have concretized my study by interpretations of selected poems. The most innovative part of my presentation is a novel interpretation of the poem *Romanesque Arches* based on the presuppositions given above.

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Keywords: Tranströmer, Riffaterre, Buber, poetry, religious worldview, Jewish mysticism, Romanesque Arches

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Staffan Olofsson

CONSOLATION AND EMPATHY IN THE RELIGIOUS WORLDVIEW OF TOMAS TRANSTRÖMER

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of my article is as the title suggests studying Tomas Tranströmer's world of poetry based on the theme consolation and empathy, a theme that I will argue is grounded in his religious view of the world. Although the poems were originally written in Swedish, the respected American poets, Robin Fulton, and Robert Bly made the translations of the poems for English-speaking countries in close contact with Tranströmer himself. Therefore I have chosen to use these translations into English as my point of departure. The use of well-established translations facilitates the interpretation of the poems in my article, since it is written in English.

I have employed the theory of the structuralist semiotician Michael Riffaterre as a main theoretical perspective in my study. For methodological considerations the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber has provided me with relevant tools.

The structure of my presentation is as follows. First, I will outline the theory of Michael Riffaterre and its bearing on the study of Tranströmer's poetry, then elucidate the relevance of Martin Buber's main perspective »I and it-relationship« and »I and you-relationship« for my interpretation, I will go on to specify the performative force of Tranströmer's poems for creating consolation and empathy, and depict the kind of religious worldview which is conveyed by his poems. Further on I will concretize my study by interpretations of selected poems which highlight Tranströmer's religious world view and the performative force of his poems as well as show the relevance of using use Buber's philosophy as an methodological tool. The most important part of my study is a novel interpretation of the poem *Romanesque Arches* based on the presuppositions given above.

MICHAEL RIFFATERRE'S SEMIOTIC THEORY

Riffaterre regarded poetry as a special kind of language use, where the message is an end in itself. In his view the poem does not attempt to refer to reality, but rather to establish a coherent system of significance. In contrast to prose a poetic text must primarily be analyzed with regard to the relationships that

develop between the words along the so-called syntagmatic axis.[1] Another way to express this is that Riffaterre's theory makes a distinction between two levels or aspects of the poem from the point of view of reading. The mimetic level provides information and references to reality in a gradual way, and often gives the impression of diversity; indeed, the poem may even seem disconnected. However, on the deeper level, the semiotic level, which emerges only after a repeated reading, when one understands the text as a whole, the poem can be apprehended as both cohesive and coherent.[2] On the mimetic level Riffaterre speaks about »meaning«, and on the semiotic level of »significance«.[3]

The term ungrammaticalities relates to the disturbances and deviations that are caused by the matrix on the mimetic level of the poem, and that makes it defective as description of reality.[4] The ungrammaticalities become trails that lead the reading from the mimetic level to the semiotic level, that is, to the underlying significance.

Hypogram is one of the most important concepts for Riffaterre. It is an extended notion of intertextuality, which includes as diverse material as other literary texts, clichés and conceptual worlds in its entirety. The hypogram is central for a semiotic reading, because it puts the text in a different context than the mimetic reading, and thus transforms the ungrammaticalities or idiosyncrasies into something that unlocks rather than locks the poem in question.[5]

This theory is an often used instrument for studying modern poetry, and is especially suited for exploring the kind of poetry that makes a distinction between two levels or aspects of the poem from the point of view of reading, a surface level as well as a deeper level, as so-called semiotic level. For example, Sverker Göransson and Erik Mesterton employ Riffaterre as main theoretical working tool in their study of poems written by poets as Edith Södergran, Gunnar Björling, Gunnar Ekelöf, Erik Lindegren, Tomas Tranströmer, T.S. Eliot and Karin Boye. Ingemar Friberg has, to take a more recent example analyzed the poetry of Göran Sonnevi based on Riffaterre's theory.[6]

THE »I AND YOU-RELATIONSHIP« AS INTERPRETATIVE KEY

In my view a relevant perspective is to understand the significance of Tranströmer's poems with reference to Martin Buber's discussion of two kinds of perspectives in the world, the »I and you-relationship« and the »I and it-relationship«.[7] Philosophically, these word pairs express complex ideas about modes of being – particularly how a person exists and actualizes that existence. As Buber argues in his famous book *I and Thou*, a person is at all times engaged with the world in one of these modes. This is a hypogram in the Riffaterreian sense of the

word. The »I and it-relationship« have an instrumental character, while the »I and you-relationship« is dialectical, with two subjects meeting each other. The »I and you-relationship« may take place in three different dimensions, in relation to nature, man's social world and in relation to the holy or God.[8] It can be described as a concrete encounter, »because these beings meet one another in their authentic existence, without any qualification or objectification of one another«.[9] However, one of the two in the encounter may be unaware of the established relationship as Buber puts it, »Even if the man to whom I say Thou is not aware of it in the midst of his experience, yet relation may exist. For Thou is more than It realizes. No deception penetrates here; here is the cradle of Real Life.«[10] These three dimensions occur everywhere in Tranströmer's poems and one essential significance of the poems are the establishment of an »I and you-relationship« between these dimensions.

Furthermore, any of these dimensions can, according to Buber, be the starting-point for a deeper understanding of oneself, to shape a more authentic life, which for Buber was signified by a transition from the »I and it-relationship« to the »I and you-relationship«. Read in this perspective the poems try to establish a way to see the nature, the world, and the holy as a direct relation between two subjects and thereby create authentic meetings.[11]

THE PERFORMATIVE POWER OF TRANSTRÖMER'S POEMS

It is not only in the poems, but also in the language itself that Tranströmer tries to evade an instrumental relation; the words are for him not objects, they are not instrumental, but are creative; they are doorways for meetings with an inner self. In order to be able to mediate consolation and empathy the poems ought to have not primarily an informative function, but rather a performative power. They may shape moments of insight that sees the world as a unity and overcomes the contradictions in world for the reader, trying to establish a more authentic inner life.[12] A way to do so is to shape points of contact between nature, the social world and the holy and that is one way to read the poems of Tranströmer.[13] As Robin Robertson says:

> But the realities of the world we live in are never far away, and the poems do move with evident conscience, even when the subject matter isn't obviously political in nature.[14]

Whiting argues that Tranströmer's poems themselves can be agents of change in peoples' life, and that poetry can open a breach in the wall of conventional thinking and seeing people have, and even create a meeting with subconscious parts of the human mind,[15] and thereby give them consolation and empathy.

THE CHARACTER OF TRANSTRÖMER'S POEMS

One reason for the choice of Tomas Tranströmer in this study is that his poetry is well known. His poems have been translated into more than 50 languages and as a Nobel laureate his work has been widely spread both in Sweden and abroad. Already with the publication of his first book of poetry, simply titled *17 Poems*, in 1954, at the age of twenty-three, Tranströmer became a respected poet in our country, and still is.[16] The landscape that Tranströmer's poetry depicts has remained more or less constant during more than 50 years under which he has written poetry.

Tranströmer's poems can thus be described as »meeting places« where an individual can encounter what in lack of an exact counterpart can be described as his inner life. Although his perspective is intensely personal, it is based on a universality that sees the poet go up and down through his own psyche before moving outside of himself to others in the world. There is an obvious appreciation of the mystical in his poetry but the metaphors are based on concrete observations from the nature, or the material world in which we live. Thus the forests, the birds, but also the telephone, the newspaper, the subway, are important building bricks in his poetical world. His translator, the famous poet Robert Bly, writes about him: »He has a strange genius for the image – images come up almost effortlessly. The images flow upward like water rising in some lonely place, in the swamps, or deep fir woods«.[17] However, this external mimesis should not be mixed up with the significance of the poems.

Tranströmer's poetry has the ability to travel to another culture and actually arrive there,[18] not least because he communicates primarily through concrete images. Perhaps that is one of the reasons for him being translated into so many different languages. Everyday objects are transformed: a newspaper, with its pages spread open for reading at the breakfast table, is described as a big, dirty butterfly (»Portrait with Commentary«). Tranströmer himself spoke about »this attachment I have to a very concrete milieu […] my poems always have a definite geographical starting point«.[19] As Robin Robertson writes: »The jagged coastland of Sweden, with its dark spruce and pine forests, sudden light and sudden storm, restless seas and endless winters, is mirrored by his direct, plain-speaking style and arresting, unforgettable images«.[20] However, the metaphors, not least from the natural world of Sweden, at the same time provides glimpses of an unseen world that helps man and gives him consolation and assists him in finding his authentic self.

TRANSTRÖMER AND A RELIGIOUS WORLDVIEW

Tranströmer's poems have been discussed from many different perspectives. Much has been said about his technical and linguistic brilliance, but a little less about his religious worldview.[21] Although his poems are mimetically related to the external world, that is, abound with concrete descriptions of nature, of the social world of man, and so on, the significance of his works of art, the deeper meaning, is always linked with the inner world of man, often in a way that feels 'religious', or 'mystical'. However, when directly asked about religion in interviews, Tranströmer is evasive, generally giving responses such as this:

> Very pretentious words, mystic and so forth. Naturally, I feel reserved about their use, but you could at least say that I respond to reality in such a way that I look on existence as a great mystery and at times, at certain moments, this mystery carries a strong charge, so that it does have a religious character, and it is often in such a context that I write. So these poems are all the time pointing to a greater context, one that is incomprehensive to our normal everyday reason.[22]

On a deeper level, and sometimes even on surface level of the poem, religious and spiritual motifs and themes are prominent. The appearance of something unknown, which could be described as something holy in his poetry, usually as a referred-to presence, occasionally as a speaking presence as well as an image of moral transformation, is one of the most central motifs in Tranströmer's poetry. It is sometimes called »Memory«, sometimes described as »the Room«.[23]

What is fascinating from a religious point of view is that this is a famous intellectual who, living in the more or less secularized society that is modern Sweden, sees and feels the spiritual limitations that such a culture has imposed on him, his neighbours, and the earth.[24] Tranströmer reports how difficult it is in such a society to keep in touch with his inner richness. He asks how man's inner richness can survive in a technological society like ours, and a society given to a secular world-view.[25] In the final stanza of the poem »April and Silence« he puts forth a notion that what he wants to say is hard to understand in a secular society: »The only thing I want to say gleams out of reach like the silver of the pawnbroker«.[26] One possible interpretation is that the silver refers to an spiritual and existential awareness that Tomas Tranströmer has devoted his career to make visible through his poetry, which is not always understood, another that the language is not adequate for expressing the meaning of his poems, since the poems are often a way to translate an experience from an inner, mental language to an

outer language with words. Tranströmer himself argues that the experience is hardly possible to translate into words, as a jellyfish, that loses all its form and beauty when it is taken from the natural element, the water.[27]

Tranströmer's personal world-view seems to have as its base an undogmatic religious outlook, with many impulses from the Christian tradition. As Jenifer Whiting puts it:

> Tomas Tranströmer is a unique kind of secular poet, who clearly sees himself within the active framework of God's continual creation.[28]

One may observe religious themes through three recognitions that repeatedly occur in Tranströmer's poetry, which Jenifer Whiting, has interpreted in more or less Christian terms: »the recognition of the holy unseen as magnetic forces drawing human beings toward them, the recognition of the self as God's unfolding creation, and the recognition of others and nature as fellow creation – that is, acts of ongoing creation.«[29]

Tranströmer's view of life treasures man and his abilities and possibilities but he does not push for the perfect. He accepts man with his faults and weaknesses, realizing that he is one of them. Life is about relations, to others, to himself to the nature, and to the holy, whatever its name. Empathy for all the living and a genuine sympathy for man, whoever he is, and a connection with the divine, pervade the symbolic landscape in Tranströmer's poetry.

There is a profoundly spiritual element in Tranströmer's poems, though not a conventionally religious one. As Robin Robertson puts it, »He is interested in polarities and how we respond, as humans, to finding ourselves at pivotal points, at the fulcrum of a moment.«[30] The understanding of the world in the poems has connections with many different religious perspectives, but it is not restricted to any of them, although the Jewish and the Christian traditions seems to be the most important seedbeds for the works by Tranströmer. However, his world-view is hardly a conventional Christian one, and the language is seldom that of the Bible. Apart from references to the Christian tradition, there is probably another dominant religious input. Some of his metaphors may have their seedbed in Jewish mysticism, in Gnostic and Kabbalistic thought. When the individual meets reality he, in correspondence with Kabba-listic thinking, redeems the world, unites dichotomy and shapes harmony. In that respect, the poems are focused on overcoming the conflicts in reality.

FROM JULY 90 (THE SORROW GONDOLA)

The establishment of an »I and you-relationship« can be found almost everywhere in Tranströmer's poems. Sometimes the

relationship is brought into being between man and nature, as can be seen in the poem »From July 90«:

> *It was a funeral and I felt the dead man was reading my thoughts better than I could. The organ was silent, the birds sang. The grave out in the sunshine. My friend's voice belonged on the far side of the minutes. I drove home seen-through by the glitter of the summer day by rain and quietness seen-through by the moon.*

Although the poem may have been based on a personal experience at a funeral it has a general significance and it must be read semiotically. The ungrammaticalities of the poem stares in one's eye from the beginning of the poem: »I felt the dead man was reading my thoughts better than I could«, »My friend's voice belonged on the far side of the minutes, seen-through by the glitter of the summer day by rain and quietness seen-through by the moon«. On the level of significance, living men are contrasted to dead people; the dead are the ones who understand and no one is playing the organ, which was what should have been expected at a funeral, instead the birds are singing. The grave has taken the place of living man, »out in the sunshine«, and not even time is on the side of man: »My friend's voice belonged on the far side of the minutes«. Thus, in the beginning of the poem dead people and nature are compared with the living men and the comparison is to man's disadvantage. They are easily replaced. It is not always man who sees through nature, but nature that sees through man. However, the poet feels that being unveiled by the dead and by nature is a positive experience. It is »the glitter of the summer day«, »rain and quietness«, it is »the moon« that sees through him. Thus, in the eyes of the lyrical subject it is nature that establishes the »I and you-relationship«. Nature is the subject of the act to see through him. This gives the end of the poem a positive note. Thus when the lyrical subject is being unveiled by nature, he feels accepted, being part of the creation. Thus, the poem breathes calmness and acceptance. The funeral is not upsetting it is revealing, it leads to an authentic emotional understanding of life. A meeting takes place, which transforms man's perspective of reality.

The hypogram that unlocks the poem is the creation of an »I and you-relationship« between the lyrical subject and the dead, the grave and the nature and a reversal of the preconceived notion regarding life that living men have the upper hand in relation to nature, an understanding that makes the lyrical subject calm and happy.

FROM THE WINTER OF 1947 (TRUTHBARRIERS)

The metaphor of the awakening occurs in Tranströmer's poems,

and is a central thought in his entire production.[31] A significant idea in the poet's works is that man has no clear view of reality, and the awakening is associated with that conception. It represents the first step in the process of initiation into a new consciousness, as in Gnostic thought were man often is described as a sleepwalker who needs to wake up.[32] In fact, already in his first poem, »Awakening is a parachute jump from dreams«,[33] he employs this metaphor, which as usual in Tranströmer's poems may have a double reference.

In the poem »From the winter of 1947« Tranströmer writes:

> *Days at school, that muffled thronging fortress. At dusk I walked home under the shop signs. Then the whispering without lips: »Wake up, sleepwalker!« And every object pointed to The Room.*[34]

The ungrammaticalities of the poem becomes evident, if not before, by the expressions »the whispering without lips«, »Wake up, sleepwalker!«, and »every object pointed to The Room«. The call to wake up, and thus the direct appeal to the lyrical subject, creates an authentic meeting, an »I and you-relationship«, which comes unexpectedly between the lyrical subject and the one who whispers. Furthermore, the impersonal days at school and the anonymous shop signs have suddenly turned into objects that pointed towards a room of freedom. The new view of things is experienced in the middle of the gloomy reality, and it comes from outside, by another person's voice.[35]

Tranströmer's use of the image of the school as a »muffled thronging fortress« echoes a view of the world as a prison or a labyrinth in Gnostic thinking. Thus the exhortation »Wake up sleepwalkers« fits perfectly the view of man as captive, as sleeping.[36] But »the Room« is a place where man wakes up. The Room is a metaphor for the true being. To enter the room of true being is the goal in much of Tranströmer's poetry, but the premise for being able to arrive in the Room is the awakening, an illuminative vision where people can be themselves without pretense or deception.[37] Thus, there is hope and comfort to be found in the middle of life, one may see all things pointing towards a possible existence of freedom.

ROMANESQUE ARCHES (FOR THE LIVING AND THE DEAD)

A treasured poem that especially emphasizes consolation and empathy is *Romanesque Arches,* which I will try to give an interpretation of my own, with the contrast between an »I and it-relationship« and an »I and you-relationship« as the main interpretative tool.

Inside the huge romanesque church the tourists jostled
in the half darkness.
Vault gaped behind vault, no complete view.
A few candle-flames flickered.
An angel with no face embraced me
and whispered through my whole body:
»Don't be ashamed of being human, be proud!
Inside you vault opens behind vault endlessly.
You will never be complete, that's how it's meant to be.«
Blind with tears
I was pushed out on the sun-seething piazza
together with Mr. and Mrs. Jones, Mr. Tanaka and
Signora Sabatini
and inside them all vault opened behind vault endlessly.

The external mimesis of the poem is the description of an occurrence that, if we choose to read biographically, can be exactly dated. The background of »Romanesque Arches« was an experience that Tranströmer had in San Marco Cathedral in Venice when he visited the church with his wife Monica after he received the Petrarca prize in 1981. The occasion for the church visit was thus one of elevation and fame for Tranströmer, which may have tempted him to regard himself as something special. In a conversation with his biographer Staffan Bergsten, he confirmed that what he experienced was portrayed in the poem.[38] The poem, however, was published many years later and it is mediated through reflections during several years. The »me« in the poem thus always refers to the lyrical subject, and not the poet, and the poem is interpreted only as a textual entity not as a reflection of an historical event. This is further emphasized by the fact that the mimetic reference of the poem collapses when the angel without face emerges, whispering consoling words. Then a semiotic reading is necessary, bringing forth the hypogram and thus also the significance of the poem.

Buber's paradigm with its »I and you-relationship« and »I and it-relationship« is the hypogram, the basic hermeneutic key, in my interpretation, and I interpret the significance of the conventional metaphors as a part of the non-mimetic context. The hypogram is emphasized by the repetition of the figure »vault behind vault« endlessly, which may suggest infinite possibilities, in the sense that man in himself is a universe, but more in line with Tranströmer's way of thinking is to regard it as infinite depths. These conventional metaphors can be seen as contrasting pairs, darkness in contrast to light, restriction and un-order to openness and order, inside to outside, public to private, collective to individual, active in contrast to passive.[39] Although the poem can be structured in different ways it has main directions of motion; it goes from the church

building to the piazza, from the lyrical subject alone to other individuals.

Even though the use of an explicit individual lyrical subject »me« is not so prominent in Tranströmer's poetry,[40] it makes its appearance explicit in this poem after a transition from a collective lyrical subject in the beginning of the poem »the tourists«.[41] The poem is, contrary to many other poems, resonate with subtle nuances in the wording that guides the interpreter. He has a handrail in the dark.

The poem starts with an anonymous »I and it-relation«, with a collective body of people »the tourists«, which the lyrical subject was not any part of. They are »the other«. The tourists are in a »*huge* romanesque church«,[42] and they »jostled«, and it was hardly any light, »half darkness«. The interior is negative »Vault *gaped* behind vault«, and there was »no complete view«. Thus, although the church is huge, the tourists »jostled«, it is dark and the interior is hard to see. The possibility for an »I and you-relation«, was thus non-existent.

Then comes perhaps a transition with a different kind of metaphor with a positive touch, »A few candle-flames flickered«. However, the definite change in mood occurs with the positive words »angel« (or »messenger«), »who embraced me« and »whispered«: »Don't be ashamed of being human, be proud!«. This entails communication and physical contact,[43] and it suggests an epiphanic moment, a revelation. The word »whispered« implies that the communication was not frightening, »through my whole body«, that it has a strong effect on the lyrical subject; it affects him as a whole. That »an angel with no face« gives the message may denote that anyone can bring the good news to the lyrical subject and it is done in a crowded place, with people he was not acquainted with, anonymous people. Staffan Bergsten suggests a more overt religious interpretation, the possibility that »angel with no face« associates to God in Old Testament, who has withheld his *panim* »face« or »identity« from man,[44] or »angel« refers to a God-sent messenger, with reference to the etymological meaning of the term.

The meeting is, as usual in Tranströmer's poetry, abrupt, unexpected.[45] The lyrical subject is surprised and passive; the activity comes from what is described as »an angel with no face«.[46] Interpreted in relation to my main interpretative key, the »I and it-relationship« and »I and you-relationship«, the lyrical subject has yet not reached a full »I and you-relationship« because the messenger has no »face«, which relates to his lack of identity.[47] Although the angel has personal contact with the subject, »embrace«, »whisper«, he is not completely in a »you« relation to him.

Now the lyrical subject sees that in himself »vault *opens* behind vault *endlessly*«. Thus the unstructured view of the vaults is changing, they are now something that imply endless-

ness.[48] Thus, the negative »no complete view« stands as a contrast to »endlessly«. The soul of the lyrical subject »Inside you« is turned into a church that is characterized by openness and infinity. However, that which is incomplete, that is not perfect, is not only accepted, it is »how it's meant to be«. To be a human is to be less than complete, and at the same time man is carrier of the infinite.[49] This middle part of the poem entails the conversion, the change of meaning,[50] a change from outside to inside. »Conversion transforms the constituents of the matrix sentence by modifying them all with the same factor«.[51]

The lyrical subject was pushed out »together with« the tourists. This was not described as an active choice. He did not actively search them up, because he did not know them. Outside forces accomplished a sense of »we«, »together with«. The lyrical subject first looked at them from outside as an anonymous mass, »tourists«, now they became as real as he himself. They have names and thus become individual persons in the poem, »Mr. and Mrs. Jones, Mr. Tanaka and Signora Sabatini« and he is one of them, and he establishes an »I and you-relationship« with them.

Another step is taken when the insight of the lyrical subject is applied to these persons »inside them all vault opened behind vault endlessly«. That the lyrical subject is on the same level as the other tourists in this regard is an insight that met him outside the church, outside the official meeting place with the divine, »on the sun-seething piazza«. However, these people were already with him in the church, but he had not seen them; they were just »tourists«. But now they are, so to speak, meeting-points with the holy, when the lyrical subject is able to see them as individual persons. Thus, the church as a building is changed into a metaphor for humans as churches/temples, associating to e.g. »For we are the temple of the living God« (2 Cor 6:16).[52] Another way to put it is that there is a dislocation from the public to the private, and the full extent of the insight is only found in the private and in the meeting with individual persons.

Thus the transformation of the »I and it-relation« to an »I and you-relation« is completed outside the romanesque church when the insight is applied to other people individually, not collectively, as for example, »tourists«. On the other hand they are not individuals, but persons,[53] who have their origins from different cultures, »Jones«, »Tanaka«, »Sabatini«. The change of perspective to other people in the poem occurs in »the sun-seething piazza«. Furthermore, the strong light »sun« is not within the »huge romanesque church«, but outside. The poem thus starts with negative visual metaphors, with »half darkness«, »no complete view«, makes a transition to »a few candle-flames flickered« and concludes with »the sun-seething piazza«. This light metaphor implies a development in understanding, a development in insight.

Even if the revelation for the individual lyrical subject was within the church, the complete insight is found outside the church, in meeting with the people *from inside the church* on the »the sun-seething piazza«. If this is read in harmony with Tranströmer's poem »The Dispersed Congregation« it could suggest a critical view of the official church and an emphasis on the persons, as »the church«, regardless if they are inside the church building or not.

The new way of seeing also includes the main metaphor itself, the vault. In the »half darkness« the vaults were perceived negatively »Vault *gaped* behind vault, *no* complete view«, but afterwards they are regarded as something positive »and inside them all vault *opened* behind vault *endlessly*«. Thus, although the vaults in the church that was the building blocks of the metaphor are the same, they are perceived differently, they are now »open« and they are »endless«.[54]

The place metaphors that refer to the inside and the outside are employed in a subtle way. The inside of the church »vaults« is re-created into the inside of the lyrical subject, and this perspective is applied outside the church to the inside of people that went outside the church. After the revelation, the lyrical subject leaves the church in tears because he can feel deep affinity with the other people, sensing their hidden spirituality.

There are two different perspectives here. One is the emphasis on that the people who was recognized was already with him in the church, but he did not see them as individual persons at first, because he had an »I and-it relation« to them, another that the experience of the lyrical subject in the church is, although his own, an experience with wide ramifications »being human«, »[y]ou will never be complete, that's how it's meant to be«. It is not individual in a restricted sense; it is rather something that applies to humans generally. Furthermore, what are emphasized are not only man's capabilities, but man's imperfection presented as good news »Don't be ashamed of being human, be proud« and »You will never be complete, that's how it's meant to be«.

The significance of the poem expresses a humanistic view of man. It refers to an existential call to become a true human being, or rather the discernment what man already is. Man with his frailty is after this insight regarded as something that is meant to be, and at the same time a meeting-place for the divine. It has positive implications; man, with his flaws, is created with an infinite potential, in Christian terminology, he reflects the image and likeness of God.

It is as usual in Tranströmer's poetry no clear-cut distinctions between the metaphors and the applications. The transformation is on both sides, in the words of Birgitta Steene, »this rapprochement of the poet to the outside world leads to

a mutual transformation, so that, neither reality nor vision remains the same. Reality confronts vision, and vision absorbs reality, but the result is that a new world is born«.[55] it is a world where nothing is treated only as an object.

This is a poem that really breathes humanism, consolation and empathy and at the same time clearly reveals the religious worldview of Tomas Tranströmer.

With reference to Tranströmer's choosy style I will conclude with the words of Niklas Schiöler: »Seldom have so many had so few words to thank for so much meaning«.[56]

ENDNOTES

1 See e.g. Johanne Prud'homme, Nelson Guilbert (2006), »Poetic Language«, in Louis Hébert (dir.), *Signo* [online], Rimouski (Quebec), http://www.signosemio.com/jakobson/functions-of-language.asp. (access 201501)

2 Michael Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry* (Bloomington, 1978), 6f.

3 Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry*, 2f.

4 Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry*, 2–7. The ungrammaticality encompasses »displacement«, »distortion«, and »creation«.

5 Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry*, 39–46.

6 Sverker Göransson, Erik Mesterton, *Den orörliga lågan: analyser av femton 1900-talsdikter* (Göteborg, 1991). See also Ingemar Friberg, *Puls: om relationen i Göran Sonnevis tidiga poesi* (Skellefteå, 2013), 27–42.

7 This understanding is novel and not mentioned in the secondary literature on Tranströmer, although Tranströmer himself at least once mentions poetry's capacity to create Martin Buber's »I and you-relationship«. See Leif Sjöberg, *The American Swedish Monthly* 59 (1965:5), 57. I have been inspired by Friberg's use of Buber in his analysis of the poems of Göran Sonnevi in Friberg, *Puls*. See especially idem, 44–86.

8 See e.g. Fridberg, *Puls*, 30.

9 Duco A. Schreuder, *Vision and Visual Perception*: *The Conscious Base of Seeing,* (Bloomington, 2014), 93.

10 Buber, *I and Thou*. Translated by Ronald Gregor Smith (New York, 1958), 9.

11 See e.g. Tranströmer's own affirmation in Kjell Espmark, *Resans former* (Stockholm, 1983), 90 n. 74–75.

12 Friberg, *Puls*, 27–42. See e.g. Rönnerstrand, »Ord som simmat«, 159.

13 Friberg, *Puls*, 12.

14 Robin Robertson, »The sound says that freedom exists«.

(http://aburningpatience.blogspot.se/2011/10/sound-says-that-freedom-exists.html , access, 201501)

15 See e.g. Jenifer Whiting, »The Recognition of Faith in the Poetry of Tomas Transtromer«, *Logos* 7:4 (2004), 69–70, 73.

16 The English translations of the poems are from Tranströmer's official translators, Robin Fulton and Robert Bly.

17 From the preface to an English edition *Twenty Poems Translated by Robert Bly* (Madison, MN, 1970). See also the review by Robert Bly, »Tomas Transtromer and 'The Memory'«, in *World Literature Today* 64:4 (1990), 570.

18 Bly, »The Memory«, 570.

19 Tomas Tranströmer, *Selected Poems*, translated by Robin Fulton (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1981), 155.

20 *The Guardian*, Saturday 28.10 2006. (http://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/oct/28/featuresreviews.guardianreview31, access 201501).

21 Bo Gustavsson, »Tre nycklar till Tranströmers poetiska kod«, *SvD* 22.11 2006.

22 Tomas Tranströmer, *The Great Enigma: New Collected Poems* translated by Robin Fulton (New York, 2011), XIV; Tomas Tranströmer, *Selected Poems*, 156.

23 See e.g. Gustavsson, »Tre nycklar«.

24 Whiting, »The Recognition of Faith«, 65–79.

25 Bly, »Memory«, 571.

26 See e.g. Tranströmer's discussion of language in Torsten Rönnerstrand, »Ord som simmat genom många texter – om språkuppfattningen hos Tomas Tranströmer«, *Språk och fiktion*, Moira Linnarud, Torsten Rönnerstrand, Yvonne Leffler, Reinert Kvillerud (eds.) (Utvecklingsrapport / Högskolan i Karlstad 95:2, 1995), 139–147. He discusses the inner language on pp. 143–145.

27 Tomas Tranströmer, *Dikter och prosa 1954–2004* (Stockholm, 2011), 235. See also Rönnerstrand, »Ord som simmat«, 139–147.

28 Whiting, »The Recognition of Faith«, 78. See also Michael C. Jordan, »Preface«, *Logos* 7:4 (2004), 12.

29 Whiting, »The Recognition of Faith«, 66.

30 Robin Robertson, »The Double World of Tomas Tranströmer«, *The New York Review of Books*, Blog, *October 14, 2011, 9:25 a.m.*

31 Gustavsson, »Tre nycklar«. See further Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism* (New York, 1996).

32 Gustavsson, »Tre nycklar«.

33 Tranströmer, *17 poems*, from *The Great Enigma*.

34 Tranströmer, *The Great Enigma*, 147.

35 According to Buber, the »I and you-relation« can only be instantaneous, it can never be a permanent possession. Thus, the »I and you-relation« in time always turns into an »I and

it-relation«. See e.g. Friberg, *Puls*, 48. Furthermore, the meeting comes from the outside of the lyrical subject, never from inside, the meeting is a response, which can be reflected in poetry as well as in art. See e.g. Friberg, *Puls*, 46–51.

36 Gustavsson, »Tre nycklar«.

37 Gustavsson, »Tre nycklar«.

38 Bergsten, *Ett diktarporträtt*, 186–190; Bo Gustavsson, »Tranströmer och V-effekten«, *Kulturen* 5.12 2011.

39 För en tolkning som avviker från författarens, se t ex Gustavsson, »Tranströmer och V-effekten«.

40 Magdalena Slyk, »*VEM är jag?«: Det lyriska subjektet och dess förklädnader i Tomas Tranströmers författarskap* (Avhandling Uppsala universitet, 2010), 88. For strategies concerning the lyrical subject, see idem, 88–131.

41 Slyk, *Vem är jag*, 139.

42 The italics in the poem are from the author.

43 The physical contact is often a sign of the true meeting »embraced me«, and is often part of the »I and you-relation« (Friberg, *Puls*, 55–56).

44 There are some possible allusions from the Old Testament to this meeting, e.g. Gen 32:24–32, with its mysterious depiction of God's blessing and the identity of Jacob (the people of Israel), who got the name Israel, because it is said »you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed«, but he has a defect »limping because of his hip« (New Revised Standard Version). Cf. also Hos 12:3–4, where God is identified as an angel, »in his manhood he strove with God. He strove with the angel and prevailed« (New Revised Standard Version). This is in harmony with Buber's use of face, as a description of God's identity, especially in the Old Testament, according to Friberg, *Puls*, 46 n. 23.

45 The meetings that constitute the »I and you-relationship« are always abrupt, they are only experienced at a glimpse and can never be the lyrical subject's permanent possession. Friberg, *Puls*, 48–49, 73.

46 See Ylva Eggehorn, »Tilltal, inte spegel – tiden och jaget i Tomas Tranströmers lyrik«, *Tomas Tranströmer. Poesifestivalen i Nässjö 1997*, 17.

47 See e.g. Friberg, *Puls*, 46 and n. 23.

48 It is when the dichotomy between the external reality »vault« and the inner reality »vault« is overcome that an authentic meeting is possible. See e.g. a similar analysis by Friberg of Sonnevi's collection of poems in Outfört: »Dikten dokumenterar ett förlopp som inrymmer övergångar mellan ett inre och yttre rum. Relationen till duet beseglas slutgiltigt via den taktila kontakten … Dikten, den mystiska processen, kulminerar när dikotomin mellan det inre och det yttre slutgiltigt upphör och verklig närvaro upprättas: Närvaro upprättas.« (The poem documents a process that entails transitions

between inner and outer spaces. The relationship with the you is sealed definitively through the tactile contact … The poem, this mysterious process, culminates when the dichotomy between the inner and outer finally comes to an end and true presence is established). Friberg, *Puls*, 63.

49 Although I agree with some of Bergsten's interpretations, I m far from convinced that the angel's message »går stick i stäv med Luthers lära om arvssynd och människans grundfördärv« (is at odds with Luther's doctrine of original sin and human depravity). Bergsten, *Ett diktarporträtt*, 188. On the contrary, there is an awareness and an acceptance of human weakness in the poem »You will never be complete, that's how it's meant to be«; thus it rather confirms Luther's position in this regard.

50 Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry*, 63ff. See Inger Ring, *Minnet regngardinen genombryter: en studie av Ragnar Thoursies lyrik till och med* Emaljögat (Eslöv, 1997), 57 and n. 21.

51 Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry*, 63.

52 See further, Rom 12:1 (New Revised Standard Version); 1 Cor 3:16–17; 6:19.

53 According to Buber, the authentic meeting can only occur between people as persons, not as individuals. See Buber, *I and Thou*, 69 and Fridberg, *Puls*, 30.

54 The word »complete« in the poem is ambiguous, not because it is used in the description of the vaults in the church »no *complete* view«, but not for the vaults inside man »Inside you vault opens behind vault endlessly«, which is in line with my understanding, but because the same word »You will never be *complete*« is also applied in a positive way to the lyrical subject by the angel. It does not have to be a contradiction here. I interpret the first as the capabilities of man, which can be regarded as infinite, but the second refers to the moral aspects, the insight that man is never perfect, which Tranströmer regards as something good; he never has to pretend that he is, a pretention that could be regarded as a prime obstacle against achieving an authentic self.

55 Birgitta Steene, »Vision and Reality in the Poetry of Tomas Tranströmer«, *Scandinavian Studies* 37:3 (1965), 241.

56 »Sällan har så många haft så få ord att tacka för så mycket mening«. Niklas Schiöler, *Ledstången i mörkret: texter om Tomas Tranströmer* (Stockholm, 2011), 28.

Jennifer Reek, »Consolation as Graced Encounters with Ignatius of Loyola and Hélène Cixous«

ABSTRACT

This article suggests that the sixteenth-century Basque saint Ignatius of Loyola and the French thinker Hélène Cixous experienced consolation in unexpected encounters with texts. For Ignatius, consolation came as a result of reading while recovering from a battle wound in 1521 the only texts available to him, of lives of the saints and Christ. For Cixous, it was the consoling birth of her writing life after the death of her father in 1948 and 30 years later a chance reading of the Brazilian novelist Clarice Lispector. These encounters serve here as a point of departure into a beginning exploration of reading and writing as consolation in the work and life of these two disparate yet essentially compatible figures. Taking a cue from Cixous's reading and writing practices, personal criticism is used in the reading of their texts so that the writing of this essay may itself perform an act of consoling.

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Keywords: Ignatius of Loyola, Hélène Cixous, textual consolation, personal criticism, death and mourning.

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Jennifer Reek

CONSOLATION AS GRACED ENCOUNTERS WITH IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA AND HÉLÈNE CIXOUS

Before I begin in earnest, my odd couple of Ignatius of Loyola and Hélène Cixous may need brief introduction for those who are unfamiliar with the work of either or both. I will refrain initially from going into too much detail about why I choose them, for that will hopefully become clear as we proceed. Suffice it to say here that in addition to the consolation I perceive in their reading/writing experiences, the texts of both have been transformational for me, though I had not considered until the writing of this article my own encounters with them specifically and uniquely in terms of consolation. I will include in my argumentation my own experiences of consolation in my reading of their texts so that the writing of this essay is not so much a writing about consolation but rather an attempt to perform an act of consoling and in doing so to get at an essence of thinking and feeling what consolation is.

Both Cixous and Ignatius exhibit a gift for encounter, an exquisite ability to meet an other, to listen and converse, to allow themselves to be led and transformed by the voice of an other, whether God, person or text. Perhaps best known as the author of the *Spiritual Exercises*, a series of Gospel meditations and contemplations meant to enable one to grow into a more intimate encounter with God, Ignatius of Loyola, the sixteenth-century Basque saint and founder of the Society of Jesus, was many things in his life: soldier, mystic, pilgrim, what we would call today »a mature student«,[1] spiritual director, teacher, priest, founder of the Society of Jesus and contributor to the Jesuit pedagogy that arose out of Jesuit spirituality, prolific letter writer (almost 7 000 letters!),[2] master administrator and teacher, founder of schools and excellent reader of his own and others' interior lives.[3]

That latter quality is what to my mind most binds Ignatius to the French thinker Hélène Cixous, for she also has a gift for seeing into the depths of her own and others' interiors. It is for this that I most love them both, for the same reason Cixous gives when she speaks of her love for certain writers she consistently engages: »The writers I love,« she writes, »are *descenders*, explorers of the lowest and deepest. Descending is deceptive. Carried out by those I love the descent is sometimes intolerable, the descenders descend with difficulty.«[4] Such skillful descent is evident in Cixous's own writing in the multiple genres in which she works – theater, theory, experi-

mental fiction, memoir, interview, notebooks – though she defies the limited descriptions those labels suggest as she deliberately crosses boundaries of fiction and theory, poetry and prose, interior and exterior. She shares with Ignatius a few other traits. She is a teacher, for decades a professor of literature at the experimental Université de Paris VIII, which she helped found as an alternative after the political and pedagogical turmoil of 1968. She is prolific, author of more than forty books and over a hundred articles. She is also something of a mystic[5] and wanderer, an Algerian Jew who has spent most of her adult life in France, having found in the French language perhaps the only space in which she feels truly at home.[6] These shared qualities of Ignatius and Cixous take us toward consolation, for they indicate deeper, underlying concerns for the freedom and flourishing of the whole human person, a caring commitment to the well-being of the other that we know as consolation.

Now I want to more formally begin, though my method might be called informal, by circling around the meaning of consolation. I include the personal and am sometimes repetitive in themes, in sounds, and deliberately so, as I seek a deeper knowing of »consolation«. My poetic way of proceeding is greatly influenced by Cixous's reading and writing practices, particularly that of *écriture féminine*[7], a term meaning much more than its literal translation as »feminine writing«. It may be considered a spiritual practice and is as much body and soul as mind, reflecting not so much sexual difference according to gender but something more fluid and dynamic ranging widely in either man or woman. Writing is encounter, transgressing boundaries and subverting the conventional order of things. My attempt here, in bringing together Cixous and Ignatius, is akin to her frequent practice of mingling those authors (»these heroes of writing«[8]) and texts for whom she feels the greatest affinity, in order to go »in the direction of truth«.[9] I have discovered an »alchemy« that occurs in joining Cixous and Ignatius – the outcome of the mixing of the two is often more precious and alive, more »true«, than each alone.[10] Ignatius, in turn, will assist me as I move from a general definition of consolation to less common understandings of the term as suggested by usage found in his *Spiritual Exercises* and to the particular meaning of Ignatius's idea of »consolation without cause«, which he describes as being »without any preceding perception or knowledge of any subject by which a soul might be led to such a consolation through its own acts of intellect and will«.[11] I will take the latter definition, which is specific to the *Exercises* and the Ignatian spirituality that derives from them, and play with it for my own purposes in order to see what we can say about these strange and graced acts of reading and writing experienced by these two disparate yet essentially compatible figures.

What, then, can we begin to say of consolation? The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word as »The action of consoling, cheering, or comforting; the state of being consoled; alleviation of sorrow or mental distress«.[12] There is not much more than that brief description provided in the usually verbose OED, but it is more than enough to tell us that consolation is an act, requiring a subject who acts intentionally, for the good of an other; it is that care as felt by the other when it is received; and it is a lessening of the pain that must be the initial felt state of the other in order for consolation to occur. What we can say about the arising of consolation is that it seeks to aid and heal a grieving other's pain and sadness, without which consolation does not exist.

The latter statement takes me by surprise, for it makes me suddenly realise that I cannot write about consolation honestly without acknowledging my own or others' need for it. I think of Cixous. Thinking of her father nearing death, she writes: »*I do not want to put a name on my anguish.*«[13] I do not want to put a name on my anguish. Perhaps I will be able to name it and so name the consolation it cries out for by asking questions of Ignatius and Cixous that arise out of our beginning definitions. What is the pain and sadness in which consolation visits them? What is my own that draws me to this topic, and how is it related to the appeal of these figures, to whom I return again and again? What is the origin of their grief? For whom are they mourning, if anyone, before their textual encounters?

»WE NEED A DEAD(WO)MAN TO BEGIN«[14]

In *Hélène Cixous: Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing,* a marvelous and moving work that is a mélange of family photo album, genealogy, reflections on writing, interviews, commentary and notebook entries, »interactive« and intertextual in a very real sense of those words, Cixous writes: »One goes forward, sowing the stones of grief behind oneself.«[15] Cixous is writing of loss and frailty, and doing so in a concrete, material manner. While leafing through family photograph albums, she notes that some of the photos are decaying, the pictures of her relatives falling out of their corners, down the page to meet family they may never have known in life.[16] More than forty of Cixous's maternal relatives died in concentration camps. They are listed here, matter-of-factly, in a family tree: Klein, Ehrlich, Freund, Orli, Friedlander, Unger, Fleischman. The litany of names in the family tree suggests the importance of identity, memory, remembrance and so, consolation, in the naming and saying of the dead. After the first reference, the words »concentration camp« are abbreviated »c.c.«.[17] (Because there are so many instances? Because it is too painful to repeat the words in full? The place names of the camps are rarely listed, perhaps unknown? Cixous does not say. The dead are named, the camps

not, and this gives the dead dignity they did not have in dying, at least for me, this naming and not-naming.) Survivors and their many descendants live around the world: Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Paris, Los Angeles, New York, Toronto.[18] Two fates for the huge Klein family, Cixous writes, concentration camps and »the scattering across the earth. This gives me a sort of worldwide resonance. I have always felt it because the echoes always came from the whole earth. From all the survivors«.[19]

—— *Sowing the stones of grief. My mother, née June Begly, died in January 2014. I write her name because I can't bear the callousness of the possessive pronoun when people talk of their unnamed relatives, taking away their identity, or so it seems to me. There is no better way I can think of to describe these past months of grief, that heaviness and burden of stone, that every so often and ever so slowly I let drop, hoping the stones will turn someday into something beyond sorrow.*

My own loss is insignificant to that of Cixous. It seems obscene to note it. Still, her work has focused on and owed itself to the death of one, her father, Georges, who died from tuberculosis when she was eleven, at the age of thirty-nine.[20] Cixous wrote forward out of mourning for her father and found life. She writes of death in tones that ring true. Writing is consolation, arriving unbidden:

> —— The first book I wrote rose from my father's tomb. I don't know why, perhaps it was the only thing I had to write then, in my poverty, my inexperience, the *only asset*: the only thing that made me live, that I had lived, that put me to the test, and that I felt because it completely defeated me. It was my strange and monstrous treasure. I didn't think about all this, otherwise I wouldn't have written. For a long time I lived through my father's death with the feeling of immense loss and childlike regret, as in an inverted fairy tale: Ah if my father had lived! I naively fabricated other magnificent stories, until the day things changed color and I began to see other scenes – including everything I could imagine that was less consoling – without overinvesting.[21]

You can see here how I would find these words consoling in my grief, as they hold out the possibility of a time when consolation is not so much needed and desired, a day when things change color. I did not turn to the expected texts of consolation after my mother died. No psalm consoled, nor any writing considered spiritual by convention. It was this text, oddly passages like this one that consoled me in its honesty in facing death and yet affirming life.

Sowing stones of grief behind oneself. Since June died I keep losing things that matter to me. A pen from Tiffany, gift from a dear friend. A silver bracelet of my mother's fell off my wrist in the spring. Summer I lost a watch, another gift. On an autumn plane trip, exiled from a place I love, I could not hold back the tears, and the weeping itself felt like loss. It is not like me, this losing of things.

In the text of hers I love best, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, Cixous claims, »we lose and in losing we win«.[22] Writing of the author Thomas Bernhard, Cixous tells the story of how he suddenly wrote in abundance after the death of a beloved grandfather, »the poet, the one who had always loved him, who was everything to him«.[23] Death comes to those we love; we live; »it *is* an act of grace«.[24] Writing is a »vital spring brought about and ordered by the disappearance of the one who was the source«.[25] It is

> »this learning to die,« that is, not to kill, knowing there is death, not denying it and not proclaiming it. [...] Our crime isn't what we think, it isn't the crime in the newspapers, it's always a bit less and a bit more. In life, as soon as I say *my*, as soon as I say *my* daughter, *my* brother, [or, I add now, *my* mother] I am verging on a form of murder, as soon as I forget to unceasingly recognize the other's difference. You may come to know your son, your sister, your daughter [she does not mention her mother, who still lives, close to Cixous, well past 90] well after thirty or forty, or fifty years of life, and yet during those thirty or forty years you haven't known this person who was so close. You kept him or her in the realm of the dead. And the other way around. Then the one who dies kills and the one who doesn't die when the other dies kills as well.[26]

The final ten years of her life, June became harder and harder to recognise. She had Alzheimer's. It was as if she were slowly disappearing, piece by piece, memory by memory. But I wonder, did I ever recognise her? Did she, me? We often did not understand each other, often we stayed hurt in the other's misunderstanding and non-recognition. Verging on a form of murder. Maybe that is what Cixous means about killing each other, at least when we are alive. Harder to bear may be what she refers to as »the unpardonable in ourselves«,[27] that we are alive after the other has died, that we are glad we are not them. An unpardonable consolation.

CONSOLING TEXTS AND TRANSFIGURED BODIES

In the work and lives of Cixous and Ignatius I perceive a potent

mingling of bodies and texts. Transformation, transfiguration, become possible in textual encounters. Cixous remarks on her perception of such transformation in her theater work: »It's the actor who is a saint, who exchanges himself often with one character. That is really the loss of one life and the undergoing of another. And it is the director who offers the world to the characters and erases himself into pure space.«[28]

I sense a resonance in Cixous's saints of the theatre with the »real« saint, Ignatius, who »loses« one life, one self, and becomes »another« as he undergoes an intense experience of pain and consolation, or a »conversion« in religious terms. In the opening of his autobiography, dictated to another Jesuit, the self he will die to is described as one who is »given to worldly vanities, and having a vain and overpowering desire to gain renown, found special delight in the exercise of arms«.[29] In 1521, this person, Ignatius the soldier, suffers a terrible injury when a cannonball shatters his leg in the battle of Pamplona. The bone is set, and he is carried on a litter to Loyola, a journey of several weeks. From his autobiography comes this description:

> His condition was serious, and the physicians and surgeons, summoned from many places, agreed that the leg should be broken again and the bones reset, since they either had been poorly set in the first place or had become dislocated during the journey, for they were now out of joint and would never heal. The butchery was repeated …[30]

Ignatius is thought to be near death and is given last sacraments. But then he takes an unexpected turn and begins to heal. The bones heal badly again, with one leg deformed. He demands the doctors operate again, and this time the pain is worse than ever. Again he heals and gradually recovers after nine months immobilized.[31] This exterior immobilization will foster an inner dynamism, one that fleshes out our definitions of consolation.

Though it is little remarked upon, it is worth noting that a crucial figure of consolation in Ignatius's recovery is a woman, his sister-in-law Magdalena de Araoz, matron of the Loyola castle, who »welcomed Ignatius to the ancestral home and cared for him while the bone in his leg was reset«.[32] After a few months he is well enough to want to read his favourite fare, chivalrous romances, »novels dealing with knightly exploits […] the best-sellers of the sixteenth century«.[33] (Ignatius did more than read these stories; he also sought to live them. As Juan Alfonso de Polanco, his secretary and one of his closest associates, wrote, »Especially did he indulge in gaming, dueling, and affairs with women.«[34] This aspect of his life was excluded from his autobiography.) But Magdalena gives him the only books

she has, and these will be life changing: Jacobus de Voragine's *The Golden Legend* and Ludolph of Saxony's *The Life of Jesus Christ*.[35] Ignatius begins to perceive a difference in his response to these texts of the lives of the saints and Christ and his worldly thoughts. As he relates in his autobiography:

> There was this difference […] When he thought of worldly matters, he found much delight; but after growing weary and dismissing them, he found that he was dry and unhappy. But when he thought of going barefoot to Jerusalem and eating nothing but herbs and of imitating the saints in all the austerities they practiced, he not only found consolation in these thoughts, but even after they had left him he remained happy and joyful. He did not consider nor did he stop to examine this difference until one day his eyes were partially opened, and he began to wonder at this difference and to reflect upon it. From experience he knew that some thoughts left him sad while others made him happy, and little by little he came to perceive the different spirits that were moving him; one coming from the devil, the other coming from God.[36]

From this initial distinction between his responses to the religious and romantic texts, Ignatius will develop the practices of the discernment of the spirits, which are the core of his *Spiritual Exercises*.[37] His attentive reading leads to an eventual incredibly intricate and delicate awareness of his bodily responses, of what he terms movements of »consolation« and »desolation«. His use of the word »consolation« above is meant in the sense that he uses it in the *Exercises*:

> I call it consolation when an interior movement is aroused in the soul, by which it is inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord, and as a consequence, can love no creature on the face of the earth for its own sake, but only in the Creator of them all. […] I call consolation every increase of faith, hope, and love, and all interior joy that invites and attracts to what is heavenly and to the salvation of one's soul by filling it with peace and quiet in its Creator and Lord.[38]

He describes another kind of consolation, as I've mentioned above, one that »God alone« gives, »without previous cause. [---] that is, without any preceding perception or knowledge of any subject by which a soul might be led to such consolation through its own acts of intellect and will«.[39] This sense of consolation is of another degree altogether, and I suggest it is the type experienced by Ignatius and Cixous in their transformative encounters with texts. Michael Ivens has described

it as »gratuitous and impossible to induce«, a »breaking into«.[40] Though many Jesuits might object to my appropriation of this phrase because its occurrence is thought to be extremely rare, others, such as Karl Rahner, may have supported it, as he saw such consolation as part of the grace that he believed infused everyday life.[41]

And what was Ignatius's reading experience except for a »breaking into« his previous way of being so that he would be transformed and so transform others with the text he developed as a result of his reading? For it is from this initial experience of consolation as a result of reading unwanted and unexpected texts, gift and happy accident, that Ignatius will develop his *Spiritual Exercises* with its central practice of the discernment of the spirits. The *Exercises* are the basis of Jesuit spirituality, the basics of which entail developing skills of listening and discernment in order to live a more holy life, that is, a life that is whole, relational, authentic, selfless in its love for God and the other, a life conducive to the flourishing of the human person, a life that is consoling. To reiterate, in this discernment, Ignatius uses the term »consolation« in a particular way, in reference to what he called »movements of the spirit«, first discovered in his reading encounter, consolation being the sense of »the good spirit« and desolation being the influence of »the bad spirit«, though that is greatly simplifying things. One listens to those spirits and uses that knowledge to make a sound decision, to discern not so much the right way, but to rightly make the discernment itself.

As John O'Malley notes in his book *The First Jesuits*, the term also had a broader sense for the early Jesuits. It could be a greeting, or blessing; it was a word that resonated with their pastoral ideal, the conviction that God is accessible to all.[42] Consolation was and is, for the Jesuit, a reality of »a movement of the heart that came from God and brought one closer to God«.[43] An early Jesuit and assistant to Ignatius, Jerónimo Nadal, described consolation as »an inner joy, a serenity in judgment, a relish, a light, a reassuring step forward, a clarification of insight.«[44] Pierre Favre, one of the first companions of Ignatius and recently canonized by the Jesuit Pope Francis, who views Favre with special regard as an ideal himself, gives consolation an expansiveness and illustrates its importance to the Jesuits' pastoral mission. He writes in his *Memoriale*:

> With great devotion and new depth of feeling, I also hoped and begged for this [from God], that it finally be given to me to be the servant and minster of Christ the consoler, the minister of Christ the helper, the minister of Christ the redeemer, the minister of Christ the healer, the liberator, the enricher, the strengthener. Thus it would happen that even I might be able through him to help many – to

console, liberate, and give them courage; to bring them light not only for their spirit but also (if one may presume in the Lord) for their bodies, and bring as well other helps to the soul and body of each and every one of my neighbors whomsoever.[45]

— *I first encountered Ignatius a decade ago in spiritual direction sessions with a Sister of Saint Joseph trained in Ignatian spirituality. In a series of spiritual conversations between us, she began to teach me Ignatius's discernment practice, to note my affective responses of consolation and desolation and to use that knowledge to make a decision well. Several years later, I would undertake the Spiritual Exercises, a thirty-day silent retreat experienced with others, in community, in which we placed ourselves in the Gospel narratives of the life of Jesus, from the Nativity to the Ascension. The goal of the Exercises was consolation in the aforementioned broad Jesuit understanding, to experience a movement of heart that came from God and brought us nearer to God, whatever our understanding of the divine might be.*

I have mentioned Cixous's mourning and the writing that was born of it, but there was another pain that occurred before her consoling encounter with a life-changing text. She describes it in terms of a desert experience, »ten years in the desert of books«, without »*amies*«, without women's voices, without their writing and reading. Then on 12 October 1978, »a garden enters [...] the unexpected comes to pass«.[46] She reads the Brazilian novelist Clarice Lispector and is consoled.[47] Listen to the words she uses to describe the effects of this surprise text that enters her life without her willing it, helping her to create in her own work an economy of gift. Women, like Lispector, when they write,

— it is to surround the birth of life with the most delicate care ... And their writings are voices changed into hands to come very gently to meet our souls, when we are searching, we have needed to leave to search for what in our being is most secret. Because a woman's voice has awakened our heart.[48]

Cixous's encounter with the text of Lispector is presented as a religious experience, salvific in its effect on her. She is able to listen with extreme attentiveness to her interior movements, with »ears in prayer«, with »inner ears«:[49]

— I had almighty ears for attending the Encounters, inside, at the moments of grace, necessary, of repeated miracle, of the welcoming of things giving themselves to one another,

> giving rise to each other, echo, passage, continuation, one in the other, one near the other, I listened to my ears opening, dilating, straining, my soul burning with trust, with expectation …[50]

Of course, the texts read by Ignatius and Cixous are quite different. Those read by Ignatius are explicitly religious, while Lispector's work is not. Yet, what matters here is not so much whether the texts are religious but that the *reading* is »religious«. What I mean to suggest here is well articulated by Robert Detweiler, who proposed that we practice a »religious reading« in which texts are »absorbed, taken in and then offered up not to a relentlessly analytical readership but rather to a contemplative fellowship«.[51] Cixous's reading makes a spiritual shift to an embodied, contemplative mode of knowing, resonant with that undertaken by Ignatius.

A woman's voice has awakened our heart. Perhaps that is why I sought Cixous for consolation. Her voice awakened my heart, surrounded it with the most delicate care. There is a text to which Cixous regularly turns that she seems to find consoling, though I don't recall if she ever uses the word. »Text« is perhaps not quite right, for this text is made up of scraps of paper Kafka wrote on when he was dying of tuberculosis. He could not speak. The fragments were later published at the end of a collection of his letters under the title »Conversation Slips«.[52] What type of conversation is Kafka's last? His great lifelong friend, companion, and consoler, Max Brod, describes the notes as »mere hints; his friends guessed the rest«.[53] He tells us what we already know once we've read them, that is, that they »show that Kafka's intellectual powers, profound kindness, and imagination remained unclouded to the end«.[54] The dying Kafka is attentive to the flowers in his room. »I'd especially like to take care of the peonies because they are so fragile,« he writes.[55] Cixous is so moved by this conversation that she claims she »loved Kafka because of these scraps of paper«, which she describes as belonging to an economy in which »there is something extraordinarily tender and precise«.[56]

Something extraordinarily tender and precise. I don't know that there is any better definition for consolation than that. Was it there in the death of Cixous's own father? It was only recently that I recalled that at least part of the reason Kafka's end is so powerful for her is that her father died of consumption also. Her description of his death lacks the delicacy of her writing of Kafka:

> — Last images: he is in a narrow room, in his own radiological clinic, lying on a small divan. I was allowed to go and see him. He no longer speaks. (He spoke no more

– cf. Kafka.) I do not want to put a name on my anguish. He addresses me with signs.[57]

Notice, there are no slips of paper about caring for the flowers of the room. It is not as magnificent and mysterious as the final words of Kafka, which Cixous will take as the title for one of her books, *Limonade tout était si infini,* a work that springs from what she, and I, experience as the most marvelous and mysterious »slip« of Kafka's final conversations: »*Lemonade it was all so boundless*.«[58] It is one of two times in her life Cixous says she does not recognise her father. It is terrible. »I saw my father enter into silence while he was alive. Everything held back: smile, held back, breath, held back, life, held back.«[59]

It is terrible. June did not speak, did not write on slips of paper, and had not been able to for some time. Her breathing was agonizing. Everything was difficult. Still, I was there and held her hand. I could speak to her, touch her, tell her I loved her so she would know she was not alone, or so I hoped.

By the time I finish writing this essay, more than a year has passed since June died. Though it was not my intention, the writing of it has been a consolation. And how could it not be, considering all I have said here. Writing is consolation, arriving unbidden. I continue to find consolation in Cixous and not to find it in those places one expects to provide it – church, community, prayer leave me empty and dry. It happened again today in the public library of a small North American town I am visiting, while reading a passage in Cixous's book *Manhattan*, about a French woman scholar visiting Yale's Beinecke Library. Something about the library reminds her of the hospital where her father died. »The images of the dead who are part of us and have departed from us do not die and they start flashing whenever a setting lends itself, so the Beinecke reminded me of my father's last days and that moment when not yet dead already he wasn't on the same side of life as me and was drifting off without moving like a ship in a dream.«[60] Reading Cixous, writing of consolation, living after death, I am consoled.

ENDNOTES

1 Ignatius began studies in the humanities at the University of Paris in the winter of 1528 when he was in his late 30s. As Joseph N. Tylenda, S.J., notes in his commentary to Ignatius's autobiography (*A Pilgrim's Journey: The Autobiography of Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. Joseph N. Tylenda, S.J. (San Francisco, 2001 [1985]), 137), »Classes were in session, and Ignatius registered at Collège de Montaigu but discovered, after an entrance exam, that his background was still insufficient for advanced work. Thus he decided to repeat these

courses, attending classes with boys in their early teens and even younger. When he successfully passed one stage, he advanced to another, following the established program of studies then in force in Paris.«

2 Ignatius of Loyola: *Personal Writings: Reminiscences, Spiritual Diary, Select Letters, including the text of The Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Joseph A. Munitiz & Philip Endean (London, 1996), 113–115.

3 For background on Ignatius of Loyola, see, for example, *The Autobiography* and *Personal Writings*.

4 Hélène Cixous: *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, trans. Sarah Cornell & Susan Sellers (New York, 1993), 5.

5 A word of explanation may be needed here in my description of Cixous as »mystic«. She is mystic in the sense that she seeks another kind of knowing beyond the intellect. This »mystic« knowing is to be found in and through a writing that attentively listens, gradually unfolds and/or is led by an »other«, is embodied, active in its passivity, and concerned with the inner depths of the writer/reader.

6 »Neither France, nor Germany nor Algeria«, Cixous writes in »My Algeriance«: »No regrets. It is good fortune. Freedom, an inconvenient, intolerable freedom, a freedom that obliges one to let go, to rise above, to beat one's wings. [. . .] I feel perfectly at home, nowhere.« (»My Algeriance: in other words To Depart not to Arrive from Algeria« in *Triquarterly* (Fall 1997), 155.) A good source for background on Cixous is Hélène Cixous and Mireille Calle-Gruber: *Hélène Cixous Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2003 [London, 1997]).

7 Verena Andermatt Conley gives an apposite definition of the term in her perceptive introduction to Cixous's *Reading with Clarice Lispector* (London, 1990, vii): »*écriture féminine* is a working term referring less to a writing practiced mainly by women than, in a broader logical category, to textual ways of spending. It suggests a writing, based on an encounter with another – be it a body, a piece of writing, a social dilemma, a moment of passion – that leads to an undoing of the hierarchies and oppositions that determine the limits of most conscious life.«

8 Cixous: *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, 154.

9 Ibid., 36. *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* is an excellent example of this aspect of Cixous's thinking.

10 See, for example, »Reading as Active Contemplation«, in Francesca Bugliani Knox and David Lonsdale (eds.): *Poetry and the Religious Imagination: The Power of the Word* (London, 2015), 189–206.

11 Ignatius of Loyola: *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph*, trans. Louis J. Puhl (Chicago, 1951), #320.

12 *OED Online*: »consolation, n.« http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/39672?redirectedFrom=consolation (accessed October 07, 2014).

13 Cixous & Calle-Gruber: *Hélène Cixous Rootprints*: »Hélène Cixous«: second para. after »My father in 1939«. Emphasis mine.

14 The subtitle opening Cixous's first »school« of writing, the »School of the Dead«, in her 1990 Wellek Library Lectures in Critical Theory at University of California, Irvine, which were later published as *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, 7.

15 Cixous & Calle-Gruber: *Hélène Cixous Rootprints*: »Hélène Cixous«: second para.

16 Ibid., »Hélène Cixous«: fourth para.

17 Ibid.: »Hélène Cixous: Klein from Tyrnau (Slovakia) Family tree«.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.: »Hélène Cixous«: para. before »Klein from Tyrnau (Slovakia) Family tree«.

20 Ibid.: »Chronicle: Hélèna's Father«.

21 Cixous: *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, 11-f.

22 Ibid.: 10.

23 Ibid.: 10–11.

24 Ibid.: 10.

25 Ibid.: 11.

26 Ibid.: 13.

27 Ibid.: 15.

28 Hélène Cixous: »The Scene of the Unconscious to the Scene of History«, trans. Deborah W. Carpenter, in Ralph Cohen (ed.): *The Future of Literary Theory* (New York, 1989), 15.

29 Ignatius of Loyola: *A Pilgrim's Journey*, 37.

30 Ibid., 40f.

31 Ibid., chapter 1. Ignatius is wounded May 1521 and leaves for Jerusalem February 1522.

32 Ibid., Tylenda commentary, 41.

33 Ibid., 43.

34 Ibid., 43; quoting Pedro Leturia, S.J.: *Iñigo de Loyola*, trans. Aloysius J. Owen, S.J. (Syracuse, 1949), 42f.

35 Ignatius of Loyola: *A Pilgrim's Journey*, 44f.

36 Ibid., 48.

37 See, for example, Avery Dulles' preface to *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph*, trans. Louis J. Puhl, S.J., Vintage Spiritual Classics Edition (New York, 2000), xv.

38 Ignatius of Loyola: *The Spiritual Exercises*, #316.

39 Ibid., #330.

40 Michael Ivens, S.J.: *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises: Text and Commentary: A Handbook for Retreat Directors* (Leominster, Herefordshire, and New Malden, Surrey, 2008 [1998]), 230.

41 Ibid.

42 John W. O'Malley, S.J.: *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993), 83.

43 Ibid., 20.

44 Ibid., 83.

45 Ibid.

46 Hélène Cixous: *Vivre l'orange/To Live the Orange* (Paris, 1979), 108.

47 Clarice Lispector (1920–1977) is one of the most important writers in 20th century Brazilian literature. Cixous began reading Lispector in the 1970s and helped bring her work to wider attention in Europe. Recently there has been a resurgence of interest with a biography and new translations by Benjamin Moser. (See Colm Tóibin's introduction to Moser's translation of Lispector's *The Hour of the Star*, the first (2011) in a series of new translations by New Directions (New York).)

48 Cixous: *Vivre l'orange*, 10.

49 Ibid., 44.

50 Ibid.

51 Robert Detweiler: »What Is Reading Religiously?«, in *Breaking the Fall: Religious Readings of Contemporary Fiction* (New York, 1989), 34.

52 Franz Kafka: *Letters to Friends, Family and Editors*, trans. Richard & Clara Winston (Surrey, 2011), 416–423.

53 Ibid., 493, n. 1.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 Cixous: *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, 151.

57 Cixous & Calle-Gruber: *Hélène Cixous Rootprints*: »Hélène Cixous«: second para after »My father in 1939«.

58 Hélène Cixous: *Limonade tout était si infini* (Paris, 1982); idem, »Lemonade Everything Was So Infinite«, trans. Ann Liddle, in *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, ed. Susan Sellers (Abingdon, 1994 [1982]), 108. In »From the Scene of the Unconscious to the Scene of History« (cited by Sellers in *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, 9f, n. 5), Cixous writes of being enticed and inspired by this phrase: »*Limonade es war alles so grenzenlos* is a sentence of Kafka's. This isn't a sentence from Kafka – the writer. It is a sentence from Franz, the man, no longer writing books, agonizing, writing only rapid and sublime messages of life, life-phrases, flashes of eternity. It is a last sentence. Perhaps the last. Its purity, its symbolic and yet concrete strength, its density, make it one of the most beautiful poems in the world. Yet it was not a poem. Only a sigh. And also the portrait of Regret.«

59 Cixous & Calle-Gruber: *Hélène Cixous Rootprints*: »Hélène Cixous«: second para. after »My father in 1939«.

60 Hélène Cixous: *Manhattan: Letters from Prehistory*, trans. Beverley Bie Brahic (New York, 2007 [2002]), 74.

Cecilia Rosengren, »On the Deathbed: Margaret Cavendish on What to Say in Times of Grief«

ABSTRACT

The article highlights a couple of fictitious speeches of dying persons, written by the 17th century philosopher, dramatist and author Margaret Cavendish. The speeches are included in her book *Orations of Divers Sorts, Accomodated to Divers Places* (1662), in which early modern society is displayed in various rhetorical situations. In the introduction Cavendish invites the reader on a tour through a metropolitan city, while eaves-dropping on people talking. Her book is in a way a theatrical staging, which fits well with the Renaissance metaphor of »theatrum mundum«. Relating Cavendish's intervention on this stage to early modern philosophical discussions on emotions and to the rhetorical genre as such, the article discusses how Cavendish conceived of the concepts of grief and comfort in her age.

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Keywords: Margaret Cavendish, Philippe Ariès, deathbed, consolation, rhetoric, theatrum mundum

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Cecilia Rosengren

ON THE DEATHBED: Margaret Cavendish on What to Say in Times of Grief

INTRODUCTION

Deathbeds have most likely always evoked a complex set of feelings and emotions – grief, anxiety, anger, relief, envy et cetera. Nevertheless, in pre-modern western societies the deathbed was thought of as a place where the transition from life to death was something you should welcome without fear. It was a tamed death, a familiar event, as the historian Philippe Ariès calls it in his classic works on death and dying in western history.[1] Unless you were stricken by a sudden or violent death, which was generally seen as an exception and something no one talked about, the prevailing notion was that your were in some way or another fore-warned of death's arrival and could thus prepare yourself and the people around you. Moreover, surrounded by family, friends and neighbours watching by your last hours on earth, you had the opportunity to perform the art of dying well, *ars moriendi*, in terms of public gestures that offered both council and consolation from within a Christian tradition and a context of salvation.[2] In fact, Ariès writes, death »was a ritual organized by the dying person himself, who presided over it and knew its protocol [...] and carried out, – in a ceremonial manner, yes, but with no theatrics, with no great show of emotion.«[3]

All the same, the ritual opened up for both theatrical and rhetorical situations, which inter alia meant handling emotions and passions put in play by the dying person and those attending. Following Ariès' argument, this particular aspect of the deathbed scene became more important when attitudes to death and dying slowly changed during the early modern period into a more modern conception of death as something abrupt, unfamiliar and frightening – »so frightful that we dare not utter its name«[4] – a wild death, in Ariès phrasing, which was not related to the notion of a shared humanity and its destiny, but rather to the specific existence of individuals and one's own death, or the passing away of the other person. It was a death that called for personal tombs and other memorial practices for the purpose of consolation and reminiscence.[5] This individualized, dramatized and rhetorical treatment of death was according to Ariès noticeable in the early eighteenth century and was soon turned into the cult of tombs and cemeteries in the centuries that followed.

In the following I want to highlight a number of fictitious

deathbed speeches from the period of transition from tamed to wild death, and to read them in the light of these notions. The speeches were included in a book of orations, *Orations of Divers Sorts, Accommodated to Divers Places* (1662), written by Margaret Cavendish, a seventeenth century prolific author of various literary and philosophical works. My questions are: Do the speeches of dying persons support the idea of a change of mentality in the face of death? Do they entail the emergence of a new need of consolation and perhaps a new conception of grief?

Margaret Cavendish was a controversial figure in her times.[6] She defied gender expectations and insisted upon being taken seriously as an intellectual person. She wrote and published several books in an age that had no actual place for such a persona. Her social standing made a career as an author possible, though her living conditions were from times to times harsh and her sex hindered any real impact on the philosophical and literary scene. She was born in 1623 as Margaret Lucas, a daughter in a royalist family. As one of Queen Henrietta Maria's ladies-in-waiting she was forced into exile 1642, an exile that lasted almost twenty years. While in Paris she married into the scientifically interested family Cavendish, in which household the philosopher Thomas Hobbes had worked for many years. Her husband William and his brother Charles encouraged Margaret to take up studying and to take part in their philosophical discussions of the day. At that time she had no formal training, but according to her autobiographical notes, she had had an urge for studying and writing since she was a child.[7] In her writings to come – first in exile and then back in England, from 1660 to her death in 1676 – she were to explore all sorts of genres: natural philosophy, drama, novel, poem, essay and oration. She also developed her own natural philosophy, embracing the new science but at the same time criticizing its dualism and mechanical concept of nature.

Although much of an autodidact and a loner, Cavendish belonged to the modern intellectual milieu of her times. She was well acquainted with the new philosophical standpoints and in her books she discussed the ideas of René Descartes, Henry More, Pierre Gassendi among others. Not least Thomas Hobbes is likely to have played an important role in her self-fashioning as a writer of philosophy – as an opponent as well as a source of inspiration. »Hobbes is an obvious starting point for trying to set Cavendish into contemporary context«, as the historian of philosophy Sarah Hutton has pointed out.[8] Thus I think it is helpful to briefly present Hobbes' reflections on the emotion of grief, which Cavendish surely had come across, before turning to the book of orations and the dying persons' speeches.

HOBBES ON GRIEF

The philosophical enterprise of the seventeenth century was preoccupied with knowledge foundation and rationalistic reasoning. Nevertheless, as the philosopher Susan James has convincingly shown, the passions played a crucial part in the early modern philosophical understanding of the human being.[9] Thomas Hobbes, for instance, believed that »the differences in people's natural wit – in their capacities for judgement, and incidentally, for fancy – lie[d] in their passions and principally in the strength of their desires for various forms of power, including wealth, knowledge, and honour.«[10] In his seminal work *Leviathan* (1651) – in the first part *Of Man*, chapter six, »On the Interior Beginnings of Voluntary Motions; commonly called the Passions. And the speeches by which they are expressed« – Hobbes identified seven fundamental passions for sustaining human life: appetite, desire, love, aversion, hate, joy and grief. Hobbes stated that these passions were all voluntary motions – as opposed to vital motions, like breathing, pulse, digestion, et cetera – and as such they were always dependent upon the faculty of imagination and a precedent deliberation, an expression of the human will and capacity. He concluded: »*Will* therefore *is the last Appetite in Deliberating*.«[11]

The seven passions described by Hobbes, had each an intrinsic potentiality to develop into more specific passions. The passion in focus for this article – grief – was accordingly a displeasure of the mind, a want of power and a dejection related to a spectrum of emotions and expressions of emotions, like weeping, shame, blushing, pity, fellow-feeling, cruelty, envy and so forth. The forms of speech, countenance, motions of body and actions, by which the passions were expressed were furthermore linked to particular intentions and particular situations such as the dying person on her deathbed. A specific human desire for consolation or comfort in relation to grief was however not mentioned by Hobbes, which does not come as a surprise considering his overall analysis of power and his analysis of human nature and the instinct of self-preservation. The closest match to consolation in Hobbes's thought is perhaps pity or fellow-feeling, though in a peculiar and individualistic way:

> *Griefe*, for the Calamity of another, is PITTY; and ariseth from the imagination that the like calamity may befall himselfe; and therefore is called also COMPASSION, and in the phrase of this present time a FELLOW-FEELING.[12]

The word fellow-feeling may have been in Cavendish's mind when she, in her orations, turns to the reader and appeals to his or her compassion to visit the dying persons, though here in the name of »charity« and »humanity«:

[…] your charity calls you forth to visit the sick, and when as death hath released those sick persons of their pains, humanity will persuade you to wait on their dead corpse to the grave […].[13]

ORATIONS OF DIVERS SORTS

Orations of Divers Sorts, Accommodated to Divers Places (1662) consists of 180 speeches, including a short prefatory speech, of which twelve are speeches of dying persons. According to Cavendish's own words in a later book – *CCXI Sociable Letters* (1664) – the orations were only written to »Exercise my Fancy«[14] But this is surely an understatement, since she also makes clear that she wants the orations to be useful, as should be the purpose of all scientific and literary endeavours. She claims in the prefatory speech that »the subjects of my orations being of the most serious and concernable actions and accidents amongst mankind, and the places most common and public, it hath caused me to write my orations rather to benefit my auditors than to delight them.«[15] The narrative frame of the speeches is intriguing. In the preface of the book, Cavendish invites the readers to go for a tour with her into a metropolitan city and then to its countryside, in times of peace and war, and peace again, observing the social life and listening to people talking and arguing.[16] This framing gives Cavendish the opportunity to present a dramatic and many-sided representation of the early modern western European society she was familiar with, by the means of various speech acts. In *CCXI Sociable Letters* she comments on this practice and says that it is »Fit and Lawful that both Parties should bring in their arguments as well as they can, to make their Cases Good.«[17] In reality Cavendish let many parties speak, which makes *Orations* a sort of social space, a public sphere *avant la lettre*, where a hypothetical discussion of multiple voices of political and social matters could occur. Susan James, the editor of the modern edition of *Orations*, argues that Cavendish broke the rule of formal rhetoric by introducing multiple voices and not just two sides to a question. Accordingly the book contains »speeches of all sorts, and in all places fit for orations, speeches or particular discourse«.[18] Cavendish adds that they are »general orations, *viz*. such as may be spoken in any kingdom or government«[19] – a standpoint that enabled her to express different views without openly defying those in power in her home country. Cavendish had political interests, as a defender of both the absolute monarchy and the rights and honour of her husband, who had been severely affected by the civil war. The rhetorical genre made it possible for her to be sharp in opinions without taking sides, which could have been risky for a woman and the wife of a person who many considered a traitor.

The objective for Cavendish was, however, not to publish yet

another rhetorical handbook in the spirit of Cicero or Quintilian.[20] Neither did she want to reproduce a number of handy commonplaces, as in the contemporary *The Academy of Eloquence: Containing a Compleat English Rhetorique, exemplified, Common Places and Formula's digested into an easie and Methodical way to speak and write fluently, according to the Mode of the present Times* […] *Upon emergent occasions* (1663).[21] Cavendish dissociates herself from a kind of artificial eloquence in other early modern books of orations and she vindicates an idea of natural eloquence since, in her words: it is better to be silently wise than foolish in rhetoric. Her wish is to match sense and reason, instead of matching words. So, with a more open and free style that matches sense and reason, rather than words, she hopes that her speeches will be useful in every man's life, in public life and not just as a delight for private companies.[22]

Notwithstanding this critical tendency towards rhetoric, Cavendish was certainly acquainted with the classical tradition, not least through Hobbes' translation of Aristotle's rhetoric.[23] Aristotle's three types of orations are represented among her 179 orations. There are (1) demonstrative orations that praise and dispraise; (2) deliberative orations that aim to prove a thing profitable or unprofitable; and, (3) judicial orations that accuse and defend a cause. The narrative that frames these different sorts of speeches is, in my reading, very effective. As mentioned above, Cavendish invites the reader on an imagined eavesdropping tour. It starts in the marketplace in a city in a country on the brink of civil war, a situation Cavendish had experienced herself and feared would reoccur. The first orations deal with the pros and cons to this frail political situation, which unfortunately ends in war. The following speeches are held in the field of war, some performed by distressed and mutinous soldiers. But, Cavendish says, »wars bring ruin and destruction to one or some parties if not to all, and loss causes men to desire peace«.[24] So when peace finally arrives the reader visits the city again, now in ruins, and listens to the citizens' opinions on how to overcome the disorders and the misery, and how to reconstruct a social and political order. The orations deal with questions like the relationship between the monarch and the subjects; the king's counsellors' part; different aspects on government; the utility of theatre houses; the freedom of conscience and speech; social customs like weddings and funerals et cetera. In seven of the orations the role of women is the topic for discussion; these are held in a more private setting as a response to a misogynist public speech. They fit nicely into the genre that developed within *la querelle des femmes*, which shows how well Cavendish was aware of and successfully could use the common places in the Renaissance rhetorical tradition if she wanted to. The same goes for her representation of the

peasants' talk, following the common places on how to depict the happiness of rural life. The travel ends at a university and sleepy orations among fellow students.

THE SPEECHES OF DYING PERSONS

In the order of the book's orations the twelve speeches of dying persons are placed after the nine speeches that focus on the relation between the monarch and his subjects and before the twenty-eight funeral speeches. The orations are the following:[25]

- A Kings Dying Speech to his Noble Subjects (no 74)
- A Daughters Dying Speech to her Father (no 75)
- A Soldiers Dying Speech to his Friends (no 76)
- A Dying Speech of a Loving Mistress to her Beloved Servant (no 77)
- A Foreign Travellers Dying Speech (no 78)
- A Lovers Dying Speech to his Beloved Mistress (no 79)
- A Sons Dying Speech to his Father (no 80)
- A Young Virgins Dying Speech (no 81)
- A Husbands Dying Speech to his Wife (no 82)
- A Common Courtisans Dying Speech (no 83)
- A Vain Young Ladys Dying Speech (no 84)
- A Fathers Speech to his Son on his Deathbed (no 85)

Maybe Cavendish put these speeches in a random order and maybe she wrote them for the purpose of exercising her fancy, in any case they all dramatize deathbed scenes in certain social settings – the state (king to subjects), the family (daughter to father, son to father, wife to husband, father to son), and also in more loosely knitted contexts of friends, lovers, soldiers and travellers. Cavendish used her experience as a play-writer and she let the characters perform the act of dying while communicating a message to a specific addressee. But since they do not represent a realistic situation, they do not offer real council and consolation as in the old *ars moriendi* tradition. So, what is performed? What is the message?

Memento mori

In many ways the speeches perform a sort of *memento mori*, as an enlightening sign in midst of Cavendish's orations of political and social issues. Through the speeches Cavendish reminds the readers of their own mortality, in line with the pregnant skull in a Renaissance portrait or the details in a Baroque *vanitas* painting, or the short life of »bubble man« in the widely read *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Dying* (1651) by bishop Jeremy Taylor. Taylor writes that to die well is to live well in life, to examine your way of living and the fundamental conditions of the short human life, and by doing so you prepare for your own calm transition to the after world. Taylor says that:

> […] he that prepares not for death, before his last sick-nesse, is like him that begin to study Philosophy when he is going to dispute publikely in the faculty. All that a sick and dying man can do is but to exercise those virtues, which he before acquired, and to perfect that repentance which was begun more early.[26]

Cavendish's dying persons seem very aware of these circumstances. They have all come to terms with the fact that death is approaching, but some blame themselves for a too late awakening. In the common courtisan's dying speech (no 83) the orator informs her friends and lovers that if she had taken care of her body and soul, she would have been in a better condition, »for had thought of Death, or could imagine the pains that I now feel, the pocky, rotten pains that torture my weak body, I should have been less covetous of wealth and more careful of health.«[27] A vain young lady (no 84) reproaches herself in the same way. She had tried to avoid death as far as possible. She tells her friends that she

> […] shun visiting the sick, because they put thoughts of death in my mind, which would disturb my mind and obstruct my delights, but if I had thought of death more, and had visited the sick oftener, I had never lived so idly, nor spent my time so unprofitable.[28]

Cavendish's speeches of dying persons confirm the idea that the dying persons are in charge of the event, independent of what kind of life he or she has behind. The pedagogical task for the dying persons is to convey that they have made friends with death, and in a consoling effort urge their addressees to also accept the fact of death. Even if, as the foreign traveller declares in his speech (no 78), it is normal for humans not to have »the curiosity to travel into Death's kingdom«[29], death is unavoidable and should be welcomed when the time has come. As the dying daughter asks her father (no 75):

> Why do you mourn that Death must be your son-in-law? Since he is a better husband than any you could choose me or I could choose my self, it is a match that Nature and the Fates have made; wherefore be content.[30]

The persons dying in Cavendish's speeches have been forewarned of their death and their words are part of the preparation to leave this world in peace, as the virgin says to her friends (no 81): »I do perceive the holy angels hover about my soul to bear it to the Gods when parted from my body […] As for my body, though it be young, yet is it only fit for Death.«[31] There are no escape routes and therefore no pain in dying. The

dying persons are calm and in a comforting way they call upon the mourners to be calm as well.

Cavendish's advice on what to say in times of grief can thus be said to activate the art of dying and a notion of tamed death. As Ariès pointed out, the dying person was more worried about the fear of not having been forewarned of death than fearing of the actual death itself. Cavendish's dying persons seem to act within the old paradigm. Grief is something that is expressed through certain repertoires of social gestures. Death is still something the dying persons are prepared to welcome. So instead of offering a Hobbesian rational discourse on human grieving, which could have been plausible considering Cavendish's support of parts of his philosophy, the speeches seem to be closer to traditional notions of grief and the act of grieving. The conception of wild death, frightening and dramatized, that is taking form during Cavendish's lifetime, can however also be found in the speeches. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* grief was during this period understood as a deep or violent sorrow of an individual person, caused by loss or trouble, as for example is shown by the common places represented in *The Academy of Eloquence* (1663):

> Drenched in a sea of sorrows – Love, jealousie, anger and sorrow divided his heart, and drew strange sighs from him. He bare the image of his sorrow in his dejected countenance […] He opened his mouth, as a flood-gate of sorrow […] She poured her self into tears without comfort, as her misery seemed devoid of remedy […] Sorrow having clos'd up all the entries of thy mind.[32]

In the dying daughter's speech to her father (no 75) this deep sorrow is very near. The daughter anticipates her father's reaction and tries to convince him not to lament her death: »Father, farwell! And may that life that issues from my young and tender years be added to your age! May all your grief be buried in my grave […] May comfort dry your eyes, God cease your sorrow.«[33]

To be remembered

Even if Cavendish's dying persons show little anxiety, they nevertheless worry about being forgotten in the world of the living. If forgotten, what was the purpose of living? In the speeches the passion of grief is connected to want of power, more in line with Hobbes's thinking, and the expressions of envy, jealousy and anger towards the living. An example of this is the dying husband who tells his wife not to re-marry after his death (no 82):

> Wife, farewell; for Death will break our marriage knot and will divorce our persons, but not dissolve our love, unless

> you be inconstant; for Death hath not that power to disunite souls, for they may live and love eternally; but if you marry a second husband […] you will bury all remembrance of me; and so I shall doubly die, and doubly be buried […] but if you live a widow you will keep me still alive, both in your name and memory.[34]

In the same vein, the lover (no 79) is tormented not by the pains of his sick body, but by the thought of being forgotten when dead, if his mistress will take another lover: »O my jealous thoughts do torture more my mind than the pains of death do torture my weak body.« [35] And the soldier tells his friends at his deathbed (no 76) that he fears that »the service I have done my king and country will die with me and be buried in oblivion's grave«.[36]

The mourners too are supposed to experience a kind of grief. But once again the displeasure of mind is more related to the fear of being forgotten in the world of the living. The dying son is sorry to cause his father the grief of him dying without issue (no 80):

> ——Father, I have been an unprofitable son, for I shall die a bachelor and so leave you no posterity to keep alive your name and family, which is a double grief, both to yourself and me, indeed to me it is a treble grief, because the fault is only mine, loving vain pleasures and liberty so much as made me unwilling to be bound in wedlock bonds […] besides, I trusted my youth and health […] but Death will alter that design, and you and I must both submit to Heaven's decree. Yet have I this to comfort me, that you did never command me to marry, wherefore my fault was not a fault of disobedience […], which makes me die in peace.[37]

When there is an issue the dying persons can happily look forward to posterity »in name and fame«[38] as the dying father tells his son (no 85). Thus, the real »displeasure of mind« for Cavendish has to do with the fear of disappearing without trace, which after all would mean that she stands on the threshold to a more modern conception of death such as the one Ariès points to, in which the human being becomes conscious of his or her specific individual and lonely life. This thought goes well with Cavendish's own ambition in life. Her biggest fear was to be forgotten, and since she was childless, this fear was a major driving force in her writing and publishing. Her attitude is typical for the horror of oblivion that was an obsessive pre-occupation among the social elite in the seventeenth century according to the historian Keith Thomas.[39] This horror is certainly linked to the new conception of the individual as an autonomous entity and the hardening social

competition, and is shown for instance in the growing popularity and importance of monuments over dead persons, often on one's own initiative.

TO CONCLUDE

Even if the nine speeches of dying persons in Margaret Cavendish's *Orations of divers sorts* most likely express a premodern conception of death and dying, they can also support the idea of a change of mentality in the face of death and the emergence of a new need of consolation and a new conception of grief that focuses on the individual existence and death rather than a shared human destiny. Cavendish's writing as a whole could be interpreted in this way, as a form of social assertion for her as an individual to deal with the abyss of existential loneliness and the want of consolation.[40] The *memento mori* is still an important reminder of the constant changes and the inevitable death, but new openings to create a posthumous name promises long after life. Cavendish could use her prolific publishing as a sort of monumental memorial, though wary of the precariousness she complains already in *Philosophical Fancies* (1653): I write, and write, and't may be never read. / My *Bookes*, and I, all in a *Grave* lye dead.[41] Cavendish was wrong; a comforting thought.

ENDNOTES

1 Philippe Ariès: *Western Attitudes towards Death from the Middle Ages to the Present (*Baltimore, 1975) and *The Hour of Our Death* (London, 1981 [1977]).

2 Ariès: *Western Attitudes towards Death*, 33 ff. For the *ars moriendi* tradition, see Mary Catharine O'Connor, *The Arts of Dying Well: The Development of the Ars Moriendi* (New York, 1966) and Atkinson, David William. *The English Ars Moriendi* (New York, 1992). The different Christian churches had different interpretations of the practices around dying, but all stressed the importance of dying well as to resist vices and to secure the salvation.

3 Ariès: *Western Attitudes towards Death*, 11f.

4 Ariès: *Western Attitudes towards Death*, 13.

5 Ariès: *Western Attitudes towards Death*, 55f. For a discussion of afterlife, tombs and memorials in early modern England see Keith Thomas: *The Ends of Life. Roads to fulfilment in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2009), 262–267.

6 The research interest in the life and work of Margaret Cavendish is growing constantly. These books give a good and nuanced picture of Cavendish's achievement as a woman intellectual and natural philosopher in the seventeenth century: Lisa T. Sarasohn: *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish. Reason and Fancy during the Scientific Revolution*, (Baltimore, 2010); Emma L.E. Rees: *Margaret Cavendish. Gender,*

Genre, Exile (Manchester/New York, 2003); Anna Battigelli: *Margaret Cavendish and the Exiles of the Mind*, (Lexington, 1998); Stephen Clucas, (ed.): *A Princely Brave Woman. Essays on Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle*, (Aldershot, 2003).

7 Margaret Cavendish: »A true Relation of my Birth, Breeding, and Life«, in *Natures pictures drawn by fancies pencil to the life* (London, 1656), 368 ff.

8 Sarah Hutton: »In Dialogue with Thomas Hobbes: Margaret Cavendish natural philosophy«, in *Women's writing* (1997), 4:3, 422.

9 Susan James: *Passion and Action. The Emotions in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy,* (Oxford, 1997).

10 James: *Passion and Action*, 213.

11 Thomas Hobbes: *Leviathan*, Richard Tuck (ed.) (Cambridge, 1996 [1651]), 45.

12 Hobbes: *Leviathan*, 43.

13 Margaret Cavendish: »Orations of Divers Sorts, Accommodated to Divers Places«, in *Political Writings*, Susan James (ed.) (Cambridge, 2003 [1662]), 120.

14 Margaret Cavendish: *CCXI Sociable Letters* (London, 1664), »The preface«

15 Cavendish: *Political Writings*, 129.

16 Cavendish: *Political Writings*, 119f.

17 Cavendish: *CCXI Sociable Letters*, »The preface«

18 Cavendish: *Political Writings*, 119.

19 Cavendish: *Political Writings s*, 118

20 Susan James, »Introduction«, in Cavendish, *Political Writings*, xxii.

21 By T. B. of the Inner Temple: *The Academy of Eloquence: Containing a Compleat English Rhetorique, exemplified, Common Places and Formula's digested into an easie and Methodical way to speak and write fluently, according to the Mode of the present Times* […] *Upon emergent occasions* (London, 1663).

22 Cavendish: *Political Writings*, 129.

23 Thomas Hobbes: *A Briefe of the Art of Rhetorique*, in *The Rhetorics of Thomas Hobbes and Bernard Lamy,* John T. Harwood (ed.) (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1986 [1637]).

24 Cavendish: *Political Writings,* 119.

25 Cavendish: *Political Writings,* 201–207.

26 James Taylor: *The Rule and Exercise of Holy Dying* (London, 1651), »The Epistle Dedicatory«

27 Cavendish: *Political Writings,* 206.

28 Cavendish: *Political Writings,* 206.

29 Cavendish: *Political Writings,* 203.

30 Cavendish: *Political Writings,* 202.

31 Cavendish: *Political Writings,* 205.

32 By T. B. of the Inner Temple: *The Academy of Eloquence*, 92–96. See also: Stephen Pender: »Rhetoric. Grief, and the

Imagination in Early Modern England«, in *Philosophy and Rhetoric,* 43:1 (2010), 54–85.

33 Cavendish: *Political Writings*, 201.

34 Cavendish: *Political Writings*, 205.

35 Cavendish: *Political Writings*, 204.

36 Cavendish: *Political Writings*, 202.

37 Cavendish: *Political Writings*, 204f.

38 Cavendish: *Political Writings*, 207.

39 Keith Thomas: *The Ends of Life. Roads to fulfilment in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2009), 240 ff.

40 Thomas: *The Ends of Life*, 253.

41 Margaret Cavendish: *Philosophical Fancies* (London, 1653), 78.

Heather Walton, »The Consolation of Everyday Things«

ABSTRACT

This article begins by outlining some of the ways in which objects have been understood to have consolatory functions in Western culture. It then explores how a recent shift in thinking about things is emerging both within academic discourse and in popular works of creative none-fiction such as Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking* and Edmund de Waala's *The Hare with the Amber Eyes*. This new materialist thinking offers the potential to challenge accepted understandings of the consolation to be found in human/thing relations. This potential is explored with particular reference to Etty Hillesum's war-time journals which place the consolation of things in a challenging and creative theological frame.

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Heather Walton

THE CONSOLATION OF EVERYDAY THINGS

PROLOGUE

In the late 1950's, when I was a little baby at the breast of my young mother, on the other side of the Atlantic significant experiments were taking place. Harry Harlow, of the University of Wisconsin, in research funded by the Ford Foundation was hand rearing tiny infant monkeys. He wrote,

> We had separated more than 60 of these animals from their mothers 6 to 12 hours after birth and suckled them on tiny bottles. Our bottle-fed babies were healthier and heavier than monkey-mother-reared infants. We know that we are better monkey mothers than are real monkey mothers thanks to synthetic diets, vitamins, iron extracts, penicillin, chloromycetin, 5 % glucose, and constant, tender, loving care. [1]

The baby monkeys receiving this »tender loving care« in their wire mesh boxes clung to the soft material on the floor of their cages. It had placed there for hygiene not comfort but the researchers noticed the little creatures became distraught when it was removed for cleaning. Intrigued by the attachment this cotton towelling generated Harlow began the famous set of experiments in which fake mother-monkeys made *either* of bare wire frames *or* padded by soft cloth leered, with grotesque tennis ball faces, over their trembling charges. Even though the unyielding wire mothers dispensed food the baby monkeys sought the soft comfort of the cloth mothers. These mother substitutes quickly became key figures in debates about maternity, the role of women in the workplace and the nature of the child parent bond. More than this Harlow claimed while »it is possible that in the foreseeable future neonatal nursing will not be regarded as a necessity, but as a luxury … it is comforting to know that we are now in contact with the nature of love.«[2]

A terrible tragedy split apart the life of my best friend, Chloe, when she was 13 years old. She had gone with her mother to visit her older sister who was married and living in Germany. Her father had remained at home and went about his normal routines. He mowed the lawn, pruned the roses, put the milk bottles on the doorstep, placed Chloe's pocket money in its accustomed place – a little jewelry box in her bedroom – and then he took his own life. In need of an income her mother returned to work, found that she liked it very much and was quickly promoted. As she worked longer and longer hours her

daughter was compensated by gifts, usually of wonderful new clothes, hot pants, miniskirts, midicoats, make up, white Mary Quant tights. Fashionable, grown-up items I could only dream of. My mother said, »That child needs love but instead she gets too much money spent on her. It's wicked and it's cruel.« I was not sure about this judgment at all.

Just before the Russian tanks rolled into Prague my friend Sybil fled the country with her parents – her father was a senior figure in the Dubcek government. Their departure was secret and swift so they were unable to take many possessions with them. One thing that Sybil did bring was her white muslin party dress. The dress was old-fashioned, multi-layered, had petticoats and a blue satin ribbon sash. I had never seen anything like it. Growing up in the »60's I was accustomed to crimplene, nylon and polyester myself. This unusual garment looked not only different but more dignified. It spoke to me of a strange, formal country very far away. Sybil allowed her new friends to try the dress on and we appeared transformed in it. »How you must miss home,« we said to her. We had become aware of the great distance she had travelled through wrapping ourselves in the folds of her garment. »Its funny«, she said, »I never really liked this dress when I wore it there but I love it here.«

PEOPLE AND THINGS

This paper will explore the consolation that can be gained from things; from ordinary and commonplace objects. I will argue that this consolatory function has been undervalued and underestimated because of the habitual denigration of the significance of material objects within our common cultural imaginary.

Interestingly, Collins English Dictionary defines consolation as a person, *or thing,* that is a comfort in a time of grief or suffering.«[3] I find it significant that »thing« is coupled with person so directly in this definition. Yet in popular wisdom the satisfaction that things can offer is usually seen as a poor substitute for other losses. The consolation offered is like that of the »consolation prize« at a children's party – a tawdry, deceptive substitute for the desired good. Things may offer comfort, to be sure, but we deeply recoil from ideas that they can do so »like a real mother«. We are sure that commodities, things made or bought or sold, cannot truly console the lost child and we do not believe that a dress can make the world a home again.

The dominant theoretical discourses of Western culture support these commonplace assumptions through making a significant distinction between the person and the thing when functioning as consolation. However, it is not possible to sustain this strict demarcation if we examine how things console us in the frequent processes of loss that constitute our daily lives.

Some of the most important work on this subject comes from psychoanalytic theory. Donald Winnicott's observations concerning the role transitional objects play in allowing children to substitute for the presence of the mother and thus make a successful transition to differentiated personhood remain particularly helpful.[4] As Margaret Gibson writes in her moving essay, entitled »Melancholy Objects«[5] the transitional processes of child development can also be mirrored in grief:

> —According to Winnicott, transitional objects are invested with a magical quality – they have protective powers warding off danger and offering comfort. Teddy bears, dolls and other toys are animated egos … [through] which a child exercises control of its environment and relationships. Transitional objects express the anguish and militate against the mother's absence as a primary figure and corporeal site of absence and loss … In other words, there is an existential dimension to the transitional objects in that they mediate nothingness. If the child negotiates the outside world and the existential anxiety of absence partly through the transitional object, it is not surprising that the grieving might also negotiate their lost object with emotional props and buffers. In grieving, as in childhood, transitional objects are both a means of holding on and letting go.[6]

In her research amongst 30 recently bereaved subjects Gibson investigates the tremendous power of the transitional object in mourning and goes as far as to state that in the most simple and poignant ways people grieve »with and through objects« which comfort them. However, following the lead of Freud, her model for this grieving is fundamentally as a process of repudiation. People require the object to make a transition from love to acceptance of loss and then to letting go. As this happens the transitional object is necessarily abjected; it must lose its significance, must also, in a sense, die. Always a poor substitute for the person who has gone the thing gradually deanimates and becomes inert matter again to be appropriately disposed of or hidden away.

From Marxist theory we have also learned to acknowledge but simultaneously critique the consolation offered by things; objects that we deeply desire but which are in fact destructive of human life and social relationships. Interestingly, Marx makes a direct connection between the illusory comforts of commodities and the illusory comforts of religion. »A commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties.«[7] Through a process of mystification, he warns us, the commodities we

produce console us for the losses we endure in the productive processes of capitalism. Their allure subtly disguises the alienation of our labour, the exploitation of our creativity and the enslavement, for profit, of those inventive, convivial and transformative qualities that make us human. This is a catalogue of serious accusations and, following on from them, it becomes clear that Marx deems it as necessary to escape from the dreamlike consolations of things as it is to escape the dangerous opiate of religion. An awakening to the true conditions of our lives is necessary – beyond the comforts of dreaming.

Marx's work on commodity fetishism is brilliant, powerful and persuasive. Today it is has become deeply influential, in a way I do not think he would have entirely approved of, in the burgeoning mass of critical writing that routinely place things in opposition to nature and people. It has been compellingly re-inscribed in the political pessimism that marks those analyses of postmodernism that proclaim the triumph of the mysterious fetish (now as likely to be a sign as an object) over the embodied human. This is the key note sounded in the work of those cultural prophets who continually warn us that our fragile humanity is being overcome by the object-systems we have created. Jean Baudrillard[8] and Zygmunt Bauman[9] stand as representatives of this starkly apocalyptic discourse.

In contrast to social theory, anthropology has had, in some ways, a rather kinder view of the object world. The anthropologists of modern times have accorded very significant roles indeed to things as they function in rituals, exchanges, gift giving or in the routine commerce of everyday life. In fact, as the dominant anthropological approach[10] has been to interpret objects as symbols bearing human meanings, they have thus become somewhat detached from the murky world of matter and understood to function like language. Things should be understood as signifiers and valued for the meaning they carry and the communication they make possible. In this frame no-one could deny the many forms of consolation that are made possible through objects but these should be properly understood as continuous with rather than differentiated from other person-centred cultural processes. Things are assimilated because they have become invisible in their »thingness« and have been baptised into the commonwealth of persons.

At this point I should make very clear that I owe a great deal to the work of Winnicott, would regard myself as Marxian in my sociological/political outlook and continue to think anthroplogists like Clifford Geertz and Victor Turner still have a great deal to teach us about the meaning systems through which we shape our lives. I also care for the planet and want to save the world. However, like many others, I have become dissatisfied with an understanding of things that I have come to believe is shaped by a Western cultural inheritance that is

founded upon the denigration of materiality. It is important, not least because of the challenges we face politically and environmentally, to »disassimilate« objects from people and find a way to »both understand things and do full justice to their materiality?«[11] Unfortunately this is a difficult challenge because, as Webb Keane states:

> The effort seems still to be haunted and confounded by such ancient dichotomies as form and substance, essence and accident, matter and spirit. Old habits die hard, and a host of poststructuralist and postmodern redemptions have not entirely shaken themselves free of these conceptual genealogies. Perhaps, as some have argued, we can't shake these dichotomies because they are so deeply part of our metaphysics of presence … because we have always been heirs of the Greeks, or conversely because we are now capitalist moderns.[12]

While the challenge may be daunting it is also interesting – and I would now like to briefly discuss a number of ways of »thinking about things« that generate more positive understandings of the consolations they offer. I should say I am being very selective here and am not attempting to describe the whole field of »thing theory«, which is a vigorous and rapidly growing area of academic debate. Also, as will be apparent, the various forms of new materialist thinking I shall consider do not neatly cohere into one overarching model – although they do contain related themes and insights.

SMALL COSMOLOGIES

I begin this brief exploration with the work of Daniel Miller who has been one of the key spokespersons for a revised approach to material culture and an active polemicist for the new thinking. Miller is an anthropologist and much of his research has been on the significance of objects in diverse cultural contexts from Trinidad to East London. He has particularly focussed on common objects, clothing, furniture, ubiquitous stuff. In this context it is interesting to note that Miller is Jewish and his work contains a number of references to the importance of things in the spiritual »economy«.

Miller's key insight is that »people-make-things-make-people«. In other words things have a formative role in the construction of culture and participate with other agents in what he views as a *dialectical*[13] processes that bring our worlds into being. Things are not inconsequential, they are not inessential, their effects are not transitory; they are transformative and their influence can be viewed as »kindly« rather than destructive. Miller argues that it is impossible to imagine human culture without the nurturing guardianship performed

by things. He takes up and amplifies Pierre Bourdieu's narrative of how amongst the Kabyle a child is introduced to the order of the house and required to learn things must be placed high or low, on the left or right. This constructed order represents a domestic induction into a wider cosmology which maintains the pattern of existence despite the apparent diversity of experience:

> This seems to me to correspond very well to what I call the humility of things. Objects don't shout at you like teachers … but they help you gently to learn how to act appropriately … objects make people. Before we can make things we are ourselves grown up and matured in the light of things that come to us from previous generations. We walk around the rice terraces or road systems, the housing and gardens that are effectively ancestral. These unconsciously direct our footsteps and are the landscape of our imagination, as well as the cultural environment to which we adapt … Things, not mind you individual things, but the whole system of things with their internal order, make us the people we are. And they are exemplary in their humility, never really drawing attention to what we owe them. They just get on with the job.[14]

So people form webs of meaning through complex interactions with networks of persons *and* things and yet so often in our binary culture we assume that healthy relationships with persons are primary and authentic and relations with things function as secondary substitutes, at best, and dangerous consolations at worst. This assumption is challenged by a simple but effective piece of research conducted by Miller in an ordinary London street and published, appropriately for the concerns expressed in this journal edition, as *The Comfort of Things.*[15]

When undertaking their investigations Miller and a colleague questioned inhabitants about the objects they lived with. They found that those who enjoyed a rich relationships with objects (commonplace things – a woman kept MacDonalds »Happy Meals« toys whilst a couple made elaborate Christmas decorations) had a similarly rich relationship with people. Those whose lives were starkly bereft of beloved possessions were similarly starved of meaningful personal relationships.

But his research took Miller beyond reversing the terms of the familiar moral equation that there is an inverse relationship between love of people and love of things. He discovered people *not only* engage with objects as part of a holistic system of meaningful relationships but *they also* construct within domestic space microcosmological systems often far more meaningful and present to them than the larger social and

religious systems in which they may participate at one remove. Through the simple way treasured objects are arranged and assembled in the domestic sphere we can gain an understanding of the cosmological frame in which the person finds meaning and consolation in life. Miller found people more than willing to explain these small, ordered tableaus when questioned – and make strong links between favourite objects and the worldviews they sustained:

> The point is that Household material culture may express an order which in each case seems equivalent to what *one might term* a social cosmology, *if this* was the order of things, values and relationships of a society, A very little cosmology perhaps … and one that in only a few cases ever develops into an abstract philosophy or system of belief …Nevertheless such a cosmology is holistic rather than fragmented and … [although] the focus is on the interior space these aesthetics are not isolated from the wider world.[16]

Indeed these micro-material cosmologies sustain identity and help generate the resilience necessary to pattern life creatively and interact meaningfully with others. Comforting things create people comfortable with themselves and others. They form us as persons who are able to look outward and explore the wider world. Beyond the simple consolation they offer a pathway is opened to deeper social participation and in this process things can even serve as vehicles to mediate our hopes and spiritual visions.

ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER …

We can see within Miller's thinking the idea that things play a dynamic role in dialectical cultural relations however, the idea that things possess agency (are actants, can do things, make changes that produce results) is more fully developed in the forms of thing thinking frequently bundled together as ANT (Actor Network Theory). The generative influence of Alfred Gell's work on the »agency« of art works[17] and Bruno Latour's[18] work on networks of actants (human, none human, corporeal and none spatial) who co-operatively produce outcomes has become very influential in a number of fields such as studies on the porous boundaries between humans and machines, the ways in which cities function, weather mapping etc, etc.

In terms of our concerns here I would like to focus on the way in which the philosopher Jane Bennett has incorporated aspects of this thinking into her work on vibrant matter and enchanting objects. Concerned that a denigration of materiality was directly implicated in a disastrous approach to the natural

environment Bennett welcomed the challenge of new materialist thinking to view agency as confederacy – particularly in its resistance to all attempts to parse the world into vibrant life and dead matter. »What«, Bennett asks, »would the world look like and feel like were the life/matter binary to fall into disuse?«[19] We then might be able to explore those important uneven spaces where none humans are actants, where agency

> is always an assemblage, where matter is not inert, where man is not lord but everything is made of the same quirky stuff…I can't predict what politics would emerge from this. My hunch is that the grass would be greener in a world of vital materialities.[20]

Recognising that to accord agency to things can be seen as a form of animism or vitalism, Bennett argues that there are considerable strengths within these frequently disparaged modes of engaging the world – at least when we use them strategically, recognising their inherent anthropomorphism and holding them in tension with a robust materialism. This approach is increasingly gaining credibility as a challenging counterbalance to the mechanical instrumentality of Western rationalism and a recovery of animism in new forms is becoming a topic of debate far beyond the study of so-called primitive religious systems.[21] Bennett holds that the sense of wonder we frequently experience in relation to objects confronts us as a compelling force. Her use of the »magical« discourse of enchantment does, of course, bring us directly back to Marx and his critique of the »mystical« commodity.

Bennett has developed her work as a respectful form of post-Marxist thinking. She argues that Marx rightly perceived the mysterious and attractive power of things. However, his accompanying analysis of the dangers of »commodity fetishism« through which »[h]umans become blind to the pain and suffering embedded in the commodity by virtue an unjust and exploitative system of production« [22] made him, and his later interpreters, downplay the real possibility that we might find objects wondrous because they are wonderful. Do they not generate physical, emotional and aesthetic pleasure and actively impress themselves upon us in every aspect of life? Furthermore, Bennett challenges us to consider an idea that has been radically suppressed in critical political discourse namely that,

> part of the energy needed to challenge injustice comes from the reservoir of enchantment – including that derived from commodities. For without enchantment you might lack the impetus to act against the very injustices that you critically discern[23]

I think it is very interesting that if we follow Miller and Bennett we can discern a route leading directly from the comfort of things to our involvement with people and onwards to the construction of political and social visions. It is an unfamiliar trajectory within a cultural system still haunted by the ancient dichotomies. These established binaries not only separate people from things they create a divide between what comforts and consoles us in the material present from what challenges us and provokes us to act in the cause of imagined futures. When I was a little girl I used to sing a hymn in which God was described as source of both hope and consolation. At a young age I thought there was a contradiction between the two. Either you got what you hoped for (the sacred) or you got consolation for your loss (the partial and profane). I perceive consolation now in more holistic terms as gently restoring active, spiritual engagement with the world as it is with all its challenges and ambiguities.

POETIC MATERIALS

At this point I want to introduce a form of »thinking about things« that differs somewhat from the dominant trajectory (represented by Miller, Gell, Latour, Bennett and others) and yet still offers interesting perspectives upon the theme of consolation that is provoking my explorations here. Tim Ingold, a Professor of Anthropology at the University of Aberdeen, has become celebrated for his radical and creative thinking on the relationships between art, things and the environment. Ingold is a very difficult thinker to pin down, not only because his work is often tangential to dominant theories, nor simply because he moves between many different fields of expertise. He has studied reindeer herding in Finland, the dynamics of walking, the connections between art, architecture, anthropology and archaeology and is always generating new research territories. Ingold also writes in a poetical, polemical and peculiar way. His most famous essay on materials and materiality, for instance, begins with this unusual demand:

> *Before you begin to read this chapter, please go outside and find a largish stone, though not so big that it cannot be easily lifted and carried indoors. Bring it in, and immerse it in a pail of water or under a running tap. Then place it before you on your desk – perhaps on a tray or plate so as not to spoil your desktop. Take a good look at it. If you like, you can look at it again from time to time as you read the chapter.*[24]

As stated above, the contribution Ingold has made to debate calls into question some of the key assumptions about objects that many new materialists cherish. These include notions of

the dialectic relationship between people and objects advocated by Miller as well as some of the understandings of agency and assemblages adopted by Bennett and her mentors. He makes this challenge on the basis that the focus of such thinking (either implicitly or explicitly) is the human encounter with materiality, primarily figured through persons meeting objects. This reduces things to a common essence, namely materiality (when no such essence exists) and subtly maintains the dominant binary system – albeit in the new form of a confederacy of actants. For Ingold, this move occludes the fact really no distinctions can be made between *anything* that exists in the general flow of life. What happens when we literally and metaphorically lift the carpet on materialist thinking is that we observe,

> beneath its surface a tangled web of meandrine complexity, in which – among a myriad of other things – the secretions of gall wasps get caught up with old iron, acacia sap, goose feathers and calf-skins, and the residue from heated limestone mixes with emissions from pigs, cattle, hens and bees. For materials such as these do not present themselves as tokens of some common essence – materiality – that endows every worldly entity with its inherent »objectness«; rather, they partake in the very processes of the world's ongoing generation and regeneration[25]

So »beneath the carpet« there are myriad materials in process and all things, including ourselves, form part of this. As Martin Holbraad argues, Ingold sees humans and things as submerged »on an equal ontological footing« [26] in a sea of diverse materials– that is materials not materiality. Learning to survive in this underwater environment is a humbling but exhilarating process.

> Once we acknowledge our immersion, what this ocean reveals to us is […] a flux in which materials of the most diverse kinds – through processes of admixture and distillation, of coagulation and dispersal, and of evaporation and precipitation – undergo continual generation and transformation. The forms of things, far from having been imposed from without upon an inert substrate, arise and are borne along – as indeed we are too – within this current of materials.[27]

I mention Ingold's rather different perspective here because it is challenging in the context of our previous thinking about things and the consolation they bring. I think it is helpful when reading Ingold to understand that his thinking on the properties of materials is related to the way an artist or craftsperson

understands them. Materials are not brute matter awaiting form and neither do they possess fixed, inherent qualities waiting to be discovered by the artist. »They are neither objectively determined nor subjectively imagined but practically experienced. In that sense, every property is a condensed story. To describe the properties of materials is to tell the stories of what happens to them as they flow, mix and mutate«.[28] These are processes which we humans know so well as we are deeply implicated in them.

I think this is a very productive way of understanding things in relation to our topic of consolation. We engage with things as materials from which creative possibilities emerge – and which can always be taken. In the flux and flow of our life world we too are implicit in the poetic potentialities of things. This is both a modern and an ancient insight. De Certeau, the social theorist and mystical writer, drew both upon his particular form of embodied materialism and an Ignatian attentiveness to a world in the process of transformation to describe the human as a poetic creator and poetic creation. Our fragile voices sounding faintly in the systems through which we move »as dancers passing lightly through the field of the other«[29]. Have courage, de Certeau encourages us and Ingold enjoins us, to inhabit the poetic potentiality of an environment infinitely fluid and ambiguous and in which what is human is always a fragile creation. What appears at first to be unhomely is in fact your natural home. Abide and find comfort there.

CONSOLING OBJECTS AND RADICAL VISIONS

It is not possible to combine the work of Miller (a neo-Hegelian) with Bennett (a modern vitalist with debts to Spinoza and Marx) and Ingold (who draws upon Heidegger and Deleuze) into one comprehensive way of understanding the consolations of everyday things and how these renew understandings of spiritual agency in the world. I don't have a problem with this myself as my academic training is in literature and theology. In literature we are quite content to let theory be metaphor – something which generates startling new insights and provokes new thinking but is not necessarily »true« in the empirical sense of the word. And theologians, as everyone knows, make a living from speaking about what cannot be spoken about so let us do so boldly whilst recognizing the intractable nature of materiality and that we will never comprehend the »true« nature of things.

But my relaxed approach to the complexity and contradictions inherent in thing theory does not mean I regard it as an engaging but impractical form of esoteric knowledge. I teach and write about it because I find it helpful. We need new ways to explore why and how things matter to people and what roles they play in our lives if we are to live peaceably in this

heterogeneous and fragile, multi-faceted life flow – or whatever you want to call it. What all the approaches above have in common is that they challenge us to examine our prejudices and assumptions as they present a far higher view of the role of things in our lives than do many of the modern theories which still continue to predominate within the Academy. They also generate an understanding of consolation that encompasses comfort and change in one inclusive gesture. I think it is very interesting that this form of consolation can be seen as having political and poetic dimensions – as well, of course, as spiritual challenges to make.

Similar approaches to the dynamic consolation of everyday »things« presented here are also increasingly evident in contemporary novels and creative none fiction. Some recent publications that take a thing-centred approach to experience have generated profound impact. Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking*[30] quickly became a classic in »grief work« and explores the straightforwardly animistic qualities with which we embue the objects that come to the fore in our lives when we experience deep trauma and loss. To my mind a more interesting book is the *The Hare with the Amber Eyes* by Edmund de Waal[31]. This bestselling work delicately displays, through recounting the »lives« of a set of small Japenese carved figures, threads connecting people and things that stretch over a long period of time -nearly two centuries. It also demonstrates how things and people are intimately bound up together in political and cultural processes. Impressionism, fascism, feminism, postcolonialism, sexual revolutions and personal loves all figure in the pages of this capacious book as we are shown how objects comfort and sustain people through periods of violent social change. Furthermore, because the text is also written by an artist, by a potter, we are never allowed to forget that things are not merely instrumental – they are wonderfully formed and works of grace.

Whilst these recent texts are valuable (and indeed there is a whole literary genre of »thing life writing »developing) there are many other works from previous eras, particularly I would argue texts written by women, that take a profound view of the consolation of material things. We have worked on some of these texts together in the Centre for Literature, Theology and the Arts at the University of Glasgow and have particularly focused on the »material mysticism« of female writers experiencing the turmoil of the middle years of the twentieth century.

In this edition my colleague, Elizabeth Anderson (now of Stirling University), interrogates the work of the celebrated modernist HD who developed a spiritual awareness focussed upon epiphanic encounters mediated through objects. These might be beloved things, often remembered from her childhood, or everyday objects that figure a divine sustaining presence in a

world made uninhabitable by violent conflict. Her most poignant writing on this topic was generated out of the experience of the London Blitz. We have also explored the novels of Jean Rhys who, in a rather contrasting vein, creates a stark, modernist symbolism depicting both good and evil out of the furniture of cheap Hotels and the fabric of fashionable clothing stores. Elizabeth Smart, whose work I have particularly researched,[32] generated a domestic sublime in which the heights and depths of experience could be charted within the mundane confines of a living space populated by pots and pans, homemade curtains, washing lines and children's clothes.

AESTHETICS OF CONSOLATION

I would like to finish this article, and draw together its diverse threads, by briefly referring to one of the most powerful articulations of the consoling power manifested through things to have emerged in twentieth century writing. The war-time journals of Etty Hillesum record her personal and spiritual journeys in occupied Amsterdam from 1942 through to her transportation to the Dutch transit camp at Westerbork. Etty was taken from there by train to Auschwitz where she died in 1943.

I love Etty Hillesum, how could you not love someone who begins her spiritual journal with the comment that this writing is both vulnerable and ecstatic; like the last »liberating« cry in orgasm?[33] I love her also because of the delicate schema she bravely creates which opposes the awful experiences of her time with sex, beauty, poetry *and things*. She creates an aesthetics of consolation in which everyday objects play a key role. As the net around the Jewish community tightens she takes increasing delight in the power of objects to point to sustain an alternative reality to the one of violence and war. She delights in a red cyclamen placed on her writing desk beneath a small lamp, on the fact that glory can still be experienced in

> An old dress, a little bit of sun … I am coming over to your place right now. I have put on a beauty of a new pink wool blouse, and I have washed myself from head to toe in lilac soap.«[34]

We see a process very similar to that described by Miller as the creation of small cosmologies at work displayed in her writing. Life becomes focused down, distilled, displayed in very little tableaus of resistance. She writes to her lover:

> I once quietly bemoaned the fact that there is so little space for our physical love in your two small rooms, and no chance of going anywhere else because of all those notices and prohibitions. But now it seems to me a virtual paradise of promise and freedom. Your little room, your

> small table lamp. My lilac soap … God knows how much that means … [for] all that may lie in store[35]

Etty found in the folded back sheets of a lover's bed, in the well-fingered sheets of a poetry book a power that consoles and confronts nihilism and death. More than this, towards the end she developed that sense, such an important part of much mystical and poetic writing, of intermingling with the things that surround her and a taking up the whole within the divine:

> I often see visions of poisonous green smoke, I am with the hungry, with the ill-treated and the dying, every day, but I am also with the jasmine and that piece of sky beyond my window[36]

> From my bed I stared out through the large open window. And it was once more as if life with all its mysteries were close to me, as if I could touch it. I had a feeling that I was resting against the naked breast of life and I thought, how strange it is wartime. There are concentration camps.[37]

I am aware this is a disturbing point on which to finish. The comfort of things in the face of terror. However, that is really where I started my talk. By trying to discern what strange and fragile forms of consolation they offer in the face of loss.

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Carl Reinhold Bråkenhielm, »A Quantum of Solace and Heap of Doubt«

ABSTRACT

The article examines two lines of reasoning for consolation on the basis of a religious belief about life after death. The *first* line departs from the presumed consoling power of such a belief (summarized in the »factory-girl« argument of John Henry Newman). According to Richard Dawkins and John Stuart Mill, this pragmatic line of reasoning is wholly irrelevant when it comes to the question whether it is rational or not to entertain such a belief. The *second* line of reasoning has to do with epistemic arguments for beliefs in a life after death. John Stuart Mill has certain arguments for the claim that it is rational to entertain such a belief. One of them is based on his specific form of theism. But is it possible to believe that the theistic Creator desires our good? I argue that it is possible even in the face of horrendous evil providing that a certain comprehensive fundamental pattern is chosen. I call this pattern »a theology of waiting«. God is revealed in the world but only in an unpredictable and ambiguous way. Such a theology of waiting is beyond the objective canons of science and logic. In sum, religious belief provides consolation conjoined with an ineradicable quantum of doubt.

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Keywords: consolation, doubt, Newman, Dawkins, Jordan, immortality, Mill, problem of evil, rationality

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A QUANTUM OF SOLACE AND HEAP OF DOUBT

This presentation will argue that religious believers are justified when they draw consolation from their faith. They have a license to hope – and under certain specific conditions – also a license to believe and draw consolation from their faith. But in this there is also an ineradicable element of doubt. They have, in short, a quantum of solace conjoined with an ineradicable heap of doubt.

My point of departure is John Henry Newman. He lived between 1801 and 1890, converted to the Catholic church 1845 and became cardinal in 1879. One of his basic books in theology is *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*.[1] There he develops a number of theistic arguments more seldom advanced in Roman Catholic theology. One of these has been called the »factory-girl« argument. More precisely, it is an argument from the need of consolation. I shall present this argument in the *first* part of this article and link up with some of Richard Dawkins's reasoning in *The God Delusion* (2006) and John Stuart Mill's arguments in his essay on theism in *Three Essays on Religion*.[2] In the *second* part I shall consider how the problem of evil impacts on religious consolation. In the *third* part I will analyze how the context-dependency of rationality affects the way that religious belief may offer consolation.

Let me add that many of my remarks are inspired by Jeffrey Jordan's book *Pascal's Wager*.[3]

THE »FACTORY-GIRL« ARGUMENT

But, first, here is the famous »factory-girl« argument. For us today acquainted with Monte Python's shoebox sketch it may sound comically exaggerated, but needless to say the original intentions were very serious indeed. The argument is found in chapter VII of Newman's *Grammar of Assent*. The title of that chapter is »Informal Inferences« and suggests that Newman has certain reservations concerning its logical strength. He begins with a presentation of the French philosopher and witty skeptic Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592).

> Montaigne was endowed with a good estate, health, leisure and an easy temper, literary tastes, and a sufficiency of books: he could afford thus to play with life, and the abysses into which it leads us. Let us take a case in contrast. »I think«, says the poor dying factory-girl in the tale, »if this should be the end of all, and if all I have been born for is just to work my heart and life away, and to

sicken in this dree place, with those mill-stones in my ears for ever, until I could scream out for them to stop and let me have a little piece of quiet, and with the fluff filling my lungs, until I thirst to death for one long deep breath of the clear air, and my mother gone, and I never been able to tell her again how I loved her, and of all my troubles. – I think, if this life is the end, and that there is no God to wipe away all tears from all eyes, I could go mad!«[4]

The »factory-girl« argument can be formally reconstructed in the following way:

— Premise 1: Religious belief offers consolation for many people in situations of distress and bereavement.

— Premise 2: If a belief offers consolation for many people in situations of distress and bereavement, then it is rational for those persons to seek consolation in religious belief.

— Conclusion: It is rational for people in distress and bereavement to seek consolation in religious belief.

Without specific reference to Newman, Richard Dawkins discusses this argument from consolation towards the end of his *The God Delusion* (2006). His main point is that »(r)eligion's power to concole does'nt make it true«[5] and I shall return to this shortly. But Dawkins also has serious doubts concerning premise 1. He defines consolation as the alleviation of sorrow and mental distress and recognizes two forms of consolation. The first form is direct physical consolation. It may appear that religious belief offers such consolation by direct contact with God, but this consolation is – writes Dawkins – imaginary, because God does not exist.[6] (Moreover comfort from science and scientific medicine is much more effective.) Needless to say, this is based on the existence of valid arguments against the existence of God. If it is justified to dispute those arguments, then consolation from contact with God would be possible.

But Dawkins also considers another form of consolation, namely by discovery of a previously unappreciated fact or a previously undiscovered way of looking at a existing facts. For example, »a woman whose husband has been killed in war may be consoled by the discovery that she is pregnant by him, or that he died a hero.«[7] But religion cannot offer such a consolation, because religions rests on false beliefs and »(f)alse beliefs can be every bit as consoling as true ones, right up until the moment of disillusionment.«[8] But a few lines later, Dawkins acknowledges »(a) believer in life after death can never be ultimately disillusioned.«[9] I think that Dawkins means that if you draw consolation from this belief *before* death, then it is a delusion, because there is no life after death. Again, this is convincing only under the provision that there are valid arguments against life after death.

But what about consolation through discovery of a previ-

ously undiscovered way of looking at existing facts? Dawkins has an interesting example (attributed to Derek Parfit) of this form of consolation. It merits to be quoted in full:

> A philosopher points out that there is nothing special about the moment when an old man dies. The child he once was »died« long ago, not by suddenly ceasing to live, but by growing up. Each of Shakespeare's seven ages of man »dies« by slowly morphing into the next. From this point of view, the moment when the old man finally expires is no different from the slow »deaths« throughout his life. A man who does not relish the prospect of his own death may find this changed perspective consoling. Or maybe not, but it is an example of consolation through reflection.[10]

Now, this way of perceiving death is an extremely interesting example. But it has an unintended twist. If death is seen in analogy with one age of a human being »slowly morphing into the next«, then some kind of continuation beyond death is suggested. This is central to the Christian understanding of death and comes forward in a famous hymn by John M.C. Crum (originally published in the Oxford Book of Carols, 1928):

Now the green blade rises from the buried grain,
Wheat that in the dark earth many years has lain;
Love lives again, that with the dead has been:
Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.

In the grave they laid Him, Love Whom we had slain,
Thinking that He'd never wake to life again,
Laid in the earth like grain that sleeps unseen:
Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.

Up He sprang at Easter, like the risen grain,
He that for three days in the grave had lain;
Up from the dead my risen Lord is seen:
Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.

When our hearts are saddened, grieving or in pain,
By Your touch You call us back to life again;
Fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been:
Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.

The parable of the grain applied in this way to human life and death could also be described as a consoling discovery through discovering a new way of thinking about a situation. Needless to say, it would not be a kind of consolation favored by Dawkins, but it is not substantially different from his own exemple.

Be this as it may. The important question is whether is rationally justified to rely upon such a discovery of a comprehensive pattern in human life. I shall return to this question towards the end of this article.

Dawkins has a second argument directed against premise 2. »Religion's power to console doesn't make it true.«[11] In other words, the »factory-girl« argument should not primarily be understood as an effort to present evidence for God or immortality, that is an epistemic argument for Christian hope. Rather, it is a pragmatic argument. The difference between the pragmatic and the epistemic argument can be explained in the following way.

Epistemic reasons for a statement are reasons about causes of the state of affairs that the statement describes. For example, an epistemic reason for the statement that a person has cancer might be certain tests indicating antibodies against cancer in the person's blood. The antibodies are caused by the cancer. Similarly, an epistemic reason to believe in God refers to phenomena caused by God such as – for example – certain religious experiences. The problem is that these experiences might be caused by purely natural factors. Possibly, the factory girl – nor anyone else for that matter – has any epistemic reasons to believe in God or immortality. But still there might be a pragmatic argument for Christian hope – and that is that it consoles us in the face of evil and suffering. Evidence is only *one of the reasons* one might have for believing, but there are other reasons. For example, I have a reason to believe in my recovery from a serious illness, if hope and optimism about my recovery makes it more likely that I will recover. There might be no clear medical evidence for or against my recovery. I might plunge into despair or be engaged in hope and one reason to believe and hope for my recovery is that this hope makes my recovery more likely. We could call this pragmatic reason for believing – in contrast to epistemic reasons.

With reference to the New Testament Letter to the Hebrews, Jeff Jordan writes that »hope is a positive attitude directed to uncertainties in the future, that a particular outcome obtains«.[12] Christian faith – and several other religious traditions – includes hope of immortality. But is it possible to hope and be rational at the same time?

Newman argues a positive answer to this question. On closer inspection, the argument contains two major claims. The *first* claim is that pragmatic reasons are sufficient for the factory girl – and, possibly, any other person – to be rational in his or her hope of immortality. In short, the pragmatic argument for Christian hope is valid. The *second* is that there are no epistemic reasons for the Christian hope of immortality. In short, any epistemic argument for Christian hope fails.

THE ARGUMENTS OF JOHN STUART MILL

John Stuart Mill argues against both these claims. I shall first address Mills argument against any claim that *pragmatic* arguments are sufficient for claims to immortality. Secondly, I shall consider his *epistemic* arguments concerning immortality.

1. There is no evidence that he had read Newman's *Grammar of Assent* (published in 1870) or that he was acquainted with the factory-girl argument. Nevertheless, certain of his considerations in *Three Essays on Religion* suggest familiarity with pragmatic arguments from consolation. Like Dawkins, Mill argues that references to the consolation of belief in immortality are of no relevance for their rationality whatsoever. »As causes of belief these various circumstances are most powerful. As rational grounds of it they carry no weight at all«.[13] Mill argues that the consoling nature of an opinion – the pleasure we should have in believing it to be true – is irrational in itself and »would sanction half of the mischievous illusions recorded in history or which mislead individual life«.[14]

Jeff Jordan has serious misgivings about Mill's line of thought.

> As it stands, Mill's objection is seriously underdeveloped. It does claim that half humankind's mischievous illusions flow from belief-formation based on consolation. But it is silent regarding the causation of the other half (might the other half flow from a strict compliance to evidentialism? It is unlikely but we need to know); and it is silent regarding the relative balance between the gain derived from the consoling belief-formation, and the ill derived from it. Does the benefit derived outweigh the loss involved? Without that information, Mill's objection just strikes an odd note, as a complaint about the production of happiness from one who advocated that production as the overriding duty of humankind.[15]

2. Let me leave this line of thought and consider Mill's thoughts on the epistemic weight of beliefs in immortality. His arguments are most favorably considered in light of his more general remarks on immortality (in part III of his last essay on theism in *Three Essays on Religion*). At the outset he distinguishes between those indications of immortality »which are independent of any theory respecting the Creator and his intentions and those which depend upon antecedent belief on that subject.«[16]

First, he considers the indications for a life after death independent of any theory about a creator and the creator's intentions. Mill quickly dismisses Plato's arguments in the

Phaedon on the ground that Plato presupposes a certain theory of the soul, namely that human beings have souls, which are separate from their bodies. But there are no scientific arguments in favor of this theory. We have »sufficient evidence that cerebral action is, if not the cause, at least in our present state of existence, a condition *sine qua non* of mental operations.«[17] This notwithstanding, these arguments afford no positive argument against immortality. »We must beware of giving *a priori* validity to the conclusions of an *a posteriori* philosophy [---] The relation of thought to a material brain is no metaphysical necessity; but simply a constant co-existence within the limits of observation.«[18]

Even if certain mental events are constantly conjoined with certain processes in the brain on this planet, these mental processes might persist under other conditions in other parts of the universe. Mill makes an illuminating comparison between belief in the soul's existence after death and belief in witchcraft. Witchcraft implies belief in non-material spirits interfering in the events of life and is conclusively disproved. »But there are no conclusive proofs against the idea that souls or the persistence of thoughts, emotions, volitions and even sensations exist elsewhere«?[19]

Secondly, Mill considers another argument against immortality. As far as we know everything in this world perishes. But Mill argues that human beings could be an exception. Feelings and thoughts are different from inanimate matter. Moreover, feelings and thoughts are much more real than anything else.

> … they are the only things which we directly know to be real, all things else being merely the unknown conditions on which these, in our present state of existence or in some other, depend.[20]

From this Mill concludes that no comparison can be made between mental events on the one hand and the material world on the other. It's certainly possible that thoughts and feelings are as perishable as flowers and planets, but we cannot know this for certain.

> The case is one of those very rare cases in which there is really a total absence of evidence on either side, and in which the absence of evidence for the affirmative does not, as in so many cases it does, create a strong presumption in favor of the negative.[21]

Mill's argument deserves a critical comment. Mills argues that mental events are the only things we *directly* know to be real and everything else are mere assumptions to account for our sensations. Echoing Berkeley, Mill claims that physical objects

in the material world are nothing but »permanent possibilities of sensation«.[22] But is this really true? Suppose that mental events are not the only things we know directly to be real, but that we also know other things such as material objects directly. I would argue that this makes no significant difference to Mill's argument. The radical difference between our feelings and thoughts on the one hand and the material world on the other is still there. And this radical difference should make us cautious about conclusions from the perishability of things material to things mental.

Thirdly, John Stuart Mill argues that there is a certain kind of epistemic reason for Christian hope. In contrast to the former arguments, this is dependant upon a modified form of traditional theism. In short, it is modified in the sense that there is low probability that a creator exists. But if a creator exists such a creator's benevolence, intelligence and power might be more limited than traditionally assumed. There is no assurance whatever of a life after death on these grounds. But even if there is no reason to believe with a high degree of assurance, there might be a reason to hope. I want to quote a significant passage from Mill's *Three Essays on Religion:*

> Appearances point to the existence of a Being who has great power over us – all the power implied in the creation of the Kosmos, or of its organized beings at least – and of whose goodness we have evidence though not of its being his predominant attribute; and as we do not know the limits either of his power or of his goodness, there is room to hope that both the one and the other may extend to granting us this gift provided that it would really be beneficial to us. The same ground which permits the hope warrants us in expecting that if there be a future life it will be at least as good as the present, and will not be wanting in the best feature of the present life, improvability by our own efforts.[23]

Mill expands this argument in the concluding part of the essay and defends a principle that, where the evidence and probabilities yield, there hope can properly take possession. »The whole domain of the supernatural is thus removed from the region of Belief into that of simple Hope.«[24] Mill's position is difficult to interpret, but it seems clear that he wants to make a distinction between rational and irrational hope. As I understand him, it is possible to make a departure from the rational principle of regulating our feelings as well as opinions strictly by evidence. But under what conditions?

Jeff Jordan discerns three such conditions in Mill's analysis.[25] It is permissible to hope if and only if

L1. for all one knows or justifiably believes, the object of one's hope could obtain; and
L2. one's hope fits with one's beliefs; and
L3. one believes that hoping contributes to one's own happiness, or to the well-being of others.

L1 and L2 are epistemic principles of a weaker nature. L1 states that your hope is (weakly) justified if it is consistent with other thing you know about the world. L2 goes beyond L1 and states that there is a stronger relationship than mere consistency, but weaker than that your beliefs logically implies your hope or imply them with a high degree of probability. Hope of existence after death fits with belief in a creator, in the sense that it would not be surprising that there is survival if a creator exists. Indeed, it would be surprising if a deity exists and there were no survival. In short, a hope for immortality has a natural fit with theism. L3 is straightforwardly pragmatic and restricts hope to those who have goals either of personal happiness or of contributing to the well-being of others. »Believing that hope results in the promotion of happiness or well-being is a necessary condition of a permissible hope.«[26]

THE CONDITIONS OF RELIGIOUS CONSOLATION

Mill's argument that it can be rational to entertain hope for a life after death rests upon his general conclusion that there is evidence – but no proof – that the universe is created by an intelligent mind, »whose power over the materials was not absolute, whose love for his creatures was not his sole actuating inducement, but who nevertheless desired their good«.[27] This may give us a quantum of solace. *But do we really live in world, which »fits« the conviction that the creator wills the well-being of the creation including the well-being of human beings?*

This brings us to the problem of evil. It is a huge area and the literature is an ocean. In the present context, there is only room for a few reflections. I will depart from a literary example.

Among the last letters from Stalingrad, there are two letters relevant in the present context. They are both, presumably, from German soldiers engaged in battle. The first writes about a Christmas Eucharist. It is celebrated in a bunker that still protected the worshipping soldiers from the anti-aircraft shells. The soldier writes: »I read my boys the Christmas story according to the Gospel of Luke, chapter 2, verses 1–17; gave them hard black bread as the holy sacrifice and sacrament of the altar«.[28]

There is no doubt that this Eucharist was experienced as a consolation in a situation of utter despair. It seems that the soldiers had a very strong non-epistemic reason to engage in

such a ritual and into the beliefs this ritual presupposes. But is the hope they entertained really rational? Let's return to Jordan's three conditions for rational hope. The soldiers in Stalingrad celebrating the Eucharist were indeed justified in their hope in the sense that they indeed believed that their hope would contribute to their happiness and, furthermore, to the well being of others. So L3 above is clearly fulfilled. But what about L1 and L2?

Another German soldier at Stalingrad suggests a negative answer to this question. He writes to his father and contrasts the pious feelings of the worship at home with absence of God at the battlefield of Stalingrad. »In Stalingrad, to put the question of God's existence means to deny it.« And he concludes with the following words:

> And if there should be a God, He is only with you in the hymnals and the prayers, in the pious sayings of the priests and pastors, in the ringing of the bells and the fragrance of incense, but not in Stalingrad.[29]

Obviously, the German soldier is referring to the argument from evil. The presence of evil in the form of suffering and cruelty at Stalingrad – and throughout human history and beyond – makes it impossible to believe in a loving and almighty God. If the argument from evil is a conclusive argument against belief in God, then the consolation drawn from this belief is illusory.

There is no doubt that the problem of evil is a heavy argument against religious belief and, furthermore, against the consolation that may be drawn from such a belief by soldiers, factory-girls and others. The main issue is whether it is a *conclusive* argument. Many philosophers before and after Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz and his famous *Essai de Theodicée* (1710) have argued that is not.[30] For example, it might be the case that God is not that mighty and/or that good which is traditionally presumed. This is the position of John Stuart Mill. He argues that »there is preponderance of evidence that the creator desired the pleasure of his creatures«.[31] He admits that the creator's wish for the well-being of human beings is indicated by the fact that pleasure is afforded »by almost everything, the mere play of the faculties, physical and mental being a never-ending source of pleasure«.[32] Furthermore, pleasure is the result of »the normal working of the machinery« but pain is either due to some external interference with it (in the form of accidents) or the result of defective machinery. But it is not justified to jump to the conclusion that the single aim and end of creation is the happiness of human beings, but only one purpose among many others.

The structure of Mill's argument is that of natural theology,

moving from a premise about the world – that is the ontological primacy of pleasure – to a theological conclusion that pleasure (in contrast to evil) is agreeable to the creator. Needless to say, there are critical questions both to the premise and the conclusion, but a closer analysis of these questions would take too far from the main purpose of this article. More significant is another point made by Mill:

> The author of the machinery is no doubt accountable for having made it susceptible of pain; but this may have been a necessary condition of its susceptibility to pleasure; a supposition which avails nothing on the theory of an Omnipotent Creator but is an extremely probable one in the case of a contriver working under the limitations of inexorable laws and indestructible properties of matter.[33]

There is, of course, another, a second possibility, namely that the creator may indeed be omnipotent, but for various reasons limiting her power over creation. A very common but very limited explanation is that evil and pain are necessary for moral growth and character. Such an explanation is clearly insufficient when it comes to what Marilyn Adams has called »horrendous evils«, i.e. »the participation in which (the doing or suffering of which) constitutes prima facie reason to doubt whether the participant's life could (given their inclusion in it) be a great good to him/her on the whole«.[34]

A more far-reaching reason for an omnipotent creator's self-limitation of power might be that creating a material universe such as ours with all its horrendous evils is a necessary condition for any personal existence over against the creator at all. Brian Hebblethwaite explains this in the following way:

> For we have come to see more clearly that it is the operation of the same general laws that both has led to the evolution of sentient and conscious life, with all its possibilities for good and creativity, and also makes inevitable the kind of accident and damage and pain which constitute the problem of physical evil. To wish away the evils is to wish away the conditions of all life and growth as well. Consequently the more we know about the structure and interconnectedness of the physical universe, the less easily can we imagine alternative universes which retain the good features of ours, but lack the bad.[35]

Interestingly, Mill comes close to a similar idea in the first essay in *Three Essays on Religion*. Having Leibniz particularly in mind, Mill argues that religious philosophers »have always saved his goodness at the expense of his power«. And he continues:

They have believed that he could do any one thing, but not any combination of things; that his government, like human government, [was] a system of adjustments and compromises; that the world is inevitably imperfect, contrary to his intention.[36]

It is an open question if such a theodicy succeeds in convincing the nonbeliever, but there is another more existential issue, which haunts the believer. It is a problem closely related to the problem of evil, but nevertheless different from it, namely the problem of divine hiddenness or divine silence. This problem is especially puzzling in the face of horrendous evil – as the German soldier in Stalingrad testifies.

I have searched for God in every crater, in every destroyed house, on every comer, in every friend, in my foxhole, and in the sky. God did not show Himself, even though my heart cried for Him.[37]

There is a difference between the problem of evil and the problem of divine hiddenness. The problem of evil arises because the alleged contradiction between (1) God's goodness, (2) God's omnipotence and (3) the existence of physical evil. God's goodness implies that God wants the well-being of God's creatures (including human beings), God's omnipotence implies that God can realize this well-being. So if God wants and can avert physical evil, no physical evil should exist. But it does.

Hebblethwaite (and, possibly, Mill) might avoid this contradiction by assuming that God's omnipotence does not imply God being able to realize contradictions and that it is logically impossible to create finite persons without at the same time allow physical – and even horrendous – evil in the world. Such a combination of things might be impossible. Let's assume that this brings a solution to the problem of evil. Unfortunately, this does not solve the problem of divine silence. Why not? *Because the goodness of God implies that God consoles devout believers in face of horrendous evil.* But as the testimony of the German soldier shows, this is not always the case. On the contrary, God is silent.

This reasoning is not on the margin of Western religion. It concerns the very essence of Christianity. The Gospels of the New Testament unanimously witness that Jesus died on the cross in an agony similar to the German soldier. »My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?« (Matt. 27:46). But faith – and not despair – is among the chief virtues of Christian life. Moreover, we are justified by faith *alone* (*sola fide*).

This Lutheran doctrine is by no means uncontroversial, but it seems to cohere with the earlier reasoning. In a certain sense it would seem impossible for a devout believer confronted with

horrendous evil to be consoled by her belief in the benevolence of God – and consequently in God's granting us eternal life – if God is silent. Such faith would require nothing short of a miracle. Not surprisingly, the doctrine of »sola fide« transforms faith into a miracle in the sense that it would not occur unless God intervenes (*sola gratia*).

The alternative to this line of thought would be an argument which showed that it is (1) rational to affirm the benevolence of God, (2) live in hope of eternal life even in the face of horrendous evil, and (3) draw consolation from (1) and (2). In the last part of this essay I intend to suggest such a line of thought.

THE CONTEXT-DEPENDENCY OF RATIONALITY

In his book *Hidden Principles (Dolda principer.* 2002) the Swedish literary scholar Torsten Pettersson analyses basic issues in the interpretation of literature.[38] One issue is of specific relevance in the present context. How is the plurality of scholarly interpretations of literary works to be explained? A literary work can be interpreted in a number of ways (and the British philosopher of religion Basil Mitchell, once gave an interesting example and analysis of this.[39]) This has to do with that is impossible *per se* to ascertain the number of implications a certain sequence of words may have. The sentence »This is a heavy suit-case« can have implications such as »Can you help me to carry it?, »Look how strong I am that I can carry it!«, »You have been able to fill it well«.[40] But plurality of interpretations is also connected with what Torsten Pettersson calls context-dependency. One important question is what context is the relevant and primary context. The answer to this question affects methods of literary scholarship and »methods are to a greater or lesser degree related to a worldview«.[41] This worldview is often obvious when it is the question of, for example, openly declared Marxism, postcolonialism, feminism or psychoanalysis, but in other cases it is harder to describe in detail.[42]

In a similar way, the rationality of certain religious beliefs is dependant upon a worldview in the sense of a comprehensive fundamental pattern (CFP). Many different religious beliefs are dependent upon a particular CFB, namely the claim that *if a benevolent God exists, then God is present in human experience*. We can call this a *theology of presence*. If such a theology of presence is presupposed, experiences of divine silence or absence present problems. This is exactly what the German soldier in Stalingrad tells us. (1) if a benevolent God exists, then God is present in human experience. But (2) God is absent. Therefore (3) God does not exist. Needless to say, there are numerous ways to circumvent this argument. Different ad hoc-hypothesis might take care of the second premise. There might be different reasons for God being silent for this particu-

lar German soldier in Stalingrad. He might carry a resistance to religious belief or God might want to put him to a test. But aside from these hypotheses, given (1) and the horrendous evil the German soldier is experiencing in Stalingrad, he seems to be quite rational in his denial of a benevolent God.

But there is also another option and it is to deny (1) and the theology of presence. God exists and is benevolent, but God is not revealed in the world. This idea surfaces in the thought of Ludwig Wittgenstein. In his youth work *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922) he writes in proposition 6.432:

> *Wie* die Welt ist, ist für das Höhere vollkommen gleichgültig. Gott offenbart sich nicht in der Welt.

The only things that shows itself is the unspeakable, the mystical, *that* the world is (6.44). One could say that Wittgenstein represents a *theology of absence*. Consequently there is nothing strange with divine silence. On the contrary, it is all claims to experience God that are problematic. All such experiences are basically illusory – provided they are not interpreted as experiences of the unspeakable.

Needless to say, there are many positions between a theology of presence and a theology of absence. One such position is a benevolent God exists, but is unpredictably revealed in the world. Hence, divine silence is not unexpected. The adequate (and rational) response is to wait for God to be revealed and prepare oneself for this event. We could describe this as a *theology of waiting*.

In *Waiting for Godot* (1952) Samuel Beckett suggests that such a waiting is futile and irrational.[43] And indeed it is – providing that there is no benevolent creator in the first place. But the situation is not the same if it is rational to believe that a benevolent creator exists, but only unpredictably revealed in the world. In this perspective it would seem that concluding from an experience of divine silence to the non-existence of God is premature.

But why believe that a benevolent God exists, but is unpredictably revealed in the world? Well, there might be some reasons for this. The conditions for experiencing God are hard to fulfil and if Christian belief about God is correct, then human beings cannot dispose of God as they dispose of material objects. God will be experienced only when God chooses to be revealed.[44]

Incidentally, the same is true for human beings (and possibly also many kinds of animals). This is illustrated by a recent and much discussed novel by the Swedish author Lena Andersson, *Utan personligt ansvar* (*Without Personal Responsibility*).[45] The main character, Ester, is unmarried, but lives in a relationship to a married man, Olof. They meet irregularly, but without

Ester getting any clear indications about Olof's commitments, feelings and intentions. In the following passage, Ester summarizes the situation:

> One argument she often entertained with herself to preserve the realism in her judgements were now grinding in the back of her mind. It was: has one right to create expectations for which there were no reasons? No. Does Olof know that he is doing that. Yes. Why is he doing that?
>
> One: He is enchanted but has not made up his mind.
>
> Two: He is enchanted but cannot refrain even if he has made up his mind.
>
> Three: He amuses himself and helps himself to what was offered, those not able to handle the concept should ask him to refrain.[46]

Ester is convinced of the first alternative, but is constantly and repeatedly left in the dark about the real facts. She does not give up the relationship and as long she believes that Olof really loves her, but cannot show it, it seems reasonable for her to go on. Many of her female friends do not believe that Olof loves her and, consequently, they find Ester's behaviour utterly irrational.

Is Ester irrational? It depends on which fundamental pattern of interpretation is chosen. The religious believer finds herself in the same situation. Doubt about the of a creator's existence and benevolence could be silenced by a CFP that presupposed a theology of presence and lead to denial and atheism. A theology of absence would leave the issue wide open as would the modified approach of a theology of waiting. What is rational or irrational is dependent ultimately dependent upon the comprehensive fundamental pattern.

So, which CFP should be chosen? Well, it seems that many arguments could play a role in this context. Scientific and logical arguments could be of certain relevance, but also weaker argument from »fitness« in the earlier mentioned sense of John Stuart Mill. But ultimately the choice of CFP is beyond the objective canons of science and logic. It this is so, there is an ineradicable element of doubt in religious consolation. Georges Bernanos wrote that faith is ninety percent doubt and ten percent hope. For every quantum of solace there is an even larger quantum of doubt.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

I have considered two lines of reasoning concerning religious belief in some form of existence after death. The first line departs from the presumed consoling power of such a belief (summarized in the »factory-girl« argument). According to Richard Dawkins and John Stuart Mill, this pragmatic line of reasoning is totally irrelevant when it comes to the question

whether it is rational or not to entertain such a belief. The second line of reasoning has to do with epistemic arguments for beliefs in a life after death. John Stuart Mill has certain arguments for the claim that it is rational to entertain such a belief. One of them is based on his specific form of theism. Hope for a life after death is weakly supported by the belief that the universe is created by an intelligent mind, »whose power over the materials was not absolute, whose love for his creatures was not his sole actuating inducement, but who nevertheless desired their good«. But is it possible to believe that the creator desires our good? I argued that it is possible even in the face of horrendous evil providing that a certain comprehensive fundamental pattern is chosen. I called this pattern a theology of waiting. God is revealed in the world but only in an unpredictable and ambiguous way. Such a theology of waiting is beyond the objective canons of science and logic. In sum, religious belief provides consolation conjoined with an ineradicable quantum of doubt.

ENDNOTES

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3 Jeffrey Jordan: *Pascal's Wager. Pragmatic Arguments and Belief in God* (Oxford, 2006).

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6 Dawkins: *The God Delusion*, 355.

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8 Dawkins: *The God Delusion*, 355.

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11 Dawkins: *The God Delusion*, 352.

12 Jordan: *Pascal's Wager*, 186.

13 Mill: *Three Essays on Religion*, 204.

14 Mill: *Three Essays on Religion*, 204.

15 Jordan: *Pascal's Wager*, 192.

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17 Mill: *Three Essays on Religion*, 198.

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21 Mill: *Three Essays on Religion*, 203.

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35 Brian Hebblethwaite: *Evil, Suffering and Religion* (New York, 1976).
36 Mill: *Three Essays on Religion*, 40.
37 See *Last Letters from Stalingrad*. Letter 17.
38 Torsten Pettersson: *Dolda principer:* kultur- och litteraturteoretiska studier (Lund, 2002).
39 Basil Mitchell: *The Justification of Religious Belief* (London, 1973), 47–71.
40 Pettersson: *Dolda principer,* 54 (translation by the author). Original: »Det här är en tung kappsäck, »Kan du hjälpa mig att bära den?, »Se så stark jag är som orkar bära den!«, »Du har lyckats fylla den väl.«
41 Pettersson: *Dolda principer,* 54 (translation by the author). Original: »Metoderna sammanhänger i högre eller lägre grad med en livsåskådning.«
42 Pettersson: *Dolda principer,* 58.
43 Samuel Beckett: *Waiting for Godot* (New York, 1954).
44 See further Carl Reinhold Bråkenhielm: *Problems of Religious Experience* (Stockholm 1985), 103 f.
45 Lena Andersson: *Utan personligt ansvar* (Stockholm, 2014).
46 Andersson, *Utan personligt ansvar*, 124 (translation by the author). Original: »Ett resonemang hon ofta fört med sig själv för att bevara realismen i sina bedömningar malde nu i medvetandets bortre regioner. Det lös: har man rätt att skapa förväntningar som det inte finns fog för? Nej? Vet Olof att han gör det? Ja. Varför gör han det då? Ett: Han är förtjust men har inte bestämt sig. Två: Han är förtjust men kan inte låta bli fast han bestämt sig. Tre: han förströr sig och för sig av det som bjuds, den som inte klarar upplägget får be honom låta bli.«

Elizabeth Anderson, »The Consolation of Things: Domestic Objects in H.D.'s Writing from the Second World War«

ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the spiritual consolation of domestic objects – Christmas decorations, food, flowers – in the writing of the American writer H.D. The paper asks how H.D.'s engagement with crafting material things formed a spiritual response to the time of crisis in which she wrote her mature poetry and prose. The paper analyses the prose texts *The Gift* and »Writing on the Wall« as well as the poem »Christmas 1944« whilst also drawing upon archival research into H.D.'s letters of the period as intertexts for the autobiographical writing. The French theorist Hélène Cixous's writing on the gift forms a framework for considering gift exchange amongst H.D.'s friends as a process of crafting community in the face of trauma. In H.D.'s work ordinary things become extraordinary and create pathways towards healing and consolation.

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Keywords: Hilda Doolittle, spirituality, Cixous, gift, modernism

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Elizabeth Anderson

THE CONSOLATION OF THINGS: Domestic Objects in H.D.'s Writing from the Second World War

In 1944 H.D., reflecting on her analysis with Freud the previous decade, wrote that at her first session he had said »you are the only person who has ever come into this room and looked at the things in the room before looking at me«. Indeed, throughout the memoir »Writing on the Wall«, Freud's study and the things in it form a significant part of the analysis. H.D.'s written rejoinder to Freud is that »he is part and parcel of the treasures« and again, »you are contained in the things you love«.[1] Freud suggests an opposition between himself and the things which H.D. denies. Here the boundary between subject and object is troubled as the things shape and contain subjectivity.

H.D. might be forgiven her social lapse, if we consider Freud's study; it is a room full of shelves and cabinets of books and antiquities, objects from ancient cultures (largely Roman but also Greek and Egyptian). Beyond the typical cluttered Victorian interior, his collection of antiquities moves the space to the realm of the museum.[2] Yet Freud's study is clearly not a museum as he would frequently handle various objects, move them around, or offer them to H.D. for comment. Many line up along his desk, forming a screen between the desk and the analysand's couch, itself covered with richly detailed rugs and cushions.

Antiquities are a certain kind of object: ancient, beautiful, expensive, markers of cultural capital and cultural memory, the opposite of the ephemeral and ordinary.[3] In this article I want to consider them alongside other objects in H.D.'s work with a humbler provenance: domestic gifts and Christmas decorations. These things enable an exploration into some of the key concerns of H.D.'s writing in the 1940's: namely, war trauma and the subsequent search for consolation which H.D. finds in relationships, spirituality and creative practice. Things play a paradoxical role for H.D.; frequently employed in metaphorical or symbolic terms, they are associated with both abstract meaning and materiality. Ordinary things are rendered extraordinary by their spiritual or emotional significance, and yet their very ordinariness remains part of their value.

H.D. was the pseudonym for the American writer, Hilda Doolittle. She first travelled to Europe in 1911 and then settled

in London. She began publishing poetry as part of the Imagist movement, publishing her first poems in *Poetry* in 1913 and her first volume *Sea Garden* in 1916. The First World War was a traumatic time for her, she had a miscarriage, her marriage broke up, her brother was killed in France in 1918 and her father died shortly after. At the war's end she became pregnant and nearly died of influenza after the birth of her daughter in 1919. At this point she began a relationship with Bryher – the writer, heiress and arts patron – that would last the rest of her life. The two lived together, primarily at Bryher's home Kenwin in Switzerland, although they also travelled extensively and returned to London at the outbreak of the Second World War. H.D. lived in London through the entirety of the Second World War despite the efforts of many friends to persuade her to return to the United States. The prolonged stress and malnutrition led to a breakdown in her health in 1946 and Bryher managed to get her to a sanatorium in Switzerland. H.D. spent the next fifteen years moving between residential hotels in Lausanne and Lugano, while continuing to write prolifically until her death in 1961.

For H.D. writing forged a connection between the material world and divine mystery. Like many Modernists, she was interested in art's potential as a resource for cultural renewal. However, she did not see art as a replacement for religion but as a means to, and expression of, spiritual understanding. H.D.'s religious syncretism allowed her to draw upon a number of different religious and esoteric traditions and to engage with spiritual concerns in her writing without subordinating it to the demands of doctrine. Her spiritual interests were wide-ranging indeed, including Moravian Christianity, astrology, Tarot, numerology, spiritualism, Kabbalah, Greek Paganism, and the cult of St Teresa.

GARDENIAS AND GODS

H.D.'s memoir »Writing on the Walls« was serialised in *Life and Letters Today* in 1945 and 1946. She did not have access to her notes from the analysis (they remained in Villa Kenwin in Switzerland when H.D. returned to London at the start of the war) and the memoir is a series of impressions, rather than a straight record.[4] She had gone to Vienna in 1933 in hopes that Freud would help her overcome the writer's block she felt was caused by the »residue of the [First World W]ar«. However, she soon came to feel she could not discuss her war-horror with him, conscious as she was of the escalating crisis in Europe and the threat to Jews. However, she could and did explore the spiritual experiences she had had following the war – in the Scilly islands in 1919 and her tour of Greece with Bryher in 1920. Throughout the memoir H.D. draws connections between spirituality – whether the peculiar visions she saw projected

on the wall in Corfu as she attempted to follow the path to Delphi or her memories of a Moravian Christian childhood – creativity and psychic health.[5]

In considering the significance of Freud's antiquities in H.D.'s memoir, critics have tended to focus on their role in H.D.'s engagement with, and challenge to, Freudian theories around transference, female creativity, sexuality and religion.[6] The most sustained attention has come from Adalaide Morris in considering the antiquities in terms of exchange.[7] Morris's theorisation of gift economy has wider implications for H.D.'s work in this period, so it is worth outlining here.

H.D. sent gardenias to Freud in celebration of the arrival of his antiquities which were shipped to London after he fled Vienna in 1938. H.D. noted the flowers were »to greet the return of the Gods« and Freud subsequently shared a joke with her, describing the note that accompanied the flowers and adding »other people read: Goods«.[8] Adalaide Morris reads this exchange as part of a larger gift economy based in generosity. The gardenias themselves mark an earlier exchange in which Freud and H.D. swapped stories of visiting Rome (he had remarked »the gardenias, in Rome, even I could afford gardenias«).[9]

Morris draws upon the work of anthropologist Marcel Mauss and cultural critic Lewis Hyde to articulate two ways in which the exchange between H.D. and Freud is marked as part of a gift economy rather than an economy of scarcity: temporal lag and a third partner. H.D. had long wished to give Freud gardenias; she attempted to give them on a number of birthdays and failed. When she finally does so, it is several years after the initial exchange of memories. The gift marks intimacy – H.D. knows Freud's memories of gardenias and his ongoing desire for them. The passage of time also allows H.D. to demonstrate that she recognises the significance of his gift of reminiscence. Furthermore, telling the tale of the gardenias at the beginning of »Writing on the Wall« indicates that the written tribute is the larger gift, one that proceeds over a decade after the analysis – which was itself Freud's larger gift to H.D. – and after Freud's death. Morris notes that this demonstrates how Freud's gift was transformative; it takes H.D. time to absorb the gifts of the analysis and put them into circulation again.[10] Morris goes on to argue that a third partner is essential in a gift economy. Giving-in-return involves two people and a static structure; however giving-in-turn opens outward: »before a return donation the gift must leave the boundary of the ego and circle out into mystery«.[11] »The spirit of things« or the »god in the goods« increases as the gift is passed on only after the intervention of a third party. This dynamism puts the gift into process.[12] In H.D.'s gift of gardenias, the antiquities form the third party. Objects themselves are part of the dynamic, sacred nature of the gift economy, not merely items to be exchanged.

The French theorist Hélène Cixous explores the concept of a feminine libidinal economy that escapes the constricted logic of giving-in-return in an early essay 'Sorties'.[13] Cixous argues that »there is no 'free' gift. [---] But all the difference lies in the why and how of the gift, in the values that the gesture of giving affirms«. Cixous's understanding of the feminine economy is that such giving is positive, it does not circle around or attempt to cancel out lack, but instead »gives *for*«.[14] The dynamism we see in Morris's understanding of a sacred gift economy (drawn from Maus and Hyde) is crucial to Cixous's theorising. She emphasises movement – »a cosmos where eros never stops traveling«, a femininity that indicates an openness to the other, difference that is both within and without as boundaries are porous.[15] Sal Renshaw argues that Cixous, like Derrida, argues that the gift as such is impossible –but that this very impossibility prompts us to consider how giving might happen in spite of this impossibility. For Cixous, the masculine economy is one that privileges closure, the gift always affirming the subjectivity of the giver at the expense of the other and foreclosing difference by the expectation of return. The feminine economy is based in plenitude and celebration of difference such that the other's subjectivity is not marginalised by the assertion of the giver's stronger agency.[16] For Cixous such gifting necessarily involves the sacred as it must be experienced »like grace falling from the sky« in order to circumvent the giver/receiver binary that prompts exchanges tending towards closure.[17] Renshaw considers some of Cixous's later writing on animals as an exploration of how it may be possible to love difference, to understand otherness as a gift and to receive such love.[18] In this article I wish to explore themes of difference, love and circulation, not through the animal/human binary but through the relations between humans and objects. In looking at H.D.'s work, we see how such graceful giving may be approached through the consideration of materials and things.

H.D.'s gardenias are addressed to the antiquities, labelled »Gods«; this introduces a third partner moving the exchange into the realm of the sacred and »directs gratitude beyond the personal, temporal, and quantifiable«.[19] Gardenias are in some ways the opposite of the antiquities. They are ephemeral rather than ancient, and do not bear the same weight of religious and cultural symbolism. Yet they are also valuable and rare (H.D. struggles to find them) – if on a rather different scale – and are associated with Rome, the source of many of Freud's treasures. The spirit of the gift and the process of giving-in-turn draws together disparate objects, revealing both their commonalities and their differences.

Gardenias and antiquities, the things in the room that are simultaneously goods and gods, mobilise a gift economy and, perhaps more radically, trouble the boundary between subject

and object. This type of giving in turn is common in H.D.'s writing of the period and, as Morris argues, is symptomatic of an ethos that pervades her life and work. Although her exchange with Freud has garnered critical attention, the ubiquity and importance of gift giving across her work invites further analysis as it surfaces in a number of different locations across both her creative writing and personal correspondence.

H.D. AND WARTIME GIFT EXCHANGE

The presence and maintenance of intimate communities is an important theme in H.D.'s writing from the 1940's.[20] What is particularly relevant to my work is the dynamic relationship between objects and persons within these social networks. H.D.'s letters frequently reference gifts exchanged within her circle of friends and this becomes even more prominent during the war. Certainly rationing and scarcity led to the increased market value of material goods, but there is also an excess value of affection mobilised by such gift-giving. The circulation of letters and materials extended H.D.'s circle of friends from those nearby who shared stresses and privations of wartime Britain to those across the ocean who were eager for first-hand accounts from the UK and in turn sent parcels with much needed food and other supplies.[21] Beyond the significant material support indicated in such gifts there was a sense of solidarity and extended community marked by these exchanges. The objects themselves circulate. H.D. describes receiving parcels from American friends and in turn making up parcels from their contents to share with other friends in England. Edith Sitwell wrote a gushy letter in response to one such wartime gesture, thanking H.D. profusely for both her letter and the tea that accompanied it.[22] The giving-in-turn of domestic goods – tea, honey, flowers, fruit – nurtures these circles of friendship, as do the letters that record generosity and gratitude.

Similar exchanges are found in H.D. and Bryher's correspondence, but they reveal greater intimacy over a longer stretch of time. H.D. frequently returned to significant shared experiences in her letters and autobiographical fiction. For example, in 1938, she wrote in response to a gift from Bryher, enthusing over a large box containing many daffodils. She comments that they reminded her of Bryher's support and care both in 1919 and ever since, noting the scent of the flowers is the fragrance of healing. [23] H.D. alludes to Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* in describing the flowers as »Daffodils […] that come before the swallow dares«, a direct quote that may have been a coded passage between herself and Bryher (the two often used a kind of private short-hand in their letters). H.D.'s daughter's name, Perdita, comes from the same play and the reference may also indicate H.D. and Bryher's shared maternal role (Bryher legally adopted Perdita and Perdita refered to Bryher and H.D. as her

»two mothers«). In H.D.'s work human relationships are bound up in the objects exchanged between individuals. The material properties of such objects are not incidental to the relationships. These objects do more than signify – they embody the relationship in their particularity.

CRAFT AND CHILDREN'S CREATIVITY

H.D. invokes the spiritual dynamism of things more explicitly in her novel *The Gift* when she muses on her childhood memories of Christmas. The text was written between 1941 and 1943, with a later section of notes added in 1944. It remained unpublished in her lifetime; an abridged version was published by New Directions in 1982 with the full version appearing from The University Press of Florida in 1998. In an extended essay written between 1949 and 1950, a meditation on four decades of writing, H.D. describes *The Gift* as an »autobiographical fantasy«; clearly underlining tension between fact and fiction, the instability of memory and the way writers shape the presentation of past events for particular narrative purposes.[24] The text oscillates between H.D.'s childhood in Pennsylvania and London during the Second World War and draws on the Moravian traditions of her childhood as well as the history of the Church in its early years in the Eighteenth Century in Moravia and the American colonies. Through the text the child Hilda searches for the meaning of »the gift«, one that includes both artistic talent and spiritual wisdom or prophecy. The gift that is spiritual and creative draws these abstractions into connection with the gifts that are material objects. The gift in process comes to signify creativity, without losing its material manifestations.

Her descriptions of the Moravian Christmas are heavily detailed, focusing primarily on her family's domestic traditions.[25] The family's preparations are many and varied, involving complex decorations. She begins her narration obliquely, approaching the festival by connecting a Saint Bernard dog that appears in memories and dreams with the Egyptian Ammon-Ra and the Roman Aries or »gold-fleece Ram«: this is typical of H.D.'s habit of layering mythologies and memories. She then shifts to a more domestic scene:

> Our Ram however, had not gold-fleece, his fleece came from Mamalie's [H.D.'s grandmother] medicine-cupboard. It was pulled off in tufts from a roll of cotton for making bandages or for stuffing pillows or for putting in ears with a little oil or for borrowing to make a quilt for the new bed for the doll-house.[26]

What follows is a fairly elaborate explanation of this seasonal domestic craft, known to all within the Moravian community but mysterious to outsiders:

> You may wonder what mysterious occult ceremony requires cotton-wool from Mamalie's medicine-cupboard, a knot of wire and the gardening-shears which did not belong on [her grandfather's] desk, match-sticks, a lump of clay. You yourself may wonder at the mystery in this house, the hush in this room.[27]

Domestic objects are out of place and ordinary materials transformed. With the clay, matchsticks and cotton-wool H.D.'s grandfather makes sheep, which go on the Moravian putz, a nativity scene set under the Christmas tree on live moss.

The children also participate in the Christmas crafting and H.D. takes their work as an opportunity to draw together the context of creativity, the objects of creation and the activity of creativity itself. The narrator plays up the element of suspense by introducing an unknown »thing«. However, we soon find out that this mysterious »thing« is not an object but an activity:

> The »thing« could not begin if there were not an old end or several almost burnt-out stumps of last year's beeswax candles […] It was not only the smell of the moss, it was not only the smell of the spiced ginger-dough that was waiting under a cloth in the biggest yellow bowl on the pantry-shelf, and yet it was all these; it was all these and the forms of the Christmas-cakes. […] The »thing« was that we were creating. We were »making« a field under the tree.[28]

Here, again, fragrance is significant. The 'thing' may be a process that includes both fragrances and forms; it requires ordinary objects to come into being, things seen and unseen. The intimacy of process and object, the suggestion that a process too, might be a thing, is suggestive of the gift economy as the things and activities not only circulate among the family members but also transform the home into a spiritual space.

In her reading of Cixous, Sal Renshaw suggests that »God [is] that ultimate signifier of unknowable gifting«.[29] In her evocation of the Moravian Christmas, H.D. emphasises the mystery inherent in this domestic activity as the source of the creativity that is itself a gift. She then moves to consider the objects of the children's creativity. She describes the creation of Christmas cakes and decorations as a spiritual activity that instantiates the Incarnation:

> God had made a Child and we children in return now made God; we created Him as He had created us, we created Him as children will, out of odds and ends; like magpies, we built him a nest of stray bits of silver-thread, shredded blue or rose or yellow coloured paper; we knew

our power. We knew that God could not resist the fragrance of a burning beeswax candle![30]

H.D. suggests that the domestic creativity of children recasts divine creativity. God is seduced into being. Offered beauty, God is unable to resist. The densely layered imagery and incantatory, repetitive language evoke this scene of creation for the reader, placing us in the position of God – also seduced by the beeswax candle. The children's activity here resonates with Walter Benjamin's evocative description of children's tendency to make discoveries in the interstices of culture: »They are irresistibly drawn by the detritus generated by building, gardening, housework, tailoring, or carpentry. […] In using these things they […] bring together, in the artefact produced in play, materials of widely differing kinds in a new, intuitive relationship«.[31] In setting up a parallel between the childlike and divine creativity, H.D. suggests that God also creates out of scraps and odds and ends.

——As the theologian Ann Pedersen argues, »To engage in that which is beautiful is to become part of the imagination of God«.[32] H.D. frequently emphasises a close association between divinity and beauty throughout her work; this is particularly pronounced in her writing from the Second World War where she explores the vexed question of the value of art in wartime.[33] The Second World War saw widespread damage and destruction to civilian arenas such as churches, galleries, palaces and businesses, as well as the more personal losses in private homes and thus a frequent concern of H.D.'s is the loss of beautiful objects and buildings. Yet she also grapples with the pragmatism of wartime that would suggest such concerns were frivolous against the massive loss of life and the practical needs of mobilisation, i.e. should paper be used for books or for weaponry?[34] The fragility and mutability of objects is underscored throughout H.D.'s wartime writing. In her epic poem, *Trilogy,* she mourns the destruction of books and scorns those who suggest manuscripts are best used for cartridge cases while in her postwar novel, *The Sword Went Out to Sea,* she indicates that the bombs turn an ordinary street into the transitory world of theatre »the debris […] sometimes left a half-house open, like a […] stage-set«.[35] Destruction and creation are folded together; objects out of place both display their ordinariness and suggest alterity.

The writing style of *The Gift* reflects this activity of making out of scraps as H.D. patches together narrative fragments of different times and different places. The ritualized language surrounding this emphasis on the material suggests that writing itself is another activity that sacralises the mundane. The children's creation of God out of beeswax and tissue paper

is reflected in the writer's creation of a nest for God through the use of metaphorical scraps and narrative fragments.

The piecing together of fragments also suggests the work of archaeologists, as H.D. reflects when considering the objects in Freud's study. In »Writing on the Wall« she describes the process of psychoanalysis as a process of collection and patchwork:

> Thoughts were things, to be collected, collated, analysed, shelved, or resolved. Fragmentary ideas […] were sometimes skilfully pieced together like the exquisite Greek tear-jars and iridescent glass bowls and vases that gleamed in the dusk from the shelves of the cabinet that faced me where I stretched, propped on the couch in the room in Berggasse 19, Wien IX.[36]

In this description it appears as if the objects are more instrumental to the analysis than the analyst himself. Here, again, the subject is formed by objects, although the emphasis here is on mending what is broken, rather than creating something new out of fragments.

The scraps with which children make a world suggest the provisional nature of their creative activity; the »thing« H.D. describes is dependent on the smell of gingerbread and the biggest yellow bowl. Thus the larger context of war, which dominates the narrative of *The Gift*, is indicated even in the childhood scenes as the objects are mutable, subject to change and precariously aligned. In the closing chapter of *The Gift*, H.D. draws a more explicit connection between her meditations on Christmas and the context of conflict within which she wrote:

> I could not visualise civilisation other than a Christmas-tree that had caught fire.
>
> There had been a little Christmas-tree here on the table, where the lamp now was. That was the first tree we had had since the 'real' war and the fragile glass-balls, I had boasted, had withstood the shock and reverberation of steel and bursting shell […] unpicking shredded green tissue-paper from a tinsel star, I said, »look at this, it's as bright as ever and this glass-apple isn't broken.[37]

Here we have another configuration of the relationship between scraps and wholeness. The shredded tissue paper harkens back to the children's nest for God and the glass apple is another instance of incarnation, sheltered by tissue paper. The apple remains unbroken and for H.D. this is both solace and hope: a witness to ongoing life.

H.D.'s model of creativity – out of chaos – out of odds and ends – picks up the imagery of chaos as the ground of creation

in Genesis 1. In *The Face of the Deep*, Catherine Keller develops a theology of *creatio ex profundis*, in opposition to the classical *creatio ex nihilo*. This is a biblical model of creativity, finding commonality between the God of Genesis 1 who broods over the formless deep – the Hebrew *tehom* – and the God of Genesis 2 who creates humanity out of dust. Keller draws on Whiteheadian process theology to argue for beginning as not a singular point of origin but a »beginning-in-process, an unoriginated and endless process of becoming«.[38] This understanding of creation as unfolding from the chaotic, formless deep undermines the traditional distinction between divine and human creativity: God creates from nothing, humanity creates from something. In this alternative view creation is part of the gift economy, giving-in-turn means taking God's gift of creation and in turn creating God – a radically relational view of divine becoming.

POETRY AS GIFT

In 1950, H.D. had a small group of poems printed as a chapbook titled *What Do I Love?*; this slim volume was distributed as a Christmas gift to a number of her friends. The chapbook contained three war poems (»May 1943«, »R.A.F.« and »Christmas 1944«) that H.D. had written between 1941 and 1944 but did not feel fit with the sequences of lyrics in the volumes of *Trilogy*.[39] This volume highlights poetry as gift –both materially in terms of the printed poems given in tribute and more abstractly in the immaterial language of the poems themselves. This is brought into sharper relief by the final poem's focus on Christmas. »Christmas 1944« is another exploration of the role of things in wartime. The poem begins in celestial company as the angels are given a choice between rising higher (out of the realm of aerial combat) or descending to share in the human experience.[40] The poem's speaker considers whether to hope to transcend the arena of strife and loss, but then concludes that a more important consideration is to ask »what do I love?«.[41] The poem's speaker considers what beloved object should be taken from »all, all your loveliest treasures« if only one thing is allowed to be carried away »as gift, / redeemed from dust and ash« (here we see a reference to the anxiety over the loss of home and possessions threatened by the war).[42] She chooses a number of objects – a clock, a lump of amber, a painted swallow, even a cat – all are precious for their emotional associations as well as their beloved physical details. Yet this list of objects is immediately made more complicated as the poem's speaker indicates that all of them have already been lost, broken or given away. The cat is a memory or a dream and the objects are only held in the speaker's memory. She defiantly claims to hold onto all of them, despite the injunction to choose one, but also worries »*is it too much?*«.[43] The speaker likens

herself and her comrades to lost children and identifies with the Christ Child who was made homeless, losing the security of the stone and wood shelter of the Inn for the precarious shelter of the manger. The speaker offers up her beloved objects to Christ, thus the things become gifts once again. In »Christmas 1944« we see how objects that are lost, broken or given away are also cherished: »redeemed from dust and ash« they carry memories of a time of peace. Heaven touches earth, first in the angels who gather the »loveliest treasures« and invite the speaker's choice, then in the Incarnation, portrayed as God's solidarity with all those who have been cast out and made lost. The poem's speaker draws close to divine life in communing with the angels and in offering up her treasures to another lost child. If in *The Gift* the children created a nest for God out of scraps, then in »Christmas 1944« H.D. offers the divine objects that are broken or elsewhere, yet still beloved. There is a sense here in which even those things that are lost are not truly gone; memory proves a consolation in a time of great loss. In giving the poems themselves as a Christmas gift several years after the war's end, H.D. invokes the memories of wartime, prompting her readers to also consider what they love.

THINGS IN PROCESS

In this paper I've considered several different kinds of things: flowers, antiquities, home-made Christmas decorations. H.D.'s texts emphasize how these disparate things are all in process. Even Freud's antiquities are not static. They move from Vienna to London and mobilise the gift economy, intervening in H.D. and Freud's relationship – both within the study and beyond. With the Christmas decorations we see more clearly that it is the process of making that is most important to H.D. This dynamism is crucial to the generative openness of the feminine gift economy explored by Cixous. Cixous's theories partake of both the genres of manifesto and utopia, and we see similar commitment to hope in the midst of bleak violence and loss in H.D.'s writing.[44] The unfolding of divinity in the world, through the co-creation of children, a writer or a network of friends, suggests that consolation may be found in the most ordinary places and things – rendering them extraordinary.

ENDNOTES

1 H.D.: »Writing on the Wall« in *Tribute to Freud* (New York, 2012 [1956]), 97, 99.

2 In »Advent« H.D. describes him as »a curator of a museum«: in *Tribute to Freud* (New York, 2012 [1956]), 116.

3 Some of the antiquities may well have been objects of everyday use in their time, but their survival across the centuries confers on them a degree of value that removes them from the realm of the ordinary.

4 After the war, H.D. collected and edited her notes from the analysis and published them as »Advent« along with »Writing on the Wall« in the volume *Tribute to Freud*. When reading »Advent« it's important to bear in mind this double-dating; it is a curious text with its origin in the 1930s but selection and editing occurring after the Second World War and Freud's death.

5 H.D. and Bryher were unable to visit Delphi but the visions H.D. saw included a tripod that she interpreted as a reference to the Delphic oracle.

6 See Diane Chisholm: *H.D.'s Freudian poetics. Psychoanalysis in translation* (Ithaca & London, 1992), 34–36; Diana Collecott: *H.D. and Sapphic modernism, 1910–1950* (Cambridge & New York, 1999), 254; Susan Stanford Friedman: *Penelope's web. Gender, modernity, H.D.'s fiction* (Cambridge, 1990), 299, 304

7 See also Douglas Mao: *Solid Objects. Modernism and the Test of Production* (Princeton, 1998), 3–4.

8 H.D.: »Writing on the Wall«, 11.

9 H.D.: »Writing on the Wall«, 9.

10 Adalaide Morris: *How to live / what to do. H.D.'s cultural poetics* (Urbana & Chicago, 2003), 127.

11 Morris: *How to live*, 128.

12 Morris: *How to live*, 130.

13 As many critics have noted, Cixous is not advocating a simple correlation between the feminine and women in a straightforward »anatomy equals destiny« argument, rather she argues that women have a greater (though not exclusive) degree of access to such an economy (hence its term feminine) because of their social positioning.

14 Hélène Cixous & Catherine Clement: *The Newly Born Woman*, Betsy Wing (trans.) (London, 1996), 87.

15 Cixous: *Newly Born Woman,* 86–87.

16 Sal Renshaw: »Graceful gifts. Hélène Cixous and the radical gifts of other love« in Joy (ed.): *Women and the Gift. Beyond the Given and the All-Giving* (Bloomington & Indianapolis, 2013), 131–33.

17 Cixous qtd. in Renshaw »Graceful gifts«, 133.

18 Renshaw: »Graceful gifts«, 134.

19 Morris: *How to live*, 128. H.D.'s gift of gardenias is not mentioned in »Advent« as the event took place long after her sessions. However, there is a similar if more understated instance of gift economy in the text. The third partner in »Advent« is Bryher. She supported H.D.'s analysis financially and emotionally through letters and gifts (she was a strong advocate for psychoanalysis, believing it to be a great gift to her generation). H.D. frequently mentions flowers appearing on her desk. Like the gardenias, these gifts were unsigned, but the recipient knew the giver's identity.

20 I have discussed this in more depth in »Sacred belonging: writing, religion and community in H.D.'s World War II novels« in *Women: a cultural review* 23:3 (2012), 271–86.

21 Annette Debo notes that the correspondence between H.D. and her British friends tends to minimise or avoid much discussion of the struggles and stresses of wartime living. Her letters to American friends were more frank and detailed but even here she (and Bryher) tended to downplay both the extent of the privations caused by the scarcity of food and goods and the danger they were exposed to in the Battle of Britain, the Blitz and subsequent bombing raids: 'Introduction' in *Within the Walls and What Do I Love?* (Gainsville, 2014), 5–6.

22 Edith Sitwell: »Letter to H.D., Undated, 1942–44?« in H.D. Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University (New Haven). For further discussion of the significance of tea and nationality in H.D.'s writing see Bryony Randall: »'Funny, but no hybrid'. H.D., tea and expatriate identity« in *Symbiosis* 13:2 (2009), 189–210.

23 H.D.: »Letter to Bryher, 2 March, 1938« in Bryher Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University (New Haven).

24 H.D.: »H.D. by *Delia Alton*« in *Iowa Review* 16:3 (1986), 189. H.D. was prompted to write this reflection on the themes and connections across her past work by Norman Holmes Pearson, her literary executor and friend who established her archive at Yale University's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library: Adalaide Morris: »H.D.'s 'H.D. by *Delia Alton*'« in *Iowa Review* 16:3 (1986), 175.

25 H.D. also describes the Moravian church services but the emphasis is on the domestic rituals.

26 H.D.: *The Gift by H.D. The complete text* (Gainsville, 1998), 85.

27 H.D.: *The Gift*, 85.

28 H.D.: *The Gift*, 88–89.

29 Renshaw: »Graceful gifts«, 138.

30 H.D.: *The Gift*, 89.

31 Walter Benjamin: *One-Way Street and Other Writings* (London & New York, 2006), 52–53. This way of creating also suggests the practice of patchwork that has lent important imagery to many feminist theologians and theorists, see bell hooks: *Belonging. A Culture of Place* (London & New York, 2009), 154–68; Kwok Pui-lan: *Post-Colonial Imagination & Feminist Theology* (London, 2005), 46; Adrienne Rich: *Dream of a Common Language. Poems 1974–77* (London & New York), 76–77.

32 Ann Pedersen: »Creativity, christology and science. a process of composition and improvisation« in Coleman, Howell & Russell (eds.): *Creating Women's Theology* (Eugene, 2011), 168.

33 The connection between divinity and beauty is most explicit in the 1943 poem »Ancient Wisdom Speaks from the Mountain«. For further discussion see Elizabeth Anderson: *H.D. and Modernist Religious Imagination* (London & New York, 2013), 157–62.

34 Debo notes the »Books for Battle« campaign which saw many books used for munitions production; H.D. was ambivalent about the campaign, recognising the military need but worrying about the loss of interesting books amidst the dross: »Introduction«, 24.

35 H.D.: *Trilogy* (New York, 1998), 16; H.D.: *The Sword Went Out to Sea. (Synthesis of a Dream) by Delia Alton* (Gainesville, 2007), 57. Richard Schechner correlates the use of ordinary objects in children's play with the theatre: *Performance Theory* (New York, 1988), 9.

36 H.D.: »Writing on the Wall«, 14.

37 H.D.: *The Gift*, 215

38 Catherine Keller: *The Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London, 2003), xvii.

39 The poems in *What Do I Love?* were published in the »Uncollected Poems« section of the *Collected Poems* where their positioning loses sight of the significance of H.D. placing them together. They have recently been made available as H.D. ordered them in *Within the Walls and What Do I Love?*, a critical edition edited by Annette Debo and published by the University of Press of Florida in 2014. *Within the Walls* is a collection of H.D.'s short stories written in the early 1940s. They were initially published in a limited edition by the Windhover Press in 1993, the 2014 edition is the first to make them generally available. Like much of H.D.'s prose they are highly autobiographical and address the material experiences of living in wartime London and also more abstract ruminations on the effect of war on the author's mental state, sense of time and concern with writing specifically and creativity more broadly. In her introduction to the volume, Debo notes that H.D. viewed the poems of *What Do I Love?* as a coda to this collection: the final story in *Within the Walls* (»Before the Battle« was written first, in 1940, but H.D.'s placed it last in her ordering of the manuscript) introduces both *What Do I Love?* and *The Gift*: Debo: »Introduction«, 5. Susan Schweik compares »Christmas 1944« with *The Flowering of the Rod*, the final volume of *Trilogy*, in her analysis of the significance of Christmas in war poetry more generally and H.D.'s »disrupted and disruptive New Testament Narrative«: *A Gulf So Deeply Cut. American Women Poets and the Second World War* (Madison, 1991), 242–90.

40 Here we see a connection with *Trilogy* as angels are a significant presence in the second volume, *Tribute to the Angels*. For more on angels in H.D.'s mature work see Suzanne

Hobson: *Angels of Modernism: Religion, Culture, Aesthetics, 1910–1960* (Basingstoke, 2011), 141–81.

41 H.D.: *Within the Walls and What Do I Love?* (Gainsville, 2014), 173.

42 H.D.: *Within the Walls*, 174. In the bombings of July 1944 friends of H.D. and Bryher had their home hit. Bryher described the incident and commented that she and other friends had an hour to salvage what they could from the ruined building: Debo: »Introduction«, 91.

43 H.D.: *Within the Walls*, 174.

44 H.D.'s utopian longings come through even more clearly in *Trilogy.*

Ruth Dunster, »The Consolation of Pirandello's Green Blanket and an Autistic Theology«

ABSTRACT

Luigi Pirandello's 1926 novel *One, No One and One Hundred Thousand* depicts its protagonist Vitangelo Moscarda as a troubled, introspective searcher for reality. Moscarda finds ultimate salvation though a mystical experience emanating from his contemplation of a green blanket. This paper performs a reading of Pirandello's novel through a lens where Moscarda's journey is a deeply theological one, and how his ultimate madness is in fact a place of consolation and rebirth. It becomes an autistic theology when its problematic stance towards relationships is taken into account, and the comfort of Moscarda's ultimate consolation becomes an acceptance of the space where a mystical theology might resonate with a theology of autistic Mindblindness, namely, the ultimate failure of human knowledge and communion.

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Keywords: autism, Pirandello, hermeneutic, mysticism, detachment, communion

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Ruth Dunster

THE CONSOLATION OF PIRANDELLO'S GREEN BLANKET AND AN AUTISTIC THEOLOGY

> Console, verb, transiti've: to comfort in distress or depression; to alleviate the sorrow of; to free from the sense of misery; from French, consolider, consolidate; con plus solidus, solid (*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*)

In this paper I am focusing the third of these meanings of consolation: »to free from the sense of misery.« The subject of this consolation is Vitangelo Moscarda, the troubled protagonist of Luigi Pirandello's 1927 novel *Uno, Nessuno e Centomila* (*One, No One and One Hundred Thousand*). My own research looks at literary spaces which are conducive to an autistic hermeneutic, because autism offers an analogue to theological notions of estrangement and sacrament as opposing faces of religious experience. I will, then, be looking at Pirandello's novel and his protagonist through the lens of an autistic hermeneutic, where his behaviour functions as a kind of metaphor for autism.

Autism is classed in the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual – 5* (published in May 2014) as a disorder. Where a normal person would empathise and intuit the mental state of another, the social imagination of an autistic person is to some degree impaired. This ability to 'read' the other is known, in the terminology developed by Simon Baron Cohen, as Mindreading (not in a clairvoyant sense) and its impaired function is known as Mindblindness. For the autistic person, this disorder permeates all relationships, problematizing all encounters.

An autistic hermeneutic is an interpretation of texts discerning places of broken relationship. However there is also a consoling aspect of autism, which lies in its bafflingly strange experience of sensory abnormalities. In classical autism the person engages with objects though the senses, particularly touch, to find deeper levels of experience than normal. Alastair Clarkson, following the autism expert Uta Frith, has described autistic people in this state as sensory connoisseurs. A sensory connoisseur perceives particular details in what is for typical people a commonplace object or action. So for example the texture of an object, the play of light or the sensation of knocking or banging can be a source of pleasure.[1]

In Pirandello's novel, my autistic hermeneutic discerns both facets of what autism recognises as pain and pleasure. The

distress and the consolation of Pirandello's character Moscarda are conducive to an autistic reading, but they are also elements where a literary-theological reading can readily take place. This paper attempts a fusion of these two readings.

PIRANDELLO AND AUTISM

Pirandello is a comparatively little-known but important precursor of Samuel Beckett and the theatre of the absurd. In 1934 Pirandello was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, and his contribution to European literature has perhaps been overlooked by the English-speaking world, although his dramas are still popular as stage productions. There is, in Pirandello's writing, something absurd and tragi-comic which offers a possibility of it being read through an autistic lens. Carlo Salinari writes:

> At the base [of Pirandello's work] […] one can find […] a feeling of the anarchic condition in which modern man finds himself, of the lack of an organic social fabric which sustains him and binds him to others, of the mastery of man by things which are external to his will, of the inevitable defeat to which man is condemned in the society in which he finds himself living.[2]

Straight away Salinari's vocabulary of the individual who is unable to be bound (connected) to others, speaks to the condition of autism and is a condition to which autism speaks. This is particularly evident in Pirandello's *One, No One and One Hundred Thousand.* The protagonist, Vitangelo Moscarda, develops in the novel an increasing obsession with how there is no one, stable perception of himself. Following his wife's comment on his facial appearance, Moscarda looks at his nose in the mirror and is shocked to learn that he has lived all his life without being aware of the fact that his nose is a little crooked to one side. He begins to wonder how others see him, and his obsession grows so that he eagerly seeks time alone to study his own reflection and finally he sees »the outsider, opposite me, in the mirror«.[3] What has begun as a perception of slight diversion begins, tragi-comedically, to become an obsession with the fact that, depending on varied and shifting points of view, he can become a hundred thousand individuals but not one single person.

Pirandello uses the trope of construction several times. The repetition of this motif can in an autistic reading be seen as a figuration of how consciousness is not an objective reality but the construction of the human mind. In other words, perfect Mindreading is impossible and there is always some degree of Mindblindness. This is borne out by the 'spectrum' model of autism where all human beings are located at some point from

neurotypicality (negligible impairment) through high functioning autism to severe autism.

Moscarda makes this explicit:

> Man takes as material even himself, and he constructs himself, yes, sir, like a house. Do you believe you can know yourselves if you don't somehow construct yourselves? Or that I can know you if I don't construct you in my way? And how can you know me, if you don't construct me in your own way?[4]

What does self-construction mean in psychological terms? It is plain that constructing the other, at least, means using Mindreading. Without this, the object of the other would be reduced to what Moscarda calls *vital statistics*.[5] These 'facts', as Moscarda calls them, are devoid of interpretation and he belittles them as a form of real knowledge, arguing that meaningful reality cannot be extracted from them. For example, »for everyone, summarily, I was that reddish hair, those greenish eyes, and that nose … anyone could … make of it the Moscarda he felt like making«.[6]

This hermeneutic then, is like a kind of Mindreading. By bringing one's own hermeneutic and applying it to the other's reality, one is trusting in one's own ability to project a subjective (own mind) attribution onto an apparently objective attribute, by extrapolating from one's own mind to the reality/the supposedly shared phenomenon. This assumption breaks down when the self is scrutinised as Moscarda does in his obsession – but without scrutiny, Mindreading is assumed to be accurate. It is precisely Moscarda's point to expose the fallacy of an objective view on anything of more value than 'vital statistics.' An autistic reading of this view sees this unreliability of perception as the failure of Mindreading. This deconstruction of a purported objectivity/Mindreading is the journey Moscarda takes.

So Moscarda says:

> Why do you go on believing the only reality is your reality … and you are amazed … that (your friend) will never be able to have, inside himself … your same mood?

> I accept the fact that for you inside yourself, you are not as I see you from outside.[7]

William Weaver's translation of this book in the 1992 Marsilio edition has the following blurb on the back cover:

> It is Pirandello's genius that a discussion of the fundamental human inability to communicate, of our essential

solitariness … elicits such thoroughly sustained and earthy laughter. (Publishers Weekly)

And Pirandello himself, quoted in the Marsilio blurb, says that

> **One, No One and One Hundred Thousand** arrives at the most extreme conclusions, the farthest consequences.

In terms of the autistic reading here used to read Pirandello, the absence of objectivity works as Mindblindness. I am then taking Mindreading as a psychological and neurological phenomenon, and using it as a metaphor for all forms of constructions of image. Where Moscarda becomes aware of the limits of these constructed images (i.e. when he begins to doubt his own 'construction'), I am extrapolating from the clinical definition of Mindblindness to see what is, in my reading of the text as a radical doubt which undercuts and interrogates – as Moscarda does – any complacent assumption of absolute or fixed reality in these mental images.

Moscarda is conscious of the gap between one constructed image and another, and so he is articulating a kind of conscious autism – the others he describes have no awareness of the difference between image constructions. They could be said to be suffering from unconscious autism, since they are victims of the gaps between differing views, but remain unaware of these differences. Moscarda then steps out of neurotypical (non-autistic) assumptions of successful Mindreading to state his position of universal autism, which is firmly agnostic regarding the construction of the other: »I don't presume to claim you are the way I depict you.«[8] Moscarda is the figure who embraces the analogue of conscious autism because he is aware of the fallibility of the construction of mental images.

MOSCARDA'S AUTISTIC FASCINATION

Moscarda exhibits another feature which resonates with autism, namely his close attention to detail. This is reminiscent of St Francis who, according to G.K. Chesterton, »was too busy looking at the beauty of individual trees to care about seeing the forest; he didn't want to see the wood for the trees«.[9] From the beginning of the novel we find Moscarda obsessed with detail, looking at his nose in the mirror. This quickly becomes a narrative of intense obsessive rumination:

> I … was made to plunge, at every word addressed to me, at every gnat I saw flying, into abysses of reflection and consideration that burrowed deep inside me and hollowed my spirit up, down and across, like the lair of a mole, with nothing evident on the surface.[10]

And the obsession with minute detail quickly expands:

> I would pause at every step; I took care to circle every pebble I encountered, first distantly, then more closely; and I was amazed that others could pass ahead of me paying no heed to that pebble

> … a world where I could easily have settled … my spirit filled with worlds – or rather pebbles; it's the same thing.[11]

It is as if the more aware Moscarda becomes of the gulf between one person and another, the more he focuses on detail, and the more aware he becomes of the non-human world.

Towards the end of the novel Pirandello engineers a plot element which allows Moscarda to consider another dimension, namely, the construction of God. Pirandello makes this explicit when Moscarda remarks that the God within him is »hostile to all constructions« – he has instead »the sense of God inside, in (his) own way«.[12] And suddenly he makes an unexpected theological statement:

> That **quick** wounded in me when my wife had laughed … was God, without any doubt: God who had felt wounded in me.[13]

Moscarda discriminates between an 'inside' God of madness and an 'outside' God of providence which others would call sane. The »quick« could be interpreted as the soul. If so, this soul is the one-and-no one which escapes definition according to any perception. This »God within« might then be the same as the mystical deity which exists by not existing, beyond being, in terms used by Meister Eckhart. It is also the Godhead discovered in the mystical union Moscarda discovers in the experience of the green wool blanket, as will become clear.

Where Mindreading has failed, there is a different kind of union which figures fairly early on before Moscarda arrives at the mystical union of the last chapter. In chapter two, when the figure of construction is used to represent the building of mental worlds, Moscarda momentarily steps outside this concept and speaks about union apart from the separateness of individual mental worlds: »Perhaps they understand each other, with that song and that creaking, the imprisoned bird and the walnut reduced to chair.«[14] This accords with the mystical experience at the end of the novel in that union and understanding take place not in human minds but in the material and non-human world. Similarly, a kind of nature-mysticism is invoked when Moscarda sees his ideal state as non-human and inert, as if to escape human consciousness might be some kind of blissful escape:

Ah, to be unconscious, like a stone, like a tree! Not to remember even your own name any more! … Clouds … Do they perhaps know they're clouds? Nor do the tree and the stone know, since they don't know themselves either; and they are alone.[15]

Ultimately, Moscarda's self-obsession turns back on itself by escaping from the *hundred thousand* images of himself in possible perceptions by self and others. The only way this can happen is to enter a mystical state where self no longer figures and the world is reduced to phenomenon.

THE GREEN WOOL BLANKET

The climax of Moscarda's movement away from the human world to a mystical union with the non-human happens in chapter 8. II, in his description of his experience with the green wool blanket.

Whereas Moscarda's self has been a 'hundred thousand' in his journey through self-doubt, at this point he says, »I found myself truly there.«[16] In Moscarda's contemplation, as he convalesces after being shot, the blanket becomes a microcosm of an idyllic natural world in his imagination: »I stroked the green down of that blanket. I saw the countryside in it: as if it were all an endless expanse of wheat; and, as I stroked it, I took delight in it.«[17] By stroking and touching the green blanket Moscarda finds a pathway out of obsession and into serenity – just as the autistic subject finds solace in an extraordinary relationship to the sensory world. In fact, there is a strikingly similar image from the autist Gunilla Gerland:

Gunilla found the place to be left in peace – behind the armchair, where she was able to shut out everything and simply be – absorbed in the material of the brown armchair.[18]

Moscarda continues:

Ah, to be lost there, to stretch out, abandon myself on the grass to the silence of the heavens; to fill my soul with all that empty blueness, letting every thought be shipwrecked there, every memory![19]

From there on, there is only one place where he can continue to live, and that place is detachment and asceticism. So he gives away everything he owns and becomes a beggar.

The wording of Pirandello's last chapter, 8. IV, »No conclusion«, reads as a paradox. »No conclusion« is the paradox of the dilemma of the author who must bring the novel to a close while leaving its characters still alive beyond the book, since

the imaginary construction of fiction leaves any arbitrary conclusion detached from the imaginary space where the characters might continue to live in the mind of the reader. So in this sense, the conclusion is »no conclusion.«

However there is another possible reading of this title. »No conclusion« might mean a conclusion where »no« is itself the novel's conclusion. If this is the case, it is a profound conclusion because the »no« is the »no« of the »no one« of the book's title. In the experience of the green wool blanket, Moscarda has arrived at a place where he wants to be no one. The one and the one hundred thousand appear to have been left behind. So Moscarda is healed of his obsession, because he tells the reader »I no longer look at myself in the mirror, and it never even occurs to me to want to know what has happened to my face and to my whole appearance«.[20]

Moscarda views his old self which bears his name, in the third person. So, he says, »[n]o name … leave it in peace, and let there be no more talk about it. It is fitting for the dead … life knows nothing of names«.[21] Moscarda's name is dead – and this is the only way he can be alive. This life is a kind of death. What has died is the concept and in the loss of name and concept, he is free from 'conclusions.'

Moscarda's freedom from the selfhood of his name means he can experience life in any form: »I am this tree. Tree, cloud; tomorrow book or wind; the book I read, the wind I drink.«[22]

It would be plausible to discount this selfless self as a mere playing with words, bringing the first person to re-attach itself to »tree, cloud […] book […] wind,« so that the »I am« exists purely rhetorically as part of 'the book.' Elsewhere, particularly in his play *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* (*Six Characters in Search of an Author*), Pirandello plays with the line between life and fiction, so that the apparently actual characters in his dramas inconveniently bring their fictional status into the space of the drama itself and disrupt the willing suspension of disbelief. Pirandello does hint at this possibility when his 'non-Moscarda' narrator in this concluding book (8. IV) says that »I am … this book.« In the fictional work, the fiction itself breaks down – and yet remains fiction.

By dying to his old existence among names and concepts he has entered into life, which is free of concepts: »[The name] is fitting for the dead. For those who have concluded. Life does not conclude. And life knows nothing of names.«[23] Again the image of construction recurs:

> This is the only way I can live now. To be reborn moment by moment. To prevent thoughts working again inside me, causing inside a reappearance of the void with its futile constructions.[24]

One would expect that »the void« would be the place of non-constructions, instead of the place of constructions. However the constructions Non-Moscarda continually escapes, by his continued moment-by-moment death and rebirth, are the false constructions of name and concept. Instead of fixed identity, Non-Moscarda lives in things. It would be impossible, apart from what could be argued as the silence beyond the end of the novel, for (non-)him to convey the experience of things without names or concepts. This is writing at the edge – he is »no longer inside myself, but in every thing outside.«[25] This is impossible. It takes the reader beyond the equations of identity. With these closing words the reader is left outside the book.

When Moscarda strokes the green blanket he is clearly entering another reality where he discerns a microcosm. It results in a state of bliss where he emerges detached from the obsessive concerns which have been torturing him. If his torment can be seen (as I have shown) as an autistic torment, can his consolation be seen as an autistic one?

Alastair Clarkson's 'sensory connoisseur' is an autistic person who becomes emerged in contemplation of some physical phenomenon which, to the typical observer seems mundane and lacking in the depth of meaning it clearly holds for the autistic person who gazes at, touches or even smells the object. The comfort of this contemplative activity lies in a kind of fascination which discerns qualities which cannot normally be seen. This is borne out by emerging neural research which picks up processing differences and differing brain morphology in persons with a diagnosis of autism. It is as if the autistic contemplative has an extraordinary focus on what is overlooked by the neurotypical eye.

For Moscarda this leads to what could be seen either as a mystical experience or a schizoid one, depending on terminology. He sees a microcosm in the green blanket and it is this experience which frees him from his self-obsession. My argument is that Restricted and Repetitive Behaviours and Interests (RRBIs) which carry this experience of sensory obsession, are the great consolation for the person racked by autism's failure to commune with the social world. For Moscarda, the green blanket does console, in the sense of relieving him of misery. It offers him a way out of his obsession with failed communication and flawed perception. In the green blanket Moscarda touches and communes with the sensory, and this act of communion is both salvation and comfort.

POST-GREEN BLANKETISM

> Rousseau's text, like Saussure's, is subject to a violent wrenching from within.[26]

Pirandello's post-green blanket state is 'subject to a violent wrenching from within,' just as Christopher Norris describes Rousseau's writing when placed under Derrida's scrutiny. The narrator is dead – 'and yet liveth' – so that the text finds itself in an impossible bind. My argument is that, before structuralism had even been formulated, Pirandello was already a post-structuralist.

In his 1991 book *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice,* Norris describes the site of deconstruction in these terms:

> [The exclusion or degradation of writing] occurs wherever reason looks for a ground or authenticating method immune to the snares of textuality. If meaning could only attain to a state of self-sufficient intelligibility, language would no longer present any problem but serve as an obedient vehicle of thought.[27]

What Pirandello's post-green blanketism does, is to confront the reader with precisely the inability to 'pin language down,' in '*self-sufficient intelligibility,*' into a stable façade of full presence. Pirandello rips open the artifice of writing in his meta-textuality where the text is attacked by another layer of text. In Pirandello's drama *Six Characters in Search of an Author,* this is accomplished by allowing the access into the play of another layer of fiction in the shape of six characters looking for the author and his play, so that they can live out their roles. This is not simply a device following the early 20th century vogue of the paranormal, so that ghosts are depicted within his drama. Something more fundamental is at work here. The second order play is strictly speaking more than a play within a play because it takes over and destroys the purported original play. The text itself is invaded by ghosts. In the terms Norris ascribes to a writing subject to deconstruction, »(the text) betrays a nostalgic mystique of presence which ignores the self-alienating character of all social existence«.[28] Pirandello subjects the text to a deconstruction: he won't allow the self-alienating character of discourse to be ignored. The original 'first level' play is the embodiment of this nostalgia for full presence. The text would, if written simply on one level, ignore the 'self-alienating character' of its own status – but this it does not allow itself to do, because of its own implicit meta-narrative.

What Pirandello's text is doing is to confront the reader with the self-alienating nature of the drama, by ripping it open and asking the reader to deal with another layer of textuality. What is happening here? Perhaps something in line with Kevin Hart's description of deconstruction in terms of the awareness of delusion; Hart sees Derrida's project as the embodiment of the awareness that »[t]he concept of a full presence, of an ideal

self-mediating identity which absolutely precedes or succeeds all difference, is a delusion«.[29]

Norris invokes Derrida's *differance* when he writes that »[t]he supplement is that which both signifies the lack of a 'presence' or state of presence beyond recall, and compensates for that lack by setting in motion its own economy of difference«.[30] The ghostly six characters are exactly this lack of presence, real but unreal, obtruding into the speech of the purported actors of the 'original' play (which in fact is ironically titled *The Rules of the Game,* and is another actual play written by Pirandello). Similarly, in the case of *One, No One and One Hundred Thousand,* the dead narrator is a gesture which forces the reader to reflect on the rhetorical nature of a text which destroys its own rhetoric by dismantling its component parts in full view of the reader.

Where does this leave Moscarda, and Pirandello's text? Moscarda is living in a world where there is no fixed meaning within the text because he has no one fixed identity – he can only exist by the constant death of the reappearance of variants of the one hundred thousand. This death is in fact a postmodern death. The attempt at signification and unmediated presence is denied. Of course a dead protagonist is impossible, yet this is what the novel offers the reader. Moscarda exists ultimately only as a series of deaths. There is no living Moscarda, except in the fragmentary moments between each of his deaths. His real substance is the non-substance of death.

Barthes describes the Death of the Author as follows: »We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash.«[31] Barthes has followed Derrida here by using the word »theology« to describe any totalising impulse. The author 'dies' by failing to be sustained by a stable text where the totality of authorial authority can be maintained. The text is written 'by no-one.' The Author as the holder of authority is dead.

Of course more is at play in Pirandello's text (the novel *One, No-one and One Hundred Thousand*) than the simple tale of a man who dies repeatedly in reaction to the stress of an impossible life. It is not merely the protagonist who dies. The author also dies. Or more accurately, the narrative embodies death. It is impossible for a dead protagonist to continue to speak. Radically dead – not merely physically dead, as a disembodied spirit who still lives, non-Moscarda speaks as the voice of Derrida's trace, where the narrative continues to exist as the free play of an identity which belongs to no one (because Moscarda as a unified (or even non-unified) self no longer exists). Pirandello is then a proto-postmodernist in his writing of the absurd here (as indeed he is in his theatre of the absurd).

The reader, by the act of reading and desiring a plot to read, manifests a desire for a stable meaning and presence. Pirandello disrupts this primarily in the post-green blanket stage with the dead narrator. However, traces of this disruption are found throughout the narrative. Moscarda from the outset progressively loses what he perceives to have been the illusion of one stable identity. As he becomes ever more aware of the lack of a stable self-image, he is inviting – or even forcing – the reader to face the status of knowledge as something provisional and constantly shifting. Roland Barthes in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* could practically be commenting on Moscarda's predicament when he writes:

> Yet today the subject apprehends himself elsewhere, and subjectivity can return at another place on the spiral: deconstructed, taken apart, shifted, without anchorage: why should I not speak of »myself« since this »my« is no longer »the self?«[32]

Jacques Derrida writes: »One must be separated from oneself in order to be reunited with the blind origin of the work in its darkness.«[33] This act is mimed by Moscarda, who confronts the reader with what it is to be separated from oneself, in order that the pure work, the living of constant death and rebirth, can be experienced. Derrida continues:

> This experience of conversion, which founds the literary act (writing or reading), is such that the very words »separation« and »exile,« which always designate the interiority of a breaking-off with the world and a making of one's way within it, cannot directly manifest the experience; they can only indicate it. [34]

Moscarda's green blanket experience is the climax of his long search and is indeed a conversion from neurosis to peace, and a change from self-obsession to freedom from self. His separation and exile, as Derrida says, cannot directly manifest the experience but only indicate it – this is the reason why the novel must end there with its non-conclusion.

Derrida explains that only »pure absence – not the absence of this or that, but the absence of everything in which all presence is announced – can inspire, in other words, can work, and then make one work«.[35] Pirandello's novel 'works' by exploring the absence of Moscarda's self – finally Moscarda is able to function (or 'work') with some sense of authenticity by embracing pure absence, even from his own name. Such a 'non-place' is described by Derrida as follows: »This universe articulates only that which is in excess of everything, the essential nothing on whose basis everything can appear and be produced within

language«.[36] Pirandello's absurd novel is, I would argue, the precursor and even the uncanny ghostly forebearer of a language which cannot present itself as a simple rhetorical bearer of meaning free of the shifting character of artifice: it actually articulates the 'essential nothing' of Derrida's project.

The last word should go to John Chrysostom, as he is cited by Derrida in *Writing and Difference:*

> It were indeed meet for us not at all to require the aid of the written word, but to exhibit a life so pure, that the grace of the spirit should be instead of books to our souls, and that as these are inscribed with ink, even so should our hearts be with the spirit. But, since we have utterly put away from us this grace, come let us at any rate embrace the second best course.[37]

Pirandello would smile at these words. They may be cold comfort, but they might be made a little warmer with the compensation of the green blanket. The autistic subject fails to Mindread the one and the one hundred thousand, but is comforted and consoled by a world of otherness.

ENDNOTES

1 Alastair Clarkson: »The Sensory Connoisseur?« Unpublished M.Sc. dissertation, University of Strathclyde, 2012.

2 Carlo Salinari: *Miti e Coscienza del Decadentismo Italiano* (Milan, 1960), quoted in *Uno, Nessuno e Centomila* (Milan, 1984), IL (my translation).

3 Luigi Pirandello: *One, No One and One Hundred Thousand*, trans. William Weaver (New York, 1992), 17.

4 Ibid. 41.

5 Ibid. 63.

6 Ibid. 20.

7 Ibid. 31.

8 Ibid. 65.

9 G.K. Chesterton: *St Francis of Assisi* (Nashville, 2010 (1924)), xx.

10 Pirandello: *One, No One and One Hundred Thousand*, 4.

11 Ibid. 5.

12 Ibid. 144.

13 Ibid. 139f.

14 Ibid. 34.

15 Ibid. 37.

16 Ibid. 155.

17 Ibid.

18 Olga Bogdashina: *Autism and Spirituality. Psyche, Self and Spirit in People of the Autism Spectrum* (London & Philadelphia, 2013), 191.

19 Pirandello: *One, No One and One Hundred Thousand*, 155.

20 Ibid. 159.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid. 159f. It is easy to read »*the wind I drink*« as a mis-spelling of »*the wine I drink*« but »*wind*« is a correct translation of »*vento*« in the original Italian text.
23 Ibid. 159
24 Ibid. 160
25 Ibid.
26 Christopher Norris: *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (London & New York, 1991), 32.
27 Ibid. 30.
28 Ibid.
29 Kevin Hart: *The Trespass of the Sign: Deconstruction, Theology and Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1991), 10.
30 Norris: *Deconstruction*, 36
31 Roland Barthes: »*The Death of the Author*« in *Image, Music, text,* trans. Stephen Heath (London, 1977), 34.
32 Roland Barthes: *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley & Los Angeles), 168.
33 Jacques Derrida: »*Force and Signification*« in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London & Henley, 1978), 8.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid. 11.

Torsten Petterson, »Shared Experience – Shared Consolation? Fictional Perspective-Taking and Existential Stances in Literature«

ABSTRACT
This paper suggests some ways in which the concerns of existential psychotherapy may be combined with the practice of poetry therapy. It emphasizes the capacity of literature for inducing perspective-taking, i.e. the reader's opportunity of experiencing the ongoing here and now of a fictional character, including the speaker of a poem. It goes on to show this process in action in four poems exemplifying, respectively, four different attitudes to the existential question of meaning and purpose in life: transcendental-optimistic (Erik Gustaf Geijer's »Natthimmelen« / »The Night Sky«); transcendental-pessimistic (A.E. Housman's »The Laws of God«); immanent-optimistic (Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's »A Hymn to the Night«); and immanent-pessimistic (Tennyson's »Oh Yet We Trust«). Whatever the stance of the poems, the reader grappling with existential questions may take the perspective of the speakers of the poems, thereby finding solace in a shared experience of the human condition.

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Keywords: poetry therapy, bibliotherapy, existential questions, the meaning of life, perspective-taking, Geijer, Housman, Longfellow, Tennyson

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SHARED EXPERIENCE – SHARED CONSOLATION? Fictional Perspective-Taking and Existential Stances in Literature

ANXIETY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Why do human beings need consolation? For specific individual reasons such as bereavement, serious illness, divorce, long-term unemployment, indigence, or the failure of major life projects. But also for general existential reasons arising from the human condition – the distress we may feel when contemplating the apparent lack of meaning in life; the mortality and finitude which seems to negate the value of our life projects; and the incorrigible propensity for brutality and violence manifest in human behaviour.

Such existential anxiety is no doubt a luxury from the viewpoint of people struggling to survive in the face of poverty or persecution. But in relatively well-to-do and peaceful Western countries its impact on mental health is considerable. According to Carl Gustav Jung a third of his patients suffered from the meaninglessness of their lives rather than any clinically definable neurosis, while Viktor Frankl put that figure at 20 per cent.[1] In Sweden a study of over 30 000 subjects determined that, while in 1989 12 per cent of the population suffered from anxiety and distress, that figure had risen to 22 per cent in 2005.[2] In other words, in years of rising standards of living and before retractions in the welfare state, at a time when Swedes had never had it so good, they were feeling more and more miserable. Similar tendencies have been observed in other countries together with their characteristic concomitant, the steeply escalating medical use of antidepressants and mood enhancers.

The reasons for this development can partly be traced to secularization and individualization undermining earlier patterns of existential and social security and coherence.[3] Mounting stress at work, as well as an increasing distance between doing one's job and seeing any positive outcome of it, also plays a part. However, since such large-scale forces are beyond our influence, and partly beyond our ken, we can take existential anxiety in the contemporary Western world as a given – a phenomenon that is timeless in itself but seems to have intensified in recent decades.

Quite rightly the connection between existential questions and mental health is a growing field of psychotherapy and

interdisciplinary research[4] taking its cue from Karl Jaspers, Ludwig Binswanger, Viktor Frankl,[5] Irvin Yalom and generally speaking, Aaron Antonovsky's observations on the correlation between health and »a sense of coherence«.[6] A separate but related development is the growth of »bibliotherapy«, also known as »poetry therapy«, practiced individually as the reading of books related to the patient's condition or in groups such as hospice patients, divorcees or the recently bereaved.[7] In this presentation I shall attempt to marry the two by bringing out the value of literature in dealing with general existential questions. I first emphasize the strength peculiar to literature in that process and then go on to discuss four poems which thematize markedly existential concerns.

FICTIONALITY AND PERSPECTIVE-TAKING IN LITERATURE

Existential questions are partly questions of ideas. And literature can convey ideas, but in the abstract, regarded as moral or epistemological pronouncements, they are usually less specific and less original than they are in philosophy or theology. Literature's strong suit lies elsewhere, in »perspective-taking«, i.e. the ability to place readers in the position of human subjects experiencing life here and now. As Edith Kern once put it, comparing philosophical texts with a novel: »if we are carried away by the passionate pace and feeling of Nietzsche's writing, Sartre's fictional hero Roquentin [in *La Nausée / Nausea*] involves us in a more immediate manner because he *lives* absurdity«.[8] In this way, literature invites readers to live for a while in a concrete external and emotional internal situation, regardless of how much it corresponds to their own experience of life. This is an advantage over discursive presentation which tends to be both more narrowly intellectual and more exclusive towards those who reject its standpoint. Discourse makes truth claims forcing us to »take it or leave it«; literature draws us into a fictional world.

This kind of experiential perspective-taking may also be found in memoirs, case studies and other stories about individual human beings. Literature, however, has an advantage over them deriving from its fictionality.

Fictionality clearly is not a *sine qua non* of literature since within the purview of that phenomenon there are documentary novels and aphorisms that purport to describe reality in a directly referential manner. Nevertheless, fictionality is a dominant literary quality. It is obviously found in the vast majority of novels, plays and short stories which do not purport to be documentary, but equally in poems. We say »the speaker of the poem« rather than »the author« precisely in recognition of the fact that the subject is a fictional character and not the author as a real-life person.

The advantage of this for perspective-taking is that we never have to second-guess the author about whether the account of past events is really true, or misremembered, or embellished, or downright mendacious, as we may need to do in documentary presentations. In fiction, what is authorized by the work as real (rather than a figment of a character's imagination) is indisputably given and true of the fictional word.

This also means that literature is not limited to what is available in memory or historical documents. An external situation, a long sequence of dialogue rendered verbatim, the thought processes of a character – they can all be recounted in just as much detail as the case requires. This may go vastly beyond what any historian or even autobiographer could persuasively present as correctly rendered, as witness, respectively, the overflowing Parisian provision market in Zola's *Le Ventre de Paris / The Belly of Paris*, the conversations filling the novels of Ivy Compton-Burnett, and Isabel Archer's nocturnal musings before the fireplace in the forty-second chapter of Henry James's *Portrait of a Lady.* This license allowed by fictionality does wonders for perspective-taking because when we are invited in such vicarious detail to see, to hear, to touch, to smell, to taste, or to immerse ourselves in an ongoing conversation or in a character's mind, we feel we are really *there*, experiencing the fictional world from within.

The same is true of fictional narratives presented as films or plays, but only in the case of external sensory detail and dialogue. Characters may of course speak of their feelings, perhaps in long soliloquies reminiscent of how minds are focalized in fiction or poetry. For the most part, however, the human mind in films and plays is not presented from the inside as it regularly is in fiction and poetry. Thus film and theatre offer excellent arenas for practicing »Theory of Mind«, the ability to understand other people based on external signs like their speech and body language.[9] Fiction does the same when a character – who may or may not be a first-person narrator – observes and tries to understand other characters. But in addition both fiction and poetry provide us with the perspective from inside a mind which resembles our own sense of self and our experience of life.[10]

That inside perspective may sometimes be unpleasant and potentially hurtful, as in the case of a murderer like Dostoyevsky's Raskolnikov, an oddball like the rambling speaker of Camus's *La Chute / The Fall*, or a person in the throes of existential absurdity like Sartre's Roquentin mentioned above. This can be unsettling. What comes to our aid, however, is the aesthetic distance, the make-believe ludic and contemplative perspective of art. It tempers identification and lessens the risk of being engulfed in a potentially noxious experience of life.

Thus in literature, more than in documentary accounts of

traumatic experiences, the reader's perspective-taking may be intimate and intense but remains controlled. The aesthetic distance conducive to that control obtains automatically by virtue of the literary work's status as a work of art. In addition, it is often emphasized by the use of artistic devices such as rhythm and rhyme in poetry. This is of some importance now that we turn to literary experiences of existential positions.

FOUR EXISTENTIAL POSITIONS IN POETRY

Strictly speaking and considering all details, there are probably as many existential positions as there are individuals. The study of literature, for instance, has never detected a complete isomorphism of outlook between two writers, and in-depth interviews of respondents quickly unearth many varieties behind labels like »atheist«, »agnostic« or »Christian«.[11] Even so, some existential questions are more important than others: the meaning of life, the existence of God, the possibility of an afterlife, the freedom of the will, the ground of morality, the origin of evil, and the good or evil nature of man. They are all embodied in literature and could be exemplified at length. I concentrate on the question characteristic of existential psychotherapy: that of meaning and purpose in the face of certain death, looming emptiness and ineluctable suffering.

I have chosen four poems which, respectively, illustrate a transcendental-optimistic, a transcendental-pessimistic, an immanent-optimistic, and an immanent-pessimistic attitude to the question of meaning and purpose. This provides intellectual and emotional variety and allows some comparison between the four stances. Nevertheless, they should be seen as four locations among many in an extensive and multiform landscape, rather than an attempt at a comprehensive taxonomy of logically possible positions.[12]

Even this clarification of the principle behind the choice of the poems belongs to the academic metalevel; in an actual session of existential bibliotherapy, the facilitator would probably just say: »here are four poems about how human beings may deal with stressful existential situations; let's read them and see what we make of them«. Furthermore, the group would probably spend an hour or so on each poem in a number of sessions rather than telescoping them into a single condensed presentation.

For the sake of brevity, my examples are drawn from poetry rather than fiction. More specifically, as it turned out, the examples I found most useful all represent nineteenth-century poetry. This is probably because that century, introduced by Romantic despair à la Hölderlin, Leopardi, Stagnelius and Coleridge's »Dejection: An Ode«, was the first to display a great variety of fundamental existential soul-searching in literature. And, as distinct from twentieth-century poetry by writers such

as Dylan Thomas, Rainer Maria Rilke and René Char, the nineteenth-century style of presentation remained direct and lucid enough to permit concise analysis.

The poems in question all embody an experience of existential hardship as well as an effort to make some kind of human sense of it. As readers we are offered the opportunity of trying out a variety of stances by taking the perspective of a fictional speaker. To highlight this special feature of literature, my comments will be confined to textual interpretation.[13]

UNIVERSAL LOVE: ERIK GUSTAF GEIJER'S »THE NIGHT SKY«

The first example is »Natthimmelen« / »The Night Sky«,[14] a well-known Swedish poem by Erik Gustaf Geijer dating back to 1840. I have translated it, preserving the original quadruple trochaic-dactylic metre – a task facilitated by the fact that, unusually for its period, the poem is not in rhyme:

> Ensam jag skrider fram på min bana,
> Längre och längre sträcker sig vägen.
> Ack! uti fjärran döljes mitt mål.
> Dagen sig sänker. Nattlig blir rymden.
> Snart blott de eviga stjärnor jag ser.
>
> Men jag ej klagar flyende dagen.
> Ej mig förfärar stundande natten.
> Ty av den kärlek, som går genom världen,
> Föll ock en strimma in i min själ.
>
> I am walking alone on this journey,
> Farther and farther stretches the road.
> Shrouded and distant, alas, is my goal!
> Daylight is waning. Night fills the sky.
> Soon I shall see but the stars everlasting.
>
> Yet I lament not the day that is passing
> Nor do I dread the night that is falling,
> For in my soul there glimmers a light beam
> Cast by the love which flows through the world.

On one level, this is a simple poem. It draws on and develops the well-worn metaphor of life as a journey along a road, emphasizing the constant passage of time. The waning of light, we realize, symbolizes the transience of life, while the night blotting out everything but the stars may be seen as an uncertain future which eventually comprises death as well as the hidden goal of the journey. Night and darkness are negatively charged – the departure point of the second stanza is the assumption that, given their advent, lamentation and dread would be

natural reactions. Indeed, the thought of the goal being distant and hidden has already triggered a gesture of despair: »alas« / »ack!«. Nevertheless, the »Yet« / »Men« signals a turn in the opposite direction based on the speaker's experience of great love filling the world. The Swedish text does not contain the word for »light«, but the word »strimma« very clearly connotes a beam of light, and so the turn towards optimism is again enacted in terms of the symbolism of darkness and light. Concomitantly, the connotations of darkness are enriched. Darkness stands for everything that is the opposite of love: loneliness, uncertainty, death. These dark forces are strongly present in the speaker's life but they become manageable because universal love is also present.

Less obvious than this general structure is the preparation, throughout the poem, for its hopeful resolution. Even in the first stanza, when the words spoke of loneliness, insecurity and night drawing near, the rhythm remained unperturbed in its steady lilt:

> *E*nsam jag skr*i*der fr*a*m på min b*a*na,
> L*ä*ngre och l*ä*ngre str*ä*cker sig v*ä*gen.
>
> *I* am w*a*lking al*o*ne on this j*ou*rney,
> F*a*rther and f*a*rther str*e*tches the r*oa*d.

And from beginning to end, the syntax imparts a sense of security by fitting effortlessly, without enjambment, into the calm regular lines comprising four stresses and nine to eleven syllables. From this point of view, the poem starts with a tension between metre and meaning, the composure of one and the agitation of the other. In the last two lines that tension is resolved; metre has tirelessly suggested that all shall be well and now meaning comes round and concurs:

> Ty av den kärlek, som går genom världen,
> Föll ock en strimma in i min själ.
>
> For in my soul there glimmers a light beam
> Cast by the love which flows through the world.

Our aesthetic satisfaction at this concurrence of metre and meaning bolsters our acceptance, in the world of the poem, of the speaker's conviction.

The universal love which inspires that conviction is not particularized but it is obviously transcendental in nature since empirically there is no evidence of love permeating existence. In a Western culture one would conventionally see the Christian God as the source of love; one may even make a connection to *The First Letter of St. John*: »God is love« (ch. 4,

v. 8). Yet it is a first characteristic of the poem – and of literature in general – that both the intimation of God and the allusion to the Bible remain implied and nebulous. The poem presses no dogmatic »take-it-or-leave-it« creed. Instead it offers a choice between specifically Christian consolation and a more unspecified sense of a benevolent force in existence. It is even accessible to readers who have no sympathy for either of the two by allowing them to appreciate a persuasive and affectionate psychological portrayal of how a person might experience being in touch with universal love.

A second characteristic of the poem – and of literature in general – is the fact that the purely philosophical content is conventional, even trite: life may be uncertain, menacing and transient but you can trust in God. However, the point of the poem is not to convey that stripped-down intellectual »content«. Instead the poem primarily places the reader in a symbolic, yet clearly visualized landscape under the sky, and in the mind of the speaker. The point is for the reader to live through a process of anxiety and consolation in that spatial and emotional here and now.

BITTER RESIGNATION: A.E. HOUSMAN'S »THE LAWS OF GOD«

Moving from an optimistic to a pessimistic transcendental stance, we consider A. E. Housman's »The Laws of God«,[15] poem XII in his collection *Last Poems* published in 1922 but written c. 1900:[16]

The laws of God, the laws of man,
He may keep that will and can;
Not I: let God and man decree
Laws for themselves and not for me;
And if my ways are not as theirs
Let them mind their own affairs.
Their deeds I judge and much condemn,
Yet when did I make laws for them?
Please yourselves, say I, and they
Need only look the other way.
But no, they will not; they must still
Wrest their neighbour to their will,
And make me dance as they desire
With jail and gallows and hell-fire.
And how am I to face the odds
Of man's bedevilment and God's?
I, a stranger and afraid
In a world I never made.
They will be master, right or wrong;
Though both are foolish, both are strong.
And since, my soul, we cannot fly

To Saturn nor to Mercury,
Keep we must, if keep we can,
These foreign laws of God and man.

The poem expresses a transcendental stance because the existence of God is a given, but, unusually enough, that conviction inspires no sense of security. On the contrary, along with society God is considered responsible for the »bedevilment«, the malicious harassment, experienced by the speaker. He rails against it, wanting to be free, but is forced to acquiesce since with their »jail and gallows and hell-fire« society and God are so much stronger than he is.

Considering the state of the world, such a pessimistic transcendental stance is intellectually possible, and perhaps no less plausible than its optimistic counterpart enshrined in many religions. However, the human function of religion is apparently to offer consolation as much as, or even more than, a viable world view. From that emotional point of view, the idea of a malevolent transcendental order is odd and unsatisfactory, hence rare. True, a world ruled by a malevolent demiurge is in a sense meaningful, purposeful, but it is not meaningful in the usual, heartening sense of the word. The stance in Housman's poem can thus be described as pessimistic but it goes against the grain of the categories »meaningful« and »meaningless«. Because of that it is a position of some originality, and the poem allows us to spend time with an engaging character who makes a persuasive and moving point: even if there is a God, who is he to decree how life is to be led by a poor soul who never asked to be born under his rule?

A SOOTHING PRESENCE: HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW'S »HYMN TO THE NIGHT«

Proceeding to the immanent stances we first turn to »Hymn to the Night«,[17] a poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow published in 1839 in *Voices of the Night*:

Ασπασίη, τρίλλιστος

Hymn to the Night

I heard the trailing garments of the Night
Sweep through her marble halls!
I saw her sable skirts all fringed with light
From the celestial walls!

I felt her presence, by its spell of might,
Stoop o'er me from above;
The calm, majestic presence of the Night,
As of the one I love.

I heard the sounds of sorrow and delight,
 The manifold, soft chimes,
That fill the haunted chambers of the Night
 Like some old poet's rhymes.

From the cool cisterns of the midnight air
 My spirit drank repose;
The fountain of perpetual peace flows there, –
 From those deep cisterns flows.

O holy Night! from thee I learn to bear
 What man has borne before!
Thou layest thy finger on the lips of Care,
 And they complain no more.

Peace! Peace! Orestes-like I breathe this prayer!
 Descend with broad-winged flight,
The welcome, the thrice-prayed for, the most fair,
 The best-beloved Night!

Here the speaker is impressed by the majesty of the night and its reserves of cool air which strike him as a fountain of peace. This inspires such reverence that he calls it »holy« and such gratitude that he describes it as »thrice-prayed for«. However, at no point does he present the night as being transcendental in origin; instead the religiously tinged words form one set of metaphors reflecting his feelings. The other set is that of encountering night as a beloved woman trailing »her« black skirts and stooping over him. The soothing presence of the night is thus doubly delectable, prompting feelings like – but only *like* – those inspired by a deity or a lover.

What is it that needs soothing? Part of the answer is given explicitly as »Care«, the unspecified troubles of human life. The other part is intimated by the epigraph – »Aspasie, trillistos« in transliterated form – drawn from book VIII, line 488, of *The Iliad*.[18] These words, »welcome, three times prayed for«, are underlined by their repetition in the last two lines of the poem as »welcome, the thrice-prayed for […] Night!«. Their context in *The Iliad* is the sentence: »Sorely against the will of the Trojans sank the daylight, but over the Achaeans welcome, aye, thrice-prayed-for, came the darkness of night.«[19] This refers to a stage in the Trojan war at which the Trojans have temporarily gained the upper hand over the Greeks (also known as Achaeans), and it is preceded by a long account of fruitless back-and-forth fighting and killing between the two parties.

In »Hymn to the Night« that allusion to continual human violence is reinforced by the word »Orestes-like«. That figure of Greek mythology came from a long family line of death and destruction. His ancestor Atreus, having discovered his wife's

infidelity with his brother, killed their children and fed their flesh to the adulterous parents. This heinous crime drew a curse on his descendants. One of them, King Agamemnon, felt compelled to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia to be able to go to Troy. On his return he was killed in retaliation by his wife Clytemnestra, who in turn was killed in retaliation by her son Orestes. He was then pursued by furies of vengeance but in the end found peace when he was acquitted by the court of the Areopagus.[20]

In what respect, then, is the speaker of the poem »Orestes-like«? Presumably not as a murderer, individually speaking, but as a descendant of murderous mankind displaying a horrible history of wars and violence comparable to that of the house of Atreus. The poem offers no hope of remedying this state of affairs but it does offer consolation. Speaker and reader alike may experience respite from »Care« and the burden of human history. The nocturnal darkness can apparently offer that »peace« because it extends far into space and the luminous »celestial walls« of the stars. As such, because it lies outside the orbit of human affairs, the night may host »[t]he fountain of perpetual peace [which] flows there«. And because it nevertheless descends on earth it can bring us that peace.

Arguably this is a weaker form of consolation than the one proffered by Geijer's poem. After all Longfellow basically creates a mood of perceiving the physical advent of night philosophically, without any foundation in a benevolent transcendental sphere. On the other hand, within an immanent conception of the world, this is really all we can hope for in the face of human incorrigibility: an alluring perception of soothing calm, well supported by the regular metre and stately imagery of the poem. A telling mark of the success of this mood-creation is the rendering of distressing reality. Enamoured of the night, the speaker has succeeded in almost banishing from his mind both his personal troubles and the horrors of human history. What remains of those battlefields is only a vague sense of »Care« that no longer complains, and the erudite circumlocutory allusions to *The Iliad* and to Orestes.

A LOOK INTO THE ABYSS: ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON'S »OH YET WE TRUST«

By contrast, Tennyson's »Oh Yet We Trust«[21] applies no such mute to the jarring woes of existence. This is poem LIV in the author's *In Memoriam H. H. H.*, a sequence of poems published in 1850. Relatively discontinuous, it moves from personal grief to general reflections on the meaning and purpose of life as well as speculations about God and the afterlife. I halt its long progression close to its midpoint to look at poem LIV in isolation:

Oh yet we trust that somehow good
Will be the final goal of ill,
To pangs of nature, sins of will,
Defects of doubt, and taints of blood;

That nothing walks with aimless feet;
That not one life shall be destroyed,
Or cast as rubbish to the void,
When God has made the pile complete;

That not a worm is cloven in vain;
That not a moth with vain desire
Is shrivelled in a fruitless fire,
Or but subserves another's gain.

Behold, we know not anything;
I can but trust that good shall fall
At last – far off – at last, to all,
And every winter change to spring.

So runs my dream: but what am I?
An infant crying in the night:
An infant crying for the light:
And with no language but a cry.

As in the case of Geijer, we again find the pervasive cultural contrast between darkness and light. But this time, rather than seeing or sensing such symbolic light, the speaker is merely crying for it in darkness like a helpless infant. This places the poem in the pessimistic immanent category. The last two stanzas undercut the tentative transcendental optimism of the first three: it is exposed as just a »dream«, for in fact we »know not anything« of God setting everything right in the end. Indeed, it makes the pessimism all the more poignant that its antidote, the optimistic belief in a meaningful transcendental order, has been considered and rejected.

What is more, in the course of that reflection the bleakness of existence has been illustrated more forcefully and explicitly than in the Longfellow poem. It consists in the fear that life is meaningless, a walk »with aimless feet«; the related fear that death is a mere expulsion »as rubbish to the void«; the cognizance of human recklessness and cruelty denoted by »sins of will« and »taints of blood«; and the observation, Darwinian *avant la lettre*, of the wasteful suffering of animals such as the worm and the moth. That is what we know. The idea that some good will miraculously come of all that devastation is exposed by the poem as nothing but a dream.

»Oh Yet We Trust« thus uses powerful imagery to epitomize in a mere 135 words the emptiness of existence, the cruelty of

man, and the suffering of all living creatures. This look into the abyss has, it seems to me, considerable value in itself. It represents in stark and uncompromising compression one possible position among philosophies of life. Thereby it makes conceptually and visually palpable a despair that is rarely articulated with such clarity but underpins many forms of malaise and depression. Again, as in the case of Geijer and Longfellow, the ideas are not remarkable as such. Their power derives not from »content«, but from our immersion in the speaker's earnestness and psychological development from hope through sober realization to despair.

Some readers will feel that this is all there is to say in positive terms, that surely the poem offers no consolation for the ills it exposes. Let me nevertheless suggest two ways of deriving solace from it. Firstly, this kind of extreme and all-embracing despair is something which we usually experience alone, and there is a social taboo against voicing it in an everyday non-medical context. By contrast, we are here invited to share it with the speaker. In that literary perspective-taking there is a comforting sense of human solidarity in the face of a common plight, a shared affliction. Secondly, though someone might call the poem a *cri de cœur*, it really is not, in the literal sense of an inarticulate scream rising from the wounded heart. The speaker may in conclusion claim to have »no language but a cry«, but he is manifestly proved wrong by the whole poem, its rhythm and rhymes, its graphic imagery and aptness of phrasing. Thus, if anything, the concluding statement draws our attention to such aesthetic qualities. And what they convey, indirectly but tellingly, is the point that the human spirit can remain indomitable even when the human condition presents itself at its bleakest. In the light of this, Tennyson's »Oh Yet We Trust« is not a crippled outpouring of despair; it is a controlled articulation which rises above despair. To its reader, it conveys a confrontation with the void but, equally, the fortitude of bearing it.[22]

CONCLUSION

To sum up, as human beings we crave meaning in a world that may lack meaning. We long for peace and security but are apt to be violent and disruptive. That plight seems irremediable, but it is a shared plight offering possibilities of fellowship and communication in many forms. One of them is literature. Whether poetry or fiction, it can suggest philosophical options but, more characteristically, it invites us to take the perspective of a character engaged in an existential struggle. However, it does so in an aesthetically fashioned and psychologically safe habitat. Thereby literature, whether poetry or fiction, can surmount loneliness and prevail over the social embarrassment of discussing existential anxiety. On the level of »content« the work in question may emanate in solace à la Geijer or

Longfellow or in despair à la Housman and Tennyson. But in both cases its reader grappling with existential questions may find consolation in a shared experience of the human condition. In Longfellow's words, we may »learn to bear / What man has borne before«.

ENDNOTES

1 Both figures are taken from Irvin D. Yalom: *Existential Psychotherapy* ([New York], 1980), 420–21.

2 See Gunilla Ringbäck Weitoft & Måns Rosén: »Is Perceived Nervousness and Anxiety a Predictor of Premature Mortality and Severe Morbidity? A Longitudinal Follow Up of the Swedish Survey of Living Conditions« in *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 59:9 (2005), 794–98. Cf. Anna-Lena Haverdahl: »Ångest har blivit största hotet mot svensk folkhälsa« in *Svenska Dagbladet*, 13 August 2005, and Elisabeth Breitholtz: »Vart tionde barn har ångest« in *Svenska Dagbladet*, 3 September 2005.

3 See further Torsten Pettersson: »Drömmar om verkligheten – skönlitteraturens potential för existentiell psykoterapi« in Dan Stiwne (ed.): *Bara detta liv. Texter i existentiell psykologi och psykoterapi* (Stockholm, 2008), 104–14.

4 Cf. Emmy van Deurzen: *Det existentiella samtalet. Ett perspektiv för psykoterapin*, trans. Margareta Wentz Edgardh (Stockholm, 1998 [1988]; Bo Jacobsen: *Existensens psykologi. En introduktion*, trans. Margareta Wentz Edgardh (Stockholm, 2000 [1998]); Hans Stifoss-Hanssen & Kjell Kallenberg: *Existential Questions and Health. Research Frontlines and Challenges* (Stockholm, 1996); Kjell Kallenberg & Gerry Larsson: *Människans hälsa. Livsåskådning och personlighet.* Andra utgåvan. (Stockholm, 2004 [2000]); Håkan Jenner: *Som livet gestaltas – livsberättande som existentiellt projekt*. Med bidrag av Ulla Hoppe Jakobsson och Dan Stiwne (Kristianstad, 2005); and Dan Stiwne: »Den existentiella terapin och utmattningen – den moderna livskrisen« in *Insikten* 11:5 (2002), 11–19.

5 See Viktor E. Frankl: *Viljan till mening. Logoterapins grunder och tillämpning*, trans. Claës Gripenberg (Stockholm, 1986 [1969]) and *Gud och det omedvetna. Psykoterapi och religion*, trans. Margareta Edgardh (Stockholm, 1987 [1949]).

6 See Aaron Antonovsky: *Hälsans mysterium*. Ny utgåva, trans. Magnus Elfstadius (Stockholm, 2005 [1991]).

7 Two good extensive presentations of the field are Nicholas Mazza: *Poetry Therapy: Theory and Practice* (New York, 2003) and Juhani Ihanus (ed.): *Att tiga eller att tala: litteraturterapi – ett sätt att växa* (Helsinki, 2004).

8 Edith Kern: *Existential Thought and Fictional Technique: Kierkegaard, Sartre, Beckett* (New Haven & London, 1970), 95, original emphasis.

9 For this concept, cf. Lisa Zunshine: *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel* (Columbus, Ohio, 2006).

10 For the role of fictionality, see further Torsten Pettersson: »Components of Literariness: Readings of Capote's *In Cold Blood*« in Stein Haugom Olsen & Anders Pettersson (eds.): *From Text to Literature: New Analytic and Pragmatic Approaches* (Houndsmill, Basingstoke, 2005), 84–88, 98–99, and »Lånade drömmar – fiktion och verklighet: Den första Fredrik Cygnaeus-föreläsningen vid Helsingfors universitet« in *Historiska och litteraturhistoriska studier* 82 (2007), 139–48.

11 See Tage Kurtén: *Tillit, verklighet och värde: Begreppsliga reflexioner kring livsåskådningar hos fyrtioen finska författare* (Nora, 1995).

12 Such a taxonomy, if at all viable, would, firstly, have to include at least a further, neutral position of both a transcendental and an immanent kind; secondly, it would have to be combined with the question of human agency – supportive, passive, or rebellious – within the four (or now six) positions. Even beyond those 3 x 6 = 18 categories, additions would be necessary. For instance, there are at least two kinds of rebellion, realistic (with a chance of success) and tragic (without such a chance). And what about individual vs. collective action … Categories could easily pullulate beyond practical utility.

13 This is not to deny that biographical and other contextual comments may open up useful additional dimensions such as the reader's sense of rapport with the author. However, it is a moot point, and one that should be subjected to empirical research, whether extensive biographical and historical contextualization strengthens or weakens intratextual perspective-taking.

14 Quoted from Erik Gustaf Geijer: *Dikter*, ed. Carina & Lars Burman (Stockholm, 1999), 203.

15 Quoted from A.E. Housman: *Collected Poems and Selected Prose.* Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Christopher Ricks (London, 1988), 109.

16 According to Christopher Ricks: »The Composition of the Poems« in Housman: *Collected Poems*, 487.

17 Quoted from *The Poems of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, The Modern Library (New York, s.a.), 369–70.

18 See Homer: *The Iliad.* With an English Translation by A. T. Murray, The Loeb Classical Library (London & Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1971 [1924]), I, 374.

19 Ibid., 375.

20 The history of the house of Atreus has been compiled from the articles on each of the relevant figures in John Warrington: *Everyman's Classical Dictionary*, 3rd edition (London & New York, 1969).

21 Quoted from *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London, 1969), 909.

22 In literary scholarship one could say that, while *the speaker* of Tennyson's poem is in the throes of despair, *the implied author* responsible for the poem as an aesthetic artifact conveys the attitude of being in command of that despair. In a session of bibliotherapy, that distinction may grow out of the discussion even without the use of these terms.