Making Sense of Responsibility in Works of Metafiction

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I, Ayesha Iftikhar Ahmed, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

This thesis focuses on metafictional works that re-examine responsibility in the light of fiction's relation to death: Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*, Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and László Nemes' Holocaust film, *Son of Saul*. Renowned for treating "reality" as potentially fictive, metafiction comes up against the inaccessibility of death in these works, which reflect on the limitations of fiction. As demonstrated in this study, the death-fiction tension takes a noticeably radical form in these works, in which "fiction", not merely literary but inclusive of problematic interpretations, lies and prevarication, is given a violent dimension. Via this plurality, "fiction" acquires a death-giving dimension and gives rise to disquieting *versions* of responsibility. On account of "fiction" in the interpretative sense, the reader/viewer is implicated in these versions, in which interpreting the other is depicted as poised on empirical violence. Reading, held out in the works as a possible mitigation of the relation between interpretative and actual violence, is explored in this study with respect to the ethical value it confers on the versions of responsibility. These versions, which remain groundless due to the pervasiveness of fiction, are argued as *critical* accounts, in the double sense, in that they reflect in conflicted ways on the ethical relevance of fiction. The death-giving role of fiction, traditionally overlooked in favor of its more life-affirming qualities, is read in the light of, and is argued as a fleshing out of, Jacques Derrida's *The Gift of Death,* which tackles responsibility from the perspective of mortality and reads it in relation to literature.

Keywords: death; *différance;* metafiction; responsibility; violence.

Impact Statement

Fiction is scrutinized in this study from the perspective of responsibility, which, in the metafictional corpus, emerges as a dilemma on account of death's role. Reading, a form of responding, is confronted with fiction in the context of interpretative and empirical violence. As demonstrated in the introduction, in terms of impact, this rendition of fiction conditioned by death and violence figures as a significant opening in literary criticism, in which fiction's relation to death is predominantly represented in positive terms. This positive trend, which contrasts starkly with critiques of fiction by Plato and Emmanuel Levinas, results, to some extent, in a glorification of fiction in literary criticism. The glorification of fictional versions of Biblical narratives comes undone in this study on account of *The Gift of Death*, in which fiction is posited on the inside of the dilemma of responsibility, or representation.

The most significant impact of this study lies in the field of metafiction, which, as illustrated in the literary review, is noticeably reticent, not only on the subject of death, but with respect to some of the violent implications of fiction. This is said to derive from the attenuation of "reality" in metafiction, in which all forms of reality are dwelt on exclusively in terms of aesthetics. The metafictional corpus in this study, however, employs aesthetics in order to showcase the overlap between all three senses of "fiction" and actual death and violence.

The political conflicts that figure as settings in the works: totalitarianism, terrorism and the Holocaust heighten the fatal effects of interpretation. These conflicts perform two important feats. Firstly, they bring fiction, via interpretation, to bear directly on death and violence. Secondly, they politicize reading, giving it a pragmatic dimension

that goes beyond its potential impact in an academic context. The corpus' depiction of reading as that which potentially counters the physical implications of interpretative violence corresponds with Derridean deconstruction, in which reading is held out as a possible opening to hermeneutics and the closure it represents. Reading on the basis of the relation between thought and action foregrounds and could potentially enhance the link between academic courses and possible courses of action in the real world. With regard to enhancement, courses in the field of hermeneutics, which open up interpretation to questioning, critique and inherent instability, could be linked to current political issues, both local and international. Hermeneutics with a political focus would push students to critique representations in the media, but also to reflect critically on their own readings of current conflicts that affect their lives on a daily basis, such as terrorism and the refugee crisis. Via concerns that come too close for comfort, the ethical and political value of re-examining one's interpretations ("fictions") could be effectively brought home.

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Table of Contents

Introduction

The role that fiction plays in our lives owes a great deal to death, to the fact that there is no knowing what it is, or how, when and where it may strike. Death is a reality that can only be responded to with speculation, something that fiction specializes in. In "Our Attitude towards Death" (1918), Sigmund Freud says that fiction "alone" provides the means of "reconciling ourselves to death" (8): "[W]e die in identification with a certain hero and yet we outlive him and, quite unharmed, are prepared to die again with the next hero" (8). This rarefied status of fiction is consigned by Freud to the past on account of World War I. What under normal circumstances represents a valuable coping mechanism is exposed as a form of "den[ial]" in the face of countless deaths (8). Freud not only draws attention to the limit that death places on fiction, but spots this limit in relation to what is affirmative about fiction.

Research Theme & Selection of Corpus

This limit on what is *good* about fiction is relevant to this study. The latter investigates the potentially problematic side to responsibility in the context of what is troubling about fiction's relation, or responsiveness, to death. More specifically, the focus is on fictional instances of responsibility that suggest a certain deathly dimension to what fiction gives us. Such instances are encountered in the following works: Anthony Burgess' dystopian novella, *A Clockwork Orange* (1962), Mohsin Hamid's 9/11 novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) and László Nemes' Hungarian Holocaust film, *Son of Saul* (2015). The main feature of the selected corpus is that the role of fiction is problematized via encounters with death and deathly violence. Through these encounters, fiction's relation to death emerges as lined with violence and death. This death-giving dimension

derives from the use of “fiction” in the literary and interpretative sense, more specifically, from the positing of literary fictions on the inside of problematic interpretations - mythical worldviews (“just a fiction”) - that give rise to violence. This complicity has an impact on the representation of responsibility, which, in all three works, is suggested as touched by violence. This suggestion is a loaded one, with respect to the role of reading; the stakes of reading are raised on account of its potential entanglement with fiction in the interpretative sense and the empirical violence it opens onto. However, it is this problematic sense of fiction that makes it possible for the reader/viewer to treat these representations of responsibility as interpretations that can be countered through critical *reading*.

By means of fiction in the interpretative sense, the corpus confronts one with the relation between interpretative and empirical violence. This relation is a dilemma we face in real-life situations; it plays a role in political conflicts and wars. The main research question has to do with whether a critical reading of this relation (the physical implications of giving meaning to the other) mitigates its violence. The tension surrounding this question pertains to the role of death, which offers this opening to the reader/viewer and limits it at the same time; for one is dealing with death represented by fiction, which can only be responded to on the basis of *as if*, as opposed to *as such*. The main research question opens onto tensions that pertain specifically to the depiction of fiction’s double role within the works. The first tension, as mentioned in the paragraph above, has to do with the interpretative sense of fiction, which is what makes it possible to uncover the problematic link between interpretation and actual violence, yet, at the same time, renders the representations of responsibility unreliable. The second tension is:

Does fiction's reflecting on its own death-giving dimension represent accountability, or irresponsibility, or both? The question of accountability links up with the inaccessibility conferred on responsibility in these works. Whether this inaccessibility is on account of fiction, or death, it is impossible to say with any certainty; yet this difference is significant because fiction is a construct that can be valued or devalued, whereas death is a reality that resists evaluation.

Via a summary of the individual works, the following paragraphs demonstrate how the corpus manifests the features outlined above. In all three fictional works, "real", or familiar, contexts of political violence, such as teen violence, terrorism and the Holocaust, are opened up to new readings. These political conflicts are represented in terms of a juxtaposition of interpretative and empirical violence.

The dystopian world in *A Clockwork Orange* is narrated by a violent teen, Alex, in a fictive argot known as Nadsat. Fiction's relation to death is negotiated through Nadsat, which represents looting, raping and assaulting as resistance against the totalitarian State. Alex's violation of others, shown to be instigated by classical music, represents a means by which the reader encounters and becomes implicated in the construction of shocking violence. Burgess' comments on Nadsat underscore the responsibility the coined argot imposes on us of interpreting what is other and the risks that arise from it: "People preferred the film [Stanley Kubrick's adaptation of the novella] because they are scared, rightly, of language" (intro xiv). While Nadsat's initiation into Alex's shocking worldview is violating, the depiction of violence and death through fiction opens up the possibility of re-reading good and bad, of confronting its constructedness. Nevertheless, finding oneself on the inside-outside of an outcast's

reading of good and bad is “scary”, for it raises the question: who is responsible for this *other* morality, the narrator or the reader?

The Reluctant Fundamentalist opens with a possible post-9/11 encounter, between a narrator (Changez) suspected of being a terrorist and an American stranger who *could* be an undercover CIA assassin. The equation between fiction and death is negotiated through the premise of suspicion, which conditions the story of unrequited love that Changez recounts to the stranger. This love story, unfolding against the backdrop of 9/11, integrates features of terror in its representation of intimacy. In so doing, the narrative juxtaposes reinterpretations of terror and intimacy, as well as the possibility of greater openness towards dreaded others, with the possibility that the story could be a tactic to distract the antagonist. The premise of suspicion is left dangling on account of the novel’s non-ending. This feature leaves the outcome of the encounter to the imagination of the reader, who, like the antagonists, is subject to the question: Am I imagining the threat?

The Holocaust film pits a fictional mission in conflict with the historical uprising undertaken by members of the *Sonderkommando* at Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1943. Undertaken by Saul, a member of the *Sonderkommando*, this mission revolves around burying an illegitimate son. Saul’s personal mission poses a threat to the lives of the survivors because it jeopardizes the uprising. The threat of death links up with fiction on account of what drives the mission of burial: the mortal illusion of life after death (survival through death), as well as two potentially fictive claims, one to do with paternity and the other to do with interpreting survival *as* death.

Making a Difference to Metafiction

Through this corpus, fiction acknowledges the limit that separates it from death, as well as reflects on how this limit is transgressed. The relevance of this study has a great deal to do with the feature of self-reflexivity that characterizes fiction's relation to death. This self-reflexivity, crucial from the point of view of responsibility, is a feature that points in the direction of metafiction, a sub-genre within postmodern literature. Although Patricia Waugh's *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (1984) reserves the term metafiction for the novel, it is applied to other literary genres contingent on imaginary elements, such as film and drama. An example is Quentin Tarantino's films, which are typically alluded to as metafiction. My use of the term is primarily dictated by formal considerations. The fact that novels figure prominently in my corpus is taken into account. That said, "metafiction" also *makes sense* because the works reflect on certain unflattering interpretations of the imaginary, which are commonly associated with the *word* "fiction".

The self-reflexivity of metafiction takes the form of "a pervasive insecurity", which it manifests with respect to its "relationship" with "reality" (Waugh 2). The genre is renowned for reflecting on the tension between fiction and reality, for looking into what goes into the making of fiction, such as history, ideology, politics and culture. The fiction-reality tension is exacerbated by death and pushed in a new direction. Although representing a means by which fiction concedes its reliance on reality, this tension risks becoming a dead end on account of metafiction's linguistic take on "reality". Because "reality" is viewed within metafiction as "mediated" by language and constituted through discourse, the argument is that it cannot be separated from "worlds constructed

entirely of language" in any clear-cut way (3). However, this linguistic accent on "reality" is challenged by death's looming presence in the corpus and the role death plays, with respect to the *giving* of meaning, in Jacques Derrida's *The Gift of Death* (1995), my choice of theoretical framework.

The Gift of Death's relevance to the research theme revolves around *différance*, which is dealt with in the next section. For now, I turn to how the depiction of death in metafictional works represents a significant progression within the genre. This progression lies in death and its resistance to discourse, which tests the permeability between fiction and reality, as well as derives from death's engagement with self-refexivity. The self-reflexivity of metafiction is criticized in David Lodge's *The Novelist at the Crossroads* (1969) for pushing the fictionalizing of reality to a ridiculous degree: "History may be in a philosophical sense, a fiction, but it does not feel like that when we miss a train or somebody starts a war" (131). Death, present in the literal sense in my choice of corpus, revolving as it does around encounters with death and deathly violence, addresses a gap pertaining to a non-serious treatment of death and violence within postmodern metafictions. This gap, elaborated on in the literature review, is attributed to the genre's stance on anti-realism, which is said to render depictions of actual violence into literariness and to reflect merely on the act of writing.

The question of death also bears on the survival of metafiction, which, "dismiss[ed]" in the "mid-seventies" "as a fad that would be outgrown" (Hutcheon Preface xii), is said to be facing extinction.[1] The genre's turning inwards is said by Waugh to be a response to the eradication of "clear-cut oppositions" by "unprecedented cultural pluralism" (10). The loss of creative tension that results from this eradication

[1] Linda Hutcheon's *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (1980).

instigates metafiction to contrive an "opposition", not to reality as such, "but to the language of the realistic novel which has sustained and endorsed such a view of reality" (11). This turning inwards on the part of metafiction is viewed by critics to betoken the kind of "self-indulgence and decadence" that anticipates the death of any "artistic form" (9).

The self-reflexivity of metafiction, the dead end it is said to represent, is, arguably, given a new direction via works that offer re-readings of responsibility in relation to the gap between fiction and death. This new direction is a return to classical concerns, in that the irresolvable question of death betrays what Waugh categorizes as the "Platonic" leanings of metafiction (89). These leanings are attributed to metafiction on account of the "concern" it manifests over the "moral" "implications" of "imaginative freedom" and the possible link between storytelling and lying (89). The latter dreaded association returns with a vengeance in the corpus, in which the morality of responsibility comes undone due to the double sense of fiction, a rigorously metafictional feature, one that reflects critically on the role of fiction.

The use of implied reader/viewer is another metafictive feature that bears on responding to death. The title of my study, "*Making* Sense of Responsibility in Metafiction", reflects the impact that fiction's duplicity has on the responsibility of the reader/viewer. Alex's picturing of the reader as a sympathetic audience: "O my brothers" heightens the initiating role of Nadsat. The "you" that is used to address the nameless American stranger in the 9/11 novel implicates the reader in the suspected antagonist's identity. This strategic form of address undermines the boundary that divides reading and the giving and taking of "real" death. The co-writer and director of *Son of Saul*, Nemes,

talks about the Holocaust film's "immersive strategy" in a series of interviews, which dwell on the film's positioning of the viewer in "the here and now" of Auschwitz-Birkenau, in the middle of it" (qtd. in Andrews 2). This "strategy" conveys how "disorienting the camps would have been to actual prisoners" (Nemes qtd. in Debruge 65) and "relies on the *imagination* of the viewer to conjure up what occurred" (my emphasis Nemes qtd. in Quart 38). The senselessness that death camp prisoners were up against is paralleled by Nemes, in a provocative fashion, with the gap between fiction and death.

Theoretical Framework

Nemes' insight into the tension between death and interpretation is pertinent to *The Gift of Death*'s treatment of Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac. Originally set down in Genesis 22, the near-sacrifice is given a seminal interpretation by Søren Kierkegaard in *Fear and Trembling* (1843). This interpretation factors substantially into Derrida's re-reading of responsibility. *The Gift of Death* relies heavily on the fictive scenarios by means of which *Fear and Trembling* comes to grips with this shocking, baffling instance from the Bible. In Genesis 22, Abraham comes up against a death-giving command from God, who orders him to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. The pull and tug between death and interpretation is latent in the Biblical narrative, in which Isaac is not merely Abraham's son but represents the covenant between God and Abraham, which would be cancelled out in the event of the sacrifice. Despite these dire implications, the Biblical patriarch obeys God's command. He takes Isaac to the top of Mount Moriah in order to sacrifice him. Just as the father is about to slit the son's throat, God revokes his command and sends an angel to restrain his knife-wielding hand. A ram, presented by God, is sacrificed

in place of Isaac and Abraham is rewarded by God for his willingness to sacrifice his only son.

This instance of responsibility, all the more shocking because it is commended as exemplary by God, elicits a radical re-reading from Derrida. He looks at the horrendous violence of Abraham's response in terms of the unavoidable sacrifice responsibility necessitates in a mortal, secular context. The logic that links responsibility to sacrificial violence is one that starts out as simple, easy to picture in a mortal, or bodily, context. It points to how our mortality leaves us no choice but to choose whom we respond to. We prioritize a particular person over others on account of the value the chosen one has in our eyes. This value that we give also links up with our mortality, more specifically, our limitations. This is where matters become more complicated. For, in the event of coming up against our innumerable obligations, this prioritizing is not something we can justify or explain to others; for it is not always clear to us why we feel the way we do about the chosen one.

This sense of not-knowing is linked to mortality and death in *The Gift of Death* but in *Fear and Trembling*, it pertains to how Abraham, confronted with God, the inscrutable One, takes a leap of faith (*GD* 78). God's privileged inaccessibility is cited by Kierkegaard as a likely reason for the patriarch's decision to sacrifice *his* flesh and blood. He also rightly points out that the father's overlapping boundaries with his son have a great deal to do with rendering the murderous attempt into a possibility of sacrifice. This implication is not only taken on board in *The Gift of Death* but this overlapping is put to work in the context of Abraham's relation to his Father. God's inaccessibility, re-read as the other within the self, as a mortal's relation to the secret of

his/her own death, gives rise to the implication that the command comes from within Abraham's self, yet this "within" is off-limits to him because it relates to his own death.

The relation to death's secrecy gives rise to a command that makes no sense to Abraham. This inaccessibility *within* language is a reference to *différance,* a notion through which Derrida thinks through the relation between death and signification. This relation derives from mortal limitations, which necessitate representation. From that perspective, representation is a possibility gifted by death. This possibility is also implicated in exclusionary violence, in that signification, as demonstrated in detail further on, involves the differing and deferring of signs. Meanings constituted on the basis of exclusionary violence are acted on by us, in ways that affect others in good and bad ways. Mediation gives us a relation to the other and yet renders the other irreducibly other. All mortals partake in the otherness of death, which is what renders them inaccessible (other) to themselves and others. The exceptional response that Abraham, the Knight of Faith, is said to give to God in *Fear and Trembling* is deconstructed by Derrida as the "night of faith" (not-knowing) that mortals, with their reliance on mediation, have no choice but to endure when responding to each other.

The inaccessibility of mortals is spoken of by Derrida in "Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility" as an encounter with danger: "I do not see the other, I do not see what he or she has in mind, or whether he or she wants to deceive me. So, I have to trust the other - that is faith. Faith is blind" (80). In *The Gift of Death,* the problem of projecting meaning onto death has to do with how giving meaning to inaccessible mortals has deadly implications. Derrida is not dealing with death in the abstract sense, but with respect to how it shows itself within mortals and in the context of interrelationships. This

is evident from the role played by the near-sacrifice in his argument, in which Abraham gives his own death a specific meaning, one that gives death to Isaac in the literal sense.

Signification's grounding in death and exclusionary violence is unpacked in Derrida's *"Différance"* (1968). In *The Gift of Death*, this grounding is shown to be at work in the command and in Abraham's attempted slitting of his son's throat. This premise, treating a death-giving encounter via the relation between death and signification, is encountered in the metafictional corpus and also overlaps in terms of concerns: the giving of death in the interpretative and empirical sense, the implication of no choice and the unaccountability of responsibility. In the following sub-sections, these concerns are unpacked by means of certain features of *différance*, which re-presents Martin Heidegger's and Emmanuel Levinas's writings on death, responsibility and sacrifice. The main focus on *différance* is with respect to how it underscores death's resistance to meaning and points to sacrifice as a possibility of giving meaning to (and taking away from) death. The role of *différance* in Derrida's re-reading of the near-sacrifice is shown to harbor a latent self-reflexivity, which is of value to the corpus. *Différance* is also analyzed in the following contexts: the tension between reading and interpretative violence, agency, or human action and the possibility of literature.

The relation between *différance* and literature, a continuation of Derrida's re-reading of the near-sacrifice, is dealt with in "Literature in Secret: An Impossible Filiation", a companion essay to *The Gift of Death*. The possibility of literature derives from the sacred, secret covenant, which is said to *stage différance*. This subversive staging of the Word, represented as a stand-in for Isaac, ties in with the relation between paternity and writing in Derrida's texts. This relation, explored by Derrida via a

dangling, fictive phrase, which he inserts into the Biblical narrative: "Pardon for not meaning (to say)" (Literature in Secret 130), is - as delineated in this section - fleshed out via the fiction(s) of paternity in the corpus. I also demonstrate how Derrida's re-reading of "test" in Genesis 22, another instance of *différance* with a literary dimension, links up with the death-giving sense of fiction in the works.

i. *Différance*: The Tension between Reading & Interpretation

In the corpus, the overarching tension between interpretation and reading frames the entanglement of fiction and the deathly implications it gives to responsibility. *The Gift of Death* also bears directly on this tension through its investigation of responsibility and the sacrificial violence that conditions it. The monstrousness of the near-sacrifice is said to represent the exclusionary violence involved in the giving of meaning. This feature of mortality speaks of the relation between death and signification at the level of interpretative and empirical violence. This relation, at the level of interpretation, gives rise to implications of no choice; for mortals have no control over the process of signification. However, this lack of mastery can be negotiated through reading. Although not free of exclusionary violence, reading makes it possible to take interpretative violence into account and this is, to some extent, a possible mitigation of it.[2] The opening represented by reading is its relation of tension to interpretation.

This tension is performed by *The Gift of Death*, in which the near-sacrifice of Isaac is said to be a "sacrifice of love to love" (65), an act of "infanticide" (68) that

[2] In "Towards a Post-Structuralist Development Ethics? Alterity or the Same?" (2010), Trevor Parfitt unravels this possibility of mitigation. He states that, although "knowledge" is "constitute[ed]" on the basis of originary writing and its "violence", "the status we accord to such knowledge can affect the extent of violence and that is what Derrida is indicating when he refers to an economy of violence. If we regard this knowledge as absolute, that is, if we institute closure, thus rendering our exclusions a permanent status, violence is maximized" (677).

renders Abraham a "hateful murderer" (66), and an instance of self-sacrifice in which "he [Abraham] gives to himself the death that he is granting to his son" (93). These irreconcilable meanings confront the reader with the problem of grasping responsibility in any consistent, coherent fashion.[3] Derrida also articulates this tension at the outset, prior to his investigation of responsibility. He states that tradition, grounded in interpretation, tells us nothing about what responsibility is; yet it is our responsibility to respond to these countless interpretations because they are all we have (viii-ix).[4] Given the context of *The Gift of Death*, the conflation of reading and "responding" is a loaded gesture; for the text revolves around a gruesome response, which is *read* through the violence of signification. This loaded sense of reading resonates on more than one level in metafictional works that employ death to suggest that re-reading one's interpretation of the other is a necessity, but also force one to reflect on how real-life confrontations with death override this necessity. The corpus reflects on reading as a possible mitigation of interpretative violence by means of re-readings of good ("horrorshow"), be-longing and survival. However, these re-readings, which drive instances of responsibility, are implicated in interpretative violence on account of the entangled sense(s) of fiction they

[3] Harris B. Bechtol states in "Abrahamic Figurations of Responsibility: Religion Without Religion in Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion" (2017) that "[s]uch a polysemy of giving death will become the site for Derrida's description of *the fix* – the difficult, complex, and messy situation – we are in with regard to responsibility" (italics in original 137).

[4] Ben Ware's "Johannes de Silentio and the Art of Subtraction: From Voice to Love in *Fear and Trembling*" looks at a number of seminal interpretations of the Binding of Isaac, such as Immanuel Kant's in *A Conflict of the Faculties*. Kant dismisses Abraham's dilemma on the basis that such an irrational command could not have come from God. For Kant, "in order for [the divine voice] to count as an expression of God's will, and therefore to be worthy of obedience, the voice must be in conformity with the *moral law*" (Ware italics in original 396). Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* is said to be a critical response to Kant's interpretation of Christianity as a domain of reason which prescribes a universal code of ethics with regard to the other (Ware 393). It shows the Knight of faith as subject to a radical passion for God, one that transgresses the generality of ethics. Levinas vehemently objects to Kierkegaard's subordination of the ethical to Abraham's personal faith in God. Based on divine intervention, which prevents the sacrifice from being completed, Levinas argues that the Akedah upholds the ethical, over and above the religious.

draw on. Because violence in the works, despite being fictional, relates to what one fears coming up against in reality, one is forced to rethink one's understanding of reading. The nagging sense that one's readings would be drastically other in life-threatening situations underscores how the overlap between interpretative and empirical violence links up with *différance*; for the disruption of reading by "real" death reflects on *différance*, which suggests that we owe signification to death and its disruptiveness.

The corpus' positing of interpretative violence on the inside of reading represents a provocative reading of the distinction *différance* lends to reading with respect to interpretation. The totalizing connotations of interpretation and its sense of closure is countered by reading, which testifies that the "opening" (gap) onto the other cannot be fully "close[d]" (Bennington *Not Half* 126).[5] The very word reading implies the other's lack of transparency (*Not Half* 72). This critical take on understanding figures as the primary tension between hermeneutics and deconstruction: "I read only […] where I do not understand" (126). The subversive take on reading in the works ostensibly conflicts with this rigorous distinction. However, this distinction is based on the *relation* between reading and interpretation. It can be read from the perspective of how reading reflects on what *binds* it to interpretation, such as meaning and exclusionary violence.

Reading as a self-reflexive mode of interpretative violence links up with the metafictional works. This mode, which is not one of mastery but is implicated in what remains inaccessible about representation, also applies to Derrida's reading of actual sacrifice through his coined construct, *différance*. His reading of Abraham's selfless

[5] In John D. Caputo's *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, interpretation is referred to as a "classical reading", which is followed by a "deconstructive reading": "The first reading is to be followed by a more 'productive', fine-grained, distinctly deconstructive reading, which explores the tensions, the loose threads, the little 'openings' in Derrida's text which the classical reading tends to close over or put off as a problem for another day" (76).

response and the risk it bears of giving meaning to death through sacrifice represents a critical stand on *différance*. As demonstrated in detail further on, *The Gift of Death* stresses on how *différance*, in giving a relation to death, potentially violates its secrecy: "Death would be this possibility of *giving and taking* [...] that actually exempts itself from the same realm of possibility it institutes, namely from *giving and taking* [...] it suspends every experience of *giving and taking*" (italics in original 45). This rigorous account of what is withheld in giving meaning can also be read from the perspective of self-reflexivity; for *différance*, invented by Derrida, not only represents his reading of representation through the lens of death but his re-reading of difference in Ferdinand de Saussure's writings, as well as of philosophical writings on death.

ii. *Différance* on Difference

Différance is coined from the French word différence, which can mean to differ from something, or to defer something, depending on the context. In substituting the "a" in place of the "e", Derrida draws attention to the simultaneity of difference and deferral. This simultaneity is demonstrated through the "a", which does not show itself in speech; it can be "read" or "written" but not heard" (*Différance* 3). The fact that *différance* is pronounced no differently from différence undercuts the philosophical claim that "speech", as meaning present to the self, is superior to writing, a stand-in for speech, thought of as "secondary" and "derivative" (Norris *Derrida* 65-67). In effect, via the "a", *différance*, without which signification is not possible, is shown to be a question of inscription. This has a significant implication, in that writing, the repetition that conditions it ("sign of a sign"), emerges as the possibility of speech. The writing that

conditions speech (*différance*) is an originary inscription that extends beyond writing in the narrow sense, for it is the very condition of experience.

Writing's association with repetition gives rise to the implication of delay or deferral. The deferral that conditions signification represents Derrida's contribution to Ferdinand de Saussure's account of difference. Courtesy of *différance*, Saussure's account is shown to harbor "a more radical notion of 'difference' than he expressly wants to maintain" (Norris *Derrida* 91) Meaning in Saussure's writings is shown to be constructed on the basis of differential relations between signs. Firstly, insofar as "the logic of difference is a non-self-identical logic", Saussure's "insistence on the privileged (natural) bond between spoken language and thought" does not hold (Norris *Derrida* 91). Secondly, differential relations imply detour and delay. Deferral takes into account the temporality of differing in signification (*Broken Tablets* xiii; Nuyen 29). Differing, typically understood only in terms of spatialization, is shown by Derrida to link up with time (the becoming-space of time), while deferral, or temporization, is thought of in terms of space (the becoming-time of space (Morin 28-9). The "present" that spacing and temporization constitute is not present *as such* because it "keep[s] within itself the mark of the past element, and already lets itself be vitiated by the mark of its relation to the future element" (Différance 13).

iii. *Différance*: Re-Reading Giving through Heidegger & Levinas

The temporality of *différance* links up with mortality and death. The mortal condition, which features prominently in Heidegger's and Levinas's writings on identity and difference, is treated more rigorously in the context of sacrifice through *différance*: "Derrida introduced the term [*différance*] by showing that Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger,

Saussure, and Levinas could be read as thinkers of difference even though they could not go as so far as acknowledging the non-teleological, origin-deferring movement that is at the heart of both the production and the expenditure of all differences" (Direk & Lawlor 4). The mortal subject's conditioning by exclusionary violence gives a radically different picture of the "Subject" than the one given by Heidegger and Levinas: "Discourses as original as those of Heidegger and Levinas disrupt, of course, a certain traditional humanism. In spite of the differences separating them, they nonetheless remain profound humanisms *to the extent they do not sacrifice sacrifice.* The subject (in Levinas's sense) and the *Dasein* [the human condition of being-in-the-world-with-others] are 'men' in a world where sacrifice is possible and where it is not forbidden to make an attempt on life in general, but only on human life, on the neighbor's life, on the other's life as *Dasein*" (italics in original Derrida *Points* 279).

Sacrifice is shown to be unavoidable in *The Gift of Death* because it constitutes the mortal subject, who undergoes exclusionary violence in excluding others. In Derrida's reading of the near-sacrifice, the focus on mortality starts with the fragmentation of the self. The latter's non-relation to itself is grounded in death's inaccessibility and is represented in terms of *différance*:

> [A]s soon as I have within me, *thanks to the invisible word as such*, a witness that others cannot see, and who is therefore *at the same time other than me and more intimate with me than myself*, as soon as I can have a secret relationship with myself and not tell everything […] then there is what I call God, (there is) what I call God in me […] God is in me, he is the absolute 'me' or 'self', he is

> that structure of invisible interiority that is called, in Kierkegaard's sense, subjectivity. (Italics in original 108)

"[I]nvisible interiority", which, in *Fear and Trembling*, represents speak Abraham's secret relation to God, is *différance* ("the invisible word"). The relation to the Other is evoked by Derrida on the basis of how the self, confronted by the gap, witnesses its own blindness or not-knowing. The self's ability to sense this gap is a riveting image, one that captures the endless dynamic between death and signification:"[T]he self anticipates death by giving to it or conferring upon it a different value, giving itself, or reappropriating what in fact it cannot simply appropriate" (44).

Significantly, the self's attempted appropriation of its death is spoke of in the context of selfless sacrifice in the physical sense. That is, the text juxtaposes the double sense of giving death (interpretative and empirical):

> How does one give oneself death […] in the sense that putting *oneself* to death means dying while assuming responsibility for one's death, committing suicide but also sacrificing oneself for another […] giving one's life by giving oneself death […] How does one give oneself death in that other sense where *se donner la mort* also means to interpret death, to give oneself a representation of it, a figure, a signification or destination for it? (Italics in original 12)

The context of signification gives selflessness another meaning. The more obvious sense of selflessness is not excluded by Derrida. The indispensable role played by mortality (the inability to be whole) in giving selflessly comes through; for dying for the other only makes sense because the other cannot be redeemed from his/her mortality (*GD* 44). The mortal limitations of the recipient guarantee that the self cannot retrieve or recover

what is given (*GD* 44). Yet selflessness, given the premise of the text, also connotes a lack of mastery, how we are not completely in control of what we give, nor are we able to fully account for how our giving affects other mortals.

This *critical* sense of sacrifice owes everything to *différance* and its reading of the self's otherness. This feature of the self is implicit in Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927) and is read somewhat differently in Emmanuel Levinas' *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (1961) and *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence* (1974). François Raffoul's *Origins of Responsibility* (2010), which analyzes seminal readings of responsibility from a post-metaphysical perspective, gives an in-depth account of how Heidegger, Levinas and Derrida read the sacrificial logic of responsibility. I draw on this account because Raffoul highlights how *The Gift of Death* negotiates the irreconcilable differences between Heidegger and Levinas on the subject of sacrifice and its relation to death.

In Heidegger's ground-breaking text, sacrifice is dealt with in the context of intersubjectivity; that is, it is not inclusive of exclusionary violence. Intersubjectivity is spoken of as the condition of "being-in-the-world-with-others" (Raffoul 144), or *Dasein*. The limitations of this condition are exposed by the self''s "authentic relation to" its own "death" (210), or "being-towards-death". In face of the self's relation to its own death which brooks no substitution and must be undergone on a singular basis, *Dasein* comes undone.

Levinas claims that the stress on the self's "unsubstitutability" in being-towards-death is a dismissal of sacrifice (Raffoul 210). This claim is dismissed in *The Gift of Death*, which demonstrates that "unsubstitutability" is thought through on the basis of

what sacrifice cannot do, the limit that it cannot transgress, regardless of how giving it may be: “Because I cannot take death away from the other who can no more take it from me in return, it remains for everyone to take his own death *upon himself*. Everyone must assume their own death, that is to say, the one thing in the world that no one else can *either give or take*: therein resides freedom and responsibility” (italics in original *GD* 45). Derrida concedes the selflessness of Abraham’s “here I am”, yet it does not lose sight of how “dying *for the other* in the sense of dying *in place* of the other” is impossible (italics in original 44). For even in dying for the other, it is one’s own death that dies (Raffoul 211-12).

While *The Gift of Death* aligns itself with the critique of sacrifice in being-towards-death, it simultaneously gravitates towards Levinas’ face to face encounter with the other; for the latter speaks of sacrifice that does not mediate on behalf of death (giving without taking): “The true relation to the other […] lies in a face to face encounter without intermediary, without mediation” (Raffoul 175). In contradistinction to the accent on the self in being-towards-death, the encounter represents “[t]he death of the other” as “the foremost death” (qtd. in *GD* 47). In the face to face, one is “called to care for the other and attend to the other as other” because the face “expresses the mortality or irremediable exposure to death of the other” (Raffoul 174): “The other does not even have to ask anything of me since its face is already, out of its naked vulnerability, a demand on me” (198).

In *The Gift of Death,* the meaninglessness that Abraham embraces and exemplifies in his response is said to undermine the economy of giving and taking that stalks sacrifice: “Abraham renounces all *sense* and all property - that is where the

responsibility of absolute duty begins. Abraham is in a relation of nonexchange with God, he is in secret since he doesn't speak to God and expects neither response nor reward from him" (my italics 96). This description of Abraham's decision verges on the face to face, which does not come under the signification and mediation of language (Raffoul 172). Yet the limitations of the Levinasian model are implied in the tension that Derrida sustains between giving and the return it counts on: "[R]esponse and hence responsibility always risk what they cannot avoid appealing to in return, namely recompense and retribution. They risk the exchange that they should at the same time expect and fail to count on, hope for yet exclude" (96).

The face to face encounter bypasses mediation on the basis of *mortality and death* (Raffoul 175), the very condition that signification (*différance)* owes itself to. This overlap represents the gap between Derrida and Levinas on the subject of otherness. Whereas the latter regards the other as pure exteriority, free of any contamination with the same, Derrida argues that the other would be inconceivable in the absence of mediation. If the other cannot be subsumed in any sense, how would it appear in a mortal context, which is what renders the other tenable in the first place?[6] In order to appear, the other must appear within the same and yet exceed that reduction: "The other cannot be what it is, infinitely other, except in finitude and mortality (mine *and* its). It is such as soon as it comes into language, of course, and only then, and only if the word *other* has a meaning" (italics in original Derrida *Writing & Difference* 114-5). Contamination is

[6] In *Points*, Derrida states that "there are little narcissisms, there are big narcissisms, and there is death in the end, which is the limit. Even in the experience - if there is one - of death, narcissism does not abdicate absolutely" (199).

what makes separation possible because it allows the other to appear as *other* (Anderson 46).[7]

Mediation is also implied in the vulnerability that is specifically spoken of as *human*.[8] Levinas's "undeconstructed, indeed assumed and proclaimed, humanism is spoken by Raffoul (167). But "human" remains an interpretation, despite Martin Heidegger's grounding of the human/animal divide in language and its relation to death. This grounding, as Derrida points out, is unverifiable on account of the alterity of animals, which is vividly captured via the parallel in *The Gift of Death* between feeding a cat and Abraham's here I am to God (71), as well as stated explicitly: "What binds me to singularities, to this one or that one […] rather than that one or this one, remains finally unjustifiable […] These singularities represent others, a wholly other form of alterity: one other or some other persons, but also places, animals, languages" (71). Levinas's exclusion of animals from the ethical encounter is read by Derrida as implicated in the distinction that Heidegger gives to humans *over* animals. Along with Kant and Lacan, who argues "the animal" "can react" "but not respond", Heidegger and Levinas are said to hold views on the animal that are influenced by "Cartesian" subjectivity, in which "the animal (in general) is consistently defined by its *incapacities* - its inability to do what humans do (speak, reason, mourn, laugh, cry, deceive)" (italics in original Bruns 416).

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[7] Raffoul argues that Levinas's reading of the other as *absolutely* other renders him blind to how being-towards-death is a relation to the other as *other* (Raffoul 211). The dissolution of being-in-the-world-with-others confronts the self with what is inaccessible about itself to others. It also brings home to the self what remains unaccounted for about its relation to others, who are also inaccessible based on their singular relation to death: "The other, the very experience of otherness, gives itself on the basis of what cannot be shared. The relation to the other opens in the relation to death. It is on the basis of this abyss of what cannot be shared – namely, death – that the other can appear *as other*" (211).

[8] Simon Critchley also makes a point of stating that in Levinas's writings, "the ethical relation…is one in which I am related to the face of the Other (*le visage d'autrui*), where the French word '*autrui*' refers to the other human being, whom I cannot evade, comprehend, or kill and before whom I am called to justice, to justify myself" (italics in original 5).

iv. A Senseless Command

Language, the distinction we give ourselves in relation animals, is shown to be on shaky ground in the near-sacrifice, on account of *différance*. What the latter suggests via the command is extremely relevant to the corpus, in which death challenges metafiction's linguistic reading of "reality". Such readings are unfairly attributed to deconstruction, which is attacked for subsuming "reality" under linguistics. The integral role that *différance* plays in countering such attacks is commented on rebutted by Geoffrey Bennington in *Not Half No End: Militantly Melancholic Essays in Memory of Jacques Derrida* (2010) and John D. Caputo's *Deconstruction in a Nutshell* (1997). This role, relevant to a corpus that deals with signification in relation to death, is reflected on by both scholars in the context of "text", which, in Derrida's writings, is not restricted to reading and writing in the ordinary sense but alludes to how mortal experience is given on the basis of an *originary* inscription (*différance*).[9] For Derrida, "text" represents the relation, not conflation, between word and world. His most misread statement: "[T]here is nothing outside the text" (*Of Grammatology* 227) is glossed by Caputo in terms of how even a first-hand, or immediate, experience of reality entails going through non-linguistic "'differential' relationships or networks" (80). Stating that Derrida "does not so much bring the world into language as he de-linguistifies language and takes it out into the world" (87), Bennington clarifies that representing "reality" as "textual", as in mediated by *différance*, is not the same thing as "identify[ing] 'text' with 'language'", for the latter "deriv[es]" from the originary inscription (87-8).

[9] In *Points*, Derrida not only pointedly differentiates between "text" and language: "I prefer to speak of traces and text rather than language", but gives specific instances of what "text" is inclusive of, such as "phrases, gestures, tones, situations, marks of all sorts" (175).

This "deriv[ation]" is exposed via the command, which, in Derrida's reading, Abraham cannot make sense of: "Abraham doesn't speak of what God has ordered him, and him alone, to do, he doesn't speak of it to Sarah, or to Eliezer, or to Isaac. He must keep the secret (that is his duty, but it is also a secret which he *must* keep as a double necessity because at bottom he *can only* keep it: he doesn't know it, he is unaware of its rhyme and reason" (italics in original 60). The command comes from that which is unrepresentable within and *to* Abraham, yet it calls upon him in the form of language. The limits of language are exposed in the face of death. The injunction conveys nothing to Abraham other than death and its resistance to meaning.

The secrecy of language is as integral to Erich Auerbach's discussion of the Binding in *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946). But, for Auerbach, this secrecy has to do with God's presence and is held to be a distinctive feature of Judaism, one that is, to some extent, compromised by Saint Paul's reading of the Hebrew Bible as "a prefiguration of Christ" (608). Conversely, in *The Gift of Death*, the secrecy harbored by language is not attributed exclusively to God's command because Derrida holds that everyday linguistic exchanges between mortals are as conditioned by inaccessibility.[10] According to Gibson, Derrida's contention in "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority'" (1992): "[T]he 'true mechanism' and 'place' of decision making is in our everyday language" (51), comes up against his stance in *The Gift of Death*, in which "the ordinariness of everyday language is discarded

[10] In "Post-Modernism and its Secrets: Religion without Religion" (2003), Clayton Crockett states that *The Gift of Death* demonstrates the "irreducible secrecy at the heart of language and thought, that it elucidates that "this mystery [secrecy] which is the core of reason inheres in the very structure of reason, and makes rationality and public discourse possible" (506).

in favor of a higher ethics beyond the intelligible world" (Gibson 132). This is a grave misreading of *The Gift of Death,* for language or mediation in general is not much discarded as shown up as inadequate in the face of responsibility. Abraham, in spite of his closeness to God, comes up against the otherness of God via a command that, for all its graphicness, gives nothing away. This withholding is not withholding as such, for it has to do with the divisibility that inheres in the giving of meaning (the differing and deferring of signification). *Différance*'s giving through withholding -"one cannot keep oneself" - is spoken by Derrida in the context of Abraham's giving to God:"[H]e does everything that has to be done", but "it is the Other who will decide what 'come' means: that is where the response is" (*Points* 149).

v. Knife-Wielding "Instant": *Différance* in Action

Via Abraham's *act* of deciding (the wielding of knife against Isaac's throat), *différance* betrays a great deal about itself. This instance is a dramatic staging of the relation between death and signification in which the interpretative sense of giving death is represented as inseparable from the attempted slaughter. As such, the knife-wielding instance stands for the conditioning of action by *différance. The Gift of Death* speaks of what is unrepresentable (exclusionary violence) in terms of what is physical: "night of faith", which also represents a juxtaposition of giving death in the double sense. The "night" of signification, which we are challenged to "read", is highlighted in the works in the context of actual death, or bodily violence. This section focuses on *différance* in action, which is relevant because the metafictional works a) treat the otherness of the other via threatening encounters with actual others and b) embed the death-signification tension within political conflicts.

"[T]he instant of decision is madness" is Kierkegaard response to Abraham's irrational decision in Genesis 22. This reference to "madness" is read by Derrida in terms of the necessity and impossibility of sustaining the conflict or tension between equally imperative possibilities; both options must bear equal importance for a sacrifice to take place. Responsibility "demands that one transgress ethical duty, although in betraying it one still belongs to it and at the same time recognizes it" (66). However, the necessity of sustaining the contradiction between the two possibilities: "The contradiction and the paradox must be endured *in the instant itself*" (66) comes up against mortality, the sacrifice it necessitates. The instant of deciding is spoken of as "madness" because sacrifice cannot be accounted for from the point of view of reason.

"Madness" also points to how the workings (the differing and deferring) of representation are not accessible to the deciding subject. For Abraham's "instant of madness" is treated in the context of what is paradoxical about signification, the fact that it is a temporal feature that does not show itself in terms of time: "The paradox [instant of madness] cannot be grasped in time and through mediation, that is to say in language and through reason […] it belongs to an atemporal temporality, to a duration that cannot be grasped" (66). [A]temporal temporality is an allusion to *différance,* which is the differing and deferring of meaning, yet is "not to be thought of as an operation that takes place *in* time" because it is that which "makes time" and space possible (italics in original Wood 273). *Différance'*s relation to death bears out that its atemporality is finite through and through, that its lack of essence pertains to what remains unrepresentable about death: "Death is the movement of *différance* insofar as it is necessarily finite" (*Of Grammatology* 143). Derrida makes a point of clarifying that the "produc[tion] of

differences" by *différance* does not imply that the coined term represents "a simple and in itself unmodified and indifferent present", for "[*d]ifférance* is the nonfull, nonsimple 'origin'; it is the structured and differing origin of differences" (11). "[D]iffering origin" underscores that *différance* is inseparable from what it effects within language.[11]

In the corpus, madness is explored in the context of inscrutable responses, which pose a dilemma for the reader/viewer. The phrase "clockwork orange", which links up with "mad" (139) in Burgess' reading, stands for the State's decision to condition Alex to be non-violent. It also alludes to what constrains free will in a mortal, temporal ("clockwork") context.[12] Madness not only plays a key role in Changez's mission of belonging, but figures prominently in how his response to 9/11 - the smile he gives - disrupts this mission, giving death to his American dream. The enigmatic smile that Saul gives in the midst of death at the end of *Son of Saul* is an instance of madness that reflects on the *making* of meaning.

Violating otherness in the context of reading-action is aesthetically set up in the works in flagrant ways. A great deal of effort is put into the making of exclusionary violence, to the extent that the violence of representation verges on the aesthetization of violence. The latter, the stylizing of violence, is an offshoot of the violence of signification, which is reflected in the former. The aestheticization of violence is related to the fiction-death/violence relation (Sheehan 82) but, from the perspective of the corpus and theoretical framework, this relation is one of difference. For aestheticizing

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[11] Geoffrey Bennington explains this in *Jacques Derrida* (1993) in the following way: "[R]einscri[bing]…God in the world, in history, finitude and mortality is already done by *différance*, which does as much for all the names that have been put in His place, including *différance* itself" (79).

[12] In his "'Review' of Stanley Kubrick's Film", Anthony Burgess states: "The title is the least difficult thing to explain. In 1945, back from the army, I heard an 80-year-old Cockney in a London pub say that somebody was 'as queer as a clockwork orange'. The 'queer' did not mean homosexual; it meant mad" (139). The review is published in *Anthony Burgess A Clockwork Orange: Authoritative Text Backgrounds and Contexts Criticism*, 2011.

violence refers to art's depiction of violence as such, which is a notable feature of the corpus but is employed to showcase the exclusionary violence giving is contingent on. The troubling implications that come about in responding to the other are accounted for with the help of actual death and violence. That is, violence *as such* is used to accentuate violence in a relational sense. That is, giving is the main dilemma, not violence as such. This giving is problematized in the context of fiction's relation to death.

In the aestheticization of violence, the medium of fiction or film is highlighted. The corpus draws attention to the medium ("fiction" is inclusive of film in the study) with respect to how the exclusionary violence of signification results in actual violence and death. This spotlighting of fiction gives *différance* an edge; fiction's overt and subversive reflection on its role heightens the self-reflexivity resonant in Derrida's reading of signification. Fiction's staging of what takes place behind the scenes ("night of faith") in signification also reflects critically on *différance*; for the prominent role of fiction renders the "reality" of exclusionary violence open to speculation.

In the works, the implications of making sense are rendered political through and through by means of two features, one, the juxtaposition of reading and violence and, two, the (de)construction of "horrorshow", be-longing and *after*life (surviving death) in specific political contexts: totalitarianism, post-911 America-Pakistan tensions and Auschwitz-Birkenau. These features draw attention to subjectivity and agency in relation to reading and signification. In that respect, they dramatize what Derrida says about "the relation between text and action" in his dialogue with Richard Kearney and Mark Dooley in "Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility" (1999):

> [W]hat I call the text is not distinct from action or opposed to action. Of course, if you reduce a text to a book or to something that is written on pages, then perhaps there will be a problem with action. Although even a text in the form of a book […] is already something like an action. There is no [...] political or ethical action which could be simply dissociated from, or opposed to, discourse. (65-6)

Différance's relation to reality is accounted for by such scholars as Bennington, Caputo and Royle.[13] However, there are critics who short-change this feature of *différance*, such as Simon Critchley. In *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas* (1999), which criticizes deconstruction for "fail[ing] to offer a coherent account of the passage from ethical responsibility to political questioning and critique", Critchley argues that the Levinasian notion of the Third makes it possible for deconstruction to "traverse the passage from ethics to politics" (Preface xiv-v). Nicole Anderson demonstrates that Critchley's privileging of Levinas over Derrida is on account of his misreading of undecidability. The latter is a logic that pertains to the instability that haunts all entities on account of *différance*. Undecidability is regarded by Critchley as a "transcendental" feature that is separate from the "empirical" domain of decision-making (Anderson 38). In her rebuttal of this reading, Anderson demonstrates that undecidability is quasi-transcendental, which means both transcendental and empirical, yet not reducible to either (41-2).

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[13] In *Jacques Derrida*, Royle counters the view that Derrida is a "linguistic philosopher or a textualist critic" based on the latter's "thinking of 'text'" (68). *Deconstruction in a Nutshell* states, in noticeably emphatic terms, that "[i]t has never been true that deconstruction consisted in some merely 'internal' and 'apolitical' analysis of texts, isolated and insulated from the institutions in which these texts are read and by which these readings are monitored. For the institutional 'context' belongs integrally to the 'general' text, the archi-textuality of which deconstruction is the analysis" (62).

In "Who or what decides, for Derrida: A Catastrophic Theory of Decision" (2009), J. Hillis Miller also questions whether examining undecidability in texts is the same thing as being besieged by a call from the other.[14] He states that the undecidable, which, in Derrida's "Force of Law", lies in not "hav[ing] any clear or rational grounds for decision", is "something very different from the undecidable oscillation between two significations in the interpretation of a text" (18). One senses that Miller here is thinking of reading in the narrow sense, which Derrida, in his dialogue with Kearney and Dooley, distinguishes from the "task of infinite close reading" that is "the condition of political responsibility": "Now, to read does not mean to spend nights in the library; to read events, to analyze the situation, to criticize the media, to listen to the rhetoric of the demagogues, that's close reading, and it is required more today than ever"(67).

Although Miller leaves the question undecided by stating that "[w]hether or not any literary texts say anything like what Derrida says would require further investigation" (18-19), he draws attention to how the urgency or necessity of taking decisions does not apply to the study of undecidability in literary texts. This point is central to Leslie Hill's *Radical Indecision: Barthes, Blanchot, Derrida, and the Future of Criticism* (2012), which cites Maurice Blanchot on the necessity of not deciding when faced with innumerable possibilities (68).[15] However, not deciding is not always

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[14] Miller grapples with the aporias of decision laid out in Derrida's "Force of Law" in the context of Henry James' *The Portrait of a Lady*.

[15] Stating that literary criticism has always been haunted by the problem of decision (undecidability), Hill explains that reading literary works from a critical stance unavoidably implicates one in the necessity of deciding on the value of texts. This act of deciding comes up against the necessity of responding to what cannot be subsumed under existing values or given frameworks. The irresolvable tension between the two necessities is what opens up the possibility for literary criticism and yet renders it impossible. In approaching literary texts, the two incompatible necessities have to be taken on board because the singularity of a particular instance of literature cannot avoid making contact with a universal set of rules and procedures. However, an opening presents itself within the context of this double bind; for deciding on

possible, particularly when undecidability is brought to bear on life-death situations that provoke visceral responses from the reader/viewer. The necessity of not deciding also does not take into account that responding in spite of oneself is an integral sense of undecidability: "[C]ould it not be argued […] decision and responsibility are always *of the other*? They always come back or come down to the other, from the other, even if it is the other in me?" (italics in original *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* 23). The possibility of a free decision opens up on the basis of what we, as mortals, are constrained to endure (the undecidability of *différance*). This is why choice is not what we *think* it is.

vi. Literature as *Différance*

A crucial feature of the corpus' depiction of responsibility is the choicelessness that underpins choice, which stems from the "night of faith" (exclusionary violence). In Derrida's writings, this "night" has a relation to literature, which stages the movement of signification and in so doing, betrays how the Word is constituted by means of that which it excludes. In effect, literature stands for representation in a self-reflexive mode. However, this self-reflexivity does not denote mastery, or knowing in a totalizing sense; like all representations, it is dependent on inaccessibility. Literature, which reflects on the not-knowing that makes up representation, is a witnessing of the void (death) that conditions mortality.

Literature's subversive stance on authority (the Word) is read by Derrida as re-presentation of the Father-son relationship. His discussion of writing in connection with paternity is fleshed out by the metafictional works via their treatment of paternity in the context of "fiction". "Fiction" gives literature as *différance* a slightly different slant,

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the singularity of a text unavoidable involves a reinvention of a rule, which illustrates that a decision is not identical with the rule that conditions it.

which this sub-section delineates via two features of "Literature in Secret": Derrida's re-reading of "test" and his insertion of "pardon for not meaning (to say). Prior to outlining the corpus' singular enactment of literature as *différance*, I unpack the notion of "literature as *différance*" and clarify the relation and distinction between literature and fiction.

In his interview with Richard Kearney, "Deconstruction and the Other" (2004), Derrida describes literature in a way that renders it into an encounter with the "night of faith" (*GD* 68): "[W]hen I speak of literature it is not with a capital L; it is rather an allusion to certain movements which have worked around the limits of our logical concepts, certain texts which make the limits of our language tremble, exposing them as divisible and questionable" (144).[16] The use of "tremble" evokes the responsiveness of language to what is other within itself. It suggests that, for Derrida, Abraham's trembling "here I am" in the face of God's command, represents an exemplary instance of *différance*.

It is on account of *différance* that "Literature in Secret: An Impossible Filiation" posits literature as a possibility *within* Genesis 22. In Sarah Hammerschlag's *Broken Tablets: Levinas, Derrida, and the Literary Afterlife of Religion* (2016), Derrida's contention, regarding the "drift" within Genesis 22 "from covenant to narrative", is explained from the perspective of the representation that is necessary to represent a "pledge" as "secret" (8). Genesis 22 "recount[s]" "what Abraham could not himself tell, what he could not tell Sarah or Isaac" and in so doing, emerges as "a third party" "disseminating" "this story" "to anyone, for any reader" (8). This slant of "betrayal" (8)

[16] The interview is published in *Debates in Continental Philosophy: Conversations with Contemporary Thinkers*, Fordham University, 139-156.

to a hallowed account of responsibility delivers another shock to the reader; for it is accompanied by the implication that "exposure to interpretation" (10) is the only means of guaranteeing secrecy. The "dissimulation" (8) of representation ensures inaccessibility via "a slippage in meaning that ironically guards its own secrecy by disrupting the relation between agent and meaning" (10). A secular response to instances of revelation, literature in Derrida's reading is shown to replicate the not-knowing of responding with such faithfulness that it emerges as a subversive commentary on it.

Literature as *différance* is a provocative stance on sacred "truths", which are shown to be reliant on literature in the sense of interpretation and dissemination. This sense of "literature" links up with literature as such. Literature in the capacity of *différance* is linked in Derrida's "This Strange Institution Called Literature" (1992) to literature the institution, which is read in terms of what it implies about responsibility via its "authorization to say everything" (37), as well as disown on the basis of fiction, or make-believe. That said, only those works of fiction represent literature that draw attention to *différance*, such as Kafka's parable, "Before the Law" (1915), which, according to Derrida's essay of the same name (1982), stage "the drama of naming, the law of the name and the name of the law" (187). The distinction of *différance* borne by literature counters the claim that deconstruction conflates fiction with literature. This is claimed by Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen in *Truth, Fiction and Literature: A Philosophical Perspective* (1994), in which literature, which consists of "invented stories" (275) *and* includes literary criticism, is said to bear an "evaluative" function (24) that renders it distinct from fiction. The conflation of fiction and literature (273-9) is attributed to deconstruction on the basis of excerpts from Paul de Man's *Blindness and*

Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism (1971). This claim overlooks significant differences within deconstructive thinkers, such as Derrida and Man, *différance* being the main one.[17]

Given its role with respect to "reality", *différance* in the capacity of literature poses a challenge to the "no-truth" stance adopted towards fiction by Lamarque and Olsen. The "no-truth" position states that evaluating fiction in the light of truth and reality is misguided because fiction, in dealing with what is make-believe, has no such pretensions. Derrida's notion of literature as *différance* demonstrates that "reality" has a great deal at stake in fiction. One gets a clear sense of this notion in Derrida's *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money* (1992), which overlaps substantially with *The Gift of Death* in terms of its focus on giving, more specifically, the conditions that render "gift" a possibility (and impossibility). These conditions are thought through by means of Marcel Mauss' *The Gift* (1925), which is re-read in relation to Charles Baudelaire's short story, "Counterfeit Money" (1869). It is in reference to what remains unknowable in the short story that Derrida elaborates on literature's relation to *différance.* The starting point of the explanation is a feature that is taken for granted when it comes to fiction, the fact that a fictional narrative "forever takes a secret with [it]" (152) because the secret is not

[17] Indeterminacy in Man's texts pertains to rhetorical strategies and the use of ambiguity, that is, features that remain within the control of authors. Conversely, undecidability, which is synonymous with deconstruction in Derrida's writings, deals with the systemic side to language, with what is beyond the writing subject and renders the meaning of what he/she says as both more and less than what is said. The difference between Derrida and de Man is dealt with in detail in Rodolphe Gasché's "In-difference to Philosophy: de Man on Kant, Hegel, and Nietzsche", which is included in *Reading de Man Reading* (1987), edited by W.Godzich and L. Waters and published by University of Minnesota Press. An overview of this difference between the two thinkers is also given by Kevin R. McClure and Kristine M. Cabral in "Clarifying Ambiguity and the Undecidable: A Comparison of Burkean and Derridean Thought" (2009): "For Derrida, it is not the ambiguity in meaning of any particular term that is undecidable, but, rather the nature of the system or structure of language itself that is the ground of the undecidable. The system of language, a network of differences, is one in which the identity of any specific signifier is constituted by its difference from its other symbols and by both its non-identity with other signifiers and the non-presence of these signifiers" (74). It is the on account of this systemic reading of language that a text is said to dconstruct itself, as opposed to being deconstructed by some other.

"real" and has nothing behind it; it is a construct existing only on the surface and accessing it makes no sense (153). This feature, laid bare in the case of fictional secrets, is applicable to transcendental truths, which, from the perspective of metaphysics, are thought to be inaccessible, in that they lie behind the surface of material things, yet, in Derrida's reading, are "infinitely private because public [material] through and through" (170). For Derrida, the distinction of fiction lies in what it implies about inaccessibility, that it is only tenable "to the extent to which it loses all interiority, all thickness, all depth" (170).

The use of "literature", as opposed to "fiction", in "Literature in Secret" is significant with respect to the difference this represents between the corpus and its theoretical framework. *Différance* uncovers problematic interpretations pertaining to "truth". For instance, the possibility of self-present meaning, which is claimed by Edmund Husserl on the basis of the living voice (the instance of speaking to oneself), is one that Derrida counters as a "fiction" because of *différance* and its conditioning of speech: "[T]he very act of representation would be foreign to the perfect internal solitude of the self" (*Broken Tablets* 9). By "fiction", Derrida is alluding to a myth, or illusion, which literature exposes by "repeating and liberating religious themes from their submission to an inaccessible origin" (*Broken Tablets* 95). In the corpus, literary fictions and aesthetic values make way for the deconstruction of concepts but also give rise to mythical worldviews, ones that give death in the literal sense. The myths that surface in the corpus, dealt with in the following chapters, pertain to the following features: Alex's projection of violence onto classical music in Burgess' novella, the construction of be-longing as wounding and bruising on the basis of tragic love stories in *The Reluctant*

Fundamentalist and the showcasing of eternal life via the aesthetic and affecting framing of paternity in *Son of Saul*.

The corpus's ambivalent take on fiction is encountered in a latent sense in "Literature in Secret", in which the "test" undergone by Abraham is re-read as God's pretense. This pretense links up with the fictive phrase: "Pardon for not meaning to say". By means of this phrase, literature asks to be forgiven for *différance*, which, in conditioning representation with inaccessibility, destabilizes the Word, thereby betraying that it is open to endless reading. God's pretense and its setting of literature as *différance* in motion, mirrored in Hamid's novel in which "pretending" is put to work in the context of responsibility, is also fleshed out in the other two works. As is *made* evident further on in the chapter on *A Clockwork Orange*, free will, which emerges as potentially fictive with respect to the freedom associated with choice, is given a number of death-giving renditions via the complicity between literary and interpretative "fiction". In *Son of Saul*, the illusion of afterlife is re-presented through a possibly fictive claim of paternity, one that arms life after death with deathly implications.

vii. Literature as *Différance* & Unexplored Fictions

The initial divine injunction is not explicitly called a fiction by Derrida. Yet the manner in which he puts to work the Biblical narrative's teleological dimension makes it possible to read the "test" as a story that God comes up with, one that is not only about giving death but which embodies death in its very meaninglessness. Genesis 22 makes it clear, at the outset, that events depicted within it represent a test of faith. That is, God is not in earnest about putting Isaac to death but is testing whether Abraham will be faithful to His word: "A test was necessary - not for God's benefit, of course, but for Abraham's,

and for the benefit of all succeeding generations of readers of the text, to demonstrate what it meant to trust God fully, to take him at his word" (Kuruvilla 498). Derrida, however, does not use "test" to make sense of the two conflicting divine injunctions but uses it to think through language's resistance to interpretation. In his reading, God, who has no interest in the actual sacrifice, is testing whether Abraham can keep his relation to God, more specifically, what is obscure about it, a secret from others.

This feint on God's part is linked to a plea for forgiveness: "Pardon for not meaning (to say)" (Literature in Secret 130), a fictive phrase that, in the following paragraphs, is shown to open onto the relation between writing and paternity. Derrida's grafting of a dangling phrase is his way of emulating what is beyond the control of mortals, namely, the decontextualisation that *différance* gives rise to. Decontextualisation springs from the divisibility and iterability of the sign, which, constituted on the basis of its differences from other signs, is "never at one with itself" but "always other to itself" (Munday 62). The sign's divisibility suggests "an unlimited number of possible contexts" as "internal to" it (Munday 62). This divisibility, given the temporality of the sign, is spoken of as iterability. That is, a sign is repeated endlessly but always as other. The otherness of repeatability also applies to how a sign is usable in innumerable contexts (Munday 62). Free will's association with choice, which attaches itself to connotations of subjection, bears out the functioning of signs in so-called incompatible contexts, as does the harping on belonging in the 9/11 novel. On account of this harping, belonging shifts from terrorism to intimacy (be-longing), while the fixation with burial in the Holocaust film opens up responsibility for the dead to an unforeseen

angle, which manifests itself in terms of the "already dead" (Saul) responding, or giving death, to the living.

Based on its subversive repetition of the "truth", literature as *différance* amounts to literature as a plea for forgiveness, the filial connotations of which Derrida derives from what is fictive within *Fear and Trembling*, namely, Abraham's asking God's forgiveness for obeying His command to sacrifice Isaac. Derrida evokes the connotations of "perjur[y]" that harbor in the possibility of both asking for and giving forgiveness (126). Based on how "[o]ne never asks forgiveness except for the unforgivable" (127), pleading for forgiveness is said to be the act of taking back an injury given to the other. There is also a sense of retraction in forgiving the unforgivable, for it implies a cancelling out of the injury that was given. And yet a sense of giving is inseparable from the act of asking and giving forgiveness, for the former involves subjecting oneself to the other's mercy, while the latter forgoes an injury to the self for the sake of the other. Disavowing is indispensable to forgiveness, in which recanting manifests itself as giving to the other. Abraham's case is all the more complicated because, in asking to be forgiven for *obeying* God, he is not merely recanting his response to God but is implicating Him in the "fault itself" (126).

The sense of betrayal that lines the possibility of for*giving* is exemplified by literature as *différance*, which, represented as an ambivalent stand-in for Isaac, faithfully replicates the inaccessibility of Genesis 22, but in such a flagrant manner as to highlight the non-content, or senselessness of responsibility. Literature's re-presentation of signification and its association with Isaac is given a distinctly literary slant in the debate between Levinas and Derrida on the subject of sons *as* literary works. This debate is

analyzed in Hammerschlag's *Broken Tablets*, which I draw on in my discussion of paternity in Burgess' novella and *Son of Saul.* In these two works, paternity *as such* is depicted as a possibility. Treated in terms of paternity as fiction, this possibility ties in with the relation Derrida posits between writing and paternity.[18] For Derrida, writing itself - both in the originary (*différance*) and ordinary sense - reflects on paternity. The relation between writing and paternity is uncovered in Derrida's "Plato's Pharmacy" (1981) in the context of Plato's *Phaedrus*, in which writing is criticized for betraying *logos (*reason, the "truth", or the Word of God).[19]

The metafictional works embed the making-unmaking of paternity in the overarching relation of writing and paternity. While the deconstruction of belonging in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* deals with betrayal of the father in the figurative sense, in the dystopian novella and the Holocaust film, fathers are depicted as sacrificing themselves to their sons. This reversal represents a betrayal of the father in the literal-figurative sense, for these "sons" verge on fictions woven by potentially *would-be* fathers. This feature gives a *novel* slant to Abraham's near-sacrifice, which *The Gift of Death* reads in a literal and figurative sense: "[W]hen we once defined dissemination as 'that which doesn't come back to the father,' we might as well have been describing the instant of Abrahamic renunciation" (96).

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[18] *Deconstruction in a Nutshell* points out that fatherhood is typically associated with fiction. This is the case in James Joyce's novel, *Ulysses*, in which the necessity of "inferr[ing]" the father leads Stephen Daedalus to contend that "paternity" is "a legal fiction" (Caputo 26). Freud uses the inescapable fictiveness of paternity to argue a "progress[ive]" side to "patriarchy": "[B]ecause to determine who the father is, you need reason, whereas to determine who the mother is, you needonly sensible perception" (26). This privilege to fiction, claimed exclusively for paternity, is said by Derrida to apply equally to maternity, for "surrogate mothers" also render it challenging to determine who the mother is (26).

[19] Derrida's *Dissemination*, translated, with an introduction by Barbara Johnson (1981), states the following with respect to how writing is represented by Plato: Writing is weakened speech, something not completely dead: a living dead, a reprieved corpse, a deferred life, a semblance of breath [...] It rolls this way and that like someone who has lost his way, who doesn't know where he is going...like someone who has lost his rights, an outlaw, a pervert, a bad seed, a vagrant [...] he doesn't even know who he is, what his identity - if he has one - might be, what his name is, what his father's name is" (144).

From the perspective of *différance*, Abraham's renunciation is not an exceptional instance but the most basic feature of signification. In this section, *différance* has been examined from the perspective of how it foregrounds the unavoidable violence *and* unconditional giving of sacrifice. *Différance*, shown to inhere in human action and to have a relation to literature, has been analyzed in the context of features relevant to the corpus, such as self-reflexivity and the tension between word and world. The premise of literature as *différance* is also shown as fostered by the corpus, which lends itself to and enhances the theoretical framework in a comprehensive sense.

Literature Review

The give and take equation between the corpus and the theoretical framework addresses a gap within the genre of metafiction. This gap is symptomatic of literary criticism's overall reticence on the following subject: the violence that conditions the relation between fiction and death. This literature review maps out the extent of this gap, which is looked into in the context of two areas. The first field is literary criticism which looks into the role of literature via the relation between literature and religion. This field is significant on two accounts. Firstly, although this category of literary criticism represents the role of literature in a predominantly positive light, it is inclusive of conflicting perspectives, such as the one offered by Erich Auerbach. Secondly, this field links up with relevant philosophical readings of death, fiction and responsibility, such as Jean Paul Sartre's existentialism, Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* and *The Gift of Death*. The second area takes priority, for it deals with literary criticism in which metafiction revolves around the limit, or border, between fiction and reality/death/violence. With respect to this border, the secondary literature on metafiction starts out with fiction as

exclusively life-affirming and is subsequently dealt with in terms of a progression from vigilance to transgression.

viii. Literature and Religion

This section looks at the relation between death, fiction and responsibility in the context of literary criticism with a Biblical focus: Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946), Frank Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending* (1967) and Chris Danta's *Literature Suspends Death: Sacrifice and Storytelling in Kierkegaard, Kafka, and Blanchot* (2011). Based on the conjecture invariably surrounding death, the death-fiction-responsibility relation is an age-old one. As demonstrated by *The Gift of Death* and "Literature in Secret", this relation is not dependent on literature as such but is at work within religious narratives, in instances that ground responses in truth. One such instance is sūra 18 *Al-Kahf* (The Cave) in the Qur'ān. A.H. Johns (1993) and Brannon M. Wheeler (1998) offer relevant readings of this sūra, in which verses 60-82 recount Moses' encounter with Al-Khidr. Moses, "claiming to be the most knowledgeable of people", is commissioned by God to seek out the greater wisdom of Al-Khidr, "the servant of God" (Wheeler 153). The sage agrees to demonstrate "God's justice" on the condition that the prophet does not demand any explanation of what cannot be fully understood (153). Moses vows to be "patient", but breaks down on witnessing the wise man boring a hole in a boat, killing a young boy and building a crumbling wall that belongs to those who deny them "hospitality" (Johns 206). Al-Khidr, pestered for an explanation after each shocking demonstration, finally breaks his silence: "I did not do it of my own accord" (207). He attributes his baffling actions to God's will and accounts for them on the basis of a future to come. Moses is

satisfied with the wise man's explanations, even though the future held responsible for the death and destruction emerges as nothing more than a story. This sense of *nothing more than a story* links up with Derrida's re-reading of God's first injunction as a fiction.

Genesis 22 is invariably referred to when it comes to discussions of fiction and its representation of reality, or "truth". In Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis*, the ineradicable resistance of Genesis 22 to representation is posited as an opening onto literary representation and endless interpretation. Auerbach's *Mimesis* is, arguably, the most influential take on the relation and distance between the elusiveness of "truth" and the prevalence of form in literature. The excessive imagery in literary texts is sharply and unflatteringly contrasted with the secrecy and formlessness that permeates the Aqedah. The relevance of Auerbach's reading lies in the ambivalence it gives to the role of literature. His take on literature has considerable influence on Derrida's re-reading of the near-sacrifice. Following Auerbach, Derrida speaks of literature as Abrahamic, but the implication of betrayal attached to literary representation in *Mimesis* acquires connotations of responsibility in *The Gift of Death*.

Danta's *Literature Suspends Death: Sacrifice and Storytelling in Kierkegaard, Kafka, and Blanchot* nudges the relation between literature and religion in a substantially different direction from the one found in Auerbach's and Derrida's readings. This direction is an exclusively positive one, in that literature not only affirms but elucidates what is life-giving within Genesis 22. The text of literary criticism draws on the near or non-sacrifice in Genesis 22 to take into account the cost that Scheherazade's law - suspending death through writing -involves. In Danta's discussion, literature substantiates the shift within Genesis 22 from the secret pact between God and Abraham

(first injunction) to the human world (second injunction); it stands for "the poetics of *averted* or *unconsummated* human sacrifice in Genesis 22" (italics in original 23). The literary works examined by Danta are fictive representations of the Binding that focus on the suspension of death in the Biblical narrative and are argued as instances of writing that suspend death through the deferral and repetition of substitution. These works are pitted against *Fear and Trembling* (1843), in which sacrifice and its teleological focus is upheld via the claim that Abraham had to be willing to lose Isaac in order to win him back. They are said to reflect critically on Derrida's downplaying of God's second injunction in favor of prioritizing Abraham's willingness to give death to his son.

Unlike Danta's study, Frank Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending* gives a great deal of credit to philosophical readings of death and the responsibility it gives rise to. Kermode argues the "End" in apocalyptic writings and fictional narratives as a stand-in for death and posits the illusory nature of death as a basis for a mortal craving for endings (55). The text of literary criticism is relevant because it uses "fiction" in the literary and interpretative sense like Sartre's existentialist writings. Inspired by Heidegger's *Being and Time*, Kermode investigates what endings signify for mortals who do not *sense* their own birth and death because they are thrown into the middle of things in the event of being "born" and are overtaken by death in the midst of action (7). This reliance on fiction to fill gaps in reality bears on coping mechanisms that we devise in real-life situations to grapple with the unthinkable (7). In *The Sense of an Ending*, fictional works offer the most ethical means of making sense of life because they keep things "real" by drawing attention to their own fictiveness (41). This aspect to literary fiction is compared favorably to "fictions", or problematic interpretations, that lead to

empirical instances of violence: "[A]nti-Semitism is a fiction of escape which tells you nothing about death but projects it onto others; whereas King Lear is a fiction that inescapably involves an encounter with oneself, and the image of one's end" (39).

Kermode's use of "fiction" in the problematizing of interpretation acquires an added edge on account of a corpus that implicates explicitly fictive fictions - what *The Sense of an Ending* regards as legitimate fictions - in the dilemma. The double sense in which Kermode uses "fiction" is criticized by Dorrit Cohn in *The Distinction of Fiction* (1999).[20] What is relevant is Cohn's concern that "fiction", in being used synonymously with untruths, acquires pejorative connotations (3), for, in the corpus, literary fiction's entanglement with other fictions renders it complicit in the giving of death. My study follows Kermode in what Cohn considers a loose employment of the "fiction". For Cohn, "fiction" stands "exclusive[ly]" for "literary nonreferential narrative", which alludes to how "a work of fiction itself creates the world to which it refers by referring to it" (13). It is what is singular about fiction, which "*can*" and typically does "refer to the real world outside the text", yet "*need* not" unlike other forms of narrative and discourse (italics in original 15). Following Lamarque and Olsen, Cohn argues that "nonrefential[ity]" should not be conflated with "fiction as untruth, fiction as conceptual abstraction, fiction as (all) literature and fiction as (all) narrative" (2). The distinction between "fiction" as a genre and the use of "fiction" in philosophy to reflect on concepts as "constructs" (Cohn 4) is a useful one. However, Cohn's discussion deals with the formal aspect of fiction, not its philosophical underpinnings; it has no stake in how "making up" reflects on the constructedness of transcendental concepts and values,

[20] Like *Truth, Fiction and Literature: A Philosophical Perspective, The Distinction of Fiction* explicitly dissociates itself from deconstructive attributions of "fictionality to all manners of discourse" (Preface vii).

whereas this relation figures prominently in both *The Sense of an Ending* and Derrida's discourse on responsibility.[21]

The role of fiction is valued by Kermode on account of how it stages the illusory character of "truth", or highlights "the gulf between being and knowing" (37). This "gulf" is broached by Kermode via Jean Paul Sartre's existentialism, which "links the fictions of art with those of living and choosing" (145). Raffoul explains that, for Sartre, "the death of God implies the disappearance of an *a priori* table of values, such that ethics and responsibility are a matter of invention […] and never of the application of rules" (italics in original 29-30). Sartre's logic is that, in real-life situations that exceed abstract, transcendental paradigms of morality, our actions give rise to values, which are meanings given by us (123). Existence acquires essence, or meaning, on account of what we make of it and accounting fully for this "authorship" of values, essence and meaning is what constitutes responsibility (29). For Sartre, the groundlessness that underpins the "authoring" of values renders it comparable to a creative, artistic undertaking. While he takes into account the unethical implications of inventing the rules in responsibility, "invention" does not imply the entanglement of literary and interpretative fictions that causes Kermode considerable concern: "If literary fictions *are* related to all others, then it must be said that they have some dangerous relations" (italics in original 37). For Raffoul clarifies that Sartre is merely pointing to an "analog[ous]" relationship between ethics and art, for the sake of underscoring the "performativity of ethics" (141).

[21] The interrelationship between literary fiction and lies, or perjury, is dealt with in the context of the relation between law and literature in Derrida's *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony* (1998). The risk of perjury unavoidably underpins testimony, which, as the obligation of telling the "truth", only makes sense if there is the possibility of lying. Testimony's entanglement with literary fictions is based on the narration - the verbal reconstruction of past events - that telling the truth involves.

On the subject of "authorship", the existentialist take comes up against *The Gift of Death,* in which subjectivity, grounded in the self's relation to its own death, is shown to be conditioned by a tension between agency and passivity. This relation to death, as will become evident further on, is what makes it possible to respond, yet invariably conditions responsibility with a sense of not-knowing and a resistance to accountability. There are also significant overlaps between the two thinkers, a circumstance acknowledged by Derrida in *Sur Parole* (1999): "To take up the question of responsibility again, even if one does not agree with the Sartrean metaphysics of freedom, there is nonetheless, in his analysis of decision, of a responsibility left to the other without criterion, without norm, without prescription, in the undecidable alone (cf. *L' existentialisme est un humanism*), there is something there that can be separated from a Cartesian metaphysics of freedom, of free will" (qtd. in Raffoul 122).[22] The absence of transcendental values elicits similar responses from them. Both regard "the moment of decision, the ethical moment" as "independent of knowledge" (Raffoul 138). Not knowing what to do is the "original situation of ethics", for "conforming to ready-made norms" would preclude a responsible decision (138). The second overlap has to do with the violence that responsibility, based on its groundlessness, is contingent on; both Sartre

[22] This is Raffoul's translation. *Sur Parole* has not been published in English. In Christopher Norris's *Fiction, Philosophy, and Literary Theory: Will the Real Saul Kripke Please Stand Up?*, Derrida's broach[ing]" of "ethical responsibility in terms strongly reminiscent of Satrean existentialism" is said to be "disconcerting", considering his former "outlook" on existentialism "as merely a kind of last-gasp humanist illusion" (36). Norris's comments on the overlap are made in the light of his own conflicted take on Derridean responsibility: "To place so exclusive an emphasis on the strictly 'undecidable', that is, the rationally non-justified and hence radically under-motivated character of ethical choice is to risk falling prey to a whole range of emotivist, decisionistor downright irrationalist ethical doctrines. And yet, as I have said, there is a clear sense in which Derrida's reflections on the aporetic character of ethical choice and responsibility - like Sartre's before him - capture something that goes to the heart of this issue and that cannot be resolved […] by any amount of conceptual analysis or linguistic therapy" (38).

and Derrida think through this violence in terms of how deciding invariably involves sacrificing one obligation to another (140).

ix. The Fiction/Death Border in Metafiction: From Vigilance to Transgression

The justice that the corpus does to the radical reading of responsibility in philosophical writings represents a significant progression with respect to how fiction's responsiveness to death is traditionally depicted in metafiction. For fictional works with distinctly metafictional features, such as *One Thousand and One Nights,* are responsible for giving fiction, or storytelling, a life-affirming reputation. In the Arabian folk tales, Scheherazade responds to impending death by narrating one story after another. Her consummate storytelling earns her a reprieve from the death sentence decreed by her husband, King Shahryar, whose wives are executed before they can be unfaithful to him. She employs the device of suspense night after night, until the king falls in love with her and calls off the death sentence. Scheherazade is widely regarded as a representative of fiction's "postponement of human death" (Faris 811). Her embodiment of fiction as a response to death reflects positively on the latter, in that death emerges as a possible "muse" based on the "stories" and offspring that result from Scheherazade's union with a death-giving king (816). The affirmative potential of fiction, in the form of "Scheherazadian narrators", has been integrated, both explicitly and implicitly, into notable works of fiction by Proust, Borges, Barth and Nabokov (826).

J.M. Coetzee's metafictional works, such as the post-apartheid novel, *Disgrace* (1999), are intimately related to my study because they deal with the death/violence-fiction border, depict how reading and writing link up with violence and treat responsibility in relation to violence that is politically motivated, yet not fully

accountable. The reading-writing-violence relation, a central focus in Coetzee's metafictional novels, is reflected by the non-representation of gang rape in *Disgrace,* which implies that real violence is resistant to narration. In "The Possibility of Ethical Action: J.M. Coetzee's Disgrace" (2000), Mike Marais discusses the intersection between narration, responsibility and violence in the context of what is explicitly metafictional about *Disgrace,* namely, its stress on imaginative identification. Imaginative identification, a desire for otherness that mitigates violence, is negated because ethical possibilities are contingent on representation. This identification is unpacked in the context of intertextual references, the protagonist's artistic ambitions and reflections on the act of writing. In Marais' study, the ethical necessity of "imaginative identification" is, initially, inferred from the novel's treatment of empirical violence and steadily gravitates towards being implicated in the violence of representation. I, on the other hand, read them alongside each other because the two forms of violence are juxtaposed in the corpus.

Gareth Cornwell's "Realism, Rape, and J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*" (2002) is relevant because it looks at the exclusionary violence of writing in the context of a void to do with empirical violence, namely, the non-depiction of gang rape in *Disgrace.* This void is read in the light of the "surplus", or excess, that representation cannot accommodate (319). Cornwell's reading links the violence of writing with its empirical counterpart, but in a way that conveys the gap between them. He calls this gap a "metafictional subtext", which allows one to read the protagonist's and focalizer's inability to "witness" "his daughter's violation" in the light of the barrier between fiction and reality: "Forced to be an outsider, Lurie [protagonist] here becomes a figure for both

the novelist and the reader, those who desire the impossible -to participate in the experience of others - and who deludedly believe that the exchange of words can enable that participation"(319).This "metafictional subtext" is significant because it lays bare the vigilance with which Coetzee patrols the border between the invasiveness of fiction and real violence (319). Cornwell cites from Coetzee's interview in his reading of the "subtext": "Coetzee has always been scrupulously respectful of 'otherness' and sensitive to questions of the author's authority to represent or speak for 'the other'. On the other hand, he has endorsed a view of the novelist 'as a person, who, camped before a closed door, facing an insufferable ban, creates, in place of the scene he is forbidden to see, a representation of that scene'" (319). In this statement, Coetzee *implies* that the border is both responsible for mitigating infiltration and yet, in of itself, is constituted on the basis of transgression. In my corpus, this border is consistently violated in ways that go beyond infringement. For the fictional works imply the fine line between fiction's responsiveness to death and the responsibility it bears for *making* death come about.

Even studies of metafiction that draw on "Literature in Secret" do not go beyond a certain limit when it comes to the role of fiction. My reference is to Adam Kelly's *American Fiction in Transition: Observer-Hero Narrative, the 1990s and Postmodernism* (2013), in which fiction emerges as paralyzed in the face of representing decisions. In Kelly's discussion, the impossibility of narrating decisions is looked at in the context of novels that belong to the observer-hero genre and in which the narrator reflects on a significant role model or hero who has passed away. The departed is associated with an agency, heroism and capacity for decision-making that, according to Fredric Jameson, has become defunct in the postmodern era, in which the prevailing

preoccupation is with the "event", or what happens to the subject. According to Kelly, Derrida's reading of the decision is a valuable response to the postmodern situation, for it looks at decision in terms of both agency and passivity, that is, it is an instance of subjectivity that is subject to the event because the other decides in me. By employing *The Gift of Death* in conjunction with its companion essay, the study bears out the relevance of Derrida's perspective on literature to metafiction, which is extended in my study to account for fiction's active involvement in the agency and passivity of decision-making.

Margaret Gibson's "Death Scenes: Ethics of the Face and Cinematic Deaths" (2001) deals with fiction and its violations in the context of film. Gibson's look at how cinematic representations of death scenes are torn between conveying and annihilating the "alterity of death" (313) accounts for how fiction impinges on death. This transgression is magnified in my corpus, in which fiction is directly responsible for giving death. The main problem with Gibson's study is that there is no mention of "meta", even though it deals with films which feature cameras and recording devices that are used to capture the death of others. This omission makes a difference, in that the challenge of segregating the ethical from the transgressive is not adequately accounted for from the viewer's perspective: "[T]he observer always changes the observed" (Waugh 3).

The deathly aspect to fiction's responsiveness to death has not received adequate attention, nor been treated in any sustained fashion. This gap is attested to by Philipp Schweighauser's "Metafiction, Transcendence, and Death in Nabokov's *Lolita*" (1998/99), which attempts to fill it, as well to explain it in the context of how an inquiry

into death and suffering is incompatible with metafiction's "anti-realist" stance and focus on "fiction-making" (100). Schweighauser quotes from Nabokov's *Bend Sinister* to illustrate the genre's resistance to being called to account for its representations of death and violence: "In metafiction, death may be but a question of style" (100). He proceeds to build on Linda Kauffman's reading, in which intertextuality is shown to be heavily implicated in the suffering of *Lolita*. The relevance of the study lies in the correlation it shows between stories and actual violence and death. The violating dimension to stories is taken into account from the perspective of the role they play in the sexual violence committed on Lolita's person by the narrator-protagonist, Humbert. What is make-believe, such as fairy tales, is shown to be reworked into unreliable interpretations that disguise sexual abuse and allow Humbert to play victim to Lolita's fatal charm.

J. Allan Mitchell's "Chaucer's 'Clerk's Tale' and the Question of Ethical Monstrosity" (2005) gives due consideration to fiction's stake in the monstrosity of responsibility. His examination of a narrative commonly compared to the Binding, namely, Geoffrey Chaucer's "Clerk's Tale", in the light of *The Gift of Death* is relevant for two reasons. Firstly, the metafictional features of the tale are highlighted by Mitchell, who analyzes the ethical dilemma within the narrative in the light of its in-built fictive audience and its questionable responses. A story of "monstrous morality" is approached on the basis of how it pushes one to question the morality of the story. The structure of the tale, its oscillating between the parabolic and parodic, represents the lens through which Mitchell scrutinizes Griselda's astounding obedience to a husband who orders her to relinquish her newborns so that he can put them to death. The priority Mitchell gives to the aesthetics of the tale takes into account the reader's implication in what is

repeatedly spoken of as monstrous and also reflects on the role that fiction plays in constructing that monstrosity. The latter angle is highlighted in my study via Derrida's essay on literature, which, as mentioned earlier, offers an opportunity to articulate what remains implicit about the fictitiousness of the divine command in Genesis 22. Regardless of its exclusion of Derrida's essay, Mitchell's account makes way for a more explicit treatment of fiction's ethical monstrosity by alluding to the violence of storytelling within narratives of revelation.

This represents a critical move, which my study aims to build on; for the dominant trend in literary criticism is split between fiction as life-affirming, and fiction as an acknowledgement of its limitations. My investigation into what can be potentially violent, or transgressive, about the affirmative role of fiction is an attempt to explore this unaccounted-for territory. There are implications to fiction's relation to death that are not so reassuring and which have, largely, been overlooked in literary studies. The self-reflexivity of metafiction has, to some extent, taken into account the risks that arise from fictional representations of real violence. This consideration is evident in studies of Coetzee's metafictional novels. These studies highlight the ways in which self-reflexivity can be and is employed by Coetzee to respect the difference, or gap, between fiction and reality. The necessity of upholding this difference presupposes that this limit can be transgressed, that the boundary itself is constituted on the basis of infiltration.

Fiction's bearing out of inaccessibility is not negated in this study. In fact, this role of fiction figures as the context for investigating contraventions that arise from responding to otherness. The attempt is to account for what spills over into the gap between fiction and death. These spills are by no means accounted for as exclusively

violent. On the contrary, the selected works, which situate the dilemma of responsibility in contexts of real political violence, suggest contravention as a possible intervention, albeit not one without its problems.

Chapter Overview

The research focus in this study is on the risk of violence that giving is shown to bear in the context of fiction's relation to death. Fiction's representation of what is literary *and* interpretative opens onto two interconnected and ethically problematic relationships: the relation between interpretative and empirical violence and the relation between the works and the reader/viewer, which represents reading as a possible mitigation of interpretative violence. The violence of giving, inclusive of the death that arises from, as well as conditions, responding, undercuts the choice traditionally associated with responding.

This multi-relational research focus unfolds through specific relationships in the metafictional works, in which the conceptual making-unmaking of "good", "belonging" and "survival" is rendered inseparable from "real" violence. The value of violence in *A Clockwork Orange* materializes in the form of vandalism, rape, theft and assault, which Alex performs with a view to entertaining the reader. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist,* the shift from (post-9/11) belonging to be-longing represents an affirmative one, from having to longing. But the romantic concept of yearning takes the form of violating sexual intimacy and in so doing, undergoes a drastic upheaval. In *Son of Saul*, the illusion of afterlife endangers the survival of inmates in the death camp.

Chapter one in my thesis revolves around Nadsat, the violent slant that it gives to fiction with respect to its role towards death. Fiction's giving of death is looked at via

Nadsat's indeterminate representation of "teen" and "adult", the disquieting implications that this permeability has with regard to choice and freedom, and with respect to the argot's deconstruction of free will. The teen-adult indeterminacy, which reflects on signification, simultaneously points to the social, cultural and political factors that condition teen violence, thereby suggesting that violation is also undergone in choosing to violate others. This suggestion is borne out by the father-figure State, which subjects Alex to moral programming in order to render him non-violent. Fiction plays a leading role in the programming, which reflects critically on the maltreatment of teens and runs contrary to, as well as gives a radical re-reading of, free will. Moral programming is linked to another possibility of giving death: Alex's vision of fatherhood, a possibility that could replicate violence in the form of a hoodlum son. This vision is argued in the chapter as a shift in the tradition of paternal responsibility, one that is positive, yet touched by violence.

In chapter two, I focus on how *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* uncovers the fictiveness of belonging, rendering it into a longing (be-longing) for what remains elusive. The gap between longing and having is negotiated, with troubling implications, by means of role-playing, which is discussed in the dual sense of playacting and responsibility. The account that Changez gives of his key responses is permeated by inaccessibility, which could have to do with responding and what remains unaccountable about it. But it could just as easily suggest that the narrative might be a concoction deployed to avert death, or to disarm the stranger prior to giving him death. This uncertainty, which exemplifies the intersection between death, responsibility and fiction, implicates the reader in the tension between responsibility and identity. I tackle this

tension with the help of Derrida's afterthought to *The Gift of Death*, "Abraham, the Other" (2008), which looks into the implications of election that stalk Abraham's self-uprooting response: "Here I am". The tussle between election and deracination is pertinent to Changez's role-playing.

In chapter three, along with *The Gift of Death*, I enlist Derrida's reading of burial in *The Beast and the Sovereign* (2011), for the sake of analyzing the mission of burial in *Son of Saul*. Saul's encounter with the boy who inexplicably survives the gas chamber opens onto an affirmative possibility that puts a number of lives at stake. On witnessing the boy's asphyxiation by a Nazi doctor, Saul claims him as his son and sets out to bury him. His claim to paternity bears an element of fictiveness because it cannot be verified in a death camp where all documents belonging to prisoners are destroyed. When called to account regarding a mission that puts his own life and the lives of other prisoners at risk, Saul responds with the claim: "We are already dead", which speaks of his relation to death, yet does not accurately represent his condition. The latter claim is unraveled in the chapter with respect to the co-implication it suggests between survival and death. This co-implication is as evident in the possibility of afterlife that, according to Derrida, unavoidably haunts burial because of our inability to access death. Saul's *making* a son of the dead boy is a strikingly tender instance of fiction's affirmative intervention in the context of death. But this intervention is given a fatal dimension in the film.

Chapter One

Re-Examining Responsibility in Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*

> Linguistics and metaphysics - the how and what of *A Clockwork Orange* - are the disparate, yet connected threads leading to the Minotaur-
>
> -Petix, 1986.

Esther Petix speaks of Nadsat, the argot coined exclusively for teens by Anthony Burgess in *A Clockwork Orange* (1962), in relation to the Minotaur (124). The latter is a mythical monster depicted in Greek mythology as enclosed within a labyrinth, where it feeds on mortals sacrificed to him by King Minos.[23] The link between labyrinth and sacrificial violence fits in with the not-knowing that constitutes the gap-relation between language and truth (the Word) in Nadsat. In the novella, the Word takes the form of the Christian concept of free will, which is uncovered as an enigma that cannot be grasped fully, yet must be endured. God's insistence on the necessity of choosing between right and wrong is puzzled over in the text as a gift from Him that puts mortals in a bind. The divine injunction, despite its categorical character, is shown to be cryptic, for it does not tell us what is right, wrong, good or bad, only that we have to choose between the two. What if we *think* something is good but it turns out to be bad?

The text's grounding of free will in inaccessibility gives choice a violating dimension, at the level of signification and action. Although the enigma of free will in *A Clockwork Orange* originates in God's inscrutability, the implications of not knowing

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[23] Esther Petix's "Linguistics, Mechanics, and Metaphysics: Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*" (1962) is one of the essays (121-130) in Geoffrey Aggeler's *Critical Essays on Anthony Burgess*, Boston Massachusetts: G. K. Hall & Co, 1986.

are not only fleshed out in a context of human relationships but take perturbingly corporeal overtones. This feature ties in with *The Gift of Death*, which unravels the infinity of God in Genesis 22 in terms of the infinite effects of mortal limitations and in so doing, uncovers Abraham's radical response to God as problematic on account of mortality.

The focus of this chapter is the permeability between choice and violation, which is analyzed in the light of Nadsat's indeterminate representation of teens and deconstruction of free will. These features represent giving with a violent dimension, as demonstrated in this chapter. The teen-adult indeterminacy, which owes itself to the text's construction of adolescence in terms of adult prerogatives impinging on the state of childhood, represents the choice-violation relation in more than one sense. While it stands for the possibility of freedom in the face of political oppression, this indeterminacy simultaneously emerges as a basis for conflating choice and violence and points to undergoing violation out of choice for the sake of freedom.

Thought through as the self's willingness to subject itself to what is inaccessible about the other, free will counters and is re-read via moral programming. Faced with resistance from teen gangs which loot, vandalize and rape indiscriminately, the State invents the Ludovico Technique, a form of biological-psychological conditioning designed to render delinquents non-violent, or *moral*. This dire futuristic world is witnessed through the eyes of one such hoodlum, Alex, who chooses to undergo the Ludovico Technique for the sake of an early release from prison. In the hoodlum's account of the treatment, we witness how the *meaning*: "[v]iolence is a very horrible thing" (121) is administered *bodily* to him by the State doctors. On a daily basis, Alex is

injected with a serum, strapped to a seat and, by means of contraptions that forcibly keep his eyelids open, coerced into watching images of graphic violence on film. These means induce gagging, nausea and weakness in the *subject*, effectively precluding him from acting on his violent inclinations, but also, unsettlingly, reducing him to a cowering mess in the face of potentially violent others. On being released from prison, the former delinquent becomes subject to retribution at the hands of his former victims.

In rendering Alex physically defenseless, with no choice but to be good to others, the conditioning treatment lays bare how preventing crime can also be violent. In so doing, the Ludovico Technique highlights responsibility from the perspective of the violence it involves. Moral programming gives a decidedly grim version of taking responsibility for the other, which cannot be dismissed, given the context of delinquency with its conflicting implications of vulnerability and crime. In the context of teens, the latter could (but in the novella does not) represent possibilities that are *largely* positive, although potentially reductive towards the other, such as caring for his/her wellbeing or acting as guarantor of his/her actions. That said, the violence of moral programming, as illustrated further on, is implicated in giving, in that it does open onto a *slight* shift within the tradition of paternal responsibility through Alex's "visions" of fatherhood (210). This chapter treats these "visions" in the context of the overarching fiction-death relation, showing how this giving instance of paternity is not devoid of violence and potentially emerges as nothing more than a story.

The reductive implications of moral programming are countered by free will, yet the possibility that violence could be intrinsic to choice undermines the either/or basis of the free will versus conditioning dilemma. Stanley Edgar Hyman makes a note of this

undermining in his "Afterword" to the 1963 Norton edition of the novella: "Alex always *was* a clockwork orange, a machine for mechanical violence far below the level of choice" (italics in original 179). Robert Bowie (1981) gives a more nuanced reading of the limits of free will; based on "how events occur with an almost predetermined inevitability" (410), Burgess is said to read free will as that which could be "limited" but "extant" (411). The limitations of free will do not eradicate the difference between free will and moral programming; for the former emerges as a possibility conditioned, unavoidably so, by violence and involves an *openness* to violating otherness, whereas the Ludovico Technique is an instance of enlisting violent means to control the other. However, as mentioned earlier on, the responsibility of dealing with violent teens makes it challenging to segregate responsibility *to* from responsibility *for*, the tension between which is exacerbated by the teen-adult indeterminacy.

The reading-interpretation tension links up with Nadsat, its representation of the relation between art and violence. This tension and relation pertain to the equation between reader and text. I discuss the text's construction of the implied reader in the context of fiction's self-reflexivity with respect to its responsibility. This is because the implied reader, visualized as an audience, implicates the actual reader in Nadsat's re-readings of good and bad and in so doing, draws attention to their potential fictiveness (in the interpretative sense). The violence that characterizes responding, both thematically and structurally, is an instance of consistency that becomes questionable on account of the pervasiveness of fiction and its role in giving death.

Fiction's relation to death is inclusive of the violent encounter, or near-death, that is said to have gone into the making of *A Clockwork Orange*. During the Second World

War, Burgess' pregnant wife was assaulted by "*four* [like the gang of droogs] American GI deserters" (italics in original Ingersoll 62). In their "struggle to remove her wedding ring", the attackers caused her to "miscarr[y]" and suffer "chronic hemorrhaging" (Ingersoll 62). Around the same time, Burgess was misdiagnosed as terminally ill. Fearing that, in the event of his death, his semi-invalid wife would be left in straitened circumstances, he decided to write as many novels as he could (Ingersoll 62). These real-life incidents are woven into the novella, which contains a replica of itself, "A Clockwork Orange", written by Burgess' stand-in, F. Alexander. The fictive author's wife is gang raped by Alex and his gang. Earl Ingersoll's comment: "Burgess had no way of confronting his wife's assailants, except perhaps imaginatively" (62) reflects on the role that fiction plays with respect to obligations that are pressing yet cannot be *real*ized.[24] The miscarriage sustained by Burgess' wife also links up with F. Alexander, whose encounter with a post-Ludovico Alex is crucial to the way in which paternal responsibility evolves in the narrative.

The personal history integrated into the narrative sets the tone for some of the other metafictional features, such as the Ludovico Technique, which lampoons the theory of behaviorism advanced by the American psychologist, B.F. Skinner. Skinner claims that human behavior is a product of the environment and is conditioned by principles of reinforcement and punishment. His ruling out of "dualism of mind and body" by behaviorism (Malone Jr. 141) renders "metaphysical" concepts, such as free will, as redundant (Malone, Jr. 143). On account of the threat it poses to free will,

[24] In a 1972 interview with the London *Evening News*, Burgess stated: "I had to get this damn thing [wife's assault] out of my system. I wrote the scene where a writer and his wife are attacked…the house they live in is called 'home'. That's how strongly I felt" (qtd. in Krämer xviii). This interview is cited in Peter Krämer's *A Clockwork Orange*, Macmillan International Higher Education, 2011.

behaviorism is satirized, not only in *A Clockwork Orange* but in Burgess' "A Fable for Social Scientists" (Newman 65) in which "'B.F.'" stands for "Bemused Fictionalizer" (Newman 65).[25] This mockery of Skinner's initials reflects on the Ludovico Technique's use of fictional components, which flesh out the behavioral perspective in terms of violence. The Technique incorporates fictional reconstructions of "real-life" crimes committed by Alex, and enlists his beloved Beethoven symphonies, the preeminent muse for his violent antics, to condition him *against* violence. Via the "cure", which, as Robert Bowie observes, "sound[s]" suspiciously similar to Ludwig van (415), Alex encounters the relation he draws between art and violence as horrifyingly other.

The hoodlum's aesthetic sense is discussed in Vincent A. O'Keefe's "The 'Truth' about Reading: Interpretative Instability in the Evolution of Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*" (1999) in the light of genre. According to Derrida's "The Law of Genre", instability haunts genre's conditioning of interpretation: "A text cannot belong to no genre, it cannot be without or less a genre. Every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging" (65). Derrida's reading is drawn on by O'Keefe with respect to the novella's preoccupation with genre as a means of controlling interpretation (41). This preoccupation, which is inferred via the conditions under which Alex performs violence, is also attributed to Burgess, whose official statements on the novella are discussed in the light of how they attempt to regulate readers' responses (40-

[25] In an article published in *The Listener*, 17 February, 1972, Burgess states that "B.F. Skinner, with his ability to believe that there is something beyond freedom and dignity, wants to see the death of autonomous man. He may or may not be right but in terms of the Judaeo-Christian ethic that *A Clockwork Orange* tries to express, he is perpetrating a gross heresy" (qtd. in Bowie 405). Burgess's statement cited by Robert Bowie in "Freedom and Art in *A Clockwork Orange*: The Christian Premises of Dostoevsky", *Thought* 56.223 (1981): 402-16.

2). Burgess's attempt, via explanatory introductions, to control the reception of his novella is said to conflict with his endorsement of choice.

Whereas O'Keefe's take on interpretation links up with the constraining dimension to choice, other critics have predominantly taken the novella's affirmative stance on moral choice at face value, so much so that the novella is made to appear "as a kind of *sermon* on choice" (my italics Aggeler 8).[26] My contention that the novella deconstructs free will, or moral choice, deviates from secondary literature that views Burgess' depiction of moral choice in *A Clockwork Orange* as didactic and dichotomous (free will/conditioning). The novella's ending, in which Alex forsakes his violent droog lifestyle for marriage and fatherhood, has contributed to this trend in interpretation (Bradley 481-2; McEntee 323). This ending, which unfolds in chapter twenty-one, was not included in the American edition when the novella first came out in 1962, the reason being that Alex's volte-face was viewed by American publishers as inconsistent with the rest of the narrative. As far as they were concerned, the narrative ended in chapter twenty, in which a deconditioned Alex envisions himself as "carving the whole litso [face] of the creeching world with [his] cut-throat britva" (199). Norton's reintroduction of the original ending in its 1986 edition is accompanied by Burgess' account of why he "meant the book to end in this way" (xv). In this account, titled "Introduction: *A Clockwork Orange* Resucked", the author not only champions the original ending on the basis that a novel must entail "*moral* transformation" (my italics xii) but concedes that it is "didactic" (xiv). Although such statements affirm the trend in secondary literature, the

[26] In *The Listener*, 17 February, 1972, Burgess states that "*A Clockwork Orange* was intended to be a sort of tract, even a sermon, on the importance of the power of choice" (198). Cited by Bowie.

ending, as I demonstrate further on, is faithful to the juxtaposition of "clockwork" and "orange" in the title.

There are critics who counter the general trend, such as Julian Coleman, who states that the didactic slant ought to be resisted in favor of responding to the text's use of "techniques and form" (62). But her study, despite its interesting premise, pays scant, if any, attention to Nadsat's charging of *good* with *bad*. Her study considers, although not in any in-depth way, how the political-legal milieu in the fictional world could be responsible for Alex's violent tendencies. This angle, pertinent to the text's representation of responsibility for the other, is dealt with much more comprehensively by Todd F. Davis and Kenneth Womack, who posit Alex's sudden veering towards paternity as an "ethical" (20) response to the "dysfunctional pseudo-families" he is hampered by in terms of interpersonal growth (28). Davis and Womack's interdisciplinary study, "'O My Brothers': Reading the Anti-Ethics of the Pseudo-Family in Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*" (2002), is relevant to the novella's tackling of responsibility because it weighs the impact that family structures have on individual development or selfhood (family systems psychotherapy) in the light of Martha Nussbaum's practice of ethical criticism.

The latter, popularly known as the "ethical turn" in literary studies, focuses on the interrelationship between ethics and literary texts (Eskin 557) and is comprised of scholars from diverging schools of thought, deconstruction being one of them. However, Derrida's belonging to the 'ethical turn' in literary criticism is thought to be complicated, on account of his deconstructive approach to the ethical (Eskin 559). On the one hand, his drawing on literature to expose the limitations of philosophical perspectives on

morality and ethics is said to predate the ethical turn, whereas, on the other, his deconstruction of moral concepts is said to exclude him from an interest in the ethical (Eskin 559). The tension between Nussbaum's and Derrida's approach to the ethical, which is integral to how my reading departs from Davis and Womack's, is dealt with in the context of Alex's vision of fatherhood. The shift from moral to ethical in Davis and Womack's study is also of immense value to my discussion. The conflict that arises from how we draw on different readings of the ethical also poses a clash that leads to interesting insights into the dilemma of responsibility.

Last but not least, this chapter builds on Esther Petix's examination of Nadsat's re-presentation of good and bad. In lines immediately preceding the epigraph to this chapter, Petix observes that although the question of moral choice – "Does God want goodness or the choice of goodness?" - is the "central thematic and structural interrogative of the novel[la]", "there is something at once delightful and horrid, dogged and elusive in *A Clockwork Orange* that even so profound a rhetorical question cannot contain" (124). The excess that Petix intuits in the dystopian novella points to a riveting opportunity to explore the dilemma from the perspective of whether choice is moral or not. My probing of moral choice in *A Clockwork Orange* draws its impetus from Petix's chapter, which invokes Søren Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* (1843) in relation to the ethical tensions that riddle *A Clockwork Orange*.[27]

Written under the pseudonym Johannes de Silentio, *Fear and Trembling* responds to Abraham's decision to obey God with both horror and awe. The dilemma faced by the patriarch is dealt with on the basis of a conflict between the religious and

[27] In a footnote, Bowie mentions that Robert Morris' *The Consolations of Ambiguity* (1971) "trace[s] Burgess' theme of free will back to Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard" (404).

the ethical, one that is resolved via the claim that responding to a divine call is an exceptional instance of responsibility that demands a suspension of the ethical (Caputo 9).[28] The fact that *Fear and Trembling* is mentioned in Petix's chapter in the context of its "paradoxes" (126), as opposed to its resolution, arguably indicates that it is on account of what is irresolvable that the parallel between the fictional dilemma and the Biblical one is drawn. The potentially *bind*ing relationship between the novella and the philosophical text is not the focus of Petix's analysis of Nadsat, which I take forward with the help of *The Gift of Death*'s re-reading of *Fear and Trembling* and secularization of Abrahamic responsibility.

This section has mapped out the research concerns focused on in my analysis of *A Clockwork Orange*: fiction's giving of death in the double sense and the tension it gives rise to between reading and interpretation. The mortal implications of the Word are fleshed out in *A Clockwork Orange,* as they are in *The Gift of Death*. The novella re-presents God's gift of free will to His creation in ways that render choice subject to violation and in so doing, speak of a deathly dimension to giving. Offered courtesy of a fictive argot, this deathly dimension invites re-readings from the reader. However, the possibility of re-reading is problematized because the groundlessness of Nadsat, on account of its fictiveness, makes it challenging to differentiate what the argot gives from meanings given by the reader. This implicating overlap, courtesy of Nadsat, is looked at in the next section with respect to fiction's self-reflexivity regarding its relation to death and violence.

[28] "Looking the Impossible in the Eye: Kierkegaard, Derrida, and the Repetition of Religion" by John D. Caputo, *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* Vol. 2002 (2002): 1-25.

The Metafictions of Nadsat

M. Keith Booker's following comments on Nadsat (1994) betray the uneasiness the novella gives rise to with respect to its infusing of art with violence:

> This language is inescapably associated with the beatings, rapes, and murders it is used to describe and the almost musical quality of the language (echoing Alex's own love of classical music) thinly disguises the ideology of hatred and violence of which the language is the verbal medium. The unusual nature of the language of Burgess' text to a certain extent distances the reader from the horrors being narrated, thereby making them initially less repugnant, perhaps even luring the reader into a certain complicity with Alex's actions. But upon reflection the radical disjunction between the musical sound of Alex's language and the actual content of his narration may make the seduction of nadsat language seem nearly as repugnant as the crimes Alex uses it to describe. (135)[29]

The conflation of music and violence that Booker starts out with ("inescapably associated") splits into language as ideology and a musical quality that masks the "hatred and violence". The "radical disjunction" that Booker establishes between Nadsat's rhythm and content is not borne out by coined words, such as "tolchocking", which, by means of its *sound,* evokes physical violence.[30] This coining effectively closes the gap between literary fictions and interpretative ones. Given that "tolchocking" is neither

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[29] Previously published as "Anthony Burgess: *A Clockwork Orange* (1962)" in *Dystopian Literature: A Theory and Research Guide*, Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1994.

[30] The bodily dimension to Nadsat is tackled by Robbie B.H.Goh in "'Clockwork' Language Reconsidered: Iconicity and Narrative in Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* (2000). Nadsat is read by Goh in the light of "onomatopoea" and "iconicity", which Charles Sander Peirce uses to talk about the "'resemblance' between the formal or material aspects of the sign, and its signified" (266). The "iconic and bodily gestures he [Alex] forces language to perform, in violation of conventional rules" (275) enhances "interpretative activity" because this bodily approach to language is "suggestive", as opposed to "scientific" (271).

English nor Russian, nor a combination of the two, the evoking of violence is something that the reader must take responsibility for. In protesting against the use of Beethoven's symphonies in the Ludovico Technique, Alex indirectly admits to his own conflation of music and violence as a projection: "Using Ludwig van like that. He did no harm to anyone. Beethoven just wrote music" (128). This admission is significant from the perspective of "fiction" and its multiple senses. For here we have a fictive argot obliquely reflecting on its own misreading of art. The value borne by this instance of self-reflexivity is also noticeably undecidable, in that fiction, both literary and interpretative, is implicated in violence, yet also absolved in the context of music, also an artistic invention.

Burgess' allusion to the invented argot as a means of screening "pornograph[ic]" (intro xiv) content points to how both the text and reader are responsible for constructing violence. Nadsat's safeguarding the reader from violence is also spoken of by Booker, but, in Burgess' statement, it is accompanied by the implication that Nadsat can be used as a screen by the reader to project his/her own constructions of violence. Via this screening technique, which precludes a relation to violence on a selective basis, Nadsat subjects the reader to the constraints that condition choice within the fictional world. In a sense, this bringing home represents a fictive device's *real*ization of a story of responsibility, one that revolves around violence. This realization reflects ambivalently on fiction, which lays bare the unreliability of interpretation by collapsing the distinction between literary fictions and the groundlessness that conditions value systems. This dismantling would not be tenable in a real-life context, where values, despite their

groundlessness, have a tried and tested quality. The value of Nadsat is that it tests the value we give to traditional, or mainstream, conceptions of morality.

Courtesy of Nadsat, the reader is placed on the inside-outside of the dilemma of responsibility, which it *responds* to through reading. The inside-outside positioning of the reader mirrors the undecidability that the differing and deferring of signification wreaks within language. By means of undecidability, Derrida takes into account the excess of meaning that is sacrificed in the process of representing a word or concept. This excess is never fully excluded, in that a concept's identity is haunted by instability. Derrida's writings demonstrate how the instability intrinsic to language is responsible for, as well as impacts, one's relation with the other, be it actual others (people), or the self's inability to know itself fully. Undecidability is a feature we come up against in the context of decision-making, which, besides entailing communication with others, forces us to reflect on our partial understanding of the demands made on us by others. The term's close resemblance to indecision is misleading, for undecidability underscores the urgency of deciding in the face of not knowing.

The multiple contexts in which undecidability (an effect of *différance*) plays out in *A Clockwork Orange* are dealt with in the following sections. These undecidable contexts represent a relational dynamic between oppositional terms, such as choice-violation, teen-adult, good-bad and conditioning-free will. Undecidability also applies to the novella's depiction of paternal responsibility. *A Clockwork Orange*, which evokes the State as a tyrannical father-figure and shows actual fathers and mentors to be infantile and irresponsible, represents a more giving version of paternity through Alex's "visions" of fatherhood. This split between "giving" and violence within paternity is one

indication of undecidability, which is as applicable to the symbolic, real and imaginary forms the familial bond takes in the novella. As illustrated in the next section, this undecidable depiction of paternal responsibility fleshes out paternity in Derrida's reading of the near-sacrifice.

A "Novel" Version of Paternity

Undecidability is also very much in evidence in Derrida's reading of the near-sacrifice. Responsibility, said to be rigorously patriarchal in *The Gift of Death*: "[A] story of father and son, of masculine figures, of hierarchies among men: God the father, Abraham, Isaac" (76), is given an opening in the form of literature as *différance* in "Literature in Secret". This opening demonstrates how literature's staging of *différance* undoes the proprietorial sense of paternity. Isaac talks back to his [F]ather through literature's showcasing of the movement of signification. *The Gift of Death* critiques the patriarchal roots of responsibility for the sake of highlighting the "exclusion" of "woman" by "the system" of "sacrificial responsibility" (76). The "woman" question is given due consideration in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, whereas the "hierarchies among" fathers and sons are challenged by *A Clockwork Orange* and *Son of Saul*.

The Gift of Death has been criticized by Dominick La Capra and Chris Danta for sacrificing the importance of Isaac, the sacrificial victim. In *History and its Limits: Human, Animal, Violence* (2009), La Capra argues that Derrida's "excessive focus on the excessive gift" excludes the victims "typical[ly]" spoken of as the "gift" in a context of "sacrifice", in this case, Isaac and the ram (182). The word "gift" applies to doubly to Isaac, a son who was gifted to Abraham and Sarah when both of them were past the age

of child bearing.[31] The gist of La Capra's argument, which Chris Danta builds on in his critique of *The Gift of Death,* is that the Biblical event, in which the ram is sacrificed as a substitute for Isaac, can be approached on the basis of how it foregrounds "the problem of the sacrificial victim", which remains, in the context of animals, unresolved even today (Danta "Test of Secrecy" 68). This problem, according to La Capra, is sidelined by *The Gift of Death* in favor of a "dialogue" that is conducted solely between "Abraham, God and Derrida" (La Capra 182).[32] La Capra's dismissal of *différance* weakens his critique of Derrida's reading of the near-sacrifice. He questions the leap that *The Gift of Death* undertakes from an irrational instance of actual sacrifice to the exclusionary violence that underpins all decisions: "Kierkegaard himself did not simply affirm the "madness" of Abraham's decision, which implies, for Derrida, the madness of all decisions. Rather Kierkegaard raised the question of Abraham's possible madness as a consideration that rendered his decision, along with all comparable decisions, radically problematic" (183). "[A]ll comparable decisions" implies that La Capra's use of "madness" is in the traditional, pathological sense, whereas Derrida's use of "madness" refers to the mortal limitations that condition signification.

However, La Capra's criticism has considerable weight as far as Derrida's sidelining of Isaac's role as sacrificial victim is concerned. *The Gift of Death,* which focuses exclusively on the first divine injunction, does not take into account that there are readings of Genesis 22 which represent God's last-minute intervention as a

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[31] In *The Reason of the Gift* (2011), Jean-Luc Marion argues that the Biblical patriarch, in sacrificing Isaac, is giving a gift that "ha[d] already been a gift given by God to Abraham and Sarah who were both too advanced in their years for child bearing" (Bechtol 150). Quote taken from Harris B. Bechtol's "Abrahamic Figurations of Responsibility: Religion without Religion in Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion", *Phainomena* 26.100/101 (2017): 135-154.

[32] La Capra's discussion is inclusive of Derrida's treatment of the sacrificial victim in "The Animal that Therefore I Am".

significant shift from the polytheistic practice of child sacrifice to monotheism's precedent of sacrificing animals in the place of first-born males.[33] In defense of Derrida, the spare, cryptic, structure of Genesis 22 does not offer sufficient evidence to bear out these readings. However, they do reinforce that the Biblical narrative can be read in terms of a more progressive version of paternity, which not only accounts for violent parental practices but, via God's last-minute intervention, undercuts a father's act of imposing his decision on his son.

Speaking of imposition, in *The Gift of Death*, Abraham is said to keep God's command a secret from everyone, including the victim-to-be, because he does not want anyone to stand in the way of his duty to God. His silence effectively renders his sacrifice into a possibility of murder, which is rigorously accounted *for* in *The Gift of Death*: "In order to assume his absolute responsibility vis-á-vis absolute duty, to put his faith in God to work, or to the test, he [Abraham] must also in reality remain a hateful murderer, for he consents to put to death" (66). Yet the prophet's decision to withhold the right of choice from Isaac - he chooses to play God with respect to his son's life and death - is not scrutinized in the light of *his* being given a choice by his Father. Drawing on the use of "test" in Genesis 22, both Kierkegaard and Derrida underscore that Abraham *chooses* to obey God, which is what makes it possible to argue the near-sacrifice as an act of responsibility. The choice is unpacked by Derrida with regard to the

[33] Steven Shankman's "Rembrandt's *The Sacrifice of Isaac*, Abraham's Suspended Knife, and the Face of the Other" (2011) cites Levinas and a number of Midrash sources - Shalom Spiegel being the most notable - in support of the Aqedah as a shift from polytheism to monotheism. Jon D. Levenson's "Abusing Abraham: Traditions, Religious Histories, and Modern Misinterpretations" (1998) states that "in ancient Israel the first-born son was long and widely believed to belong to God and must be offered to him, either through literal sacrifice (rarely, as in Genesis 22) or through one or another of the rituals by which a substitution was made" (270-1). In "Fathers and Firstlings: The Gendered Rhetoric of Child Sacrifice" (2013), Nicole J. Ruane, who cites Levenson extensively, corroborates that in Abraham's time, sacrificing children, specifically first-born males, was quite possibly an accepted practice.

suffering, anguish and irreparable loss that it inflicts on the father, to the extent - as Chris Danta observes - that the father usurps the role of victim ("Test of Secrecy" 68).

The Gift of Death lays a great deal of stress on the Biblical patriarch's paternal love, which is borne out by Genesis 22: "Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld *thy son, thine only son*, from me" (my italics Genesis 22:12). However, one cannot lose sight of the fact that, prior to Genesis 22, Abraham sacrifices - albeit not literally - Ishmael, his first-born son by the Egyptian handmaid, Hagar.[34] Sarah's inciting the patriarch to forsake Ishmael and Hagar to the wilderness is endorsed by God: "And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac thy seed shall be called" (Genesis 21:12). As soon as one ventures outside the frame of the Binding into other verses in the Genesis, Abraham's identity as a loving father becomes less assured and the harrowing picture that both Kierkegaard and Derrida paint of the near-sacrifice suggests a possible projection on their part, particularly since there are readings, such as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's, in which Abraham is viewed as a loveless character, as an unnatural father who felt distressed and anguished by his paternal feelings for Isaac (Ware 404).

There is, as Danta points out, a version of the Binding in the Qur'an, in which Abraham confides in his son (unnamed but said to be Ishmael), regarding the unfathomable command. In this version, the victim-to-be complies with his father's decision to obey God ("Test of Secrecy" 72). In all fairness, the exchange between father

[34] Moshe Reiss examines Abraham's history of moral lapses in "The Actions of Abraham: A Life of Ethical Contradictions." *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 24.2 (2010): 174-192.

and son is not a part of Genesis 22, which is the version that appears in *The Gift of Death*. But Danta, who dwells on how secrecy in *The Gift of Death* sacrifices Isaac's importance to Abraham's relation with God, argues that the patriarch's silence, treated as a foregone conclusion by Derrida (67), is also not borne out by any actual textual evidence in Genesis 22: "God never asks Abraham to keep his sacrificial command a secret in Genesis 22 […] God never swears Abraham to secrecy. Nor do we read anywhere in the Bible that Abraham actively concealed his sacrificial purpose from those around him" (67-8). In *The Gift of Death*, Abraham's abstaining from questioning his Father about a command that makes no sense to him is what makes his response a possibility of unconditional giving. In "Derrida, Abraham and Responsible Subjectivity" (2016), Patrik Fridlund pinpoints the ethical significance of the silence *between* Abraham and God by pointing out that making the other accountable to ethical generality is tantamount to undermining one's own subjectivity or capacity for responsible decision-making, for it is a way of ensuring that one's response is in accordance with existing laws, customs and values (63). Derrida scrupulously highlights what is affirmative *and* negative about secrecy, which does not merely stand for actual non-communication between God and Abraham but, first and foremost, represents the inaccessibility of representation (*différance*). Abraham's withholding of the command from Sarah and Isaac is acknowledged in *The Gift of Death* as an instance of deliberate secrecy but one that is entangled with the patriarch's inability to speak of a command he *cannot understand* (*GD* 60). Like La Capra, Danta does not take into account the role that *différance* plays in Derrida's reading of the near-sacrifice. That said, such partial

readings are not excluded by *The Gift of Death*, which also employs secrecy in the conventional sense (a deliberate withholding of information).

According to Danta, secrecy is a possibility that Derrida, like a number of scholars, reads into the gaps ("Test of Secrecy" 66), which can just as easily be said to hold out the possibility of "Isaac's tacit acquiescence" (68): "[I]t strains the bounds of psychological probability to think that Isaac fails to intuit what is going on as the two approach the summit of Mount Moriah. Surely Isaac realized at some point along the way that he was the one intended for the sacrifice? Surely he acquiesced in the sacrifice in letting Abraham bind him to the makeshift altar on Mount Moriah?" (68). Given Isaac's passivity and voicelessness in Genesis 22, Danta's reading, arguably, verges on a reading into, one that, nevertheless, lends some kind of agency, no matter how minimal, to the sacrificed son, who is made privy to a decision that concerns him the most intimately out of the three participants. Danta's reading also reflects more flatteringly on Abraham's identity as a father, which, in *The Gift of Death*, is shown to be torn between two extreme readings, a self-sacrificing father (93) *and* a perpetrator of" infanticide" (68).

Paternal responsibility is severely tested by the theme of crime and political oppression in *A Clockwork Orange*. The authoritarian State, an implacable father-figure, is confronted with conflicting obligations on account of its delinquent citizens. The focus on a vicious delinquent confronts one with what is, arguably, the worst (but necessary) form of taking responsibility for the other. This focus raises specific questions regarding choice: To what extent it is acceptable to deprive a criminal of his freedom? The possibility of deciding on this question is rendered undecidable by Nadsat's framing of

an encounter with a violent other in terms of what is violating about otherness. This stress on alterity is consistent with the philosophical underpinnings of a fictive argot that exposes morality as a linguistic construct. The fictional world not only examines the necessity of deciding on a criminal in the context of legal, political and social factors that could potentially be responsible *for* teen violence, but shows how this responsibility comes up against, yet cannot completely yield to, the pressing obligation to respect the otherness of the other. The theme of crime not only intensifies the violation that conditions choice in *The Gift of Death* (on account of *différance*), but implicates the reader in deciding *on* the other: "[H]ow many of us would prefer to leave him [Alex] with his free choice when we know that there is a good possibility he would freely choose to smash our skulls?" (Bowie 410).

Besides crime, the other feature that challenges traditional meanings of paternity is the fictiveness that stalks fatherhood in the novella. This feature, shared by *Son of Saul*, emerges on account of Alex's "visions" of fatherhood. As demonstrated further on, these "visions" exemplify literature as *différance*; for they represent an imaginary version in which fatherhood emerges as self-sacrificing and involves a subversion of paternal authority. The giving-death relation is reflected differently via the "visions", which are suspected of being an outcome of moral programming. A violent form of bodily conditioning is shown to open onto a re-presentation of traditional paternity and this re-presentation is depicted as an endless cycle that fathers and sons have no choice but to repeat. This sense of repeatability, which reflects the mechanizing of choice, is discussed in relation to the iterability that *différance*, or the movement of signification, sets in motion.

Nadsat's indeterminate construction of teen and adult also sets in motion good and bad implications of choice. The focus of the next section is this indeterminacy, the ways in which it unfolds in the light of the State's conditioning of violent teens. This conditioning is not restricted to the Ludovico Technique, but applies to the licentious freedom that the negligent State gives to the teens to violate others and in so doing, encroaches on their tender condition.

Transgressive Teen or Transgressing "Teen"?

The unstable identity of 'teen' is by far the most complex feature to the choice-violation relation, which is constructed on the basis of teens violating citizens at will and by means of the Ludovico Technique, which Alex volunteers to undergo because he does not consider what it might mean "to be *made* into a good boy" (my italics *Clockwork* 106). The text's (un)making of teen reflects on who bears responsibility *for* crime in the fictional world, teens or adults. Denoting 'teen' in Russian, Nadsat's intimate association with adult experiences comes through in the opening lines, which offer a chilling portrait of Alex and his fellow hoodlums ("droogs") sitting in the Korova Milkbar, drinking milk "prodd[ed]" with drugs that "would sharpen you up and make you ready for a bit of dirty twenty-to-one" (3-4). But this is not an instance of the droogs breaking the law, for there is *no* law against adulterating milk with drugs. The novella's opening makes one privy to the horrifying conventions that govern the lives of teens in this dystopian world. Although Nadsat represents an age group typically associated with rebellion, the narrative's opening makes it obvious that its portrayal of teen agency is far from straightforward: "The Korova Milkbar was a milk-plus mesto […] what they sold there was milk plus something else. They had no license for selling liquor, but there was no

law yet against prodding some of the new veshches which they used to put into the old moloko" (3). The image of child-like, milk swilling teens *legally* partaking of drugs makes it uncertain whether it is an indication of liberalism, or if one is witnessing a violation of innocence. The tussle between freedom and infringement, confined by critics to the behavioral engineering dilemma, is rife in this image and takes on a relational aspect, in the sense that the license to consume drugs is a *right* that breaches the tender boundaries of teens. Alex's initiation of the reader ("my brothers") into his milieu does two things, one, it intimates freedom as a possible contravention and two, it skillfully embeds violence and transgression ("dirty twenty-to-one") within the lawful. In responding to what is morally and culturally shocking in the narrative, the reader witnesses a reconfiguring of the main dilemma between conditioned morality and moral choice; for *choices* that the reader deems to be *moral* are revealed by Nadsat to be *conditioned* by a particular moral framework, one which emerges as obsolete when compared to this futuristic world. The coined argot makes one uncomfortably aware of one's preconceptions about dystopias where, via paranoia and stories of persecution, protagonists reinforce the readers/viewer's fears of being in an alien, hostile environment. Here we come up against a fifteen-year-old who is disconcertingly blasé about a law that is conducive to the "ultra-violent" (4).

The permissive stance on drug use, in being at odds with the authoritarian political backdrop, makes one feel uncertain regarding the opposing terms, imposition and choice, which make up the dilemma. The permeable borders between choice and violation dominate the opening pages of the text, which presents another conundrum of responsibility, consisting of girls sporting "badges" with "the names of the different

malchicks they'd spatted with before they were fourteen" (5). "Before they were fourteen" gives one pause because it represents an age below sexual consent, not only for the reader but, judging from his disparaging, judgmental description, for Alex as well. What we are faced with here is a teen convention that defies the law, or a hint of the police State's lack of vigilance. With their dual distinction of *having* and *being had*, the badges reinforce the text's construction of freedom on the basis of violation. In view of the pervasiveness of rape in the narrative, what renders this image all the more disquieting is the willingness or promiscuity ("splatted") that is underscored on the basis of age. Alex's harsh and - given his *own* licentious tendencies - sanctimonious observation links up with his later representation of the ten-year-olds that he rapes in Chapter 4: "They saw themselves, you could see, as real grown-up devotchkas already, what with the old hipswing when they saw your Faithful Narrator, brothers, and padded groodies [breasts] and red [lipstick] all ploshed on their goobers" (47). The hoodlum's self-serving, misogynistic perspective on the opposite sex, however, does not deflect from the discomforting presence of badges, which, in *suggesting* an absence of laws regarding the age of sexual consent, make one question whether there could be such a crime as rape in that world. Yet there is such a thing as rape in the dystopian world and, presumably, it is a punishable offence, for why else would the two ten-year-old schoolgirls, subject to "the strange and weird desires of Alexander the Large", threaten Alex that the "rozzes should be got on to [him]" (51)? It could just be that the protagonist *perceives* ten-year olds as sexually available.

Since the entire narrative consists exclusively of Alex's worldview, the probable role played by mentality does not eliminate the conflation of sexual intercourse and

violation, which has been pointedly mentioned by two critics. Petix makes a point of stating that the "old in-out-in-out", denoting sexual intercourse in Nadsat, emerges exclusively in the context of rape (125). In "Alex Displays Hostility toward Women in *A Clockwork Orange*" (2014), Deanna Madden talks about "the disturbing linking of eroticism and rape" (116).[35] This unsettling equivalence between sex and violence pushes one to speculate about the criminal identity of rape in the dystopian world. Is it an act punishable by law but accepted socially? In the event of sexual violation not being enough of a crime in society, wouldn't males and females, even extremely young ones, be conditioned differently with respect to sexuality? Or is rape a violation that teens are *free* to inflict widely on others because of the police state's lack of vigilance? These are questions that have a significant bearing on one's response to the text and yet are not accounted for in the narrative.

Significantly, "[i]n-out-in-out", with its connotations of coming and going as one pleases, is used by "prison charlie" (the prison Chaplain or *Chaplin*) to refer to a life of crime and recurring imprisonment: "Is it going to be in and out and in and out of institutions like this" (88). Imprisonment not only heightens the violation that "in-out-in-out" is charged with on account of rape, but, given Alex's fears of being sexually assaulted by the older prisoners, it reiterates the intersection between violating others and being violated in the context of what is *thought* to be corrective and rehabilitative (prison). The intimacy between coercion and what is remedial is glaringly, as well as risibly, evident in the text's use of "Prison Religion" (91). Prison is where Alex comes into contact with the Bible, "the big book" (89), which he initially reads in order to

[35] Previously published in *Misogyny in Literature: An Essay Collection* under the title "Women in Dystopia: Misogyny in *Brave New World*, *1984*, and *A Clockwork Orange*". The collection of essays is edited by Katherine Anne Ackley and published by New York: Garland, 1992.

ingratiate himself with the prison chaplain but grows to appreciate on account of its "fighting and the old in-out" (89). The coining of "Prison religion" represents spirituality in the context of physical incarceration, the phrase bearing decidedly satirical overtones with regard to religion, which is suggested as *confining*, as a kind of stranglehold. Yet one can also read "Prison Religion" from the perspective of how Christianity is itself confined to prisons and used only to forcibly reform the prisoners: Although "in and out", employed as it is in the dual contexts of rape and jail, emerges as charged with bodily connotations, the text, via "Prison Religion", imbues the experience of being physically confined with the possibility of communion, via the "Divine Word" (88), with the other. Yet this possibility is also riddled with violence, for communion with God is championed by "prison charlie" via images that evoke hell as "a place, darker than any prison, hotter than any flame of human fire, where souls of unrepentant criminal sinners […] scream in endless and intolerable agony, their noses choked with the smell of filth, their mouths crammed with burning ordure, their skin peeling and rotting, a fireball spinning in their screaming guts" (88).

In Nadsat, one of the terms used to denote violence against others is "twenty-to-one", which is said, by Petix, to evoke an image of violent teens ganging up on hapless individuals (125) and is reminiscent of twenty-one, an age that is said by Burgess to represent maturity and adulthood (intro x). Its literal meaning, as in how "twenty-to-one" tells the time, is as relevant, particularly with regard to the uncertainty between teens and adults. For the indeterminacy of "twenty-to-one" is thrown into sharp relief by "pee" and "em" (pm), used respectively to refer to Alex's father and mother. The dubiousness of "twenty-to-one" derives from how pm, as in what comes after midday and represents

maturity in the fictional world, becomes, after a point, am, which stands for before midday and immaturity.[36] It is arguably on this basis that the night is said to belong to the teenaged droogs (7). Via the am-pm undecidability, adolescence and adulthood are highlighted as states that are conditioned by temporality, in which maturity or growth is not a choice as such. The temporal condition of humans is also directly linked with the way clocks work. In that respect, the vilified mechanizing of 'natural' humans is revealed to be the intrinsic condition of human beings, who operate like "clockwork". Interestingly, the "clockwork" condition, used by the narrator to shift the responsibility of teen violence onto mature others ("twenty-to-one"), makes it possible to read the State, which attempts to induce the "clockwork" condition exclusively in delinquents, as an entity itself subject to that *state*.

The intersection in am-pm between temporality, otherness and its potential violence corresponds with Derrida's notion of *différance,* which alludes to the otherness that arises from the delay and difference of temporality. In Derrida's writings, the otherness that we owe to temporality is a relation to the other that is conditioned by disruption and violation: "Derrida's deconstructive logic is always concerned with the impossibility of being in itself […] this logic follows from the implications of temporality […] and entails a thinking of irreducible violence. The temporal can never be in itself, but is always disjoined between being no longer and being not yet" (Hägglund "Necessity of Discrimination" 42). The violating effects of otherness, which enable representation or language, are intimately related to empirical forms of violence,

[36] This "clockwork" reading of youth and maturity is arguably implicit to Philip E. Ray's "Alex Before and After: A New Approach to Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*", in which F. Alexander, the fictive author of "A Clockwork Orange", is argued as Alex's future self, or *f*uture Alexander.

which is why otherness "raises the demand for responsibility in the first place. If the other could not be violated or annihilated (and inversely, if the other could not violate or annihilate me) there would be no reason to take responsibility or pursue reflections on ethical problems (52). The relation between systemic and empirical violence and its implications with respect to responsibility are in evidence in the instability of am and pm, in which otherness emerges on account of time and also manifests itself in terms of immaturity and maturity, that is, concepts to do with time. And the meaning of these concepts is not only tackled in relation to actual violence but with regard to who is responsible for it. In fact, the possibility of teens turning into adults overnight has everything to do with what the former indulges in at night. These "experiences" could have something to do with how, in this *future* world, in which eighteen-year-olds are expected to settle down and start a family, maturity does not take a great deal of time. What we, as readers, have to deal with is this otherness of states supposedly familiar to us and the way in which this difference disrupts our meaning-making process. One is left to confront the violations that are shown to condition, as well as arise, from the overlap between teens and adults.

This overlap is exploited by Alex who plays "Uncle" - "Come with Uncle" (48) - to two schoolgirls no "more than ten" (47) and represents his sexual assault on them as "education" (49). "Alex's sexual abuse of his 'nieces'", viewed by Davis and Womack as a "devastating and distressing" instance "of unregenerate evil" (30), is, along with the droog's other violent antics, argued by the two critics as an outcome of "the vacuous moral and family systems that fail Alex" (20). The nightmare that "pee" has - just prior to Alex's betrayal by his fellow droogs - about his son being "beaten" by "the boys" (53)

figures prominently in Davis and Womack's discussion of paternal negligence. For Alex's father chooses to lose sight of his prophetic dream in the face of the bribe offered to him by his son: "the odd peet [drink] of Scotchman in the snug somewhere for you and mum" (54).

The father's dream: "I saw you lying on the street and you had been beaten by other boys" (53) represents an interesting overlap between literary and interpretative "fiction". This overlap is reinforced by Alex, who speaks of "[a] dream or nightmare" "like a film inside your gulliver [head]", one that "you could walk into and be part of it" (124). "[D]ream" is also represented by the hoodlum as misleading, or as an inversion of the truth: "But dreams go by opposites I was once told" (54). *Giving the lie* to dreams is reconsidered by the droog in the context of his own dream about losing his position as leader of the gang: "George giving his general's orders and old Dim smecking around toothless as he wielded the whip" (53). For when George, deriding Alex's inexperience: "[Y]ou think and govoreet sometimes like a little child" (57), substitutes himself as leader of the gang, Alex thinks to himself: "So my dream had told truth, then." (57). [P]ee's graphic dream: "[Y]ou were like helpless in your blood and you couldn't fight back" (54) links up with significant instances of "reality" in the narrative, such as the Ludovico Technique, in which Alex is *made* to feel the violence depicted in films in a physical *sense*. The father's failing to act in the face of what he regards an ominous nightmare figures in stark contrast to Alex's loving, self-sacrificing "visions" of fatherhood, on the basis of which he decides he wants to marry and become a father.

"[P]ee" also does not bear financial responsibility for his son, a circumstance that allows the latter to be unaccountable with reference to his line of 'work': "I never ask for

money, do I? Not money for clothes or for pleasures? All right, then, why ask?" (53). This crucial factor lends considerable weight to Davis and Womack's claim that Alex's family is "pseudo". However, one must take into account the "rabbiting" status (40) of Alex's parents, which makes it uncertain whether "pee" chooses not to, or cannot take financial responsibility. It is on account of money, "a bit of extra pretty polly" (*Clockwork Orange* 154), that "pee" and "em" sheepishly stand by as their "lodger" (29) proceeds to throw out their only son.

Davis and Womack's study offers valuable insights into the forces that shape Alex's droog identity, making it possible to consider the violent subject in terms of what he may be subject to. However, it does have its problems, in that it disregards the permeable boundaries between children, teens and adults, which is a crucial opening onto the narrative's ambivalent and open-ended representation of responsibility. Adults are explicitly identified in the narrative by their lack of freedom: "[T]here being this law for everybody not a child nor with child nor ill to go out rabbiting" (40). The teen-adult overlap - with its undecidable effects on responsibility - is in evidence in the text's representation of P. R. Deltoid, a father-figure whose job as Post-Corrective Adviser is to ensure that the droog stays out of trouble. Deltoid issues an ultimatum to the hoodlum regarding his "assorted nastiness": "[W]atch out, little Alex, because next time […] it's going to be the barry place" because of *his* infantile fear of getting a "big black mark" from the State (42). The "big black mark", which underscores the State's infantilizing of its adult citizens, effectively closes the gap, with respect to maturity and responsibility, between the Corrective Adviser and the juvenile delinquent, particularly since the former confides in Alex – as a "good friend"- that a "confession" is forced out of corrective

advisers in the event of one of their charges "end[ing] up in the stripy hole" (42). Based on his initials, P.R. (public relations?), one can infer that Deltoid represents the State, yet, in performing his responsibility to it, what he inadvertently betrays to Alex is the violence that underpins the regime's reformation of delinquents.

The humorous overtones notwithstanding, Deltoid's betrayal of the State simultaneously speaks of the suffering he undergoes in being responsible to it. Although this suffering is nothing like the *silent* suffering of Abraham, who, in *The Gift of Death*, both chooses not to and is unable to account for his response to God, Deltoid's *account* of suffering for the sake of responsibility is, like the patriarch's silence, on account of mortality. His fears, which pertain directly to physical torture, point to how mortality can be used to pressurize individuals into doing things against their will and for the interests of others. The possibility of torture pits the most unyielding aspects of mortality against choice, which is challenged in this context to the point of being almost eradicated. Yet, in evaluating Deltoid's responsibility, one must bear in mind that not only is there a choice in what one submits to in torture, the physical suffering, or the demands of the torturers, but there is also a difference between being guided, in one's decision, by a fear of it and deciding in the face of actual torture.

Deltoid's case is also one in which responding ethically *to* the other, as in reforming Alex and keeping him out of jail, is accounted *for* by the possibility of imposition, his fear of being tortured by the State. That is, it is an instance in which accountability forces one to be more responsive to the other. In that respect, it shows a side to accountability that is not accounted for in *The Gift of Death*. Although the Corrective Officer's main objective for acting responsibly is self-preservation, he suffers

nevertheless, from fear, as well as on account of his conscience, or what he owes the other. In effect, mortality in the form of physically incapacitating pain is a far more specific limitation than that which precludes responsibility from being fully responsible in *The Gift of Death,* namely, the indispensable feature of sacrifice. It is a possibility that affects a deciding subject in some particularly terrifying ways if he or she happens to be subject *to* a police state. Conversely, *The Gift of Death* tells us nothing about the specific political, legal or moral context that must have governed and risked being disrupted by Abraham's decision. All we are told is that Abraham's decision is in breach of "ethical generality", which, following Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, is used to allude to moral values that "can always be mediated and communicated" (*GD* 64), such as accountability or self-justification, adherence to customs and laws, as well as loyalty to one's family and community. What "ethical generality" specifically involved at the time of the near-sacrifice on Mount Moriah is not mentioned, but one cannot fault Derrida on this point because Genesis 22 does not concern itself with such questions either.

A Clockwork Orange does concern itself, not only with what *good* and *bad* represent to Alex but how his reading of morality both derives from and critically reflects on the morality prevalent amongst adults in his society: "If lewdies are good that's because they like it, and I wouldn't ever interfere with their pleasures, and so of the other shop. And I was patronizing the other shop" (44). The commercial packaging that Alex gives to morality effectively purges it of any transcendental value. It is also noticeable that, whereas goodness is spoken of in relation to obscenity ("lewdies"), badness, the droog's choice, is given the ethical-political trappings that characterize the paternal authority of the State:

> [B]adness is of the self, the one, the you or me on our oddy knockies, and that self is made by old Bog or God and is his great pride and radosty. But the not-self cannot have the bad, meaning they of the government and the judges and the schools cannot allow the bad because they cannot allow the self. And is not our modern history, my brothers, the story of brave malenky selves fighting these big machines? I am serious with you, brothers, over this. But what I do I do because I like to do. (44-5)

Although "badness" is conflated with individuality and somewhat craftily attributed to the divine, when it comes to representing badness as a possibility of responsibility, Alex not only positions himself on the side of "my brothers" but resorts to the collective "our". In effect, Alex is accounting for his individual responsibility by means of that which, according to *The Gift of Death*, attenuates it, namely, "ethical generality". Yet, in the face of tyranny, accounting for one's rebellious response is a means of identifying one's cause, of representing a call for change. Accountability turns out to be particularly convoluted in a world where constant policing suggests that all possible acts are preemptively accounted for, be it active rebellion, or a private instance of pleasure. The instability of accountability is borne out by Alex's demagoguery, which not only abruptly reverts to "I" but falls back on the original representation of badness as pleasure ("like"). Yet the "[b]ut" that precedes "what I do I do because I like to do" suggests that Alex views pleasure as a possibility that contradicts his ideological position. His agency is seriously undermined by "like", which links up with the "shop" metaphor, in which badness is spoken of as a pleasure that is consumed. It is almost as if Alex gives up on rationally accounting for his relationship with violence, falling back, in an immature

fashion, on "like" as a way of saying that it cannot be explained nor does it demand any justification. Davis and Womack view the constant of "like" in the narrative as evidence that bears out Nadsat's "inherent uncertainty about the nature of emotional responses" (26), as well as "[Alex's] lack of sophistication, and his naïveté" (25). Yet the youthfulness and vulnerability of the teen narrator's not-knowing undercuts the way in which he insightfully accounts for the harshness of the State.

A major problem with Davis and Womack's study is that it risks absolving the droog of responsibility. This conflicts with the teen protagonist's take on *his* responsibility: "I do bad, what with crasting [theft] and tolchocks [beatings] and carves with the britva [razor] and the old in-out-in-out" (44). This admission of responsibility is double-edged, in that "bad" is violence employed in the interests of freedom and yet Alex's taking responsibility for his violence is a form of *agency* that *owes* itself to an oppressive regime. In acknowledging the criminal nature of his "crasting and tolchocks and carves with the britva and the old in-out-in-out": "[Y]ou can't run a country with every chelloveck comporting himself in my manner of the night" (44), he also implies the State's right to curb his freedom.

What is particularly noteworthy is the way in which Alex responds to the claim that the "adult world" bears sole responsibility for the growing problem of violence. The claim is made in "a bolshy big article on Modern Youth" about "no parental discipline", on which the droog comments in the following manner:

> [T]he best veshch they ever had in the old gazetta was by some starry pop in a doggy collar who said that in his considered opinion and he was govereeting as a man of Bog IT WAS THE DEVIL THAT WAS ABROAD and was like ferreting

> his way into like young innocent flesh, and it was the adult world that could take responsibility for this with their wars and bombs and nonsense. So that was alright. So he knew what he talked of, being a God-man. So we young innocent malchicks could take no blame. Right right right. (Capitals in original 46)

It is interesting how the repetitious "Right right right", which conveys a strong sense of sarcasm, discounts the account of adult responsibility via an expression of ostensible corroboration and validation. This aspect is particularly significant with respect to the author of the article, who, as a "pop" and a "God-man", emerges as doubly paternal. And this voice of authority is dismantled via a reference to the priest's "doggy collar", with its connotations of being on a leash and restrained violence. Via the use of "bog", the priest's perspective on responsibility is also evoked as a dilemma or quagmire, which denotes muddy ground that one gets stuck in because it offers no stable footing. Hence, a father-figure who draws on religion to speak up on behalf of his sons' innocence is spoken of as mired in a stance that is groundless. This instance, in which a "God-man" holds the government responsible for violence, pushes one to reflect on Genesis 22, which ends with God revoking the sacrifice of a first-born male. The fact that God commends Abraham's willingness to use violence for His sake suggests, as Derrida points out, the violence intrinsic to responsibility. But in Alex's comments on the article, what is highlighted is the violence latent in *religion's reading* of responsibility and in a manner that is not only biting but also more accountable as far as his own responsibility for violence is concerned. This accountability is problematic on account of the teen-adult indeterminacy for two reasons. Firstly, the droog's willingness to bear responsibility has a great deal to do with the freedom he associates with violence and this association is

undercut by the violation teens undergo on account of this freedom. Secondly, as demonstrated in this section, the indeterminacy allows teens to disown responsibility via a projection of crime and violation onto adults.

With regard to the violation that conditions choice, the teen-adult indeterminacy figures as a precursor, as well as a dystopian version, of free will. In the next section, free will is shown to manifest the choice-violation in diverse contexts, all of which link up with the fiction-death relation. Free will is the most conflicted feature in the entire novella. On the one hand, free will is held out as a possibility that combats moral programming, while, on the other, it is shown to be entangled with the Ludovico Technique, which Alex chooses to undergo out of ignorance. This entanglement emerges as a relation of difference, which pertains to the not-knowing that must be confronted in responding to the other. The latter is a condition insisted on by free will and *The Gift of Death*, but which is ruled out in moral programming.

The Paradox of Free Will

In *A Clockwork Orange*, the question of choice is looked at from the Christian perspective of free will, with respect to how the religious concept materializes in a totalitarian context. This context lends itself to *The Gift of Death*, which thinks through Christian representations of choice and faith on a secular basis, that is, in terms of how they condition relationships that are exclusively mortal. There are fundamental differences, however, for free will represents that which distinguishes humans from other mortal beings, such as animals, whereas, in *The Gift of Death*, the human-animal divide is one more instance of the exclusion involved in the giving of meaning. For Derrida, the act of choosing is shown to be grounded in that (irrationality and passion) which

undercuts the notion of choice as quintessentially human, or the property of 'man'. Secondly, God Himself is shown to come under mortality (*GD* 108). Yet both the philosophical text and novella not only speak of mortality as a condition of choice but signal the irresolvable tensions that choice gives rise to in a context of mortal constraints.

The character who voices the aporias of moral choice is "prison charlie", whose position as prison chaplain is rendered satirical through an association with Charlie Chaplin. Prison charlie browbeats the prisoners into "attend[ing] to the Divine Word" (88), yet uses the notion of *free* will to caution Alex about his decision to be made into a "good boy" and in so doing, raises some "hard ethical questions": "Does God want goodness or the choice of goodness? Is a man who chooses the bad perhaps in some way better than a man who has the good imposed upon him?" (106). The fact that free will is represented by a chaplinesque character argues an irreverent take on Christianity, yet there is more to this take than satire. For the ordeal that unfolds via Charlie's representation of free will draws attention to how the concept itself is *tested* by mortality. His profound representation of free will, quoted above, is framed by a skillfully crafted disclaimer: "Were it expedient, I would protest about it [Ludovico Treatment], but it is not expedient. There is the question of my own career, there is the question of my own weakness of voice when set against the shout of certain more powerful elements in the polity" (106), which, like Deltoid's whining, pushes one to reflect on how *free* an individual can be in a world where survival makes one unavoidably dependent on others. It is challenging to decide whether it is a disclaimer that risks undermining the argument of free will or a confession of weakness and irresponsibility, for it bears signs of both.

The way in which the chaplain represents Alex's decision to volunteer for the Ludovico Treatment is significant for two reasons. Firstly, it is very telling with regard to choice, which is spoken of in relation to subjection, even abject subjugation. Secondly, it both raises and dismantles a distinction between the ethical and morality: "And yet, in choosing to be deprived of the ability to make an ethical choice, you have in a sense really chosen the good. So I shall like to think" (107). On the face of it, the sacrifice of "ethical choice" to the "good" points to a distinction between the ethical and moral conventions, which are implied as convenient, comfortable and unthinking. Yet the divide between the ethical and the good is not as simple as it appears, for good is represented as choosing to be deprived of choice, which is an act of unconditional surrender to the other and that, particularly from a Derridean perspective, is ethical. In choosing to obey God, Abraham "acts as if he were discharged of his duty toward his fellows, his son, and humankind" (*GD* 73), that is, relinquishes all his rights, including, perhaps, his right to being *human*. The droog's unconditional surrender moves in the opposite direction, for at the end of the novella, he pictures himself as surrendering unconditionally to an unyielding son. The dismantling of the barrier between ethical choice and the good could be a convenient rationalization on the part of the prison chaplain, particularly in the light of his of his "[s]o I shall like to think". By means of the latter, he *disowns* responsibility regarding the ordeal facing Alex but in a way that intimates an *awareness* of his irresponsibility. His unraveling of responsibility from the perspective of what "God want[s]" (106) simultaneously renders his "[s]o I shall like to think" as a conscientious acknowledgement of the Other's inaccessibility. Regardless of his "[a]ll may be well, who knows? God works in a mysterious way" (107), the prison

chaplain recognizes the torture that is in store for Alex: “You are passing now to a region where you will be beyond the reach of the power of prayer” (107). Alex, however, willingly signs the Reclamation Agreement because he imagines that feigning to be good will dupe the State into freeing him from prison.

According to O’Keefe, it is Alex’s reliance on genre that leads to his misreading the State’s “Reclamation Agreement” as a means of regaining his freedom (42). Both the droog and the Ludovico Technique derive their power from genre’s capacity to generate a conditioned, captive audience. The droog’s identity is constructed by means of trappings that contrive masculinity in order to give an unmistakable sense of male aggression: the “jelly mould” that “fit[s] on the crutch underneath the tights” and the “big built-up shoulders” that “were a kind of mockery of having real shoulders like that” (4).[37] These props fail to elicit the expected response from the two schoolgirls Alex rapes. Encountering them in the “disc-bootick” (47), what incites him to make the schoolgirls “grow up real today” (49) is their addressing him as “bratty” and “biggy” (48). O’Keefe demonstrates that the droog’s violation of others includes enforcing the meaning he gives to his acts of violence: “Alex forces F. Alexander to ‘viddy’ or watch him rape his wife, as if sensing the power a ‘text’ attains from being ‘read’ by a (literally) conditioned, captive audience” (34). The study, which bears out the novella’s interweaving of reading and violence, also looks at the Ludovico Technique in the light of genre “taken to its extreme”: “In effect, extending genre to the textuality of culture,

[37] In “Fashion and Masculinity”, published in *Anthony Burgess A Clockwork Orange: Authoritative Text Backgrounds and Contexts Criticism* (2011), Berthold Schoene- Harwood focuses on Alex’s “grotesque drag act of masculinity” (259) as an indication that his violence “follows the normative script” of “appropriate masculine behaviour”. Schoene-Harwood contends that this feature of conformity points to Alex as “a puppet on invisible strings long before he delivers himself into the hands of the experimenting behavioural scientists” (262).

the doctors impose a particular structure of 'sanity' and 'health' on to Alex's mind and body […] the scientists enforce a genre of expectations with respect to Alex's social experience" (37).

Whereas the doctors employ genre to enforce a certain mode of behavior in the hoodlum, Alex punches his fellow droog, Dim, for the sake of schooling his responses to music. This instance of "education" follows Alex's encounter with the "ptitsa [woman] singing" in the Korova Milkbar. The ptitsa's song about *choosing to submit* to a violent death elicits an unprecedented response from him:

> [O]ne of these devotchkas -very fair and with a big smiling rot and in her late thirties I'd say – suddenly came with a burst of singing […] it was like for a moment, O my brothers, some great bird had flown into the milkbar, and I felt all the malenky hairs on my plot standing endwise and the shivers crawling up like slow malenky lizards and then down again. Because I knew what she sang. It was from an opera by Friedrich Gitterfenster called *Das Bettzeug*, and it was the bit where she's snuffing it with her throat cut, and the slovos are "Better like this maybe". Anyway, I shivered. (Italics in original 31-2)

Paradoxical associations, to do with freedom-imprisonment, or the choice to submit, converge in this singular encounter between Alex, music and woman. Typically shown to evoke images of "crasting and tolchock[ing]"(44) in the droog, music, in this instance, points to his being receptive to and overwhelmed by woman, an other he consistently demeans and subjugates via rape. In a sense, this reversal is embodied by the shift from cut-throat, used with reference to Alex's razor, to throat cut. Woman is doubly represented here, via the female songstress and the "she" featured in the song. What

starts out with connotations of flight, freedom and feminism ("some great bird") shifts to a sense of confinement with, "Gitterfenster", the fictional opera composer's surname, which, as Phillip E. Ray points out, is German for "'barred window', or the window of a prison" (487). Although Ray reads the entire text, including this particular image, in terms of a dichotomy between freedom and imprisonment (487), the undecidability of the two terms inheres in his reference to suicide, which is the *choice* to submit to death: "The heroine has sought presumably to escape this prison, whether literal or figurative, but, realizing that she can only succeed through suicide, has now taken that step" (487). This "she", who expresses a willingness to submit to a violent death, stands for a relation with what is unrepresentable, namely, death. Through woman, the droog's relationship with submitting others to deathly violence is momentarily reconfigured. Alex exclusively associates music's creative destructiveness with violence against others. He views classical music as implicated in forces of divine violence. This is made evident during his brawl with his fellow droogs: "I viddied that thinking is for the gloopy ones and that the oomny ones use like inspiration and what Bog sends. For now it was lovely music that came to my aid […] I could just slooshy a bar or so of Ludwig van (it was the Violin Concerto, last movement), and I viddied right at once what to do […] I whisked out my cut-throat britva" (57-8). His linking of classical music to his "cut-throat britva" comes up against a song about a "throat cut". In choosing to submit to that which is not subject to choice (death), "she" represents the singularity of responsibility.

The "shiver[ing]" that the woman's suicide gives rise to in Alex is noteworthy, for he is accustomed to inspiring horror in others. The case of "she" not only speaks of responsibility's grounding in death but this relation becomes all the more pointed by the

instance of suicide, in which the choice to die is spoken of in the context of not-knowing ("maybe"). In that respect, the teen's "shivering" is reminiscent of the "fear and trembling" that Kierkegaard attributes to Abraham in his encounter with God and which is discussed in *The Gift of Death* on the basis of the deciding self's apprehension of itself as irreducibly other: "I tremble before what exceeds my seeing and my knowing […] although it concerns the innermost parts of me, right down to my soul, down to the bone" (55). Yet significant though this "shivering" is from the point of view of Alex's decisions, it gives one pause with regard to the violence it is revealed to be responsible *for*. For the awe that Alex is shown to feel in the face of the "singing ptitsa" renders him cruelly intolerant towards Dim, whose "dog-howl" in response to the song provokes the former into "fist[ing]" the "[f]ilthy drooling mannerless bastard" on the "rot [mouth]"(32). Alex accounts for *his* violence in terms of what Dim deserves: "It was like he was singing blood to make up for his vulgarity when that devotchka was singing music" (33). The image of "singing blood" represents a literal take on the relation between art, pain and suffering. Alex responds to the song, in which "she" submits to a violent death, with an image that conflates music and violence and which aestheticizes his "fist[ing]".

Ironically, the song in which "she" disclaims all authority ("maybe") becomes a basis for Alex's assumption of leadership over his fellow droogs: "There has to be a leader" (34). As leader of the gang, Alex lays down the law with respect to music: "You understand about that tolchock on the rot, Dim. It was the music, see. I get all bezoomny when any veck interferes with a ptitsa singing" (34). Alex uses his susceptibility to music to lay down this law, which draws on the threat of violence to curtail the freedom

of his fellow droogs. This instance ties the choice-violation relation directly to art. As such, it foreshadows what Alex comes up against in the Ludovico Technique. The use of classical music, protested against by Alex, is justified by the State doctors in the following terms: “Delimitation is always difficult. The world is one, life is one. The sweetest and most heavenly of activities partake in some measure of violence – the act of love, for instance; music, for instance. You must take your chance, boy. The choice has been all yours” (130).

Alex’s ending up in prison is the result of his choice to continue - no matter what the consequences - in his droog ways. This particular choice is phrased in ornate language, what Alex calls “fair speeching” (44), and is framed by quotation marks. It is a decision that is taken in view of the violent death that it potentially leads to. As such, it draws on the song in which the woman with her throat cut chooses to submit to a violent death: “Fair, but a pity, my lords, because I just cannot bear to be shut in. My endeavour shall be, in such future as stretches out its snowy and lilywhite arms to me before the nozh overtakes or the blood spatters its final chorus in twisted metal and smashed glass on the highroad, to not get loveted again” (44). The image of “singing blood” is recycled via “blood spatters its final chorus” and the figure of woman is reconfigured as a future that opens onto a dramatic death. This decision is thought through by Alex in terms of his entire life story, including its ending.

Speaking of death as “the end”, Ray regards the woman who slits her throat in the song as a precursor of Alex’s attempt to kill himself: “The heroine has sought presumably to escape this prison, whether literal or figurative, but, realizing that she can succeed only through suicide, has now taken that step […] She is, therefore, in the very

same situation as Alex when F. Alexander's friends leave him in their locked flat with the music turned on" (487). The attempted suicide is instigated by F. Alexander and his fellow political activists, who plan on using a conditioned Alex as "a potent weapon" against "this present evil and wicked government" (179), as "[a] martyr to the cause of Liberty" (183). Fully aware that classical music induces physical sickness in the conditioned subject, the activists play "a very gromky and violent piece" (186), one that goads the former droog to jump out of the window. The composer of the "violent piece", "Symphony Number Three", is "the Danish veck Otto Skadelig" (186), whose surname means harmful in Danish.[38]

Texts, or, more accurately, the meaning that Alex *gives* to them, are also shown to play a role in his giving death to himself. A "pamphlet" that pronounces "DEATH TO THE GOVERNMENT" and "an open window on the cover" of a "booklet" that says "'Open the window to fresh air, fresh ideas, a new way of living'" are interpreted by the beleaguered protagonist in the following manner: "And so I knew that was like telling me to finish it all off by jumping out. One moment of pain, perhaps, and then sleep for ever and ever and ever" (capitals in original 188). The desperate conditions Alex is subject to renders death as the only possible means of representing freedom. The choice-violation relation comes full circle via this decision, from cut-throat to throat cut.

This relation gives rise to "teen", takes the form of teen violence and its so-called solution (Ludovico Technique), as well as inheres in free will. Rein*forced* in a number of ways by Alex's decision to father a son, the nexus between choice and violation witnesses a progression via the protagonist's willingness to submit to otherness out of

[38] My secondary supervisor, Dr. Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen, brought this meaning of "Skadelig" to my attention.

choice in the context of life and future fatherhood. This step forward, consistent with the text's treatment of decision-making as touched by violence, takes the form of "visions", that is, bears a fictive status within the fictional world. With its doubly fictional status, this decision brings the curtain down on Alex's show of horrors for the sake of domesticity, a future "like sweet flowers" (212). The "End" is applicable in more than one sense; the "visions" of fatherhood, which occur at the very end of the novella, involve an exclusion of the reader: "But where I itty now, O my brothers, is all on my oddy knocky, where you cannot go" (212).

The following section highlights the ways in which the hoodlum's story of fatherhood challenges the patriarchal tradition of responsibility, which *The Gift of Death* refers to as "[a] story of men" (110). Despite being rigorously male-centric, the representation of paternal responsibility wreaks havoc within the "hierarchies among men: God the father, Abraham, Isaac" (*GD* 76).[39] The story of fatherhood, offered via the novella's ending, is a striking instance of literature as *différance;* it re-presents paternity with a view to its exclusion of woman and with respect to the displacement that goes into the making of [F]ather. Alex's reading of his "visions" in relation to the tradition of paternity reveals the deconstruction of paternal authority to be at work within this tradition.

[39] The possibility of reading reversal as conversion is demonstrated in *The Gift of Death* (9-10). The starting point for Derrida's deconstruction of responsibility is Jan Patoćka's essay "Is Technological Civilization Decadent, and Why?", in which the Czech philosopher argues that it is incumbent on Europe to embrace a Christian model of responsibility, one that is purged of its Platonic and pagan antecedents. *The Gift of Death* traces the history of responsibility via the successive religious movements of ancient "orgiastic mystery", Platonism and Christianity. Each movement is represented as an eruption that simultaneously deviates from and incorporates its predecessor. These events or eruptions are said to be reversals or betrayals that at the same time constitute conversions.

Chapter Twenty-One: Growing up or "The Child is Father of the Man"?

The exclusions that go into the making of paternity are highlighted in chapter twenty-one, which was originally excluded from the American edition of *A Clockwork Orange*. In this chapter, realizing that he is "like growing up" (211), Alex decides he wants to be a father. The aspect of "growing up", which harks back to the teen-adult indeterminacy, spotlights the story of fatherhood ("visions") from the perspective of the Derridean relation between "son" and works of literature. The feature of writing, which constitutes *and* undermines paternal authority, is at work in Alex's "visions" and is accentuated via the teen-adult indeterminacy.

William Wordsworth's insight in "My Heart Leaps up" (1807): "The Child is father of the Man" takes an unexpected form via eighteen-year-old Alex's "visions" of fatherhood, which he reflects on as "like cartoons in the gazettas":

> There was Your Humble Narrator Alex coming home from work to a good hot plate of dinner, and there was this ptitsa all welcoming and greeting like loving. But I could not viddy her all that horrorshow, brothers, I could not think who it might be. But I had this sudden very strong idea that if I walked into the room […] there I should find what I really wanted […] For in that other room in a cot was laying gurgling goo goo goo my son. Yes yes yes, brothers, my son. (210-11)

Fictive elements take such an exaggerated form in these "visions" that it is as if the text is caricaturing its depiction of fiction as a means of responsibility. The "visions", replete with stereotypical images, are not only recounted from the perspective of his role as narrator, but the story of fatherhood *happens* to the storyteller. The take on fiction is markedly unflattering, in that the "visions" are conveyed through stock, unimaginative phrases. Significantly, these "visions" are embraced by Alex: "[y]es yes yes" in the wake

of an ordeal of physical suffering and recent brush with near-death. It is as if "reality" has tempered the droog's use of artistic expression, which is shockingly banal in this instance. Yet, paradoxically, this banality enhances the novelty that these "visions" hold for Alex. His infantile language implies his lack of mastery over this unforeseen event, which has no reality as such but takes hold of him from within. Unlike his antics, which he performed with a view to drawing attention to himself as a consummate artist, the scene of fatherhood is devised around the son. Yet the latter is solely the narrator's creation, given the gaping hole that stands-in for the wife-to-be.

The tussle between childlike teen and adult is at work in these "visions", in which the bypassing of marital comfort for the sake of claiming a son points in conflicting directions. Being doted on by an imaginary wife is devalued in relation to the possibility of drooling over a "gurgling" son: "[T]here I should find what I really wanted". This implies a readiness and willingness to care for, as opposed to be cared for, by the other. Yet this commitment not only comes at the expense of his relationship with his significant other but involves his substituting himself in place of the son's mother.

The former droog's picturing of himself in a mothering light links up with his description of F. Alexander's hospitable treatment towards him: "[T]his kind protecting and like motherly veck" (177) and "[l]ike a mother to me was what he was" (198). Assaulted by his former victims and the police (his former fellow droogs), Alex lands up outside F. Alexander's HOME, which he and his gang members broke into four years ago. Failing to recognize his former assailant in this battered condition, the author dresses Alex's wounds, feeds him and "draw[s]" him "a nice hot bath" (172). Ray reads F. Alexander as "a father" who turns "murderous" (484) in the event of discovering

Alex's "real" identity. He dismisses the motherly connotations that the droog gives to his namesake: "Alex sees F. Alexander as treating him in a parental manner, although he gets the gender wrong" (484).[40] Yet the possibility of mothering is latent, albeit at a bodily level, in the dream Alex has, during his confinement in "State Jail" (85), about "being in some very big orchestra" (99). In this dream, he acquires the most notable physical feature of pregnancy: "What I was playing was like a white pinky bassoon made of flesh and growing out of my plot [body], right in the middle of my belly" (99-100). Alex's reflecting - just prior to deciding on fatherhood - on the artistic achievements of musicians reinforces the dream's conflation of art and procreation: "I was eighteen now, just gone. Eighteen was not a young age. At eighteen old Wolfgang Amadeus had written concertos and symphonies and operas and oratorios […] Eighteen was not all that young an age, then. But what was I going to do?" (210).

The art-procreation conflation lends itself to the debate between Levinas and Derrida on the subject of sons as works of literature. Hammerschlag sums up the difference that Levinas's *Totality and Infinity* posits between paternity and authoring: "The relation with the son illustrates the self's chance for true transcendence, not a transcendence which would merely materialize the vision of the self, as in the work of art that I produce from my idea. The work of art would not be transcendent. The transcendent comes in the issuing of the son, who would be fully free of the issuer" (*Broken Tablets* 7). Derrida problematizes Levinas's distinction between sons and works

[40] The father-son equation is just one of the interpretations that Ray gives of the F.Alexander-Alex relationship. In fact, the father-son reading is the least interesting because it follows the Freudian oedipal model. Alex's rape of F.Alexander's wife is said to be an appropriation of the mother: "Alex the son succeeds not only in possessing the mother but also in taking her away from the father [she dies], an event which intensifies the latter's natural desire to triumph over his rival into a rage for murder and revenge" (485). This is a fairly simplistic take on rape. However, the link that Ray draws between the two males on the basis of writing, which I look into further on, is convincing.

of art on the basis of *différance,* in which "the differential function of language always escapes the intention of the author" (7). The point made by Derrida is that a work of art cannot be identical to the author's intention, for the latter's representation through exclusionary violence gives it a degree of inaccessibility, thereby precluding it from being intention *as such*. The writer encounters his [W]ord] as other on account of the movement of signification; this other is paralleled with the son by Derrida, for whom the meaning of the father-son relationship is, in of itself, "the work of textuality" (Hammerschlag 8). "[T]he work of textuality", a reference to *différance* (the movement of signification), points to how there is no univocal, stable meaning of father-son, which can be read in more than one sense. The latter possibility is borne out by Alex's "visions" of fatherhood. As demonstrated in the preceding paragraphs, the "visions" go off in conflicting directions with respect to meaning. They suggest the would-be father's exclusion and substitution of mother, yet this exclusion and replacement gives some noticeably maternal attributes to the father.

The "visions" also bear out iterability, which is Derrida's re-reading of repeatability based on *différance*. As explained in the introductory chapter of this study, the differing and deferring movement of signification speaks of the repeatability that constitutes the singularity a given meaning bears in relation to other meanings. The implication of repeatability can be inferred because a given sign *re-presents* the innumerable signs that constitute its presence through their absence. It is on the basis of re-presentation that Derrida speaks of repeatability as iterability, or that which points to otherness or difference within the same. The movement of iterability, which is the basis on which "Literature in Secret" posits a father-son equation between Genesis 22 and

literature, bears on literature's re-presentation of divine secrecy. This re-presentation betrays inaccessibility to be a rigorously mortal feature and speaks of signification as that which pivots on death (a void, or senselessness).

The feature of iterability is borne out by Alex's authoring of his son. For the erstwhile droog pictures his future son as a possible replica of his droog self, yet "droog" does not bear the same meaning it once had for Alex. Mature Alex looks back on his drooghood as "one of these malenky toys" with a "winding handle on the outside": "[A]nd you wind it up grrr grrr grrr and […] it itties in a straight line and bangs straight into things bang bang and it cannot help what it is doing" (211). Prior to this instance, the use of "machines" is exclusively reserved for the State, which the teens are said to be up against in their pursuit of freedom. This betrayal of his former reading has a "good" side to it. For the narrator lays "little droog Alex", to rest: "O my brothers, remember sometimes thy little Alex that was. Amen" (212), in order to give life to the other and to be reborn as a father. He gives death to his droog self, who, significantly, "feel[s] like old Bog [God] himself" when he "ha[s] vecks [men] and ptitsas [women] creeching away in [his] ha ha power" (46). Alex's reversal or *conversion* involves toppling the God-like version of himself. Moreover, his vision of fatherhood, in which he foresees his violent son disregarding his paternal advice, suggests that he is more open to the voluntary subjugation encountered in the Prison Chaplain's reading of free will:

> When I had my son I would explain all that [youth] to him when he was starry [old] enough to like understand. But then I knew he would not understand or would not want to understand at all and would do all the veshches I had done, yes perhaps even killing […] and I would not be able to really stop him. And nor

> would he be able to stop his own son, brothers. And so it would itty on to like the end of the world, round and round and round […] like old Bog Himself […] turning and turning and turning a vonny grahzny orange in his gigantic rookers. (211-12)

In evoking the possibility of a father confessing his irresponsible youth to his son for the sake of protecting him, Alex counters the stereotypical (mis)representation of uncommunicative, self-absorbed fathers. The picture that he draws is incredibly poignant, particularly since the former droog foresees that a sense of responsibility, regardless of explanations, cannot be passed on like a tradition. Whereas in *The Gift of Death*, paternity unfolds in the context of a Father's inscrutable demand for violence, as well as a father's secretively attempted slaughter of his son, in the novella, a (former) hoodlum envisages himself as a father *dissuading* his son from following in his droog footsteps. Yet the attempt to "explain" the shortcomings of the droog legacy of violence is lost on his son and this is in line with what Derrida states, that responsibility cannot be handed down in the form of a lesson (*GD* 73-4) because of its intrinsic inaccessibility. The desperation to get through to the other in Alex's vision of fatherhood highlights the limitations of communication, which *différance* draws attention to.

The "machinic" character that free will acquires via Alex's decision is challenging to pin down in terms of "good" and "bad". It is noticeable that the visionary and forward-looking facets to Alex's decision seamlessly merge into a paternal pattern that is rationalized on the basis of a mechanistic God. The use of "rookers" for hands not only represents God as an identity that is ceaselessly and repetitively in motion (as opposed to He who sets everything in motion) but speaks of that entity in terms of what

rooks, that is, “swindles” or “cheats” (*OED*). Repeatability is conveyed via the recurring use of “round” and turning”, words that bring to mind what is wheel-like or rotating, as well as evoke the cyclical or seasonal movement of nature. The natural-mechanical intersection, approached from the tradition of procreation, as well as from the perspective of an “orange” animated by a machine-like God, represents what Royle calls Derrida’s “new thinking of the machine”, as in that which reflects on how “the machine, repetition, writing and death” condition life (*Jacques Derrida* 2). This orange-machine (or, in Derridean terms, life-death) relation gives a subversive turn to the novella’s representation of moral choice over moral conditioning.

Alex suspects that medical conditioning could have something to do with his decision to become a father, which is shown to take a bodily form: “I felt this bolshy big hollow inside my plot [body], feeling very surprised too at myself” (211). Suggestive of *force*,”bolshy” is used in the context of what is ostensibly a respectable, moral *commitment* to marriage and fatherhood. It is at the same time an eruption of force in a context of passivity. Alex, the decider, being subject to a force from within resonates with Derrida’s brief but eloquent rendition of undecidability in *Adieu to Emmanual Levinas* (1999): “[C]ould it not be argued that, without exonerating myself in the least, decision and responsibility are always *of the other*? They always come back or come down to the other, from the other, even if it is the other in me?” (italics in original 23). The possibility, held out by Derrida’s quote, of a self responding uncharacteristically, of discovering itself as other, is shown in the novella to be touched by scientific conditioning. This represents a behavioristic spin on Derrida’s discussion of decision-making as conditioned by the other. My attempt is not to collapse the difference between

conditioning induced through bio-psychological means and the conditioning of the human consciousness by an originary writing referred to as *differance* or the trace. Unlike the Ludovico Technique, the Derridean trace is not in our control but is a process that all human beings are subject to in the most basic or physical sense. As an originary writing, the *trace* alludes to the way our thoughts are inscribed with language, that is, even before we learn to speak and write. On the basis of a process that we do not set in motion nor can we step outside of, Derrida talks about the human condition, or what is "natural", in terms of what is mechanical, which, however, is not synonymous with sameness but implies a repetition - what is called *iterability* - that never shows itself as the same. However, the two perspectives on conditioning do converge in an interesting way on the *mechanics* of decision-making. In both cases, the possibility of subjectivity, or "free" choice, is shown to arise from conditioning.

There is a significant difference, one that has to do with Alex's decision aligning itself with the mechanistic or "program[able]" element to tradition (*GD* 7). This element to tradition is deemed an anathema in Derrida's account of decision-making. Although the deciding subject *must* be mindful of existing traditions, a decision, if it claims to be *responsible*, invariably brings about a shift in, or ruptures, the mindless, mechanical repetition of existing traditions, laws, customs and rules (*GD* 29). The "other in me" is directly tied to this shift in tradition. Paradoxically, it is via the mechanistic element of tradition that Alex lends an exquisitely subversive twist to Derrida's representation of responsibility as unmitigatedly patriarchal. For the representation of Bog or God, the Father, at the head of an endlessly rotating tradition of sons flouting their fathers counters the image of Abraham and Isaac submitting to their respective fathers in *The*

Gift of Death. The fundamental features that, according to *The Gift of Death*, represent responsibility as rigorously patriarchal - God and fathers and sons - are all mirrored in Alex's decision but in a way that, consistent with iterability, renders the patriarchal open to otherness (or betrayal) within itself. The pathos in Alex's portrayal of machine-like tradition also enables one to spot the suffering, the heartache and the yearning to communicate in what shows, or betrays, itself as a mindless motif; for the image ties repeatability to the blindness of human emotion.

The mechanics of free will and the "bolsh[iness]" of morality speak of the irreducibility of the ethical to what is 'good'. Yet Davis and Womack's reading of the ending as an ethical response foregrounds only the positive aspects of Alex's decision, which is said to be a "hopeful vision of a healthy, functional family" (23). Their reading does not take into account that an opening onto the other is not possible without some form of violence. This is because it draws on Martha Nussbaum's version of the ethical, which, as Geoffrey Galt Harpham points out, is a far cry from Derrida's, in that it subscribes to a "determinate conception of the human good" (56). The very opening onto the other is described in Derrida's *Writing and Difference* (1967) as a "pre-ethical violence" (*différance*) that constitutes the possibility of an ethical relation to the other (128). Given that violence is always imminent and at the heart of every relationship, what is proposed as ethical can only be spoken of in terms of "lesser violence", which may or may not turn out to be " less violent than the violence [it] oppose[s]" (Hägglund "Necessity of Discrimination" 48).

With regard to literature and responsibility, Derrida views the former, with its undermining of the "truth-function of language", as that which "interferes with

philosophy's ability to guide and instruct" (Harpham 56). That is, in foregrounding the undecidability intrinsic to language, literature opens up moral concepts to the ethical, as in what is simultaneously good and bad. Nussbaum, on the other hand, holds that literature "*teaches* virtue far more directly and effectively than philosophy ever could" because it "test[s]" "general principles" against "specific instances" of "ethical decision-making" (my italics Harpham 56-7). She looks upon literature as transformative, as that which opens onto an affirmative reading of the other. For Derrida, however, a literary text is an encounter with otherness, the disruptive effects of which can be positive but not without a degree of violence. The novella's ending bears out this reading of disruption, for it oscillates between an affirmative shift in paternal responsibility and some troubling implications to do with the interlinking borders between crime and respectability.

These overlapping borders are borne out by the fact that Alex is not the only droog drawn to marriage and fatherhood. In fact, with respect to this aspiration, he is inspired by his former gang member, Pete, who "introduce[s]" him to his wife, Georgina (208). Dim, described by the narrator-protagonist as "worth three of the others in sheer madness and dirty fighting" (19), is encountered, just prior to the denouement, in the form of a policeman. In view of these troubling representations of respectability, the possibility of conforming could just as well be a *form* that *cons*, both with respect to Alex, who could be merely trading one form of violence for another, and the reader who might dismiss the ending as conformist.

The conformist elements in the novella's ending are so overplayed from the angle of fiction (as evident from Alex's "cartoon" inspired "visions") that it is almost

impossible to read the ending as morally prescriptive. Alex's story of domesticity and familial responsibility is, ironically, rendered other through conventional, hackneyed and commonplace images. These images reflect critically on morality, thereby precluding the "visions" from being moral as such. That said, the narrator-protagonist's volte-face not only conflicts with Nadsat's previous take on good and bad but also with the argot's construction of the implied reader. This literary device, the focus of the next section, ties in with the novella's self-reflexivity regarding fiction's responsiveness to death and links up with the reader's self-reflexivity regarding his/her responses to Nadsat. The narrative's use of "fiction" in the literary and interpretative sense is reflected via a literary device that embeds the reader in the text. As it is, the reader is implicated in Nadsat's giving of death in the double sense; the implied reader bolsters this relation, which forces the reader to reflect on and re-read his/her interpretations of fiction, of the responsibility it bears towards and for death.

Self-Reflexivity and/as Choice-Violation

Nadsat's conditioning of the reader's self-reflexivity through the implied reader also reflects on the choice-violation relation. On account of its fictiveness, Nadsat takes and gives considerable license to the reader as far as meaning-making is concerned. That said, as mentioned earlier on, Nadsat's fictiveness also implicates the reader's potential responses (readings) to what the argot constructs with interpretations that reflect on the conditioning of the reader. The reader's confrontation with his/her conditioning represents an opening. In line with the choice-violation relation, this opening gives, albeit not without implications of violence. For the possibility of questioning and

rethinking one's evaluations is accompanied by the risk of coming up against what cannot be thought through.

The relation between reading and conditioning bears out *The Gift of Death*'s take on responding. On account of mortality, responding is said to be grounded in what is inaccessible to the self about itself. Based on this grounding, responding brings choice in relation to no choice.

The concept of implied reader, crucial to all three works in this study, emerged as a result of Wolfgang Iser's response to Wayne C. Booth's discussion of the relation between reader and text. In *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (1978), Wolfgang Iser states that the implied reader "embodies all predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect; predispositions laid down, not by an empirical outside reality, but by the text itself. Consequently, the implied reader as a concept has its roots firmly planted in the structure of the text; he is a construct in no way to be identified with any real reader" (34). Leslie Hill contends that "the critical scattering of the subject of sense and reading" (99) is overlooked in Iser's formulation of "the reading subject" as "a participating consciousness" (99). In response to this oversight, Hill sums up the implied reader as the "intersubjective" (imaginary) relation that writing involves: "For the author, just as the literary text is linguistic artifact directed towards the grasping of an imaginary object, so the reader fulfills the role of an imaginary Other, to whom the writer addresses his text, and who is present in the literary work as a virtuality and as a support, yet absent from it as a biographic singularity or an individualized body" (96). According to Wende Ommundsen's "The Reader in Contemporary Metafiction: Freedom or Constraint?" (1990), the "virtuality" of the implied reader is treated

differently in metafiction, which typically constructs the implied reader "as a fictional character of sorts" (170). The fleshing out of the imaginary presence-non-presence of the implied reader by means of fiction is applicable to *A Clockwork Orange*, as will become evident further on.

Ommundsen's study is also relevant because it analyzes how metafiction treats reading in the context of the relationship between freedom and constraint. The freedom-constraint relation, which corresponds with the choice-violation relation, is shown to be at work in the interpretation that the actual reader gives to the text's/film's construction of implied reader/viewer. That is, the study takes into the account the "I" that activates the implied reader. The "I" at the heart of the implied reader applies in my study, in which the use of "the reader" is inclusive of the actual reader's interpretation of the implied reader. This "I" is also crucial because reading is subject to the violent implications of responding (giving death in the double sense) and bears out the blind spots that go into the *making* of a perspective.

The relation between the implied and real reader plays out in relation to the freedom-constraint feature to reading (responding), which is unraveled by Ommundsen in the light of the *necessity* of freeing oneself from what texts represent as constraints. Drawing on Linda Hutcheon's discussion of metafiction, she demonstrates that the stress within the genre is "simultaneously on freedom and duty" (175). Her analysis of the constraining element of freedom in metafiction is particularly relevant with respect to the individual interpretation that conditions "what is determinate" within the text, such as the implied reader. Given that it is the reader who determines "what is determinate" or "indeterminate' within a text, Stanley Fish posits the implied reader as "a relative

concept" (171). That is, "my implied reader differs from your implied reader" (171). Fish's reading, which highlights "the basic problem of meaning" (171), is qualified by Ommundsen, who speaks of "divergent readings" in the context of the "interpretative positions" that can be "locate[d]" within the text (171). Roland Barthes' representation of the reader in "The Death of the Author" (1967) as without "a history, a biography, and a psychology" is refuted by her on the basis that a reader "can only deal with the textual traces which can be construed as meaningful from the vantage point of her or his textual experience" (174).

The construction of the implied reader, its conditioning of the reader's self-reflexivity, reflects the novella's relation to itself as a work of fiction. Both instances of self-reflexivity draw on the choice-violation relation. A striking instance of *A Clockwork Orange*'s self-reflexivity is the parodic replica it contains of itself: "A Clockwork Orange", a treatise on moral choice written by Burgess' fictional stand-in, F. Alexander. Through its replica, the novella mirrors its representation of moral choice in a completely different light. When F. Alexander discovers that Alex is one of the perpetrators who broke into his "HOME" (23) and raped his wife, his compassionate stance towards the victim of the Ludovico Treatment takes a vengeful turn. The brutal beating of F.Alexander and the gruesome gang rape of his wife by the four droogs is witnessed by the reader. Regardless of the ridiculous figure the fictive author cuts, the sudden breakdown of his liberal stance on account of personal injury makes a forceful point regarding the difficulty of avoiding judgment in certain cases. The presence of F.

Alexander lends the abstract concept of moral choice a personal angle, which bears out the fragility of ethics in the presence of an inexplicable and terrifying force.[41]

Deciding on violent others is problematized by the text's representation of both Alex and F. Alexander as perpetrator-victims in relation to each other. F. Alexander's endorsement of moral choice in the aftermath of a near-fatal assault is a decision that faces up to the real implications that might follow in its wake. However, on discovering that the droog does not merely represent a victimized category, but is his personal demon, the author decides to make an example of Alex for the sake of *making* a case for moral choice.

The F. Alexander-Alex relationship is read by Ray as a father-son equation bound by authorship because the two namesakes are "authors of books entitled *A Clockwork Orange*" (483): "[W]hile F. Alexander is writing his book on the night of Alex's first visit to HOME and has a bound copy of it on his shelves during the second visit, Alex has not yet begun to write his" (484). The binding feature of writing in this instance not only ties in with the relation between paternity and writing but reflects directly on writing as violence. The double sense of giving death (interpretative and empirical) is represented via the "clack clack clacky clack clack clackity clackclack" (24) of F. Alexander's typewriter. This rhythmic sound accompanies the breaking and entering of the author's HOME by Alex and his fellow droogs. It is as if "A Clockwork Orange" is playing out in terms of actual violence. The treatise on moral choice is torn into shreds by Alex, for whom the author stands apart from his former victims: "[S]o here was another intelligent type bookman type like that we'd fillied with some hours back, but this one was a writer not a reader" (24-5).

[41] I owe this eloquent encapsulation of the dilemma of responsibility to my supervisor, Florian Mussgnug.

Alex's distinction between reading and writing does not hold from a Derridean perspective, in which reading is inscribing. Nevertheless, it does bring the action of writing into sharp focus. The figurative connotations of "orange" are also given a literal slant via the vicious beating undergone by the author, whose "litso [face]" is described as "all purple and dripping away like some very special sort of a juicy fruit" (27). The unthinkable risks attendant on moral choice are, literally, brought HOME to the author, whose allusion to "s*word*pen" (my italics 25) in "A Clockwork Orange" exemplifies writing as violence: "The attempt to impose upon man […] laws and conditions appropriate to a mechanical creation, against this I raise my swordpen" (25).

Moving on to the reader's self-reflexivity, which is offered courtesy of the implied reader, it is noticeable that the fleshing out of this literary device takes a somewhat literal dimension in *A Clockwork Orange*. In the opening pages of the novella, the narrator communicates to the reader, whom he addresses as "my brothers", his awareness of being watched. This awareness suggests a mutual gaze, one that Stanley Kubrick's film adaptation (1971) captures vividly by opening with a close-up of the droog looking directly into the eye of the camera.[42] This gaze makes the reader self-conscious, as well as anxious, because "brothers" implies this encounter is a confrontation with the other within the same. This possibility of the other within the same arises on the basis of the entertainment *value* of violence. The droog enacts this value via a performance that he evaluates on the reader's behalf: "We [droogs] hadn't done much, I know, but that was only like the start of the evening and I make no appy polly loggies to thee or thine for that" (10). In effect, the reader is attributed, albeit on a non-judgmental, fraternal basis, tendencies that are unmistakably voyeuristic. The

[42] English actor Malcolm McDowell plays Alex in Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange.*

fictional fleshing out of the implied reader, by means of ambivalent or unflattering traits, can, as Ommundsen points out, posit an "anti-model rather than a model for the real reader" (170). However, this treatment of the implied reader is far from straightforward in the novella because physical violence in a fictional context exempts one from the responsibility of intervening. Witnessing violence is all one can do but what this doing amounts to is difficult to say. This limiting of responsibility forces one to question the value of one's response, more so when it is given a specific value via the droog's willingness to perform for the sake of entertaining his reader. The reader's expectations are evidently borne in mind by the narrator: "[T]here I was dancing about with my britva […] And, my brothers, it was real satisfaction to me to waltz - left two three, right two three - and carve left cheeky and right cheeky, so that like two curtains of blood seemed to pour out at the same time, one on either side of his fat filthy oily snout" (20). The image "two curtains of blood", which links up with the traditional stage curtains in theatres, implicates the audience, in an active sense, in Alex's performance.[43]

A Clockwork Orange employs fiction in order to foreground the relation between blindness and meaning-making, which is relevant to Nadsat, as well as to potential responses by the reader. The blind spot that makes it possible to give meaning has to do with death and mortality, which give rise to representation, yet condition it to inaccessibility. The sufferings Alex earnestly confides in his "brothers":"[T]his is the real weepy and like tragic part of the story" (85), are self-reflexive as far as fiction is concerned, yet point to his blind spot. For the narrator-protagonist obviously does not take into account the laughter such self-pitying representations *could* generate in "the

[43] This association between curtains, blood and staging is reminiscent of the End in the Kermodian sense: *bring down the curtain.*

reader". This potential response must, of course, be considered in view of *my* use of "the reader", which, as clarified earlier on, revolves around the "I" that actuates the implied reader.

The *possibility* of laughter positions the reader as betrayer vis-á-vis the trusting hoodlum and yet brings him/her closer to the latter; for it is this beguiling naiveté to an otherwise menacing Alex that endears him to the reader. Laughter is a potential response to Alex's blindness, one that represents the reader's blind spot. The act of figuring out the hoodlum's worldview is disrupted by laughter, which emerges as a conflicted, unguarded response, one that forces the reader to look inwards: what does this say about *me*? The affectionate amusement that arises from being up close with Alex puts one in mind of the potentially misleading facet to responding to a violent other on a page. From that perspective, the novella's scrutiny of decision-making is inclusive of what could be illusory about fictional interaction with *specific* others, whose otherness can never be completely free of certain implications. For it is difficult to imagine anything funny or endearing about encountering a violent delinquent in real life. The otherness of "horrorshow", a coined version of the Russian *khorosho* (good), speaks of profound implications, such as the potential violence that could result from *showing* and acting on the *horror* one feels when faced with a violent other. But in an actual encounter with a delinquent, the reader would not have time to take into account all these conflicting angles, given the menace that such an individual would pose to his/her safety and wellbeing.

The narrator-protagonist's comment on the access that fiction gives to "reality" is relevant to the novella's self-reflexivity. During the Ludovico Technique, Alex is

'treated' to a film in which two droog-like characters "ma[k]e a real pudding out of this starry [old] veck". The film ends with a "close-up" of the spilt blood, regarding which Alex observes: "[A]nd the krovvy flowed beautiful red. It's funny how the colours of the like real world only seem really real when you viddy them on the screen" (115). This observation is a telling account of fiction's capacity, not only to bring one close to one's physical vulnerability, but to open a window onto real experiences that we are curious about and are happy to bear up with, or even enjoy, as long as they happen to fictive others. This statement, which is so revealing with regard to fiction's ambivalent role, also emerges as a dangerous distortion, coming as it does from an individual who draws real blood on a daily basis. How can blood only be *real* to him on screen? This obtuseness, which suggests that Alex's account (narrative), despite its explicitness and brutal honesty, is so detached from what he does, pushes the reader to step back from a narrator who is in a bodily predicament - on account of the Technique - that one has no choice but to empathize with.

The stress on mortality in *The Gift of Death*, thought through via Abraham's gruesome act on Mount Moriah, plays out in a rigorously bodily context in *A Clockwork Orange*. The bodily sense underscored by novella's depiction of responsibility represents the relation-gap between the reader and Nadsat. The argot, distinctly sensual, plays on the reader's senses by means of words that evoke physicality and bodily conditions. It also employs the body to reflect on the giving of meaning as a possibility of giving death. The intimacy between Nadsat and deathly violence bears out the death-giving dimension to fiction and, given the interpretative sense of "fiction", has am implicating effect on the reader. The Ludovico Technique, arguably, compels the reader to feel

invested in the fate of a ruthless hoodlum. Yet the co-implication of fiction and death also points to Nadsat's distancing effect on the reader, whose experience of death and violence is only in a vicarious sense.

The choice-violation relation also makes a great deal of sense because of the accent on physicality in the novella. Physicality, in the context of the body's capacity to surprise, shock and disconcert, bears out the freedom indispensable to choice and, simultaneously, suggests an element of imposition. Nadsat gives a novel slant to the conflicting (freedom and imposition) connotations of physicality by inventing on the basis of the body's resistance to language and thought.

Conclusion

This chapter has analyzed Nadsat in the light of the main research theme: fiction's giving of death and the implications of violence it gives to choice, as well as the implicating effect this version of responsibility has on reading. The argot, which represents fiction's relation to death, offers an account of responsibility in which the recurring feature of choice-violation highlights the violence of giving and in so doing, reflects ambivalently on fiction's role towards death. The choice-violation nexus has been examined in this chapter in the following contexts: the teen-adult indeterminacy, the deconstruction of free will, the Ludovico Technique, the ptitsa's song and paternity.

From the perspective of the reader, the pervasiveness of the choice-violation feature represents a consistency that also reflects critically on the role of fiction. Although this consistency lends considerable credibility to Nadsat's version of responsibility, it relates to structure and form, to what can be fashioned, or given by mortals. The coined argot's self-reflexive mode foregrounds the potential fictiveness of

its re-presentation of responsibility and in so doing, opens it up to critical readings. Consistent with the giving-death role of fiction, the opening represented by reading is argued as touched by interpretative violence.

As demonstrated in this chapter, the choice-violation nexus opens onto a slight but significant shift within the tradition of paternal responsibility. This shift, which demonstrates that traditional representations of father-son relationship harbor non-traditional, subversive possibilities, does a great deal of justice to Nadsat's role in the capacity of literature as *différance*. Reading *A Clockwork Orange* from the point of view of literature as *différance* extends the novella's significance beyond a dystopian context of unremitting violence by showing that violence inheres in the construction and performance of responsibility.

In the next chapter, fiction in the mode of giving death is examined in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* in the context of the run-in between two post-9/11 antagonists and the story of be-longing it opens onto. The discussion focuses on the story's rupturing of boundaries between post-9/11 belonging and sexual longing. This rupturing is consistent with the violence entailed in giving, for longing points to how identity is given on the basis of the other, or what remains inaccessible to the self about itself. The destabilization of identity opens onto the dilemma of responding. Untenable in the absence of an "I", responding implicates the"I" in interpreting the call of the other. The indispensable "I", which gives meaning to what cannot be known fully, underscores the violating dimension to choice and links up with the tension between reading and interpretation. In the 9/11 novel, interpretative violence is uncovered via a re-reading of belonging as be-longing and is also drawn on by longing, on account of its relation to

role-playing. Rendered inclusive of pretending and responsibility, role-playing is examined in the chapter from the perspective of how it involves a giving up of self for the sake of appropriating the other's identity.

Chapter Two

Belonging and Responsibility in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

> I was not certain where I belonged – in New York, in Lahore, in both, in neither – and for this reason, when she [Erica] reached out to me for help I had nothing of substance to give her.
>
> -Changez, *Reluctant Fundamentalist*, 2007.

> In responsibility I divest myself of what is properly my own. Yet to answer the call is already to claim it as my own.
>
> -Sarah Hammerschlag, 2008.

Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, a 9/11 novel (2007), opens in a bustling bazaar in Lahore, where Changez, the autodiegetic narrator from Pakistan, runs into a harassed looking American stranger. The stranger, who remains anonymous and silent throughout the novel, is addressed by the narrator as "you". This "you", which the implied reader is, to some extent, on the inside of, is treated by Changez to an account of his tortured relationship with post-9/11 America. The account opens at Princeton, where, as a student, Changez is recruited to work as an analyst by Underwood Samson, a prestigious corporate firm in New York. Just as the Pakistani is on the verge of assimilating into the elite world of America, 9/11 happens, followed by the War on Terror. The latter's negative impact on America-Pakistan relations renders him uneasy over his complicity in Underwood Samson's corporate designs on "Third World" countries. The ethical reservations that riddle his American dream find a homology in his troubled romance with Erica, a wealthy American socialite he conflates with America. Erica's obsession with her dead lover, Chris, gives rise to a responsibility in Changez to heal her. This obligation, undertaken by means of sexual role-playing - "pretend[ing]" to

be Chris (119) - conflicts with, as well as draws on, Changez's sexual longing for her. Due to his disenchantment with Am[E]rica, the Pakistani returns to Lahore, where, in his teaching role at a university, he gets involved in politics and stages demonstrations against America's foreign policy. In his role as a political activist, he advocates Pakistan's "disengagement" from America (203). His political mission's suspected link to terrorism, revealed near the very end of the narration, takes the reader back to the novel's beginning, to what *might* have instigated Changez to open up to a stranger whom *he* suspects of being a CIA agent sent on a mission to assassinate him.

The possibility of threat, or imminent death, that stalks the encounter is treated by the narrator as a possible fiction: "It seems an obvious thing to say, but you should not *imagine* that we Pakistanis are all potential terrorists, just as we should not *imagine* that you Americans are all undercover assassins" (my italics 208-9). Fiction mediates Changez's encounter with the possible assassin, whose "*mission*" he tries to ascertain and deflect by means of his narrative (italics in original 1). The threat of death remains uncertain throughout, on account of an inconclusive ending that leaves the text poised on a note of imminent violence that may or may not happen. This tension-filled void instigates the reader into imagining possible outcomes to the encounter. Perhaps Changez gives death to the stranger, or is assassinated. It could be a case of both contingencies, or neither of them, given that the "beard[ed]" narrator claims to be "a lover of America" (1). The responsibility of deciding on an outcome is delegated to the reader by this gaping hole, a textual stand-in for death that resonates with actual concerns faced in a post-9/11 world. This drawing on real concerns implicates the reader in responding to death through fiction, in the literary *and* interpretative sense. The

reader's vicarious position vis-à-vis death, undecidable on account of the narrator's use of "you", is not exempt from violence; it entails writing death, a possibility that gives the "Scheherazade[an]" (Hildreth 200) ending a "novel" slant by making the fiction-death relation work both ways.[44] Writing death is not confined to one's speculation regarding the death faced by the two antagonists, but also applies to the process of interpretation, which emerges on the basis of excluding other possible meanings and risks infringing on the inaccessibility of the text.

The novel highlights the dilemma of reading the other in a situation where actual violence or death is a threat. In foregrounding how physical violence can arise from one's reading of the other, the text implies the necessity of being more giving in one's reading of the other. At the same time, the novel spotlights this responsibility in a context where this affirmative possibility could potentially result in death. It is a premise that situates our mortal limitations, our unavoidable contingence on representation, in relation to the risks that arise when responding to actual others. This premise parallels the one in *The Gift of Death*, in which the representation of God as the self's relation to its own mortality makes it possible to read the violent divine injunction in the light of the exclusionary violence of representation. The novel's interweaving of actual or empirical and interpretative violence is a feature that binds all three works in this study. Drawing on *The Gift of Death*, I speak of this feature as a two-fold possibility of giving death.

As in the other two works, what binds empirical and interpretative violence in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is fiction, which is predominantly represented through role-playing, a popular trope in metafiction (Waugh 34). "[P]retending", another way of

[44] Amy Hildreth's "Cosmopolitan Hospitality in Post-9/11 Popular Fiction: Asad's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*", *Engaging Terror: A Critical and Interdisciplinary Approach*, edited by M. Vardalos, Universal-Publishers, 2009.

describing “fiction”, is indispensable to “play”, which is “a necessary aspect of human society” (Waugh 34). When “play” takes the form of “literary fiction”, language, “characterized precisely by its detachability from specific context” and involving the shifting movement of signification, is highlighted in terms of its playful dimension (Waugh 35). The decontextualization at work in *différance* is contrived within fiction, which “manipulates the relation between a set of signs (whether linguistic or non-linguistic) as ‘message’ and the context or frame of that message” in order to show that the “same” act, when “shift[ed]” to another “context”, “requires very different interpretative procedures” (Waugh 35). This shift, in both context and meaning, is witnessed through Changez’s role-playing, which, in *playing* out in instances of healing, acquires connotations of responsibility.

Fiction’s relation to death is represented by Changez’s role-playing, his “pretending” to be Chris, Erica’s dead lover. Like Nadsat, role-playing underscores the inaccessibility of responsibility and is shown to be implicated in giving death. Whereas the fictive argot in Burgess’s novella uncovers the violation that conditions choice, Changez’s role-playing, or en-*acting* responsibility, not only emerges as a basis for disowning responsibility, but renders inaccessibility at risk of being claimed. Changez’s commitment to belong to a post-9/11 America and a bereaving Erica draws on the ambivalence of role-playing. This commitment of his uncovers the fictiveness of belonging, which shifts from a state of ownership into one of longing for the other.

I examine the responsibility-belonging conflict in the context of a tension within subjectivity, which pertains to whether giving to the other involves a return to the self. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist,* the tension within subjectivity links up with fiction-death

relation via two features: one, Changez's narration, which is conditioned by the suspected post-9/11 encounter and re-presents post-9/11 belonging by means of certain key responses, which are analyzed in this chapter. The second feature is the accent on role-playing, which gives rise to violent implications in the context of be-longing. These implications are shown in this chapter to have a significant bearing on fiction's relation to death.

The tension within subjectivity is borne out by the knife-wielding instant in *The Gift of Death* from more than one angle. Firstly, in this "instant", the Knight of faith *acts* on the basis of what mortality has imposed on him, namely, the "night of faith", or *différance*. Secondly, the "night of faith" alludes to exclusionary violence, which makes it possible to give meaning to the void of death, yet, in of itself, cannot be sensed, or recuperated, by mortals. In *The Gift of Death*, Abraham's selfless giving to God is not absolved of a possible return to the self (Hammerschlag "Another, Other Abraham" 80) on account of the meaning sacrifice gives to death's inaccessibility. The giving of meaning detracts from inaccessibility and yet this taking away is also contingent on loss. *Différance* does a great deal of justice to the dilemma of giving.

Sarah Hammerschlag reads T*he Gift of Death* in the context of this dilemma. She argues that the text is conflicted between aligning itself with and countering the stress on deracination in Levinas's model of subjectivity. According to her, the model of ethical subjectivity encountered in *The Gift of Death* is a distinctly Levinasian one, in which the stress is on deracination (Hammerschlag 80). For Levinas, the patriarch's decision to leave his ancestral home in Genesis 12:1 for the sake of God represents a response that uproots the self (Hammerschlag 78). In response to Hegel, who criticizes the prophet for

cutting himself off from humanity for the sake of an insular, slavish equation with God (Ware 404), Levinas "revaloris[es]" Abraham's "alienation" by reading it in relational terms, as in a response to the other that others the self (Hammerschlag 78). It is in faithfully following the Levinasian model that *The Gift of Death* thinks through the tension between Levinas's insistence on "irreplaceable singularity" and the self's deracination: "[R]esponsibility requires two contradictory movements. It requires one to respond as oneself and as irreplaceable singularity […] but it also requires that, being good and through goodness, one *forget* or *efface* the origin of what one gives" (my italics *GD* 52). "[F]orget[ting], or effac[ing] the origin of what one gives" draws attention to the necessity of un-binding the response from any given or representable identity, which is impossible since responsibility, as Genesis 22 stresses, must be manifested.

As Hammerschlag points out, the possibility of a return to the self is articulated much more explicitly in "Abraham, the Other" (80): "In responding I divest myself of what is properly my own. Yet to answer the call is to claim it as my own" (Hammerschlag 81). Spoken of by Derrida as "a post-script" to *The Gift of Death* (312), "Abraham, the Other" draws on Franz Kafka's fictional parable "Abraham" (1947) for the sake of investigating how the Biblical patriarch's response appropriates God's call by giving meaning to it. The parable emerges as a striking instance of literature as *différance*, one that offers a provocative re-presentation of "here I am" by giving it implications of election and presumption.

As demonstrated further on in the chapter, the pull and tug between selfless giving and election is taken forward via the accent on role-playing in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. The double sense (playacting and responsibility) of role-playing in the

novel has its counterpart in Derrida's reading of the Binding. In *The Gift of Death*, God's feigning an interest in the sacrifice of Isaac elicits an exemplary response from Abraham. The latter's decision is rendered by Derrida, on behalf of God, in terms that, from the perspective of morality, are unquestionably provocative: "I see that you have not only understood that [responsibility] as an idea, but that - and here lies responsibility - you have acted on it […] you are absolute responsibility, you had the courage to behave like a murderer in the eyes of the world and of your loved ones, in the eyes of morality, politics, and of the generality of the general or of your kind" (73). In this version of God's Word, the transgressive side to responsibility is both played up and underplayed via the use of "behave *like* a murderer". The phrase draws attention to what is performative about responding. As such, it reflects on God's performance, as well as the act that Abraham, in *Fear and Trembling*, assumes for the sake of protecting Isaac's faith in God: " Lord God in heaven, I thank you; it is better he [Isaac] believes me a monster than that he should lose faith in you" (qtd. in Literature in Secret 124).

My discussion of fiction's implication in Changez's responses also represents a progression with respect to studies that focus on the fiction-death relation in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. One such study is Lindsay Anne Balfour's "Risky Cosmopolitanism: Intimacy and Autoimmunity in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*" (2017), which views the 9/11 novel as an "interrogation of the possibilities and limits of hospitality in a time of terror" (214). Changez's hospitality towards the stranger is said to take on the risk of narrating a tale that "effectively weakens his [Changez's] agency, identity and life force". This tale is read as "the

stranger that will leave him [Changez] heartbroken, strip him of both worldly possession and emotional passion, and eventually get him killed" (222).

Balfour examines narration in Hamid's novel in the light of Derrida's autoimmunity, which refers to how mortal entities, be it living or conceptual ones, have the potential to work against their own mechanisms of self-protection, or immunity. Autoimmunity reflects on *différance,* which constitutes a given meaning on the basis of that which undermines it. Balfour's Derridean reading is significant, for it spotlights the violence of giving and takes into account the death-giving capacity of fiction. However, the main focus of the study: the auto-immune aspect of hospitality is limited to how fiction's death-giving capacity impacts the storyteller. That is,"direct violence, from one party to another", which features prominently in my analysis of what fiction gives, is ruled out by Balfour on account of Changez's "embracing" of "suicide" through narration (222).

The giving aspect of fiction is vouched for in "Abraham, the Other", which owes its re-reading of "here I am" to Kafka's parable. This re-reading is analyzed in the next section in the context of Derrida's discussion of the tension between responsibility and belonging. This tension, outlined in view of its relevance to *The Reluctant Fundamentalist,* is reflected on by Derrida with respect to his troubled relationship with and the obligation he owes Judaism. The implications of election uncovered within belonging come up against the selflesslessness of responding. The possibility of election, tackled by "Abraham, the Other" in the context of nationalism, plays out in a political context in the 9/11 novel and is *re-presented* via role-playing, as in materialized and undermined. The deracination-election tension, uncovered by Derrida within "here I

am", is relevant to role-playing, as well as to the unaccountability that stalks Changez's narration of his own responses.

The Undecidability of "Here I Am": Deracination & Election:

There is no "here I am" in Kafka's parable, in which the fictional Abraham responds to the divine command with self-doubt. He is ready to respond to God, provided in responding he does not court the risk of appearing "like a bad student" "who from the back of a class […] would think that he heard his own name, whereas the teacher had honored another" ("Abraham, the Other" 312). This imaginary Abraham questions his election by God: "[H]e could not believe he was the one meant, he, an ugly old man, and the dirty youngster that was his child" (Kafka 44). The divine call triggers a rigorous self-examination within the prophet; it tests his faith in himself. What torments Kafka's Abraham is whether *he* is worthy of carrying out God's order, for the divine call is not distressing to him on account of *what* it requires him to do.

In his reading of the parable, Derrida focuses on the possibility of election that attenuates the uprooting indispensable to selfless giving. "Abraham, the Other", in which Derrida reconsiders his former reading of "here I am" (*The Gift of Death*), points to fiction as a means of taking discourse on responsibility forward. Derrida says as much in "Abraham, the Other": "Kafka […] conjures up more future to come than many others by striking the rock of his fictional writing, and by calling us to this truth (such at least is my interpretation): that anyone responding to the call must continue to doubt, to ask himself whether he has heard right, whether there is no original misunderstanding" (337). In this statement, which talks about the dilemma of being called, Derrida places himself in the position of one who responds to fiction's call to truth. This position is

provocative, for fiction is attributed with revealing the truth about an instance of responsibility that is said to be exemplary in Holy Scriptures, as well as in *Fear and Trembling*. The parable uproots other readings of "here I am", including the one offered in *The Gift of Death* and, as such, is elected, by Derrida, as the "truth". Yet Derrida's reading of fiction as "truth" is scrupulously claimed by him as an interpretation that belongs to him. His acknowledgement of the truth as *his* interpretation is claimed by him in view of its limitations. As such, the claim performs the tussle between deracination and election.

The locus of the deracination-election tension is the "I" in Abraham's "here I am", which Derrida reflects on in the context of what he owes his Jewish belonging. This personal obligation, unraveled in view of the appropriating implications to "here *I* am", is, initially, spoken of in the context of guilt: "On the matter of Judeity or Judaism, the insufficiency, the inadequacy, the failure (all mine, and of which I have not finished speaking) are graver, and I fear, more significant than a simple incompetence, an incompetence and a lack of culture, to which, by the way, I at the same time also confess" (314). Derrida's problematic equation with Judaism dates back to his childhood in French Algeria, where the passing of anti-Semitic laws in 1941 forced him to attend a school meant only for Jews. He grew up viewing his Jewish belonging as an imposition, one that was initially foisted at birth through circumcision and was later thrust upon him by means of "wound[ing]" "insult[s]" "at school" (318). Derrida's bond with Judaism, which touches his self most intimately, was formed through a sense of rupture and "dissociation". Hence, he speaks of possibility of belonging in the following terms: "[A]

certain rupture, a certain departure, a certain separation, an interruption of the bond, a radical un-binding remains also […] the condition of the social bond as such" (314).

Derrida's phrasing of the possibility of belonging evokes the distance or separation indispensable for a relation, be it with one's community or one's relation to oneself. This (un)making of belonging through "distance", "interruption" and "rupture" ostensibly takes a more romanticized form in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, in which belonging is (de)constructed on the basis of longing. Longing, however, not only underscores the fragmentation of the self, but is shown to be implicated in violence against actual others.

Further on in the chapter, my textual analysis of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* will illustrate how the novel's re-presentation of post-9/11 be-longing and the War *of* Terror bears out the relation between interpretative and empirical violence.This relation (and its political context) is as pertintent to belonging in "Abraham, the Other", in which the giving of meaning by the exemplary "I' is said to "lead" to "state nationalism in its most violent forms" (321). In a more general, or less "exemplarist", context (321), the "I" is spoken of with respect to the conflict within responsibility, that is, the necessity of giving meaning *and* its implication in interpretative violence:

> It is possible that I have not been called, me, and it is not even excluded that no one, no One, nobody, ever called any One, any unique one, anybody. The possibility of an originary misunderstanding in destination is not an evil, it is the structure, perhaps the very vocation of any call worthy of that name, of all nomination, of all response and responsibility. (337)

Derrida employs “One” for both the caller and the respondent in “no one, no One, nobody, ever called any One”. This splitting of “One” harks back to *The Gift of Death*, in which God’s singularity is represented as the fragmented condition of the mortal self and its inability to be fully accessible to itself. “One” also shoulders a double responsibility, for giving meaning to the other’s call and also for, perhaps, imagining the call itself. The self’s being at cross purposes with actual others starts with the gap within itself, which conditions the possibility of a call and a response to it. This gap underscores the necessity of giving meaning and reflects on how interpretation infringes on inaccessibility.

“[O]riginary misrepresentation” is a reference to the giving of meaning, which is “originary” on account of the gap gifted to us by mortality. In stating that “originary misrepresentation” is indispensable to responding, Derrida is reflecting on *différance*, which highlights that we can only grasp the other as *other*, not *as such*. For Derrida, the unavoidability of appropriation bears an ethical dimension, in that it renders it possible to respect the other’s otherness. In contradistinction to Levinas’s reading of the other as absolutely other and “not other *than* me”, Derrida argues that “in order that the other remain other”, “I must still relate that other to me”. The point that Derrida makes is that “the other is irreducibly other, meaning that the other can never be fully reduced either to pure sameness or pure otherness” (Peterson 551). Hence, the possibility of originary misrepresentation is not a barrier to responsibility but a possibility of it and yet it is tied to implications of election, which *must* be taken into account for the sake of minimizing violence towards the other.

Speaking of violence towards the other, the "I" in "here I am" trespasses on the inaccessibility of the other and risks substituting itself in place of actual others. For there is always the possibility that the responding "I" may not be the only or the first addressee of the call" (337). For Derrida, assuming the role of the "chosen one" verges on "potential boastfulness and arrogance" (Hammerschlag 76-7). This presumption is argued by Hammerschlag as the "flipside" of the unworthiness - "the shame involved in being ridiculous"- felt by Kafka's Abraham (76-7). The risk of a subject "substituting himself violently for another" is attendant on the possibility of responsibility, which is subject to "the law of substitution" (Abraham, the Other 337); responsibility "call[s] for an infinite increase of vigilance and concern" on account of its "*law* of substitution" (my italics 337). The possibility of violent substitution plays out in both directions via the double sense of role-playing: responsibility *and* pretending. The latter sense bears out Changez's hijacking of Chris's identity and, simultaneously, implies the narrator-protagonist's loss of self to his dead rival.

The law of substitution is highlighted in and performed by Derrida's brief but dense description of responsibility: "the other decides in me", which suggests the impossibility of fully knowing to whom or what we owe our decisions. This description represents a reading of subjectivity that substitutes the Kantian conception of an autonomous deciding subject. The deciding self's inability to fully access its decision is said to be grounded in the subject's relation to his or her own death. This not-knowing is accounted for by the term undecidability, which refers to how the possibility of representation, in being conditioned by difference, precludes any given meaning from being pure, intact or whole. Undecidability bears a great deal of ethical significance

because it points to how the possibility of representation, or what is spoken of as *originary* violence, is open to both violent and non-violent possibilities. This openness is sacrificed when one meaning is given precedence over the other on the basis of what is moral. However, without this privileging or deciding on meaning, there would be no representation, which is inclusive of meaning and its manifestation in terms of action (Elmore 37-9).

The undecidability that conditions *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* starts with Changez's *wounding* love story, which, rendered inseparable from the threatening encounter that gives rise to it, emerges as a possible substitute for terror. The next section focuses on the suspected post-9/11 encounter in the light of the fiction-death relation and with respect to the undecidable relationships it opens onto: beard-lover (terror-intimacy), suspicion-paranoia-fiction, terror-fear, and responsibility-pretending (en-acting). *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*'s undecidable structure, which veers between a dramatic and interior monologue, is also reflected on in the light of relevant readings of the 9/11 novel's structure.

The Encounter: Meeting or Making Fate?

The "other decides in me" is relevant to Changez's encounter with possible death, which conditions the re-presentation of his conflicted responses to Am[E]rica. In his run-in with with the American stranger, the Pakistani narrator-protagonist plays the role of a "bearded" "lover of America" (1). This role opens onto his narration of inscrutable responses, which he retrospectively accounts for in terms of their shocking impact on his sense of self. My discussion of the narrator's encounter with possible death is followed by an examination of four key responses. My examination is implicated in the suspicion

that conditions the encounter because it takes into account that the text's unmaking of belonging might just be a tactic that seeks to deflect the threat of death.

The role of bearded lover posits the narrator's identity in the context of longing. It also reflects on the conflicted identity of his narrative, in which the wounds that accompany his sexual role-playing not only apply to the bruising he undergoes at the hands of an unresponsive Erica but imply that love-making could be an analogy of the 9/11 attacks. The "commingling" (*RF* 104) of terrorism and sexual intimacy has given rise to speculation amongst critics regarding the love angle's identity: is it an allegory of 9/11, or not? Whereas Peter Morey regards the "over-determined symbolism" as an indication that the love story may be "a tale spun" for the sake of baiting the "US auditor" (140-1), Anna Hartnell's argues the cross-cultural romance as an allegory with a difference. In her view, the love angle is a representation of post-9/11 that holds out the promise of America's capacity to rise above racial differences and move out of the shadow of its European colonial history. But this promise is not delivered on because "America is locked in a nostalgic embrace with Europe, an embrace that refuses to be transformed by the postcolonial moment that Changez potentially represents" (343). The reader's resistance to simplifying "stereotypes" (581), which Sarah Ilott rightly attributes to the text's heavy-handed use of allegory, links up with the narrative's representation of *fundamental* identities as suspect.

As Hartnell points out, the relevance of the suspect allegory is that the coupling of terrorism and intimacy points to conflict as a possible relation. But the possibility of conflict as a relation need not be confined to the allegorical love story, as it is in Hartnell's study. I would argue that it is as applicable to Changez's encounter with the

stranger, which constituted by conflicting possibilities of suspicion and hospitality, represents a *relational* conflict, one that suggests there is more than one way to respond in a situation of conflict. Changez's soliciting the attention of his suspected assassin could be his way of testing the possibility of responding otherwise to conflict: "Excuse me, sir, but may I be of assistance?" (1). It could be that he takes it upon himself to test post-9/11 "paranoia" (208) via his role as a "bearded" "lover of America", in which a hostile other is posited within the self.

This representation of a conflicted self potentially bears on the novel's use of a one-sided dramatic monologue to enact an intercultural dialogue. The Pakistani narrator speaks on behalf of all the others in the novel, be it the American addressee or the characters who inhabit his narrative; in fact, all disruptions, interruptions and questions by others are mediated by him. The latter feature, referred to by Nazry Bahrawi as "truncated dialogue", is said to shift the American stranger's "paranoia and anxiety" "over to the reader" (271). Bahrawi's point about "truncated dialogue" can be extended for the sake of reflecting on a specific structural feature of the novel, one that sets up the reader's "paranoia" directly in the context of "fiction" (in the interpretative and literary sense). This feature has to do with the construction of the narrative as a single speech act, one that vocalizes a number of others, such as Erica and Jim, Changez's employer and mentor. There is no outside to Changez's one-sided dialogue because the entire action in the novel takes place inside it. This embodying of all others by a single voice pushes one to speculate about the identities in the narrative. Morey, who offers valuable insights into "the novel's constant attention to fiction-making" (140), points out that the novel is "*falsely polyphonic"*: "[W]e hear the voices of Erica, Jim, Wainwright et al., but they are

all ventriloquized by Changez, who may well be an unreliable narrator and whose story has its own political rationale and relentless momentum" (italics in original 139). Yet Morey, who questions whether these "characters" are "real" or "concocted for the benefit of his suspicious US auditor" (140), stops short of suggesting that the American addressee could be a figment of Changez's imagination. Hamid implies as much in speaking of "the novel's two main characters, the Pakistani protagonist and the silent American listener, as 'a divided man's conversation with himself"' (Hamid qtd. in Bjerre 258). There is nothing to stop the reader from speculating whether the "monologue disguised as a dialogue" (Ilott 573), could be an *interior* monologue, particularly since the narrator confesses to being "plagued by paranoia" (208).

This confession acquires implicating undertones via the juxtaposition of "beard" with intimacy, which can be read from the perspective of how terrorism is camouflaged to fit in with everyday life for the sake of disrupting it. This feature to terror, arguably, makes us all prone to suspicion and opens up terror's relation to a fear that could be imaginary. The encounter casts suspicion in a double role, in that it calls forth the possibility of death and renders it into a possible fiction. Suspicion and its partaking of fear opens up the possibility of reading terror on the basis of fear.

The encounter is grounded in the relation between terror and fear: "I was warned by my comrades that America might react to my admittedly intemperate remarks by sending an emissary to intimidate me or worse" (207-8) and yet poses a possibility of investigating it. Changez represents the encounter as a means of combating his "paranoia": "I must avoid […] constantly looking over shoulder" (208). His confessing to "paranoia" implies that he regards his own suspicion as suspect. The parallel that he

draws between his mental condition and that of Kurtz's in *Heart of Darkness* reinforces the connection between suspicion and fiction: "I have felt rather like a Kurtz waiting for his Marlow" (208). In drawing on fiction, the narrator points to what could be absurd and self-gratifying about his heightened perception of his predicament. Whereas Kafka's parable brings to light the potential presumption of Abraham in Genesis 22, here fiction is shown to both nurture and deflate the self-importance that constitutes responding to death. Relating to Kurtz in the light of death also opens up a different way of responding to death, for Changez decides to meet his fate, as opposed to lying in wait for it.

In some respects, this driven approach to death is a humorous distortion of the agency that comes from death. In meeting his fate, the narrator could, in a sense, be responsible for *making* it happen. Ilott points out that "there is nothing but a suggestive use of imagery, which we must remember is always manipulated by Changez's narration, to indicate any actual threat posed by either of the characters" (573). Changez's willingness to engage with an American regarding his conflicts with Am[E]rica argues a degree of openness, which is explicitly spoken of in relation to the expectations he has of this fateful encounter: "Allow me to assure you that I do not always speak this openly; indeed, I almost never do. But tonight, as I think we both understand, is a night of some *importance*. Certainly I perceive it to be so - and yet if I am wrong, you will surely be justified in regarding me the most terrible boor!" (italics in original 105). This openness is inclusive of the possibility that his perceptions may turn out to be illusory and although it risks falling back on illiberal post-9/11 readings via "boor", this instance of backsliding is still a way forward; for Changez brings a misreading that belongs to the American in relation to his own biased perceptions.

The inflicting dimension to storytelling, evident in the play on "boor" and "bore", is central to Megha Anwer's reading of the 9/11 novel. She speaks of Changez's narrative as a "hijack[ing] of the American, as a means of "metaphorically holding him hostage with an intricate yarn woven out of sundry personal details" (20). The violence that inheres in fiction rears its head with respect to the role that self-conscious heroism plays in Changez's relation to death. Changez's "paranoia", which is responsible for the encounter, springs from his fearless condemnation of America's fatal foreign policy in a televised interview: "When the international television news networks came to our campus, I stated to them among other things that no country inflicts death so readily upon the inhabitants of other countries, frightens so many people far away, as America" (207). The stance, adopted by Changez on behalf of Pakistan, as well as other Third World countries, involves speaking out against a dominant economic and political power. His condemnation, which derives from his role as political activist, does not address the economic concerns that render Pakistan subordinate to America, although these are raised elsewhere in the narrative. The exclusion of concerns that argue a basis for intimidation and open up the possibility of accountability, on both sides, makes way for a monstrous America that gives death to others. It is this death-giving America that Changez responds to by means of inflammatory rhetoric. Given America's constant surveillance of Pakistan in the wake of 9/11, Changez's scathing attack renders him vulnerable, a circumstance that is brought home to him by his comrades' warnings. He skillfully attributes the forceful impact of his denunciation to the media: "[M]y brief interview appeared to resonate; it was replayed for days, and even now an excerpt of it can be seen in the occasional war-on-terror montage" (207). This gesture draws attention

to fiction's re-presentation of responsibility as violent. It reflects ambivalently on Changez's narrative, which reworks terror in a context of affirmative possibilities to depict intimacy as wounding and healing as officious. The irony is that the scathing attack on America is in the interests of defending Pakistan, yet it is appropriated by discourse ("war-on-terror montage") that belongs to America and which, earlier on the narrative, is provocatively spoken of as "posturing" (190).

The narration of the interview is inclusive of Changez's afterthoughts on his performance before the camera. In the aftermath of his rant, he views his denunciation differently, from the perspective of the dual connotations of en-*acting* responsibility:

> Later, it occurred to me that in addition to expressing my dismay, I was possibly trying to attract attention to myself; I had, in my own manner, issued a firefly's glow bright enough to transcend the boundaries of continents and civilizations. If Erica was watching - which rationally, I knew, she almost certainly was not - she might have seen me and been moved to correspond. (207)

"I was possibly trying to attract attention to myself" implies that his impassioned response was driven by bravado and that he regards his performance of responsibility with a certain degree of critical detachment. The hyperbolic language used to describe the performance both heightens and deflates the impression of bravado, which is simultaneously spoken of in relation to his insignificance ("a firefly's glow"). In fact, it is his insignificance that makes his response heroic in his and the imaginary eyes of others. Heroism starts out as that which potentially risks deflecting from the response, but, on account of the responder's insignificance, does not overtake, or hijack, the response. The performance is claimed as one in which he was carried away by emotion:

"I was perhaps more forceful on this topic than I intended" (207) and acknowledges that his preoccupation with himself was, to some extent, responsible for his performance before the camera. This admission is noticeably rigorous, for the narcissistic feature, which strikes him in the aftermath of his interview, is explicitly said to be there, as a conditioning factor, in the instance of his responding. Changez's afterthoughts uncover what he risked taking away from the response on account of his concern with heroism.

However, what follows this conscientious accounting renders things more complicated. My reference is to the narrator's uprooting of the original response, which shifts from a political mission to a call upon a possibly dead beloved to respond. Rumored to have committed suicide during her stay in a sanatorium, Erica's death remains unconfirmed in the narrative because her body is not found. Near the end of the narrative, the narrator dwells on the possible fictiveness of Erica's death in the context of the letters he writes to her, in the hope that she might respond. A violent denunciation of a death-giving America is substituted by a desperate call to a possibly dead or unresponsive lover. This substitution displaces an instance of violent substitution with one of responsibility, in which Changez draws attention to himself out of concern for Erica, for the sake of confirming her whereabouts. His electing to sever Pakistan's ties with America seeks to redress the former's subservient and reluctant role in the War on Terror, to which it was recruited on the basis of intimidation from the US: "Either you are with us, or against us". Via his mission of disengagement, he presumes to take charge of destroying a relation that, *to him*, represents his unbreakable bond with Erica, one that is shown to outlive her suspected death. The conflation of America and Erica does a great deal of justice to the dilemma of electing to respond to the other, in that the

presumption that conditions the political mission is shown to come up against the lack of choice that constitutes a relation.

The encounter analyzed in this section features a role (bearded lover) that is charged with the giving and taking of death and performs a number of disquieting, undecidable relationships. This undecidability cautions the stranger (and reader) against projecting certain meanings onto the other, but, at the same time, heightens the riskiness of the encounter. The role of the bearded lover role stands for a relation between incompatible others, suggesting that relationships may not be a question of choice. As in "Abraham, the Other", in which the necessity of "I" gives an aspect of choicelessness to responding, the uprooting and appropriating effects of role-playing also link up with the possibility of no choice. For Changez elects to assist a stranger whom he views as his dreaded fate (death) and his exposing himself to death is for the sake of re-presenting a fundamentalist as a lover. This lover, in turn, not only sports a beard (has a political agenda), but assumes the responsibility of healing Erica and in so doing, wreaks havoc in the life of his significant other.

The Binding Glare

The instance I turn to in this section is also one in which the role played by the narrator-protagonist - that of a member of the American elite - links up with deracination and election, as well as the sense of violation this tension gives to responding. This role bears on Changez's relation to himself, with respect to the choicelessness that conditions it. In this instance, dressed in a "suit" (77) and seated in a "limousine" (76), the Pakistani Americanophile is subjected to a glare by a Filipino jeepney driver in Manila. The Pakistani's performance as a member of the American elite is disrupted by the driver's

glare of "undisguised hostility" (76). This glare puts him in touch with a "Third World sensibility" that he harbors unbeknownst to himself. Changez, sent to Manila "to value a recorded-music business" on behalf of Underwood Samson (75), speaks of his stay there in the context of his "act[ing] and speak[ing], as much as [his] dignity would permit, more like an *American* (italics in original 74). This performance, which he claims is a departure from his usual behavior, is attributed to the "respect" that his Filipino counterparts reserve for his American colleagues in the workplace (74).

He claims that his acting like an American is an exception. This is borne out by his narrative, in which, earlier on, he pits his instant identification with New York against the possibility of being American: "I was, in four and a half years, never an American; I was *immediately* a New Yorker" (Italics in original 37). Changez's positing of a city that belongs to America on the outside of what is American is telling with respect to the inside-outside state of his own belonging. The act of claiming belonging and the violence it involves is also represented later on, in the wake of the attacks, in the context of New York's relation of non-belonging to America: "Your country's [America's] flag invaded New York after the attacks; it was everywhere. Small flags stuck on toothpicks featured in the shrines; stickers of flags adorned windshields […] They all seemed to proclaim: *We are America* - not New York, which, in my opinion, means something quite different" (italics in original 90). The invasion undertaken by America for the sake of feeling whole brings the tension of belonging in relation to hostility.

This hostility constitutes Changez's performance in Manila: "I learned to tell executives my father's age, 'I need it *now*'; I learned to cut to the front of lines with an

extraterritorial smile; and I learned to answer, when asked where I was from, that I was from New York" (italics in original 74). The shame that he confesses to feeling on account of this performance: "I was often ashamed" (74) also points to hostility in the form of an inner conflict. The description of the glare captures the uncomfortable intimacy that hostility gives rise to: "There was an undisguised hostility in [the driver's] expression; I had no idea why. We had not met before - of that I was virtually certain - and in a few minutes we would probably never see one another again. But his dislike was so obvious, so *intimate*, that it got under my skin" (italics in original 76). The penetrating feature to hostility, suggested by "under my skin", links up with the text's intertwining of love-making and 9/11. But it also applies to the way in which the glare forces Changez to confront the fictiveness of his belonging. The glare uproots Changez's performance of American elitism and substitutes it with a bond that is referred to as a "Third World sensibility":

> I remained preoccupied with [the glare] far longer than I should have, pursuing several possibilities that all assumed - as their unconscious starting point - that he and I shared a sort of Third World sensibility. Then one of my colleagues asked me a question, and when I turned to answer him, something strange took place. I looked at him - at his fair hair and light eyes and, most of all, his oblivious immersion in the minutiae of our work - and thought, you are so *foreign*. I felt in that moment much closer to the Filipino driver than to him; I felt I was play-acting when in reality I ought to be making my way home, like the people on the street outside. (Italics in original 77)

In a sense, this instance represents two encounters; for the glare tears Changez away from his immediate surroundings, plunging him into speculation about a person whom he knows nothing about and, very likely, never will. This speculative mood, is, in turn, disrupted by a colleague who represents his reality, yet confronts him as utterly "*foreign*" and irrelevant.

This encounter within an encounter makes way for a significant admission regarding his performance of Americanness: "I felt I was play-acting". The word "play-acting" is evocative of insincerity, which contrasts sharply with and is exposed by the disconcerting directness of the glare. The severity of the glare does not come with a context. It comes out of nowhere, just like God's command in Genesis 22, in which Abraham has no means of knowing it is a test. Unlike the command, however, the glare's violence is not caught up in expectations of love or loyalty. It does not ask anything of Changez, but just conveys, in an unmistakable manner, "I don't like you". The personal character of the glare forces Changez to focus on that part of his identity which is accessible to one who knows nothing about him. He looks to his belongings, to his suit and expensive car, privileges that he owes to his play-acting and disowns by means of. Via "play-acting", he concedes that these belongings, or trappings, play a role in making up his identity, but he also implies that what the driver makes of him based on these props is far removed from his reality for, in reality, he is no different from "the people on the street outside" (77).

The glare pulls Changez away from his class-conscious preoccupations and brings him closer to the financial gap that constitutes his home. This gap, which can be easily *imagined* as the reality of a poor jeepney driver making his way home, is, in

Changez's case, a reality that derives from what might just be a fiction. For the Pakistani's social standing back home in Lahore is said to be neither poor nor rich, or, more accurately, rich *once upon a time* but fallen on relatively hard times. The gap confronting the Pakistani, "a growing inability to purchase what we previously could" (12), pertains directly to the material possessions that prop up his and his family's social standing. The narrator's construction of home reflects on fiction as a means of perpetuating the myth of belonging, in that what he regards as *fundamental* to his identity is his *rumored* belonging to the landowning elite in Pakistan. He owes this belonging to his relative's *imagined* memories, their "[*n*]*ostalgia"*, which he compares to an addiction to crack cocaine, the consequences of which "littered" his "childhood" (italics in original 81). The gap in his belonging makes it into a longing, a sublimated, romanticized version of hunger: "I did not grow up in poverty. But I did grow up with a poor boy's sense of *longing*, in my case not for what my family had never had, but for what we had had and lost" (italics in original 81).

Presumably, it is on the basis of this gap that he shares a "Third World sensibility" with the driver, whose piercing glare puts him in mind of what, in reality, underpins his American be- longing. This "Third World sensibility", which makes way for his admission of "play-acting", is also constructed on the basis of speculation and "assum[ptions]". This construct, used for the sake of "understanding" the "disorienting" glare, makes way for Changez's confrontation with the hunger that underpins his be*longing*. His resistance to this aspect to his identity emerges in his interaction with Jim, his employer and mentor, who spots his "*hungry*" (italics in original 13) side in their very first meeting and, later on, links it to Changez's non-belonging: "'You're a shark.

And that's a compliment coming from me. It's what they called me when I first joined. A shark. I never stopped swimming. And I was a cool customer. I never let on that I felt like I didn't belong to this world. Just like you'" (80). Jim's "implicat[ing]" "confession" renders Changez "uncertain of how to respond" (80). Although this uncertainty is exclusively drawn out with respect to what he finds entrapping about Jim's openness, one wonders if it could have to do with the "unconscious" underpinnings that are attributed to his Third World sensibility. The gap that Changez identifies between his and Jim's problematic belonging: "[Jim] had grown up outside the candy store, and I had grown up on its threshold as its door was being shut" (81) is, arguably, negligible compared to the one between his hungry longing and the hunger of the jeepney driver.[45] His projection of "Third World sensibility" is blind to this gap and yet the affinity that this sensibility represents is forged on the basis of a gap.

This "Third World" construct, which potentially stands for Changez's blind spot, is reworked to expose his "denial" of post-9/11 rumors about Pakistani cabdrivers being beaten in New York: "I reasoned that these stories were mostly untrue; the few with some basis in fact were almost certainly exaggerated; and, besides, those rare cases of abuse that regrettably did transpire were unlikely ever to affect me because such things invariably happened, in America as in all countries, to the hapless poor, not to Princeton graduates earning eighty thousand dollars a year" (107-8). This retrospective look at how blind he was in the wake of 9/11 explains away the awful predicament of poor Pakistani

[45] In "Framing Travel and Tourism: Allegory in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*" (2017), Mandala White argues that the"meta-allegor[ical" text, exploiting the "elusiveness" of allegory, "mobilize[s] a series of false (or at least devious) allegories" to highlight "the inherent ambiguity of representation" (4). White lays bare the fictiveness of the Third World construct from a geopolitical perspective, one that does not bear out the "kinship" that the narrator forges between a predominantly Christian, neoliberal and relatively prosperous Philippines and an Islamic, economically dependent Pakistan (8).

Muslim male immigrants in New York by stating that the hapless poor, irrespective of which country they belong to, live in Third World conditions. Changez's complacent cynicism effectively uproots his former claim to Third World sensibility, yet, in a sense, this brutal take makes more sense than the sensibility construct, at least as far as the reality of poverty is concerned. This armor of denial, said to be a coping mechanism that enabled him to turn a blind eye to "the impending destruction of [his] personal American dream" (106) and to focus on his job at Underwood Samson, improvises on the possibility of fiction as a response to death.

This conscientious demonstration of denial comes from a university lecturer and political activist, who has bridged the gap that formerly existed between him and marginalized others: "My office hours were soon overrun by meetings with politically minded youths […] I became a mentor to many of these men and women; advising them not only on their papers and their rallies, but also on matters of the heart and a vast range of other topics - from drug rehabilitation and family planning to prisoners' rights and shelters for battered spouses" (204). Here we have another version of the "Third World sensibility" construct, which throughout the text emerges on the basis of a gap. The bridging of one gap opens up another one, which, in this instance, has to do with the suspicion of terrorism that the narrator weaves into his political mobilization of Pakistan's youth. This weaving is, initially, undertaken via the narrator's representation of himself as suspect in the eyes of his academic colleagues: "I have received several warnings on more than one occasion, but such is the demand for my courses that I have until now escaped suspension" (205). He follows this up with a student's suspected involvement in the assassination of an American humanitarian aid coordinator. The

involvement, posed as doubtful by the narrator, is recounted with a view to highlighting the boy's unaccounted-for detention: "[I]t was impossible to ask the boy himself about the matter, as he had disappeared - whisked away to a secret detention facility, no doubt, in some lawless limbo between your country and mine" (206). The narrator's selective approach with respect to suspicion heightens the tension but also illustrates that suspected terrorists are subjected to questionable methods of accountability. This intensifying of tension takes place just prior to the ending, the gaping hole that tests the reader, as to what he or she makes of Changez and the threat that he opens up to a new "sensibility" via his narrative.

In the instance of the binding glare, the narrator-protagonist's re-presentation of corporate America uncovers his conflicted self. The other within Changez disrupts his American elite act, bringing him closer to a glaring stranger. This re-presentation of intimacy reflects on the love story and on his equation with his American addressee. The instance of the binding glare pointedly focuses on the inaccessibility of Changez's response, which uproots his performance of Americanness, substituting it with a fictive identification: "Third World sensibility" (77). This contrived "sensibility" reinforces the fiction-death relation, in that it potentially links up with the disquieting "smile" that escapes Changez on witnessing the 9/11 attacks on television. The "smile", dealt with in the next section, not only points to an unforeseen "sensibility", one that both the narrator and the reader struggle to make sense of, but situates deracination and election in a rigorously capitalistic context via a conflation of identity and "product".

The Impenetrable Smile

Like the glare, the "smile" takes place in Manila and is narrated from the perspective of Changez's Americanness. But there are differences, in that the "smile" belongs to Changez and it is his own response that implicates him in an inner conflict. In this instance, the problem of belonging starts with Changez's investment in Am[E]rica and works its way inwards to bear on what he cannot fathom about himself. As demonstrated further on, the "smile", played up as a passive response, is narrated with respect to how it radically alters his conception of his self. The othering of his self foregrounds the inaccessibility, as well as deracinating effects, of responding. The deracinating effects of the "smile" simultaneously bear out the possibility of agency, in the form of "Third World sensibility", which ties in with Changez's political mission in Lahore. Agency is also implicit in the effect the uprooting "smile" has on the stranger (and reader); the latter is rendered subject by the "smile" to the implicating side of confession, which is formerly spoken of by Changez in relation to Jim. The passive "smile" is analyzed in this section in the context of belonging, which links up with the inaccessibility of responding, the fiction-death relation and the deracination-election tension with its implication of choice-no choice.

The inaccessibility of responsibility pertains to the self's relation to itself, which overlaps with the self's interaction with actual others. This overlap is brought forth in Mairéad Hanrahan's discussion of belonging. Hanrahan demonstrates "the importance played by belonging, in the meaning of feeling a part of a greater whole, a shared togetherness, in the constitution of one's sense of identity" (Preface 1). Her unpacking of belonging works its way inwards with regard to the concept's dependence on the other.

She demonstrates how belonging, in linguistically "deriving from the Old English *be-* (intensive prefix) + *longen*, 'to go along with/alongside, signals a relation to the other irreducibly at the heart of the concept" (1). As pointed out by her, the "original doubleness or duplicity" (1) of belonging has to do with how identity is constructed on the basis of difference, or in relation to what is other. Belonging would not make sense without the possibility of transgression; likewise, transgression is only tenable if one belongs. My former study (2017) of belonging in Hamid's novel deals with the following premise in conjunction with *The Gift of Death*: The risk of transgression is what makes belonging possible and renders it problematic. Whereas my earlier reading examines the commitment belonging involves the self in and the possibility of violence this gives rise to, this chapter renders that perspective inclusive of how responsibility is both contingent on identity and entails an uprooting of it.

The "smile" uproots Changez's *near*-assimilation into America and substitutes it with the conflict that he feels towards his American dream. This conflict may or may not tie in with a possible identification with terrorism. "One only belongs to something that one *could* betray" (italics in original Hanrahan 1) applies to his American belonging, which is both ruptured and confirmed by the "smile". It also applies to the way in which the "smile" uncovers, yet cannot fully account for, what is excluded by his American identity.

It is in Manila that Changez comes across a television newscast of the attacks, which he reflects on in relation to fiction:

> I turned on the television and saw what at first I took to be a film. But as I continued to watch, I realized that it was not fiction, but news. I stared as one -

> and then the other- of the twin towers of New York's World Trade Center collapsed. And then I *smiled*. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased" (italics in original 82-3).

Changez's mistaking the attacks for an action sequence from "a film" is a reflection on the orchestration of the deathly attacks. One implication of his error is that the staging, or staginess, of the attacks deflected from the violence and devastation. It could also have to do with actual violence, the possibility that it can strike us as unreal. What this comment puts one in mind of is that an intimacy with violence and death, on account of their otherness, is experienced as fictive. Yet this does not come through in the narrator's following observation: "[M]y thoughts were not with the *victims* of the attack - death on television moves me most when it is fictitious and happens to characters with whom I have built up relationships over multiple episodes" (italics in original 83). For Changez's point is not that fiction is a possibility of being in touch with what cannot be experienced first-hand, but that, for him, death is only moving on television under certain conditions. Outside that specific frame, death loses its potency. In "Manipulative Fictions: Democratic Futures in Pakistan" (2009), Cara Cilano describes the "smile" as "Changez's aesthetic appreciation of the attacks" (211). This is a telling description, one that points to the 9/11 novel's self-reflexive stance on fiction as a response to death, as well as fiction as a means of giving death. The rendering of death as heavily reliant on fiction allows Changez to shift the responsibility of his incriminating "smile" onto what is limited about representation itself. It makes it possible for him to convey how he was acted on by the media and betrayed into giving an inappropriate response to death. This claim is contradicted by the "fury" (114) that he feels on chancing upon the newscast of

America's invasion of Afghanistan. The "ghostly night-vision images of American troops dropping into Afghanistan" are deciphered by him in terms of relationships: Afghanistan was Pakistan's neighbour, our friend, and a fellow Muslim nation" (113) that are very real to him.

That said, in his narrative, 9/11 is integrated into a melodramatic love story, a circumstance that suggests that his observation regarding death's contingence on fiction is self-referential. It is also noticeable that he braces his addressee for his narration of the "smile". The dramatic build-up that Changez gives to his "smile" is on account of the latter's potentially upsetting effect on his addressee: "I ought to pause here, for I think you will find rather unpalatable what I intend to say next, and I wish to warn you before I proceed" (82). Despite this warning, or perhaps because of it, the account of the "smile" elicits a violent response from the stranger: "Your disgust is evident; indeed, your large hand has, perhaps without your noticing, clenched into a fist" (83). The passive smile is put to work to demonstrate the forceful impact of fiction. The senselessness of the smile is conveyed by means of a happy story that turns on itself: "I was the product of an American university; I was earning a lucrative American salary; I was infatuated with an American woman. So why did part of me desire to see America harmed?" (84). The "I" that constantly draws attention to its progress could pass for an advertising pitch for the American dream, which is uprooted by "So why did part of me desire to see America harmed?".

The self-conscious, repetitious use of "American", in suggesting that the dream could have to do with *being* American, harks back to the illusion of belonging. Changez's statements open on a note of belonging, for "product" connotes an object that

is made and owned by someone; it is that which typically comes with the seal or stamp of its manufacturer. Yet, with the use of "infatuated", they gravitate towards longing. The plastic connotations of "product" suggest that belonging is a construct that is appealing on the outside but not inhabitable from within, because the self would be redundant if one could actually be on the inside of oneself. There are also poetic implications to the use of "product", which reflects on how producing, or making, involves creating a distance with oneself for the sake of coming closer to it.

This distance can be translated into hostility, as we witness in the "harm" that a "product" poses to its creator. The confrontation between "product", with its capitalistic connotations, and "harm" reflects on the novel's embedding of Islamic terrorism within the fundamentals of corporate finance. "[P]roduct" and "harm" represent the text's splitting of fundamentalism between "the threatening otherness of radical religious groups" and "the incorporation of nations into a global financial empire focused on "'fundamentals'" (Gay 69). David Gay does great justice to the 9/11 novel's critique of capitalism; however, the text opens up capitalism to other possibilities via the use of "product" and its implications of shaping the other. These cannot be segregated from what is affirmative, such as nurturing, rearing and conditioning, particularly since "product" is used in the context of education ("university"). These rearing connotations also apply to Al-Qaeda, which Derrida likens to an auto-immune disorder because it was originally "a system of self defense", put in place by the West, in which Muslim Mujahedeen were trained to "fight against the Soviets in Afghanistan" (Appelbaum 100) but later turned to attacking the home body itself (the West).

The not so reassuring implications to nurturing render Changez's auto-immune relation to Am[E]rica as exceedingly complex, which is not restricted to the "harm" that a suspected terrorist represents. For his narrative bears witness to how Erica, in inviting him to act as her official escort at the events of New York society, opens up the *possibility* of his feeling whole: "I felt I was entering in New York the very same social class that my family was falling out of in Lahore" (97) and the way in which his possibility risks trespassing on her absorption "in a world of her own":

> [S]he was struggling against a current that pulled her within herself […] I wished to serve as her anchor in these moments, without being so vulgar as to make known to her that this was a role I felt she needed someone to play. I discovered that the best way of doing this was to come close to touching her - to rest my hand on a table, say, as near as possible to hers without actually making contact - and then to wait for her to become aware of my physical presence, at which point she would shake her head as if waking from a dream and bridge the gap between us with a small caress. (98-9)

This getting that involves a potentially invasive giving makes it possible for Changez to see through the illusion of belonging: "[I]t is not always possible to restore one's boundaries after they have been blurred and made permeable by a relationship: try as we might, we cannot reconstitute ourselves as the autonomous beings we previously *imagined* ourselves to be. Something of us is now outside, and something of the outside is now within us" (my italics 197). This eloquence fails the narrator in his account of the autoimmune smile and the "harm" that it does to his sense of self: "But please believe me when I tell you that I am no sociopath; I am not indifferent to the suffering of others.

When I hear of an acquaintance who has been diagnosed with a serious illness, I feel - almost without fail - a sympathetic pain […] When I am approached for a donation to charity, I tend to be forthcoming" (83). This recounting of unrelated instances looks like a desperate attempt to re-instate his former self. The smile confronts him with that which exceeds his constructed self and puts him in touch with what is other, with affinities that are excluded by his product-like self and its adoption of cutthroat, "neoliberal economic values" (Seval 108).

The failure to fully account for the smile is, ironically, rendered suspicious by the narrator himself, in what emerges as another instance of autoimmunity. For he immediately follows up the question: "So why did part of me desire to see America harmed?" with "I did not know, then" (84). This implies that he now knows, yet, curiously, Changez continues to profess "a profound sense of perplexity" with regard to his "pleas[ure] at the slaughter of thousands of innocents" (83). Perhaps he is feigning "perplexity", or there could be a possibility that he fails to assimilate his inexplicable, visceral response to the attacks into his retelling. A "perplexity" that is "profound" is suggestive of unknowable depths, which he was not this reticent on in the instance of the glare. In fact, he went so far as to give it a name, "Third World sensibility", which links up with the symbolic meaning that, in this instance, he gives to the attacks: "I was caught up in the *symbolism* of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees" (italics in original 83). Changez's positing of America on "her knees" is read by Tina Managhan in the light of a Western, liberal *we,* which opposes the totalizing forces of globalization. To Managhan, Changez represents a "New Yorker", not "a Pakistani or an American" (35). He not only "fit[s] in" but is also "'one of us'", based on what

Baudrillard claims about 9/11: "*we all dreamt it"* (35). The fantasy that Baudrillard refers to has to do with "overturning power, not in the name of a moral or religious confrontation, nor some 'clash of civilizations', but as a result of the pure and simple unacceptability of the global power" (italics in original Baudrillard qtd. in Managhan 35). But the absence of "I", of individual responsibility, in such symbolic readings is scrutinized within Changez's narrative. The possible defensiveness that accompanies his symbolic reading is rendered evident by the disclaimer that precedes it: "My thoughts were not with the *victims* of the attack" (italics in original 83). By means of this statement, he distances himself from the actual violence of the attacks and positions himself closer to what is merely "*symboli[c]*" (italics in original 83).

The text's implication of reading, of giving meaning, in actual violence is highlighted via the "smile" confession: "But surely you cannot be completely innocent of such feelings yourself. Do you feel no joy at the video clips - so prevalent these days - of American munitions laying waste the structures of your enemies?" (84). Confession, spoken of as an act that implicates its audience, is used to target the "you" in the faceless crowd. Earlier on, the narrator refers to himself and the American stranger as "bats", that is, those who are may not be actively involved in organized violence, yet are somehow complicit, on an insidious level: "They [bats] are successful urban dwellers, like you and I, swift enough to escape detection and canny enough to hunt among a crowd […] no matter how close they come to these buildings, they are never involved in a collision" (71-2). The possibility of disowning an actual involvement in violence on the basis of "it's just a reading" is problematized by the description above, which reflects critically on Changez's smile, as well as his narration of it.

The comparison with "bats" links up with Christopher Nolan's interpretation of the masked superhero, Batman, in *The Dark Knight*. The film draws unsettling parallels between the Joker, a terrorist, and America's vigilante superhero, Batman. Via the Joker, the film, largely viewed as a post 9/11 allegory and commentary on terrorism, offers an unflattering commentary on heroes, whose insider-outsider status, regarding the law, allows them to escape the consequences of their crimes. A faceless subject, who performs heroic deeds without recognition, is woven into the text for the sake of demonstrating the implications of understated subjectivity. Changez draws on this type of subjectivity in his "firefly" heroics. This demonstration, which points to fiction re-reading itself, reinforces what is suspect about the anonymous agent who brings "Am/Erica" to "her knees".

"Am/Erica" on "her knees" is a "*symboli[c]*" reading of 9/11 (italics in original 83) offered by the "smile". This re-presentation, which features an anonymous agent of destruction, suggests a subversive play on the deracinating effect of the "smile". For anonymity, which reinforces the violence of inaccessibility in the context of responsibility (mission), undermines the role of identity with respect to responsibility. In so doing, it brings deracination, that is, what is unmistakably *giving* about responsibility, directly in relation to violence. Given the sexual connotations of a gendered America on "her knees", the two instances of problematic sexual intimacy, examined in the next section, can be read as the text's en*act*ment of the "*symbolic*" reading. In accentuating the sexual violence that unfolds in the two instances of intimacy, the "*symbolic*" reading spotlights fiction's giving of death in the double sense (interpretative and empirical).

In the next section, the giving of death by fiction is dealt with in the context of sexual role-playing. The latter is examined with respect to how it capitalizes on the deracination-election tension and highlights the unaccountability of Changez's response to Erica's obsession with Chris. As illustrated in the next section, the question of accountability is also at stake in the different meanings Changez and Erica give to their sexual intimacy. Erica's account of her closeness to Changez is shown to reflect critically on how the latter bestows inaccessibility on his responses. In my analysis, sexual role-playing is argued as a means by which longing manifests itself as *having* and is, simultaneously, shown to emerge as an affirmative response to female sexuality.

Love-*Making*

The conflicted role that fiction plays with respect to healing is laid bare via sexual role-playing, which negotiates the necessity of consent via questionable means ("pretending"), and yet scrupulously uncovers the invasiveness of longing. Role-playing is also significant because it heightens the otherness of responsibility and showcases the violence of otherness. Responsibility emerges as drastically other in the second instance of sexual intimacy because Changez en-*acts* the role of Chris, who belongs to Erica and is implied as Christ-like. In the context of love-making, fiction treads a thin line with respect to otherness, which Chris's association with Christ renders all the more imperative, as well as vulnerable to the risk of infringement. The Messiah connection links up with the stress on healing in the two instances, which, respectively, revolve around a bruise and wound.

The bruise features in the first attempt at love-making, which takes place shortly after 9/11. It opens with Erica inviting Changez to take a look at the bruise on her

ribcage. He has trouble reading her invitation, which he, initially, mistakes for a "jok[e]" (101). The conflict that he feels on inspecting the bruise implies that he does not feel comfortable about his interest in her body: "I commanded myself to focus on her bruise" (102). This tension that he feels on account of his desire for Erica is made evident earlier on when he decides to act as her "anchor": "I could, without exaggeration, watch her for hours. The pride of her stance […] the failure of her garments to cloak the memory of those naked breasts I had seen in Greece: all these things filled me with desire. *And yet* I was also filled with protectiveness" (my italics 98). The text's use of "and yet" conveys the uneasy coexistence between desire and responsibility.

In view of the novel's conflation of America and Erica, the latter's bruise can be read as a symbol of a post-9/11 wounded America. The fact that "the dark and angry" bruise (102) is viewed "in the glow of the television" (101) links it to the televised attacks. The bruise's dramatic value comes through in the description of Erica as "hav[ing] sprung from the pages of a graphic novel" (101-2). The possibility that this melodramatic equation between intimacy and 9/11 may have been appropriated from Erica is also held out, what with 9/11 symbolizing a personal trauma for her, to do with the death of her lover, Chris. While the text's theatrical treatment of the bruise underscores its implication in the allegory, the connotations of injury that the physical mark unavoidably carries are shifted to an unexpected context, to do with healing.

Anna Hartnell reads the novel's conjoining of intimacy and 9/11 as a means of offering an alternative response to post-9/11 tensions, one that fails in the face of Am/Erica's inability to embrace Changez's otherness. Hartnell's perspective on the love story as a failed initiative, however, presupposes the possibility of love as untouched by

conflict, which is not borne out by the text's depiction of intimacy as lined with the risk of violence. The non-violent resolution put forward by Hartnell may have been derived from the narrative, in which the narrator touches on how America, in the wake of the attacks, could have "reflect[ed] upon the shared pain that united [it] with those who attacked [it]", instead of "engag[ing] only in posturing" (190). As a possibility of healing that gives rise to a wounding wound, the bruise episode potentially disrupts the narrative; for it counters the narrator's naïve resolution to the political conflict by showing how even in a personal context of friendship and growing attraction, matters can take a drastic turn.

By fleshing out the abstract prospect of sharing pain in a given situation, the bruise opens onto an alternative reading of healing. Changez's desire "to serve as [Erica's] anchor" (99) takes an unexpectedly violent turn in the face of Erica's sexual unresponsiveness: "Mainly she was silent and unmoving, but such was my desire that I overlooked the growing wound this inflicted on my pride and continued. I found it difficult to enter her; it was as though she was not aroused. She said nothing while I was inside her, but I could see her discomfort, and so I forced myself to stop" (102). Ilott argues that the passage above "evoke[s] rape": "Erica's passivity, accompanied by the suggestive language of 'overlook[ing] the growing wound' and the force required to enter her, signifies rape, which suggests that the narrator is in fact disguising reality" (579). The implication of force can be read in "I found it difficult to enter her". However, while I agree it can be read as rape, it is not at all certain that in this instance Changez is "disguising reality". It could be that he is misreading 'reality' due to his emotional self-absorption and narcissism, which are evident in the yoking of sexual

violation to the "growing wound" inflicted on *him* by Erica. Even his manner of admitting to self-involvement is self-centered, for, although he refers to her physical "discomfort", it is his "pride" that is said to suffer a "wound".

The double sense of Changez's "wounding" illustrates how language can work otherwise in terms of meaning. The duplicity of "wounding" also shows how an instance of actual violence can mean something radically other to the one who appears as a perpetrator to others (such as the reader). That is, the relation between interpretative and empirical violence is a gap that can be read in conflicting ways. The reader confronts this gap-relation from a different angle in *A Clockwork Orange*, in which the gap, on account of an unfamiliar argot, is doubled. In relation to Nadsat, the reader tussles with "novel" words *and* interpretations for violence. The link between "good" and violence in the 9/11 novel emerges in the context of healing through intimacy, which turns violent and elicits a response that the giver experiences as violating. As explored in detail in the next chapter, in *Son of Saul*, interpretative and actual violence are juxtaposed via an innovative use of sound design, which simultaneously highlights the tense relation between "good" and violence.

The bruise in the 9/11 novel is also a device, one that is *made* use of by both Erica and Changez and plays more than one role. In drawing attention to the tragedies we construct around wounding experiences in our personal lives, the bruise nourishes *and* potentially undermines the reader's vulnerability to Changez's tale of unrequited love. Due to a road collision in Lahore, he also suffers a bruise, one that is not only described as "livid" but locates itself in the exact same position as Erica's bruise, on his rib cage. A nurturing stance is adopted towards this bruise: "I stared at myself in the mirror and

touched my skin with my fingers and hoped that the mark would not soon fade" (197). The bruise is complicit in the text's double-edged treatment of tragic love, for it embeds Changez's longing for Erica within *her* pining for Chris.

This embedding of wounds puts one in mind of *Laila Majnun*, a famous Arabian-Persian love legend, which, in the manner of the Christian Stigmata, imbues a wound with overlapping relationships. Ilyās Ben Yūsuf Nizami Ganjawi's Persian version of *Laila Majnun* reconfigures the Stigmata, with respect to the hierarchy between God and mortals:

> As children attending the *madrassa*, they [Laila and Majnun] were totally infatuated with each other. Majnun is related to behave in a strange way. At a writing lesson, he was found by the *mullah* repeating not the name of God, 'Allah', as ordered, but misspelling it, rearranging the signs into 'Laila, Laila'. The teacher became furious and punished the enamoured pupil by striking him. At that very moment, Laila cried out in pain; she was so much at one with Majnun that her body showed the same bloody marks of punishment as his. (Italics in original de Groot 126)

Courtesy of its association with *Laila Majnun*, the bruise intimates how wounding experiences are conditioned by fiction and open onto narratives that have the capacity to render others vulnerable. Alongside inviting a re-examination of the hallowed notion of longing as a wounding experience, the bruise's literary associations point to how longing can be wounding to *others*. On being treated to Erica's heightened accounts of Chris, Changez pointedly reflects on how such representations exclude others: "I did not know whether I believed in the truth of their love; it was, after all, a religion that would not

accept me as a convert" (129). "[C]onvert" connotes belonging on the basis of betrayal, of the self for the sake of the other. The intersection that he draws between "imaginary", "truth" and "religion" counters the possibility that her stories could be mere exaggerations; for "religion", with its connection to unknowable truths, links up with a heightened state of mind or perception that fiction is also said to induce.

The fact that the awkward struggle for sexual intimacy ends with Erica's stories of Chris - "how they had come to kiss, how they had come to make love" (103) - is significant because Changez, who reflects "perhaps theirs was a past all the more potent for its being imaginary" impersonates Chris in the second instance of love-making. The novel's probing of responsibility in the context of substitution draws on fiction as a possible stand-in for suspect truths. At the end of the first episode of sexual intimacy, storytelling is evoked as a means of "consol[ation]" in the face of loss: "I wanted to console her, to accompany her into her mind and allow her to be less alone. So I asked to tell me about him [Chris]" (103). The passive act of listening is represented in terms of how it affects the "audience": "I attempted to separate myself from the situation, to listen to her as though I were not both aching for her and hurt that - seemingly despite herself – her body had rejected me" (103).

However, Changez's seeking to be on the inside of Erica's mind, her story, alerts one to what is encroaching about passivity. His attempt to cure Erica of her "powerful nostalgia", via "consenting to play the part of a man not myself" (129), overlaps with his speculative desire to be on the inside of America's "dangerous nostalgia" (130) for a "fictitious" era: "What your fellow-countrymen longed for was unclear to me - a time of unquestioned dominance? of safety? of moral certainty? [...] I felt treacherous for

wondering whether that era was fictitious, and whether - if it could indeed be animated - it contained a part for me (131). In these lines, which manifest themselves as an edgy, biting echo of Changez's thoughts on Erica's stories of Chris, "fictitious", preceded by treacherous, as in untrue, or unfaithful, is followed by role-playing in the dual sense: *playing* a role and performing responsibility. Although it is clear that this en*acting* of responsibility is speculated on with a view to giving life ("animated") to a myth, it is uncertain whether the construction of this fiction is deemed by the narrator to be good, bad, or both. It is as if fiction has completely infiltrated responsibility, rendering it subordinate to constructions of morality.

The possibility of infiltration takes a seriously controversial direction in the second episode, in which narration not only intrudes on but projects invasiveness on what is sacred. The projecting of a "wound" shifts onto "the entrance between [Erica's] legs" (120) sets in motion a process of desacralization. The reference to the wound is baffling in a situation where Erica not only consents to Changez's suggestion, "[p]retend I am [Chris]" but is shown to experience an orgasm because of the role-play. This pretense is linked to Changez's desperation to salvage his daydreams of a life as Erica's husband, which are threatened by her increasing lapses into the past: "I think of Chris a lot" (118). Changez tells her his stories of Pakistan, in the hope that she might relax in bed. It is when this initiative fails that he resorts to role-playing, which he speaks of as a decision that comes to him out of the blue: "I do not know why I said it; I felt overcome and it seemed, suddenly, a possible way forward" (119). Once again, in narrating his responses, the accent is on his being acted on. This passivity, consistent with the not-

knowing that he is confronted with, is shown to acquire agency by means of his reliance on role-playing when faced with death, loss, or inaccessible others.

Inaccessibility and its attendant passivity are integrated into his narration of his performance as Chris: "I cannot, of course, claim that I was *possessed*, but at the same time I did not seem to be myself" (italics in original 120). It is not clear what he means by "possessed", whether it denotes his being overtaken by sexual desire and ecstasy, or if it specifically refers to his role-play. What it does give a sense of is that his pursuit of having Erica results in his being had, an impression that reiterates belonging as a relation to oneself as other. The gnawing sense of "shame" that he aligns with his "satiation" is predominantly evoked with respect to the self that he loses to his dreaded rival: "My satiation was understandable to me; my shame was more confusing. Perhaps, by taking on the persona of another, I had diminished myself in my own eyes; perhaps I was humiliated by the continuing dominance […] of my dead rival; perhaps I was worried that I had acted selfishly and I sensed, even then, that I had done Erica some terrible harm" (121). The latter confession is phrased in vague terms, perhaps because sexual role-playing is constructed as a form of giving. His usurpation of identity is represented exclusively in terms of the subjugation he undergoes in "substituting himself violently for another" (Abraham, the Other 337). This is an unmistakably fanciful reading, based on the fact that Chris is dead. The implications of impersonating a dead other are not taken into account, at least not directly. For "I had acted selfishly" owns up to a transgression but in relation to Erica. It could be that Changez regards Chris as someone who belongs to Erica; for the rival that he violently substitutes represents Erica's

immortalizing of her beloved, which could be why he implicates her by asking her to "pretend [he is] him".

Pretending to be Chris is undertaken for the sake of laying the dead lover to rest *forever after,* but this role becomes implicated in immortalizing him, which involves *grave* harm to sacrosanct entities. This immortal side to Chris links up with the baffling allusion to "wound", which can be explored in the light of the Stigmata for two reasons. Firstly, sexual intimacy in this instance opens onto a mystical experience and, secondly, the role played by mediation is stressed on: "It was as though we were under a spell, transported to a world where I was Chris and she was with Chris, and we made love with a physical intimacy that Erica and I had never enjoyed […] I watched her shut eyes, and her shut eyes watched *him*" (italics in original 120). The mediating role played by Changez in the second episode renders him central to the reunion between Chris and Erica. That is, the text places him, a rejected lover and a Pakistani discriminated against in a post-9/11 America, on the inside of the Stigmata. There could be an implicit play here on Stigmata, "denot[ing] particularized marks of piety", and stigma, with its "negative connotations" of "dishonour or failing" (Dailey 277). The stigma of being a Muslim male in post-9/11 America is faced by Changez, who is called a "[f]ucking Arab" and threatened with physical violence by a stranger in a "parking lot" (133-4). Stigmatized Changez in turn views Erica's revered longing for Chris as a *mark* of "her psychosis", which he takes it upon himself to "extricate her from" (119). A Muslim narrator's mapping the Christian Stigmata onto the vulva renders the desacralization all the more pointed and attacking. If - as Sarah Ilott argues - Chris, with his "*Old World* appeal" (30), stands for Christopher Columbus (579), then Changez's assault is on

colonial manifestations of Christianity. Bearing in mind how (Am)Erica's stories of Chris draw on the spiritual, sacred and inscrutable side to religion, the narrator's rendering of the Stigmata in a context of militancy could also be a deliberate mirroring of America's reductive perspective on Islam in the wake of 9/11.

That said, the attacking treatment of the Stigmata could just as easily be read as a critical reflection on the meaning that was given to 9/11 by the attackers. 9/11 is commonly perceived as an instance in which the "Abrahamic religions", "*properly* understood" as "antithetical to violence", were "hijack[ed]" by the terrorists (italics in original Sherwood 821).[46] This perception is based on the fact that two of the hijackers who crashed the planes into the World Trade Towers on 9 September 2011 left behind documents which likened the attacks to Ibrahim's sacrifice to God: "The two remaining textual traces of the hijackers, the manual for the slaughter (*dhabaha*) and Muhammed Atta's last will and testament, both referred to precedent of Ibrahim" (italics in original Sherwood *Reading the Abrahamic Faiths* 24).[47] The re-presentation of the Stigmata, which renders the Chris-Erica love legend wounding in more than one sense, is rigorously metafictional. For it not only rewrites a religious concept through 9/11 discourse, but replays the attacks on the basis of what they *meant* to the terrorists, who visualized themselves as one more, or "Another Abraham". A spiritual relation that leaves its mark on the body is appropriated by the text to foreground the relation between reading and violence.

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[46] Yvonne Sherwood's "Binding-Unbinding: Divided Responses of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam to the 'Sacrifice' of Abraham's Beloved Son", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 72.4(2004): 821-861.

[47] In "The Hagaramic and the Abrahamic: or Abraham the Non-European", Yvonne Sherwood points out that 9/11 "revived" Abraham's association with "'religious violence'" "in popular form" (24). This association dates back to "Immanuel Kant and the deists". The study by Sherwood is a chapter in *Reading the Abrahamic Faiths: Rethinking Religion and Literature*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015, pp.17-46.

In the light of the woman-nation conflation, the images of "blood" (120) that inexplicably issue from Erica's body align themselves with conventional ideology in which female bodies are rendered into "arenas of violent" conflict in order to facilitate the "production of nationalist" "thought" (Saigol 2000 paragraphs 2-3). The woman-nation trope, a popular convention used in colonial contexts to project "anxiety" regarding "contamination" (Mc Peake 1), is reworked with the anglicized Pakistani playing Chris in order to purge Erica of her "psychosis" (119). The insertion of the Stigmata effect into this patriarchal frame is not surprising, considering religion's long-standing tradition of control over female sexuality, which the text simultaneously reinforces and disrupts. The arming of the Stigmata links religion to violence against the female body. Ironically, this attack comes 'home' to a 9/11 narrative that focuses on Talibanized territory (Afghanistan and Pakistan). On the other hand, Changez's sexual role-play bears out his willingness to pander to Erica's fantasies of another man and to address her "dormant" sexuality, which could be why he represents it as "a possible way forward" (119).

"[A] possible way forward" is worth looking into because, in enabling Changez to finally make love to Erica, role-playing could be the text's way of suggesting fiction as a possibility of mitigating the violence intrinsic in any relation. Changez as Chris is a performance which is torn between pretending and the possibility of healing: "I wanted to help her, to hold onto her […] I was desperate to extricate her from the maze of her psychosis" (119). The text's representation of it as an unethical act *and* a healing initiative builds a tension between mutually incompatible possibilities. While the role-playing provides Erica, whose "sexuality" is said to have been "mostly dormant since

[Chris's] death", with sexual relief (103), Changez's longing to *have* what Erica had with Chris brings out the acquisitive side to be-longing. The text refuses to break the ethical tension.

Nevertheless, Changez's sexual role-playing does suggest that perhaps the violence of be- longing can be attenuated with a more fluid and fictive approach to one's identity. The intimacy involving role-playing contrasts sharply with the first episode in terms of physical violence. Granted, the second attempt at intimacy does contain images of violence but they cannot be identified on the basis of material evidence. Although their presence in the text invites ethical scrutiny, the fact that the images are unidentifiable could denote that Changez's heightened consideration and sensitivity towards Erica makes him aware of possible transgressions. The text's play on penetration-invasion is an exemplary instance of giving death in the double sense (interpretative and empirical violence); for this play implies what is invasive about Changez's insistent desire to understand Erica, which is framed in decidedly sexual language: "What was essential was that I seek to understand why I had failed to penetrate the membrane with which she guarded her psyche" (160). The problem of reading emerges as more pronounced in the context of love-making because it is deliberately made to unfold via 9/11 imagery. Changez and Erica perceive the second instance of intimacy in drastically different terms. In the wake of her orgasm, Erica says to him, "You're a kind person" (121) although he is said to feel "at once both *satiated* and *ashamed*" (italics in original 121). When he visits Erica at the mental clinic, she reiterates her positive reading of his role as mediator: "You helped me […] You were kind and true, and I'm grateful" (153). This stresses the affirmative role of playacting.

Changez's offering to take on the role of Chris is a mark of his attentiveness to Erica's stories of intimacy with Chris. It is an act that reveals his capacity to listen to what the other desires and loves. In a sense, his impersonation of Chris is an attempt to reenact the love legend of Erica and Chris. He wants to play a part in a story in which lovers *be long* to but do not have each other. It is a story that he identifies with: "Something of it [Erica's story] seemed familiar to me; later I would realize what seemed familiar was the *emotion* with which she spoke, an emotion similar to that which she evoked in me" (italics in original 103).

One could also argue that, via sexual role-playing, the text takes a huge leap forward with regard to the role of male sexuality. Initially, the text takes on the subject of Changez's sexuality from a postcolonial perspective, with a view to representing the traditional feminization of male immigrants belonging to a certain ethnicity, but with a difference. For Changez's speaking of himself as "a perfect breast" capable of seducing "corporate recruiters" puts him on top (5). This seductive potential to Changez takes on other, more affirmative possibilities in relation to Erica, to whom he offers himself as "an exotic foreigner given to role-playing" (153). Although "exotic" stereotypically casts Changez in the role of colonial subject, the way in which he offers himself as an outlet for a woman's pleasure: "[B]e lustful - come back to New York with me" (154) dramatically redefines patriarchal representations of male and female roles in the context of sexuality. This aspect of the text deserves more attention because of its potential contribution to the novel's probing of terror, which, in connection with the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, harbors a fear of female sexuality.

However, there are other implications with respect to Changez's curing of Erica of her "powerful *nostalgia*". His "consenting to play the part of a man not myself" (129) is disquieting because it ties in with the narrative's critique of capitalizing on the other's loss. "The compassionate pangs for soon-to-be-redundant workers" (112) that he feels in his role at Underwood Samson underscore the pitfalls of having. The facile consolation that he uses to counter his reservations also reflects on his healing of Erica: "I dwelled instead on the positive aspect […] on the idea that I had chosen a field of endeavour that would be of ever-greater importance to humanity" (111). The possibility of making the most of a bad situation is one that is as implicating where Erica is concerned. Changez's giving himself up to others (both Erica and Chris) is contingent on her willingness to convert her loss into an opportunity of gain. The text's *fundamental* reading of belonging - the inside-outside facet to it - is turned to "good" account by Changez, who devises a means of having through loss. This devising confronts one with what could be invasive about fiction's relation to death.

Erica is also implicated in having through loss, but she accounts for her longing for Chris with respect to its effect on Changez. This difference is a significant one from the perspective of responsibility. In apologizing to Changez for "pulling [him] in" (153), the suggestion is that she regrets implicating him in her *nostalgia*, - which the narrator, in the context of his feudal belonging, alludes to as "imagined memories" (81) - for a man he cannot replace. Her perception of Changez as other than Chris can be read as both a rejection of the former, as well as respect for the other's difference. "[P]ulls me in" crops up earlier on in the narrative in the context of writing: "I used to turn to it, my writing, when I needed to get something out that was stuck inside. But I can't get it out

now. It pulls me in, you know? I dwell on it instead of writing it" (127). Initially identified as her writing, "it" is subsequently spoken of as that which eludes it. The dread that Changez feels regarding this "it" is borne out by the suggestion of death that Erica gives to it: "It's whether there's something left […] or whether it's already happened" (127). In a sense, she is referring to the End of her story, that is, as she envisions it.

Erica's novella, entrusted to Changez in the wake of her disappearance (suspected suicide), *gives death* to his narration of her. The novel's tying of the patriarchal to fiction manifests itself via Changez's sexual role-playing and his inability to grasp Erica's novella. Fiction is shown to be implicated in Changez's patriarchal appropriation of Erica and, simultaneously, bears witness to her inaccessibility. He fails to recognize her in her writing, which is alluded to, not in terms of language, but what is evocative of primal: "rhythms or sounds". These "rhythms or sounds", which reveal Erica as foreign to him, also inspire a degree of primal fear in Changez. The phrase "[I]t seemed a mistake, offered no clues" expresses the fear that comes from an awareness of being lost and in the dark. The narrator's mastery is shown to suffer a serious setback at the hands of Erica's narrative. It is noticeable that her "purposeful" and "resolute" expression of herself is not only represented as a renunciation of his narrative but speaks of a belonging that excludes him.

Unlike the one who narrates her, Erica has the capacity to laugh at her own addiction to tragedy. Her confession to feeling haunted by her dead lover's death in the wake of 9/11 is responded to by Changez with a cautionary anecdote about a beautiful spinster aunt of his, who, on losing the love of her life, is said to have become as "mad as a March hare" (92). Erica's responds with "a surprised and delighted guffaw" (92). This

could denote that she finds Changez's description of his aunt ludicrously sexist. Or, given that he does use Lewis Carroll's March Hare, a comically mad character, to talk about a woman's tragic fate, her laugh could be acknowledging his attempt to mock her contrived state of mind. This particular exchange between the two is delightfully loaded: "'Is she really mad?' Erica asked, raising an eyebrow and imitating my pronunciation of the word. 'Yes, I am afraid,' I said with mock solemnity. This made her smile" (93). Erica, the fiction writer who exemplifies death's inaccessibility through her rumored suicide, becomes a means by which the text reflects on the more humorous, even risible, aspect to the relation between fiction and death. For Changez's habit of drawing on "doomed" love stories remains intact: "I could only *imagine* how many suitors she [his "painfully attractive" aunt] had turned away, and I wondered if my infatuation with Erica was as doomed as theirs had been" (my italics 94).

The ambivalence of fiction's responsiveness to death, witnessed predominantly in the context of Changez's role-playing, comes into sharp focus via Erica's decision to commit herself to a sanatorium. As the nurse points out to Changez, staying at a clinic, "where people could live in their minds without feeling bad about it", is Erica's choice because "for [her] [Chris] was alive enough" (151). The question of responsibility and guilt is rendered all the more acute via Erica's decision to seek refuge in a place where delusions are treated as both real and problematic. In committing herself, in the double sense, to the clinic, she concedes the "madness" - the irrationality - that underpins responsibility. She recognizes the clinic as a place "where people can recover themselves" (150), yet talks about it in terms of how its setting, "snow[y]" "slope[s]", "reminds" her of her skiing trips with Chris (155). The latter implies that this could be a

"commitment" to replaying the past by means of nostalgia. Erica's apology to Changez: "I am sorry about everything" underscores that it is a decision taken with a view to acting more responsible towards Changez (155). However, his response to Erica's final farewell: "But he is *dead*, I wanted to shout!" (italics in original 155) suggests that what, for her, is more responsible is, nonetheless, "wounding" for him.

The "wounding" effect of responsibility harks back to the giving-death relation, which sexual role-playing gives a complex rendition of. Sexual role-playing lends deracination features of usurpation, yet it also reanimates the Erica-Chris love legend. This giving of life offers a subversive re-presentation of the Stigmata, which is made to reflect on the War on Terror as an instance of militant Christianity. The insinuation of religious violence into a context of sexual intimacy initiates a play on penetration-invasion, which renders it uncertain whether the violence that permeates love-making belongs to the War on Terror or 9/11. In his role as Chris, Changez responds to Erica's sexual needs, at considerable cost to his male pride. From this perspective, "pretending" brings about a significant shift in male-female sexual relations.

Via role-playing, sexual intimacy emerges in terms of the pull and tug between longing and having. The longing-having tension situates the deracination-election one in a context of romance-religion-capitalism-politics. As will become evident in the next section, this multi-faceted context reappears in Changez's response to "janissary", which offers a convoluted version of deracination and election. This version draws on a context of imperialism and in so doing, reflects on the "I" in the face of deracination in the context of the otherness that constitutes the self.

Modern-Day Janissary

The hi*story* of the term "janissary" - which, in modern usage, denotes a mercenary - also reflects on the possibility of having through loss. From a historical perspective, "janissary" refers to "a member of the Turkish infantry in the Ottoman Empire" (*OED*). This history is narrated in the text with a view to the inside-outside of belonging, its losses and gains. Although janissary crops up the context of corporate finance and its impact on Third World countries, it also links up with the romantic underpinnings of "bearded lover"; for, in Urdu, a person who is willing to die for his/her beloved is spoken of as a "jaanisaar". Changez's encounter with the word "janissary" in Chile signifies a confrontation with his own role as a "modern-day janissary" at Underwood Samson. This encounter is anything but tender, but it is one that plays a crucial role in his decision to forsake his American dream. Changez's decision bears a great deal of irony because it comes about as a result of a story that lays bare the slippery history of janissary.

This instance is set in a context where literariness is both undervalued and at risk. The company that Changez is commissioned to appraise in Valparaiso is a "publishing" one (160). Managed by Juan-Bautista, whose love of books is stressed, the company is assessed by Underwood Samson on behalf of a client who intends to "shut down" the "commercially unviable" literary division to the enterprise (161). Changez's literary connections: "My father's uncle was a poet" brings him to the attention of Juan-Bautista, who keeps an eye on him, on the inner turmoil that precludes him from doing his job: "I have been observing you, and I think it is no exaggeration to say, young man, that you seem upset" (171). This sympathetic opening is followed by a confrontational question: "'Does it trouble you,' he inquired, 'to make your living by disrupting the lives of others?'" (171). It is as if Juan-Bautista is made to embody the shock that stems from

"sharing pain". Changez responds to this uprooting question by drawing a distinction between deciding and valuing: "We just value […] We do not decide whether to buy or sell, or indeed what happens to a company after we have valued it" (171), which cannot be sustained, not only because clients decide based on facts and figures drawn up by Underwood Samson, but because, put simply, deciding is giving value to something. This is one of the rare instances where the reader can identify that he is lying, for, earlier on, he explicitly talks about the role that he and his "team" play in "shaping the future": Would these workers be fired? [...] *We*, indirectly of course, would help decide" (Italics in original 76). This italicized "we" harks back to the faceless audience and an agency that is not claimed by an "I". The use of "indirectly" also gestures at the vicarious role of the reader, who, after reading Changez's unmaking of belonging, is confronted with an ending that betrays him or her into giving a visceral response.

In response to Changez's speciousness, Juan-Bautista resorts to giving him a pointed account of the janissaries, the "Christian boys" "taken in childhood" by the "Ottomans and trained to be soldiers in a Muslim army, at that time the greatest army in the world" (172). The novel's treatment of "janissary" draws on a number of contradictory images: military recruitment as nurturing, children as soldiers, loyalty that engenders militancy, and annihilation of the other as an act of self-erasure: "They were ferocious and utterly loyal; they had fought to erase their own civilizations, so they had nothing else to turn to" (172). In this reading of janissary, the self's constitution by the other, which the text reiterates on a number of occasions but in different contexts, is situated in a historical context that incites resistance and hostility towards this constitutive other. The text's take on belonging takes a *fundamental* form here, one that

contrasts starkly with the stirring and appealing version of be-longing that emerges via Changez's entanglement with Erica. Bautista gives his own particular thrust to the conflict between owning and longing in belonging. "[T]hrust" is used by the narrator to signal how facts are sacrificed in historical accounts to *make* a specific point: "I am, after all, telling you a history, and in history, as I suspect you - an American - will agree, it is the thrust of one's narrative that counts, not the accuracy of one's details" (135). "[N]arrative", played on in terms of *a* fiction, highlights the ethical potential of an account that draws attention to its inaccuracies, or fictions. Dunja A. Mohr states that Hamid's 9/11 novel "allow[s] the reader to experience a web of repressions, silences, misunderstandings, manipulations, prejudices and, eventually, to recognize that the characters - and, by implication, we as readers - need to continuously change (or negotiate prejudiced) perspectives if we want to see more than (pre-)selected parts of the story (or stories)" (82).[48] The coupling of "thrust" and "narrative" represents fiction in terms of the violence that, from a Derridean perspective, constitutes the ethical.

Juan-Bautista's "thrust" comes home to Changez:

> I was a modern-day janissary, a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country with a kinship to mine and was perhaps even colluding to ensure that my own country faced the threat of war […] I had thrown in my lot with the […] officers of the empire, when all along I was predisposed to feel compassion for those, like Juan-Bautista, whose lives the empire thought nothing of overturning for its own gain. (173)

[48] Mohr's "Terror as Catalyst? Negotiations of Silences, Perspectives, and Complicities in Ian McEwan's *Saturday*, Ali Smith's *The Accidental*, and Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*", *Radical Planes? 9/11 and Patterns of Continuity*, edited by Dunja A. Mohr and Birgit Däwes, Brill Rodopi: Leiden & Boston, 2016.

It is significant that "I" is used in the context of an identity that represents servitude and subjugation. This is consistent with the narrator's representation of agency in the context of being acted on. Interestingly, the "I" crops up, or is claimed, in the event of its uprooting. This uprooting is undertaken by a self who is confronting itself as other (Third World). This confrontation is also an instance of constituting the self, claiming itself via "mine" and "my". Changez's admission is a selective reading of the account that Juan-Bautista gives of the janissaries, in that it speaks of his role at Underwood Samson in "them and us" terms. What he gleans from Bautista's thrust is the hostility between and not the indeterminacy of self and other. This indeterminacy, however, conditions the reference to America's colluding against Pakistan in the context of the latter's growing tensions with India. Shortly before the janissary instance, Changez mulls over the two neighbouring countries' "tit-for-tat tests of their ballistic missiles" in the context of America's betrayal: "[W]ith American bases already established in Pakistan for the conduct of the Afghanistan campaign, all America would have to do would be to inform India that an attack on Pakistan would be treated as an attack on any American ally and would be responded to […] Yet [America] was signally failing to do this" (162-3). America is clearly placed on the inside of Pakistan, in a military context that entails an emotional investment. The self-serving alliance that Changez criticizes America for is as applicable to his own investment, both financial and emotional, in Am[E]rica; for it is at Princeton that he resolves to substantiate a native identity that is persistently spoken of by him as under erasure.

His decision to abandon the project in Chile reflects, with noticeable *reluctance*, on his inextricable entanglement with Am[E]rica: "[W]ithout my job - which I was

certain to lose - my visa would expire, and I would be compelled to leave the United States. But I resolved not to consider such things at that moment; I did not want to wonder whether I was abandoning any hope of being with Erica. All I knew was that my days of focussing on the fundamentals were done" (174-5). The irony is that Changez's renouncing of fundamentals opens onto a new relation with them, for he teaches finance in Lahore. This new version, which springs from a context of termination, links up with what remains suspect about fundamentals, the belonging to terrorism. Suspicion permeates the decision to give up fundamentals, which is attributed to Juan-Bautista, whose "exist[ence]" is called into question: "[D]id this so-called Juan-Bautista even exist? I assure you, sir: you can trust me. I am not in the habit of inventing untruths! And, moreover, even if I were, there is no reason why this incident would be more likely to be false than any of the others I have related to you" (172-3). The role that Juan-Bautista played in *his* decision is also held up to scrutiny. Whether the "old man" wished to resolve the conflict that the Pakistani youngster was undergoing at the time, or if it merely had to do with targeting one "who was weak" "among his enemies", the narrator cannot say. But he chooses the more "compassion[ate]" possibility (166).

Changez's decision to choose the more "compassion[ate]" stance on Juan-Bautista reflects on the violence that accompanies giving. This "compassion" reinforces the interpretative and empirical sense of giving death. For it is in falling prey to Bautista's version of "janissary" that Changez betrays his obligation to Jim and gives up on his role of "anchor[ing]" Erica. The giving of credence to Bautista opens onto a mission of patriotism towards Pakistan. This mission substitutes the role of modern-day janissary and is suspected of being implicated in terrorism.

In opting for a "compassion[ate]" reading, the narrator could be giving a cue to the reader, to respond tenderly to the conflict that *makes up* a bearded lover. The latter role, responsible for narrating the other roles played by Changez, poses a problematic, as in far-fetched, relation between terrorism and intimacy. That said, it also represents a significant feat of re-presentation, in which "pretending" negotiates the issue of consent - crucial to intimacy and a non-issue in terrorism - in such a way that invasiveness reveals itself on the inside of consenual sex. The uncovering of this invasiveness enables the reader to make sense of the relation between intimacy and terror.

Conclusion

In the reading that *I* give of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the text's depiction of post-9/11 conflicts is analyzed from the perspective of responding and reading, the way in which the text interweaves the representation of violence with the violence of representation. The partial control that we have on the latter opens onto an examination of the choices open to us in contexts of actual violence. The question posed by the text is: Can more inclusive readings of the other mitigate violence? Although the interpretative-empirical violence relation is laid bare with respect to both political conflict and intimacy, the responses examined in this chapter demonstrate that the ways in which this connection is *narrated* makes all the difference.

The question of belonging, raised in the context of nationality, class, and romance, also reflects on the framing of a given relation to the other, with respect to how it impacts others and the responses they give. In replaying the conflict of be-longing, the text gestures at the potential fictiveness of identity and reflects critically on how stories of longing render loss into a means of having. In the four responses analyzed in this

chapter, be-longing is treated via an entanglement of intimacy, politics, capitalism and religion. This entanglement undergoes a significant shift via “janissary”, which Changez responds to by striving to substitute his longing for Am/Erica with political belonging to Pakistan. However, as demonstrated in my analysis of the encounter (Meeting or Making Fate?), the patriotic Pakistani’s mission remains entangled with Jim’s fundamentals of finance and manifests itself as a die-hard longing for a possibly dead Erica.

The novel’s (un)making of be-longing through role-playing takes Derrida’s re-reading of responsibility in “Abraham, the Other” forward in certain respects. Role-playing bears an interesting relationship with the tension between deracination and election, for it strives to circumvent the necessity of “I” and yet fails on account of belonging, which gives the self’s uprooting connotations of appropriation. Deracination is given an unforeseen slant via Changez’s reading of 9/11, in which it is undermined, not by election, but by the destruction that plays out in the context of anonymity. The novel’s treatment of deracination and election via role-playing also exploits an opening held out by Derrida’s affirmation of Kafka’s parable in “Abraham, the Other”. As illustrated in this chapter, Derrida pointedly concedes that his affirmation is an interpretation, for the sake of alerting the reader to its potential fictiveness. The fictiveness of interpretation is rendered in an explicit fashion through role-playing. In “Abraham, the Other”, fiction is accredited with uncovering the appropriating side of selfless giving. This transgressive feature of responsibility is posited on the inside of fiction’s responsiveness in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist.*

In the Holocaust film, *Son of Saul*, which is dealt with in the next chapter, the death-giving dimension to fiction’s responsiveness is explored in the context of

responsibility to the dead. In the death camp, Auschwitz-Birkenau, the protagonist, Saul, undertakes to bury a dead boy he claims as his son. Via this possibility of burial, which places Saul's and the other inmates' lives at risk, the film confronts one with what unavoidably remains illusory about our relation to death. Fiction plays a more elevated role in the film, as in it is not conspicuously associated with theatrics, histrionics, or contrivances. It pertains to the inaccessibility of life after death, the pursuit of which fuels Saul's mission of burial. This mission is also shown to be contingent on claims that emerge as inscrutable because of their relation to death, but which are not untouched by the possibility of evasiveness.

Chapter Three

Making Sense of Choice in *Son of Saul*

> We are already dead.
>
> -Saul, *Son of Saul*, 2015.

> Hope has to do with the postwar conception of the Holocaust, which revolves around stories of survival. It's a cinema that has concentrated on the exceptions that make the rule. Whereas in Auschwitz the rule was just that: death.
>
> -László Nemes, 2015.

> It is from the perspective of death as the place of my irreplaceability, that is, of my singularity, that I feel called to responsibility. In this sense only a mortal can be responsible.
>
> -*The Gift of Death*, 1995.

Son of Saul (2015) is an acclaimed Hungarian Holocaust film, co-written and directed by László Nemes.[49] In the film, events unfold at the extermination camp, Auschwitz-Birkenau, spanning a day and a half in October 1944. In Holocaust history, the date is significant on account of a prisoners' uprising that took place at the death camp. Although the uprising failed, resulting in the execution of the rebels, it represents a historic instance of resistance, not least because it was organized by the Special Squad, that is, prisoners belonging to the *Sonderkommando*. Coerced, under threat of death, into complicity with the Nazi regime, these prisoners were in charge of sending new arrivals at Auschwitz to the gas chambers and disposing of their corpses in crematoriums.

The protagonist, Saul Ausländer, is a member of the *Sonderkommando*, who joins the uprising solely for the sake of a personal mission. This mission arises on account of a boy who, miraculously, survives the gas chamber, but is promptly asphyxiated by a Nazi

[49] The film won the Grand Prix at the 2015 Cannes Film Festival, the Oscar for the Best Foreign Language Film and the Golden Globe award for Best Foreign Language Film.

officer and sent for an autopsy. *Claiming* the boy as his illegitimate son, Saul steals the boy's corpse from the autopsy room and hides it in the quarters of the *Sonderkommando*, with the intention of giving his "son" a proper Jewish burial. The angle of burial is a fictional one: "The story of this man wanting to bury his assumed son is a fictional story which just came out of my mind" (Nemes qtd. in Ganjavie).[50] This personal mission is shown in the film as dependent on the uprising, which, in entailing collaboration with prisoners not confined to the crematoriums, gives Saul a chance to look for a rabbi. In his desperation to find one, Saul misplaces the gunpowder required to blow up the crematoriums. This negligence earns him the hostility of his fellow members, who have already been placed at risk by his decision to hide his "son's" corpse in the Squad's quarters. When confronted by his fellow members, Saul not only justifies his mission of burial on the basis of paternity, but dismisses their concerns about survival with the claim: "We are already dead". This claim, a problematic interpretation (a "fiction") inextricably tied to Saul's potentially fictive paternity, represents the (would-be) father's justification for his personal mission.

The film employs fiction to accentuate the reality of death, which, according to Nemes (second epigraph), is overlooked by Holocaust cinema's preference for stories of survival.[51] *Son of Saul*'s embedding of burial, a fictional mission, into an actual failed rebellion heightens the focus on death, thereby drawing attention to the relation between death and fiction. It is somewhat ironic that burial, like survival, was an "exception" in the death camps, yet it is recruited to reinforce the "rule" of death. From the perspective

[50] Amir Ganjavie interviews Nemes in "The Reality of Death: An Interview with László Nemes about *Son of Saul*", *Notebook Interview*, 7 July 2015, Web (no page numbers).
[51] Nemes' statement (the second epigraph) is an excerpt from his interview with Nigel Andrews: "*Son of Saul*: Framing the Unspeakable" by Nigel Andrews, *Financial Times* (Film), Dec. 4 2015, para.12.

of metafiction, this contrivance renders the boundaries between fiction and reality uncertain, particularly since the film has been noted in Aura Poenar's "Necessary Monsters, Monstrous Narratives, Haunted Images of Our Time" (2018) for giving death the reality it lacked in the death camps: "The gesture of the protagonist Saul Ausländer to try to bury the young boy, to allow the boy to die in a place where death no longer exists is a very powerful one" (322-3). The *giving of death* to death is explained by Poenar in the light of what Primo Levi, a Holocaust survivor, witnessed at Auschwitz: "As Primo Levi put it, the camps made death impossible, death itself was murdered here, as people were denied their individual death in the highly effective serial production of dead bodies" (323). Death, the condition of giving meaning in the world, is "murdered" because it is given a form reminiscent of televisual media: "serial production" and it is restituted (or reconstituted) through the medium of film.

Although in his statement, Nemes rules out survival in favor of death, the film depicts a dilemma between these two possibilities. This dilemma unfolds via the conflict that takes place *within* the Special Squad. The claim "we are already dead" is not only responsible for the conflict between the members of the *Sonderkommando*, but is conflicted from within, for it implicates survival in death. The undecidability between death and survival has a significant bearing on the question of choice, which, as demonstrated further on, is problematic enough in the case of the Holocaust. I approach the problem of choice in *Son of Saul* via two features that render the boundary between death and survival indeterminate: one, Saul's problematic claim of being "already dead" and two, the representation of burial, which, via the film's cryptic ending, suggests, albeit not in any coherent fashion, the possibility of life after death. This indeterminacy

is looked at from the angle of inaccessibility, as in what does Saul *choose*: death or survival? This inscrutability, which overlaps with the secrecy of Abraham's decision explored in Derrida's *The Gift of Death,* opens up the problem of evaluating whether Saul's choice devalues survival, or rethinks the meanings we give to death and survival.

Saul's mission, which draws its impetus from imminent death and stands for a possibility of *giving death* to the rest of the survivors, parallels the double-edged relation between death and giving in *The Gift of Death*. The possibility of giving unfolds in a context of burying a son, that is, paternal responsibility. Like Alex's "visions" of fatherhood in *A Clockwork Orange,* Saul's paternal responsibility is, in certain respects, no more than a story, one that, as illustrated further on, takes the tradition of paternity forward in ways that are significant *and* deathly. The droog's "visions", which also represent an affirmative shift implicated in violence, do not materialize in terms of action. Saul, however, risks his life in performing paternal responsibility, which consists of burying his "son".

Burial in *Son of Saul* poses a challenge; a response to the dead and undertaken by the "already dead", it, arguably, tests the limits of the exclusively mortal context of responsibility in *The Gift of Death,* in which giving is contingent on mortal needs and is circumscribed by death: "Only a mortal can give […] and that mortal can give only to what is mortal, since he can give everything except immortality" (44). In fact, *Son of Saul* tests the limits of this entire study, which scrutinizes fiction with regard to how it responds to limitations placed on it by death. Saul seeks to give the possibility of afterlife to his dead son. In that sense, his mission is in excess of mortality and death. Yet burial, which aims to guarantee the dead survival after death, is only tenable in the context of

mortality. Burial has an inside-outside relation to mortality, much like immortality in *The Gift of Death*, in which it is said to be the self's secret relation to its death (91-2). This inside-outside feature to burial is unpacked by Derrida in *The Beast and the Sovereign* (2011), which looks into the ritual's implication in survival. There are specific sessions in the text in which Derrida dwells on the possibility of deciding between inhumation (burial) and cremation in the West.[52] These reflections offer a secular reading of burial. Significantly, burial's relation to survival is unraveled in the light of fiction, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). Robinson Crusoe's "fear" of being "buried alive" (Third Session 77) is posited as a "phantasm", a *mortal*, reductive response to death's otherness: "[W]hoever votes in favor of inhumation, for self or for those around him or her, is telling him or herself a story and yielding to the phantasm according to which all is not over and in which moreover so-called death does not have the last word, and in which one's story is not over" (Sixth 164). The significance of this reading of afterlife cannot be overestimated, for it is not merely thought through by Derrida by means of fiction, but is said to be an illusory meaning that is owed to mortality. In that sense, death tells us a story.

Derrida's reflections on "the seemingly sovereign choice" between burial and cremation are represented by Michael Naas as a shift in his discourse on responsibility (321): "The other is thus not first and foremost the one for whom I am responsible, the one who appeals to me to feed or clothe him or her, but the one who will in principle if not in fact survive me, and so the one who will be left to mourn and to bury me *in one*

[52] Third, Fifth and Sixth Sessions in volume II.

way or another" (Italics in original 321).[53] Like the chapter on *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, which draws on *The Gift of Death* and Derrida's re-reading of it in "Abraham, the Other", this chapter takes into account the shift identified by Naas.[54] What is at stake in my argument is this shift's emergence in the form of an irresolvable conflict in *Son of Saul*, which pits these two responsibilities (duty to the living and the dead) against each other, overlapping them via burial's investment in survival.

Burial ties in with the main research focus: fiction's giving of death in the interpretative and empirical sense, the undermining of choice and the tension between reading and interpretation. The co-implication between death and survival, which insinuates the possibility of no choice between responding to the dead or living, links up with fiction via the illusion of afterlife that underpins burial. The illusion of afterlife gives death in the double sense because it represents a problematic interpretation (a "fiction") that puts the inmates at risk of death. The film's ending - as demonstrated further on - opens up Saul's faith in the afterlife to critical readings. However, the illusoriness of life after death cannot be verified. This limitation, to some extent, implicates critical reflections on the mission of burial (survival after death) in interpretative violence.

Rewriting the History of the SK: From Compulsion to Choice:

The co-implication of death and survival, which is explored via the mission of burial, arguably, inheres in the Squad's history of complicity. This history, as illustrated in this

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[53] "To Die a Living Death: Phantasms of Burial and Cremation in Derrida's Final Seminar", *Societies* 2 (2012):317-331.

[54] In *Not Half No End: Militantly Melancholic Essays in Memory of Jacques Derrida* (2010), Geoffrey Bennington says with respect to Derrida's re-readings of his "own earlier texts": "JD's work constantly loops back through itself, finding itself in itself as other than itself, revitalising itself, keeping itself alive (maybe re-inseminating (re-disseminating) itself?). What kind of life-form is that?" (49).

section, is reworked in *Son of Saul* for the sake of depicting the possibility of choice in a context of compulsion. This shifting of accent from complicity to redemption can be read as a response to Holocaust discourse on the absence of choice in concentration camps.

The camps, where the Nazis exploited the human compulsion to survive in order to impose certain tasks on the prisoners, were extreme cases of compulsion. Primo Levi's Holocaust memoir, *The Drowned and the Saved* (1986), dwells at length on the *Sonderkommando,* prisoners who were an exception in the camp because they were granted a temporary reprieve from death - lasting no more than "a few months" (Grey Zone 34) - in return for carrying out duties in the death camp. Adam Brown's *Judging 'Privileged' Jews: Holocaust Ethics, Representation and the "Grey Zone"* (2013) offers a succinct summary of these death-related duties: "The tasks of these prisoners, the vast majority of them Jews, involved using deception to keep order among those about to be gassed; sorting their confiscated belongings; hosing down the corpses; cutting hair and extracting teeth from the bodies; burning the corpses in the furnaces or on outdoor pyres; crushing the remaining bone fragments; and disposing of the ashes" (Intro.1). Levi relegates the *Sonderkommando* - on account of their "deathly" duties - to "the grey zone", a space of ethical questioning that examines instances of complicity with the Nazi regime. These instances were committed by prisoners within the camps and by higher up Jewish officials, in charge of running the ghettos. The Special Squad's complicity with the Nazis, out of fear of being executed and for the sake of material benefits, figures as central in "The Grey Zone".[55] Investigating the border between choice and compulsion in these instances of complicity, "The Grey Zone" poses the dilemma of judgment: "I

[55] "In return for their cooperation, members of the *Sonderkommando* had access to clothing, bedding, food, cigarettes, and alcohol, all taken from the newly arrived 'transports'" (italics in original Brown 2).

know of no human tribunal to which one could delegate the judgment" (29).[56] Even Levi concedes that he has no idea how he would have responded had he been set aside by the Nazis to undergo this ordeal of choosing. It is not possible to know, not even for one who, like Levi, has undergone Auschwitz, which is why he repeatedly stresses the inappropriateness of judging such instances of complicity: "[O]ne is never in another's place […] I ask that we meditate on the story of the 'crematorium ravens with pity and rigour, but that a judgment of them be suspended" (43). Renowned Holocaust scholar Lawrence L. Langer takes Levi's writings forward in *Versions of Survival: The Holocaust and the Human Spirit* (1982) with his discourse of "choiceless choices" (72). The paradoxical phrase "choiceless choices" reflects how choices "imposed by a situation that was in no way of the victim's own choosing" do not qualify as "decisions" (Langer 72). Taken under "extreme duress", such "decisions" argue an absence of "intent or volition", without which "judgment", accountability and responsibility are not tenable (Brown 16).

The Holocaust themes of death, survival, choice and compulsion are reconfigured in *Son of Saul* via a prisoner's "self-imposed" mission of burial (Klawans 36).[57] The coimplication of fiction and history, a significant feature of the film's metafictional make-up, is represented by burial, by means of which the film rewrites the history of the "crematorium ravens" (Grey Zone 38). Burial stands for Saul's "inner survival" (Nemes qtd. in Karakantza 31) at a time - the "summer" of "1944"- when "the Birkenau inferno was at its fiercest and the Special Squad, some 900 men strong, worked in shifts around

[56] "Why did they accept the task? Why didn't they rebel? Why didn't they prefer death?" (Grey Zone 41).
[57] Stuart Klawans' review of *Son of Saul* in "Full 12 Rounds" (2015): 34-7.

the clock" (Wachsmann 18).[58] The exceptional instance of a "crematorium raven" taking on the responsibility of burying the dead emerges in the face of relentless dehumanization and death.

The film's play on the tension between the "rule" of "death" and the "exception" of survival is inspired by the history of the SK. These "dead men walking" (Posner 86), whose temporary reprieve from death implicated them in cremating the corpses, exemplify this tension.[59] "[T]he different circles of hell" undergone by and witnessed through Saul (Wachsmann 20) evoke an image of life that is torturous and akin to an endless process of dying that eludes death.[60] At the same time, the co-implication manifests itself with respect to the 'privileged' status of the Squad: "[I]n a morbid twist of fate, it was the prisoners closest to the epicenter of the Holocaust who enjoyed the best living conditions. They helped themselves to possessions left behind by the dead, either for themselves or to bribe the SS officers, dressed in warm clothes and underwear, and rarely suffered hunger" (Wachsmann 20). On account of these benefits, "privileged" has been used in relation to the *Sonderkommando*. Not without qualification, however, because death, the fate of all prisoners without exception, was even more imperative in the case of the SK (Grey Zone 34), whose "privilege" of witnessing the extermination process first-hand led to their being "routinely liquidated" by Nazi officials intent on maintaining "absolute secrecy" around the annihilation of the Jews (Larsson para.5).

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[58] "Nightmare of Crime" by Nikolaus Wachsmann, *Sight and Sound* 26.5 (2016):18-20.
[59] Michael Posner's "On the Human Imperative", *Queen's Quarterly* 123.1 (2016):79-87.
[60] In *Versions of Survival: The Holocaust and the Human Spirit,* Lawrence L. Langer objects to the parallels drawn between "camp experience" and "Hell": "We describe the camp experience as Hell on earth, ignoring the simple fact that Hell was a place for the punishment of sins, whereas the Jews of Europe were innocent" (10-11). Langer's critique of resorting to familiar imagery when faced with unrepresentable horrors is encapsulated by the title of the chapter, "Language as Refuge".

Son of Saul's portrayal of the Special Squad and its grounding in a number of historical sources is elaborated on in "Questions of Filiation: From the Scrolls of Auschwitz to *Son of Saul*" (2016) by Nicholas Chare and Dominic Williams, who read the film as a "work of fiction" that "provide[s] a major historical corrective to received ideas of the SK as emotionless automatons" (17). The film's historical underpinnings derive largely from the diaries that were written by the *Sonderkommando* in charge of the crematoriums at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Originally written in Yiddish by the members and published by "Polish historians" as "The Scroll of Auschwitz" (2), these diaries have been translated and published in French under the title *Des voix sous la cendre* (Voices Beneath the Ashes), as well been included, in the form of excerpts, in Gideon Greif's *We Wept Without Tears* (1999). Chare and Williams analyze the film in the context of these diaries, as well in relation to historical sources that are integrated into the plot, such as photographs of the crematoriums taken secretly by the Special Squad. Yet the study does not mention what Nemes acknowledges as a source of inspiration, the writings of Miklós Nyiszli, the "Hungarian physician" who "was one of the very few survivors of the last Special Squad in Auschwitz" (Grey Zone 37).[61] In Nyiszli's account of Auschwitz, there is an incident involving the Special Squad at Auschwitz that bears a striking resemblance to Saul's discovery of a boy's "tenacious" (Zacharek 62) grasp on life in the gas chamber.[62] The incident figures prominently in "The Grey Zone", which draws on Nyiszli's writings: "In the gas chamber have been jammed together and murdered the

[61] In his interview with Peter Chumo, Nemes states that the "two important writings" on which *Son of Saul* is based are Miklós Nyiszli's "firsthand account of the extermination" at Auschwitz and "The Scrolls of Auschwitz" (4). "Preserving History, Preserving Film: An Interview with *Son of Saul*'s LászlóNemes and Geza Rohrig", Post Script; Commerce 36.1 (2016):3-10.
[62] Stephanie Zacharek's review of *Son of Saul*: "In the Midst of Atrocity, *Son of Saul* Seeks Grace", *TIME* (2016):62.

components of a recently arrived convoy and the squad is performing its horrendous everyday work, sorting out the tangle of corpses, washing them with hoses and transporting them to the crematorium, but on the floor they find a woman who is still alive" (38-9). Levi describes the incident as "exceptional, unique" because the members, described as "slaves, debased by alcohol and the daily slaughter", were "transformed" by their compassion towards the girl, whom they concealed, warm[ed]" and fed (39), yet could not save from execution.

In Tim Blake Nelson's film, *The Grey Zone* (2001), held to be "one of the most sustained examinations of the Sonderkommando" (Williams 144), this incident is depicted as it is recounted in Miklós Nyiszli's *Auschwitz: A Doctor's Eyewitness Report* (1946).[63] In terms of plot, *Son of Saul* comes very close to its Hollywood Holocaust predecessor, which also depicts the Squad torn between the uprising and the possibility of giving refuge to the girl. However, the Hollywood version of Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1944, despite being compared, in certain respects, to a "pulp gangster film" (Williams 144), sticks more closely to Holocaust discourse, as is evident from its title.[64] On comparing *Son of Saul* to Nelson's Hollywood venture, Nemes emphatically states that his film is an "Anti-*Grey Zone*!" (italics in original Badt para. 12).[65] *Son of Saul* makes a point of drawing attention to Holocaust discourse, for the incident involving the girl is mentioned *within* the film by the fictional stand-in for Doctor Nyiszli. On examining the

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[63] 'Figuring the Grey Zone: The Auschwitz Sonderkommando in Contemporary Culture", *Holocaust Studies* 25.1-2(2019):141-157.

[64] In "Figuring the Grey Zone: The Auschwitz Sonderkommando in Contemporary Culture", Dominic Williams states that the use of "a contemporary idiom" and "American accents" "causes" the film, "in a cinematic context, to smack of the verbal skirmishing of gangster films: the wisecracks of Scorcese's Mafiosi or the florid speech of Tarantino's bank robbers" (144).

[65] Karin Badt's "Cannes Grand Prix Winner *Son of Saul*: A Critical Review", *The Huffington Post*, Oct. 2015, updated June 2017. Badt, whose critque of *Son of Saul* verges on brutal, disagrees with Nemes' reading of Nelson's film as "relying on constant upheaval that is theatrical" (para. 12).

gasping boy discovered by Saul and other members of the squad, the doctor remarks: "I only saw this once before, that girl some time ago" (00:10:46). However, this inclusion is for the sake of opening it up to readings of survival as death and death as survival.

That is, it is a metafictional gesture, one that reflects on the role of cinema. The film's destabilizing of discourse is commented on in "Fixed Focus: *Son of Saul*" (2016) by Richard Alleva, who regards Saul as one who "elude[s] Levi's moral categories" based on "the air of solipsism" that the film "gives" to the protagonist's "quest for a religious burial" (27). The challenge that *Son of Saul* poses to Levi's discourse is corroborated by Nemes. In his interview with Leonard Quart, the writer and director takes exception to Levi's stance on the SK because "question[ing]" "choice" from a "postwar" perspective "contribute[s] to shifting responsibility onto the victims rather than shifting responsibility onto the perpetrators" (39).[66] Nemes calls for a "shift", with respect to "our moral view" on the SK, and aligns *Son of Saul* with this responsibility: "The question should be about how the perpetrators put into place the machinery of destruction and how they used their own victims to operate the extermination machine. It's about shifting the point of view not only in cinema, but also in our moral view" (39).[67]

Nemes's dismissal of choice in the case of the Squad is interesting, given how his film settles on a member of the Squad for the sake of re-examining what is (and is not)

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[66] "A New Perspective on the Holocaust: An Interview with László Nemes", *CINEASTE* (2015):38-9.
[67] In a joint interview with Nemes, Rohrig, the actor who plays Saul, represents the shift, called for by Nemes, as his personal responsibility: "[I]n particular I feel as a personal mission to speak in defense of the Sonderkommando. I think there is plenty of misunderstanding and even misleading, malicious comments and views out there about them. So when the role and the function of the Sonderkommando comes up, I passionately address that" (4). Peter Chumo's interview of Nemes and Rohrig, "Preserving History, Preserving Film: An Interview with *Son of Saul*'s László Nemes and Geza Rohrig, *Post Script; Commerce* 36.1 (2016):3-10.

redemptive about choice. In a camp where choice is said to have been inoperable (Brown 16) and dead bodies, including those of family members, were dumped by the Squad members in ovens, Saul's fixation with burying his son represents a possibility of responsibility, more so because it flagrantly disregards the one feature that attenuates choice: the compulsion to survive. However, Saul's choice, which implicates him in viewing *other* survivors as "already dead", is - as illustrated in this chapter - in excess of what is redemptive and self-sacrificial. The shift called for by Nemes, with respect to morality, ties in with the film's treatment of redemption, which, marked by the tussle between death and survival, emerges in excess of the positive meaning we give it. Burial, inserted into the history of Auschwitz-Birkenau, complicates one's response to the uprising, which, in Holocaust history, stands for an *actual* instance of redemption on the Squad's part. Further on in the discussion, the ethical implications of this fictional angle are also shown to reflect critically on the more conventional depiction of redemption in Nelson's *The Grey Zone*.

The Implied Viewer in *Son of Saul*

The meaning of redemption is severely tested by the conditions under which burial is carried out in the film. For in a death camp, a situation of life and death, the ritual is not an immediate concern. Yet Saul makes it out to be one; the importance he gives to the dead pushes the viewer to imagine the crisis of death and survival as radically other, in terms of survival through death (burial). The conditions the SK prisoners were subject to in the camps also point to survival through death, albeit in a different sense. The atrocities witnessed by them were ones they were forced to take part in for the sake of survival and which entailed viewing the death of others in terms of their own survival.

To a *small* extent, this enforced witnessing is structurally built into *Son of Saul*, as a feature that conditions viewership. Chari Larsson views the film's Squad-centric structure as a choice that takes on "the ethical responsibility of spectatorship" (para 3).[68] This responsibility, tied to Levi's warning against "turn[ing] away [from the Special Squad] with a grimace" (qtd. in Larsson 3), is undertaken by the film through its construction of the implied viewer. A certain degree of compulsion is built into this construct, who, as Stephanie Zacharek points out, cannot "avoid fixating on" the "*X*" printed on the back of Saul's jacket, a "mark" of his membership (62). However, the unrelenting focus on this "mark" of complicity elicits from the *actual* viewer more than one interpretative reading.

In this particular reading, where I am the one *giving meaning*, the "X" of complicity is read as a possible cross borne by Saul, as well as an indication of what might be wrong with an otherwise redemptive choice. Nevertheless, the construction of meaning arises in response to what conditions the role of the implied viewer. According to Geza Rohrig, the actor who plays Saul in the film, *Son of Saul* is designed to have a specific effect on the viewer: "We didn't want anyone to cry because crying is cathartic. We wanted to deliver a more lasting impact, a punch to the stomach or the throat" (qtd. in Debruge 65).[69] The violence that is incorporated into the film is also intended for a specific audience, "a disconnected generation", one "that doesn't know much about anything of this sort [the Holocaust]" (Nemes qtd. in Ganjavie). This "disconnected[ness]", which pertains to time and the distance it gives rise to, is induced in the viewer by the film via "immersive" techniques (Nemes qtd. in Quart), for the sake

[68] "Making Monsters in László Nemes' *Son of Saul*", *Senses of Cinema* 81 (2016).
[69] Peter Debruge's "An Unblinking Horror", *Variety* 330.10 (2015):64-5.

of giving him/her an authentic sense of what it meant to *there* in a death camp: “The idea was to make it impossible for the viewer to be able to understand the camp as a single coherent space, so it becomes a labyrinth in a way” (Debruge 65). The film’s construction of the death camp as “present” - “we wanted to make it [Holocaust] present” (Nemes qtd. in Ganjavie) - via a sense of disunity, fragmentation, and disintegration reflects on *différance*, which renders meaning as present to the self through differing and deferring, that is, movements that give implications of delay, absence, loss and fragmentation to “presence”.

Nemes’ reference to “labyrinth”, which harks back to Petix’s representation of Nadsat as that which opens onto a “Minotaur” (124), links up with *différance* and with a relevant reading of *Son of Saul*’s “monst[rosity]”. My analysis of Nadsat in the light of *différance* draws on Petix’s description of the argot as a maze in which the relation between “linguistics” and “metaphysics” leads to a mythical beast that subsists on sacrificial violence. The “labyrinth[ine]” death camp’s conditioning of the implied viewer, tackled in detail further on, heightens the stupefying effect of the death-survival co-implication that constitutes burial. This re-presentation of burial bears directly on *différance* from two angles. Firstly, the co-constituting relation between death and survival bears out the differential relations between signs that go into the making of meaning. Secondly, as illustrated in the introductory chapter, *différance*, which arises from death and mortality, puts death to work via exclusionary violence to give meaning. This giving on the basis of death (“night of faith”) echoes the relation between life and death.

"[L]abyrinth" can also be read from the perspective of relevant responses to the Holocaust film, which has been likened to a "monster" by Georges Didi-Huberman, a renowned "French philosopher and art historian" (Larsson par. 1). In an "open letter" to Nemes, titled *Sortir du Noir*, Didi-Huberman commends the director on his Holocaust film: "A necessary, coherent, beneficial, innocent monster" (qtd. in Larsson para. 1). In his essay on the photographs taken by the SK of the crematoriums, "Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz" (2008), Didi-Huberman "carefully reconstruct[s] the movements of the photographer" (Larsson para. 8). A fictional reconstruction of the event is also offered by Nemes, who acknowledges his "debt" to the philosopher (Larsson para.7). *Son of Saul* contains "a highly symbolic, self-reflexive" (Vincze 116) scene in which Saul and a fellow member take photographs of pits where bodies are being burned.[70] Nemes' comment on this scene raises concerns pertaining to Holocaust representation from the perspective of what is metafictional about the film, such as "the image within itself" and the merging of viewpoints between protagonist and viewer:

> We integrated this moment into the heart of the film, as it corresponds to a segment of Saul's journey through the camp when suddenly, just for a moment, he participates in the construction of our view of the extermination. And also, because of the representation of the image within itself, we are, at that point and

[70] Teréz Vincze discusses the scene as one that "mirrors the problems of representation that the film itself wrestles with": "One of the prisoners pretends to repair a broken lock on a door while the other one tries to take photographs of what is happening in the courtyard. Suddenly the wind blows smoke in their direction, covering up the scene, thus they are unable to take the picture. The smoke that reminds the viewer of the process of cremation, at the same time blocks the vision of horror and makes it impossible to be recorded in the photograph" (116). "The Phenomenology of Trauma. Sound and Haptic Sensuality in *Son of Saul*", *Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies* 13 (2016): 107-26.

> only then, questioning the very status of representation. (Qtd. in Larsson para. 10)[71]

The challenge that Didi-Huberman's work poses to Holocaust discourse's "prohibition" (Larsson para. 2) against images is doubled in *Son of Saul*.[72] For the latter's "restaging" of the photographing of the crematoriums (Gibson and Howell 151) reflects its integration of counter discourse and nudges reconstruction in the direction of fiction. This nudge towards fiction is as discernible in Nemes' insistence on the responsibility of imagining: "I think this power of imagination is morally very important because we cannot recreate the horror; we can only suggest it" (qtd. in Ganjavi). Whereas "imagin[ing]" is posited by Didi-Huberman as "a response that we must offer, as a debt to the words and images that certain prisoners snatched, for us, from the harrowing Real of their experience" (*Images* 3), for Nemes, it supplements what cannot be *recreated.* Given the plural sense in which "fiction" applies in this study, what is also noteworthy is the way in which the director pushes the viewer's imagination in the direction of "project[ion]". Responding to the film's success at the Cannes Film Festival, Nemes states that he "hope[s] it [*Son of Saul*] stays with people, so that it becomes personal […] People have to project themselves into this film" (Donadio para. 25).[73] Nemes' use of the verb "project" reminds one of readings in which his Holocaust film is compared to "a video game" (Williams 142).[74] More importantly, "project" aligns interpretation with

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[71] Larsson is citing an excerpt from Nemes' interview with Antoine de Baecque: "Interview with László Nemes", *Son of Saul*, Paris, *Rendez Vous,* 2015.

[72] The essay led to Didi-Huberman being "accused of voyeurism, fetishism and iconophilia" (Larsson para. 6). Yet it represents an "irrevocable turn in Holocaust discourse", which, subsequently, moved towards "questioning the injunction against Holocaust representation" (para.6).

[73] Rachel Donadio's "In *Son of Saul*, László Nemes expands the language of Holocaust Films", *The New York Times*, Dec. 14, 2015, Web.

[74] Dan Kagan-Kans in "That Holocaust Feeling" states that "[a]nyone who in the last fifteen years has played a first-person or near-first-person shooter, adventure, or horror video game (that is, a game where

filmmaking, thereby attenuating the negative connotations of interpretation (*projecting* one's own reading onto the other) and giving the subjective dimension to reading an artistic slant. However, interpretation, in the sense of projecting onto the other, emerges as far more problematic throughout the film, with the dilemma of making meaning taking a particularly acute form in the film's ending. The dilemma of meaning and reading the other unfolds within the film, specifically between Saul and his fellow members, who fail to understand the importance he gives to the dead boy. From the viewer's perspective, the dilemma is constructed via filming techniques that insinuate a sense of distance and inaccessibility into his/her position of intimacy with the protagonist.

The film's immersive techniques are said to have a maze-like effect by Teréz Vincze, who argues that the film's "construction of space and narrative" represents a "labyrinth", "an effective metaphor for the emotion of fear" and the "bodily reactions" it "induce[s]" in "viewers" (115). This labyrinth takes a physical form within the film, "a dangerous and narrow corridor with full of traps, and a monster at the end: the gas chamber" and represents "a subjective point of view (of the person lost in the maze)" from the perspective of the "camera" (115). As in the case of Nadsat, immersion by means of this labyrinth, created via dim lighting and camera angles, is experienced as an effect of fiction by the viewer. The role that fiction plays in immersion makes the viewer feel a degree of distance from the sense of intimacy that the latter gives. The feature of

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the player's perspective is that of the character he is controlling)…will recognize what *Son of Saul* is up to… As in this sort of game, *Saul* is without much context, background, or character development - anything that could detract from the immersive feeling" (para. 18). *Advancing Jewish Thought: Mosaic*, March 7 2016, web. Parallels between *Son of Saul* and video games are also drawn in Peter Labuza's "Shallow Depth: *Son of Saul* 'Shows' Nothing and Says Nothing", Daniel Kasman's "Cannes 2015 and Oliver Lyttelton's "Cannes Review: Visceral Hunharaian Holocaust Drama Could Be a Palm D'Or Frontrunner".

(a) fiction also touches Saul's journey through the maze, where he not only acts as the viewer's guide but to which in the opening scene he leads the new arrivals. One of the tasks of the SK was to lie to the prisoners selected for the gas chamber, which, both orally and literally, was made out to be a communal shower room. This feature to the Holocaust, which provides the film with a ready-made story that *gives death*, is pushed into the background, where it is represented through sound. Although Saul, a silent persona, is not shown as lying to the prisoners, stories about the shower room can be heard in the background.

The "role" that "sound design" (107) plays in the film's immersive techniques and construction of the implied viewer is dealt with in detail by Vincze, who situates his analysis within Vivian Sobchack's and Laura U. Marks' framework of "haptic sensuality" (110). This framework encompasses "all of the senses" "addressing the human body" (109), not merely the one traditionally prioritized in filmmaking, namely, the visual sense, which gives the viewer the illusion of mastery (Vincze 112). The latter is also said to bear a haptic dimension in the context of "blurred" images, in which case the eye "tends to move over the surface of its object rather than to plunge into illusionistic depth" (111). The very first image encountered in *Son of Saul* is a blurred one, which follows in the wake of a dark screen accompanied by sounds.

In the context of audio-visual works, sound is said to be both challenging to locate and difficult to shut out. Vincze raises two relevant points in his elaborate account of the use of sound in the film. The first point, which pertains to the "tension" the film creates between "onscreen" action and "off-screen" sound (113), ties in with the overlap between reading and violence, the two senses of *giving death*. The atrocities of the

Holocaust are excluded from the frame, making their presence felt only through sound. According to Vincze, the film employs off-screen sound as a "'natural' continuation" of events "taking place onscreen" (113). This is evident in the scene where Saul stands outside the gas chamber, listening to the screaming and wailing going on inside. The film also uses off-screen sound and space to unsettle what falls within the frame: "The invisible, the absent, makes the presentation of the visible continuously fissured" (113). This "fissur[ing" is particularly evident in scenes where Saul's single-minded mission to hide, protect and bury the corpse blurs out events going on around him. The rationale to this "fissur[ing" strategy reflects on the role that conditioning plays in reading: "He [Saul] worked there for four months and so he lost his ability to see the horror, no longer noticing the atrocities because he got used to it. Given this, I blurred out the horrifying images in the background" (Nemes qtd. in Ganjavie). The violence that affects the making of meaning in death camps is empirical; yet the film's strategy, of layering Saul's personal responsibility with off-screen sounds of violence, ones that are both outside and inside, can be read in terms of *différance*, or exclusionary violence. This strategy is comparable to what unfolds in the love-making instances in Hamid's novel, in which the imagery of sexual violence could belong to Changez's re-narration of terror into sexual intimacy.

The horror[s] that Saul no longer see[s] are heard by the viewer, whose reading of the protagonist's perception of events is, in turn, conditioned by these sounds. On the one hand, the presence of these sounds enables the viewer to put Saul's selective view of events in perspective. However, given what Nemes says about the effect of sound on Saul's capacity to construct meaning, this possibility of taking a detached, critical view

might just be an illusion on the part of the viewer: "We wanted the audience to hear […] sounds without the sources being identifiable. It was what the film's protagonist could hear - a chaotic jumble of sound amidst a tightly regulated and ordered camp. What the sound conveys is the sense of how little the protagonist can reconstruct and control" (Quart 38). The sound effects of violence give rise to and undermine the making of meaning.

Vincze's second point has to do with sound in the form of "breathing", a feature that is closely related to the film's depiction of responsibility and its conditioning of the viewer's response to the mission of burial. From a linguistic perspective, "sound" links up with the "conscience" (121): *listen to one's conscience* or *when conscience calls*. This association is borne out in terms of a key scene, Saul's encounter with the boy in the gas chamber. The boy is, initially, not seen but heard by the protagonist, whose attention is drawn because of the sound of labored breathing. Röhrig analyzes this encounter from the perspective of responsibility as a possibility of resurrection: "Once this encounter with the boy takes place, everything changes. I believe that in some way the death of this boy resurrects Saul. With that added life from the boy's life being in him now, so to speak, he is able to see through different lenses. He gets this clarity of vision as a gift" (qtd. in Aguilar para.14).[75] Like *The Gift of Death*, Röhrig's reading of the encounter posits death as giving, yet stops short of thinking through the response that this gift elicits from Saul.

The viewer's response is shown by Vincze to tie in with the feature of breathing. The scene in which Saul "sits on the bench beside the corpse and takes a really deep

[75] Carlos Aguilar's "Fighting Death, of Cinema and Humanity: László Nemes and Geza Röhrig on the Blazing *Son of Saul*", *Moviemaker*, December 18, 2015, Web.

breath - we can hear the sound of air entering his body" (114) is said to give the spectator a sense of release: "[I]t feels as if the film lessens its grip on us and lets us take a deep breath" (114). Saul's breath functioning as a breather for the viewer has an implicating side; for it opens onto the possibility of emotional investment in a mission that very likely would not provoke such a response from the spectator if he or she were, in reality, on the inside of the dilemma. There are viewers, such as Karen Badt, who struggle to suspend their disbelief in the face of Saul's mission: "I could not believe in this man [Saul] nor in his (ridiculous) mission. I lost all credibility in Saul's bond with his son, a son who remains a cadaver, with no identity" (Para. 15).

Evaluating "Already Dead":

In a sense, Badt's inability to relate to Saul and his mission loses its sting in the face of his claim to being "already dead". Underscoring Saul's inaccessibility, the claim gives the spectator - who is forced to view events exclusively through the protagonist - a crucial degree of critical distance from the latter's perspective. In so doing, the claim puts to work "the double vision" that, according to Stuart Klawans, Nemes "practices" in the film, "keeping Saul in focus as an object of study (more than as a point of view)" (36).

This section reflects on the *value* of "already dead", which lies in how it opens up burial to conflicting readings and in so doing, points to the double bind of evaluation in responding to the other. I demonstrate how the problem of evaluation links up, via the "we" in "already dead", with the question of belonging (who is intrinsic to the self, remains other, or is given the distinction of the preferred other?). "Already dead" makes it challenging to resolve this question because it constructs a sense of identification with

the Squad, but this identification is with a view to justifying a mission that jeopardizes the members' survival.

Saul's claim of being "already dead" is by far the most uplifting feature in *Son of Saul* because, in the face of impending death, it figures as a response other than the compulsion to survive. The irony is that burial's implication in survival potentially contradicts Saul's commitment to the dead. His claim: "We are already dead" is also ethically problematic because it implicates others in its representation of the living as "dead". Yet this representation cannot be dismissed out of hand because the figurative assertion takes on literal implications in a death camp, where the (un)making of subjectivity, courtesy of the exclusionary violence of *différance*, unfolds in terms that underscores the physical in "metaphysical".

The literal implications of "already dead" have to do with *when* and *where* the claim emerges in the film. In terms of timing, the statement follows scenes in which Biederman, the Oberkapo in charge of Saul's kommando, is ordered by the SS officer to draw up a list of "seventy names" of "[m]en [he] do[esn't] need" (00:56:12-17). It is noteworthy that Saul witnesses the order, subsequent to which he exchanges a look with a shamefaced Biederman. The claim is uttered in the midst of a *Sonderkommando* unit expecting to be annihilated any minute, a setting which pushes one to reflect on the protagonist's first-hand knowledge of the Nazi order. The *when* and *where* make it possible to read "already dead" in terms of the death awaiting the unit. Saul could be confirming the Nazi order - still only a rumor for the rest of the members - in speaking of this fate as a thing of the past. Or he could simply be reminding them that their survival is subject to a death sentence. Saul's brutally honest assessment, however, betrays that

which he himself *chooses* to be blind to. For he says “we are already dead” in response to Hirsch who holds him, or his fixation with burial, responsible for compromising the one possibility of escape: “We’ll die because of you two [Saul and his recruited rabbi, Braun]” (01:21:40). “We are already dead” deflects the accusation of negligence, which is countered as null and void based on the “already dead” status of the SK. But impending death is nothing like being dead. And, in conflating the two conditions, Saul conveniently overlooks how necessary survival is for the completion of his mission.

The claim is fairly strategic, for it attempts accountability on the basis of “we”, a position of identification and belonging. Whereas (be)longing for Am[E]rica gives rise to Changez’s presumption of purging her of a dead lover, Saul presumes to account for others as “already dead”. The latter presumption, however, comes undone because “dead” stands for a state of absolute inaccessibility that cannot be known, not even by those who are in it. The explicit role that “dead” plays in the story of belonging in *Son of Saul* renders it into a progressive version of the one encountered in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*; for in the latter, the narrator, despite sensing the fictiveness of belonging, undergoes a number of role-playing scenarios for the sake of having a sense of it.

That said, looking at “we” from the standpoint of *we sonderkommando* also has its problems. For Saul’s surname, Ausländer, “mark[s]” him as a “foreigner unworthy of a stable identity” (Carr 2), that too, within a category that is already unstable (in-between perpetrators and victims) and which is shown in the context of dissension, even with respect to the uprising, which is, arguably, in favor of all survivors. Led by Avram, the rebellion is shown to exist in a state of tension with Biederman’s plan of smuggling

photographs of the crematoriums to the outside world, which provokes the former to question: "Will your pictures bring an entire army here to free us?" (00:23:39). This tension is exacerbated when Saul, intent on finding the Renegade, a rabbi in Mietek's unit, offers to help Biederman, just so that he can make his way to the "outside".

The question of belonging also remains dangling because 'we sonderkommando' is *almost* the equal of "dead" in terms of inscrutability. The members of the Squad, also known as "bearers of secrets" (Levi 4), represent a position of inaccessibility that derives from the secrecy of death.[76] Just prior to the opening scene, the film defines *Sonderkommando*: "In concentration camp language, a term used to designate a special group of prisoners, also known as 'bearers of secrets' (Geheimnistrager)" (00:39-48). The title reflects directly on the history of the Squad's singular relation to the secrecy of death. These prisoners were terminated for the sake of keeping the gassing of prisoners a secret from the rest of the world. This termination was undertaken via a process that was rendered secret by means of the members, whose task it was to deceive the prisoners into entering the gas chamber under the false pretext of taking showers. It is a context that lends itself to *The Gift of Death*, for secrecy crops up in relation to responsibility and accountability and takes a double form. There are knowable secrets that the members were made privy to against their will, yet these secrets were also in view of what cannot be known, namely, death. In *Son of Saul*, a secrecy that pointedly pertains to the Squad is added to the broader relation between secretiveness and inaccessibility. We witness this when Saul's decision to hide the corpse in the *Sonderkommando* quarters is challenged by Feigenbaum, a member who secretly jots down notes about the goings on in the crematoriums: "You play with our lives" (00:48:52). Saul responds by attacking

[76] Levi in the "Preface" to *The Drowned and the Saved*.

Feigenbaum's secret: "I'll show the Germans where you bury your writings about the camp!" (00:48:59). It is a situation in which secrecy, which binds the Squad to the same fate, rears its head as an instance of divisiveness. The secrets committed by Feigenbaum to the diary also link up with the inaccessibility that Levi attributes to the Sonderkommandos, on account of their singular predicament.

The question is, could "we are already dead" be alluding to the moral implications that result from this 'privileged' relation to secrecy? Judgment, a problem associated with complicity in Holocaust discourse, is employed in *Son of Saul* to uncover the dilemma that inheres in responding to the other. Via this "metaethical" approach, a term that Adam Brown uses to describe his own examination of "*how* judgments of 'privileged Jews' are constructed" (italics in original 3-4), the film broadens the investigation of the relation between judgment and representation. Brown borrows "metaethical" from John K. Roth's *Ethics During and After the Holocaust: In the Shadow of Birkenau* (2005), in which the term refers to a scrutiny of existing judgements on the basis of "understand[ing] more fully how those judgments work as well as what limits they face and problems they entail" (60). In Brown's discourse, "meta-ethical" takes into account that all representations of "privileged" Jews, irrespective of how neutral they claim to be, are contingent on value judgments because "language is never neutral or value-free" and "judgment is inherent in all forms of representation" (25). In a sense, the film's probing of responsibility on the basis of its contingence on evaluation talks back to Brown's investigation, for judgment is shown to advance the choices pursued by "privileged Jews" in *Son of Saul*. That said, this fostering side to judgment has a nasty side, which becomes evident when Dr. Nyiszli, refusing to hand over the

boy's corpse: "You don't need it" (00:12:41), is verbally attacked by Saul: "But your boss does!" (00:12:45). The doctor - whom Avram calls a "butcher" within his hearing - points out that his 'privileged' situation is no different from Saul's: "I'm a prisoner like you" (00:12:57). But the attack hits home, for the doctor agrees to allow Saul "five minutes" of privacy with the dead boy before he is cut open. It is noteworthy that Saul's judgment is not borne out by the doctor, who, in the event of the missing corpse, does not report Saul to his boss; instead, he merely asks him to find a substitute for the body. On witnessing the doctor's request, Avram passes condemnation on Saul's *obligation* to the dead: "You failed the living for the dead" (01:23:52).

The friction between the members exposes judgment as a means of furthering personal agendas. The double-edged relation between evaluation and responsibility that emerges in these two instances makes it challenging to pin down judgment. Saul's attack incites the doctor to put himself at risk and that too, for the sake of the other's obligation. The protagonist's former commitment to survival is displaced by his responsibility to the dead, yet the latter is, nonetheless, assumed on the basis of a newfound *bias* against survivors. Avram's clear-cut preference for the living over the dead ties in with his own drive for survival *and* derives from his being in charge of the uprising. The necessity of recruiting as many rebels as possible forces him to be more tolerant of Saul's fixation, despite the fact that he looks upon it as irrational: "I'll get you a rabbi afterwards. I need you" (00:50:38-42). Avram's attempt at bargaining on the basis of the other's irrationality is an instance of self-interest that contrasts starkly with the implacability that characterizes Saul's mission. When the rebellion breaks out, we witness the leader giving in to Saul's impassioned plea on behalf of his own mission: "Let me go" (1:26:48). The

father's "let me go" pulls one in, but it is accompanied by a tug that puts one in mind of how uncompromising his obligation is, to the extent of being horrifyingly heedless of others. Avram's concession to Saul's soul-stirring obligation forces the spectator to confront the cost of investing in it, a circumstance that Nemes dwells on: "Even if his [Saul's] deeds seem senseless to every-one around him. It makes sense to him. And it makes sense to the viewer, even though there's a conflict. For the viewer says: 'In this fragmented reality, should I stick with the pitiful people who are dying or should I pay attention to him?'" (qtd. in Andrews 2). It is a judgment call, one that implicates the viewer in the film's displacement of judgment from the Squad's history of complicity into redemptive territory.

For Saul's preoccupation with burial is *judged* by other members on the basis of how it threatens the other equally redemptive possibility, the uprising. "Already dead" situates the conflict squarely in the center of redemption, for the two obligations that cut into each other are *untouched* by complicity. Stephanie Zacharek not only notes the ambiguity of redemptive decisions in the film: "Though his [Saul's] mission is noble, there's never any certainty he's doing the right thing" (62) but talks about it with respect to what could be questionable about choice itself: "In the midst of the unspeakable, what does the 'right' choice mean?" (62). The very title of Stephanie Zacharek's review, "In the Midst of Atrocity, Son of Saul *Seeks* Grace" (my emphasis), implies that the film's depiction of redemption could be uncertain despite its earnestness. For Nemes, ambiguity does not merely pertain to morality but is an inherent feature of "film", a medium specifically chosen by him for the sake of "explor[ing] ambiguity" (Donadio para.5).

The film's "ambiguous versions of redemption" (1) are said by Steven Alan Carr to give the film an edge over Nelson's *The Grey Zone* (2).[77] Curiously, Carr does not attribute *Son of Saul*'s "deni[al]" of "facile redemption" (1) to the fact that it converts an instance of miraculous survival into a possibility of burial, which, given the life and death situation, potentially takes on the aspect of "a seemingly vain and useless deed" (Nemes qtd. in Liebman 47). The withholding of "facile" deliverance is said to have to do with the Hungarian film's innovative cinematography, which, unlike its "unobtrusive counterpart" in Nelson's *The Grey Zone*, uses visuals that foreground the fragmentation and subjectivity that play into Saul's meaning-making process and which come in the way of any coherent, cohesive reading of his decision (2). The significance of Carr's reading is that it brings the possibility of redemption face to face with the subjectivity of evaluation.

Chare and Williams' analysis of redemption is remarkably nuanced, in that it discusses the film from the perspective of how Saul makes meaning by drawing on the death that surrounds him:

> Saul's cutting himself off from the camp, and the rest of the Sonderkommando, is less easy to commend than the open and armed resistance displayed by his fellow prisoners. But like the writing [diaries] of the SK, it is a creative act, making a set of connections and separations as a way to resist the system of connection and separation that the camp regime forces upon him. (16)

In the study, the paternal relationship is spoken of as *created* via Saul's *severance* from others. It is a study that takes into account the death-survival co-implication that conditions Saul's redemptive act, the violence that constitutes it: "[A]s well as cutting

[77] "*Son of Saul* and the Crisis of Holocaust Film", *Film Criticism* 40.3 (2016):1-3.

himself off in space, [Saul] cuts himself off in time, living almost in a different timeline from everyone else, with no shared memories […] The adoption of the son is the only continuity with the past that he asserts, one that no one else believes" (11). One witnesses a more literal form of Saul's violence against others in his menacing behavior towards the Renegade rabbi, whom he tries to pressurize into doing his bidding by threatening to expose his priestly past to the Oberkapo: "Mietek knows you're a rabbi?" (00:32:51). In order to lend weight to his threat, Saul starts to recite verses in a loud, mimicking fashion, one that is reminiscent of the humiliation *he* suffers at the hands of Nazi doctors, who parody a traditional Jewish dance, forcing him to participate. This is an instance that substantiates Michael Posner's reading of Saul as one who appropriates the "irrationality", the law of no "logic at Auschwitz" (86). When the Renegade continues shoveling the ashes of the dead into the river, Saul petulantly grabs his spade, hurtling it into the water. In response, the Renegade walks into the river, presumably to drown himself. Saul jumps in after him, managing to bring him to safety. But the damage is done and Saul knows that, for he asks the Renegade for forgiveness before the SS officers shoot the latter: "Forgive me" (00:34:24).

The failure to be unquestioningly redemptive becomes an ethical means by which the rebellion and burial offer a critical response to each other. On the face of it, the rebellion is in a stronger position when it comes to critiquing its other. Potentially, it stands to benefit all the prisoners confined at Auschwitz because the rebels, in the event of escaping from the camp, plan on enlisting the help of the Polish resistance. It is "good" for all concerned and "bad" only for the Nazis. And it is not, as such, in the way of the boy's burial, which, as Avram points out, can wait on the rebellion which *must* be

put into action immediately on account of the latest liquidation order. But quite simply, the rebellion has more leverage on account of the value *we* place on life, which is put into question by burial: "What's beyond survival?" (Nemes in interview by Mizrahi 54).[78] Although the value of survival is, first and foremost, particularly in concentration camps, applicable to physical existence, this basic level is shown to link up with bigger, unanswerable questions, such as what does survival *involve*? Because survival can only be in relation to death, or that which compromises life, it renders living into a process of enduring the death(s) that life gives. Survival's relation to death, which Bennington tackles in the context of Derrida's writings, is based on the Freudian "principle of reserve" that characterizes life: "In order to live at all without simply going up and out with a bang, life must die a little" (*Not Half No End* 10). As stated by Bennington, for Derrida, life itself is "life-death, or else survival, living on" (10). Acknowledged by Derrida as the basis of *différance*, the notion of life-death, or "life as the economy of death" (10), is central to the reading of giving in *The Gift of Death*.

These philosophical implications, nonetheless, are tested by actual situations, particularly ones that take place in death camps. Speaking of which, Stuart Liebman speaks of Saul's mission as an "ironic counterpoint" to the uprising but does not unravel how "already dead" opens up the compulsion for survival to a degree of uncertainty that cannot be resolved nor dismissed (48).[79] Saul's "mad passion" is said to be a "more abstract moral" "model of resistance" that shows up the more "obvious and familiar heroism" of the uprising (Liebman 48). But the question is: how does this "abstract" resistance manifest itself in the film? Moreover, it is not at all certain that the singular

[78] Shevaun Mizrahi, "Hell on Earth", *Filmmaker* (2015):50-5, 84-5.
[79] *Cineaste,* New York, vol. 41.1(2015):46-48, 55.

character of Saul's personal mission remains quite as lofty as one would expect. There is an instance that makes it possible to ground the inscrutability of "already dead" in Saul's relatable desire to shut out the "living". It has to do with Saul overhearing a conversation between two members, Hirsch and Yankl, about a sexually charged encounter with a female prisoner. The encounter is related to Yankl by Hirsch, who speaks of the woman in question in the following terms: "Not just her body, the way she looked at me. I had to talk to her. She was breathtaking" (00:51:30-35). Yankl responds in a markedly base manner: "So she saw it coming!"(00:51:41). On catching snippets of this animated exchange, Saul, who is eating listlessly at the table, says to Avram with an air of deadpan disgust: "I wish I couldn't understand anything" (00:51:44). His disgust implies that he views the two members as desensitized to how sexual urges can be out of place in an environment marked by death, particularly when they are entertained by those who treat corpses like carcasses. Saul's perspective is in keeping with the "degradation and despair" that "Polish survivors" have testified to, with respect to their imprisonment at Auschwitz (Wachsmann 20). This perspective brings home the affirmative connotations of Saul's status as "outsider", which, "in this macabre universe, he truly is, if only because this thin remnant of the human, this tiny light, still flickers within" (Posner 81).

However, dehumanization potentially cuts both ways in this scene, on account of the co-implication of death and life. For Saul's heightened sensitivity to a "soul-robbing" (Liebman 47) existence in the death camp gives rise to a *longing* for death, which corresponds with what Martin Hägglund says in "Time, Desire, Politics: A Reply to Ernesto Laclau" (2008) about survival being at stake even when it is a question of ending

all survival. Hägglund's explanation is offered in the broader context of the logic of survival that underpins mortality in Derrida's writings:

> First, if one were not invested in survival, one would not experience any suffering that could motivate suicide, since one would not care about what *has happened*, or *is happening* to one. Second, if one were not interested in survival one would not care to end all survival, since one would not care about what *will happen* to one. The investment in survival is not only the source of all joy in life but also the source of all suffering in life. (Italics in original 195)

An investment in survival as "the source of all suffering in life" is a philosophical phrase that acquires some exceedingly corporeal implications in a death camp. It is these bodily implications that give rise to a longing for death within Saul. The poignancy of this longing is put into perspective with respect to how it incites him to view the other survivors as base and inhuman, as "already dead". The ambivalence that touches the protagonist's attempt to redeem himself from his dehumanized condition is commented on by Larsson, who approaches "already dead" via the "corpse-like, gaunt-faced, affectless" (para 4) persona of Saul: "It is this non-space between life and death, human and inhuman that Saul inhabits. Despite this, Saul is motivated by the very human desire to save the boy's soul and perhaps, even his own" (para 4). The intersection that Larsson draws between "human and inhuman" is particularly relevant to Saul's keen insight into the deadening effects of survival, which renders him dead to preoccupations that are not only intrinsic to embodied beings but which open onto *human* relationships. Yankl's take on the encounter merits Saul's repugnance, for it is undeniably crude. But Hirsch stresses the woman's eyes, which suggests a connection between him and her, one that is positive

in an environment where individuals are reduced to thinking only of their *own* bodily needs.

Avram's reminder: "You used to talk about women too!" (00:51:46) talks about Saul's own capacity for such encounters with women in the past tense - as "already dead" -, yet he forces Saul to obtain the gunpowder from Kanada, a female slave labor unit, because of Saul's "connection" with Ella Friedlander. Is this an attempt by Avram to reignite the connection vehemently disowned by Saul? Despite Saul's denial: "I don't know her" (00:58:52), the connection comes through in the way Ella looks beseechingly into Saul's eyes and reaches out to touch his hand, which he withdraws. Although there is no means of ascertaining any facts about this relationship, the brief, wordless interaction between Saul and Ella suggests a history of intimacy. It is also noticeable that turning his back on a mutely pleading Ella distresses Saul, who takes off his hat and screws up his features, betraying intense frustration. Ella's anguish, which implies that Saul could be *touched* by his son's death in more than one sense, puts the poignancy of his mission in perspective. Nemes' statement on the responsibility of the Sonderkommandos is relevant to Saul's cutting himself off from the "living":

> The film raises the issue of what kind of resistance and heroism is possible in a concentration camp, since much of their humanity has been drained. That is not only because of the Gestapo's oppression, but also because the Sonderkommandos have at some point in their vile labor closed themselves to all human frequencies, including their own. (Qtd. in Quart 38)

However, the relation between dehumanization and responsibility in *Son of Saul* is not as negative as it appears in Nemes' statement, for the irony is that Saul's switching off from

the concerns of the living is what makes it possible for him to respond to the call of the dead.

Saul's "obliterating the 'call of life'" (30) for the sake of burying a family member forms the basis of a parallel that Efimia Karakantza draws between him and the eponymous heroine in Sophocles' *Antigone*.[80] The stress on burial is doubled in the Greek tragedy, in which Antigone is entombed alive by King Creon, her uncle and the ruler of Thebes, for burying her rebel brother, Polyneices. In "Dying Becomes Her: Posthumanism in Sophocles' *Antigone* in the Light of László Nemes' *Son of Saul*" (2017), Karakantza states that "[t]he special relation to [death] that unites Saul and Antigone" has to do with how they have "already crossed the boundary between the living and the dead" (32). Being "'already there'", that is, in the realm of the dead" (38) is said to be an identification "adopt[ed]" by both protagonists for the sake of burying their kin (32). This identification is looked into by Karakantza on a slightly different basis, as in a shift from death to life rather than a co-implication (29).

The ethico-political conflict in *Antigone* is an angle of particular relevance to *Son of Saul*. The conflict, which boasts of a vast, seminal philosophical-psychoanalytical discourse, dates back to Hegel's reading of *Antigone* in *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), in which the opposition between family and state is said to respectively represent an incompatibility between ethics and politics. In Hegel's reading, Antigone's obligation to bury her brother is associated with "pre-rational" divine laws, which, despite enabling a passage to what is predicated on reason and self-knowledge (human law), are excluded

[80] The similarity between *Son of Saul* and *Antigone* has been noted by other critics, such as Stuart Liebman, Chari Larsson and Dorot Niemitz, whose article is titled "A Modern *Antigone*: *Son of Saul* by László Nemes", *World Socialist Web Site*, published online 28 January 2016.

from the male domain of politics (Chanter 384).[81] In *Glas* (1974), Derrida renders the boundaries between the ethical and the political porous by means of burial, which is torn between irreconcilable representations. On the one hand, the *dead* epitomizes what the family stands for: "the singular, the essentially singular", that is "incapable of passing to universality", or "giv[ing] rise to the life of the citizen" (143). On the other hand, burial is on the side of *logos* because it staves off associations of "animal[ity]": "Hegel also thought burial is the proper(ty) of (the) man […] This operation [burial] prevents the corpse from returning to nature. In embalming it, in shrouding it, in enclosing it in bands of material, of language, and of writing, in putting up the stele, this operation raises the corpse to the universality of spirit" (144).[82] Hence, the exclusion of family, in particular woman, who is "entrust[ed] with" "erect[ing] [man's] burial place" and "maintaining the corpse in a living, monumental, interminable surrection", shows itself to be the condition of the political. The state's contingency on the family model, summed up by Tina Chanter: "The family, then, is both inside the system, and it provides the structural integrity of the system at the same time. It is both internal to the system, and it *is* the system" (Chanter 388), pivots on burial, or "[c]rypt", which "organizes the ground to which it does not belong" (*Glas* 166).

[81] Tina Chanter takes a critical look at Derrida's re-reading of Hegel's Antigone, arguing that it falls prey to the German philosopher's "fetishization" of the Greek heroine (380). "Antigone as the White Fetish of Hegel and the Seductress of Derrida", *A Companion to Derrida*, ed. Zeynep Direk and Leonard Lawlor, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2014, pp.378-390.

[82] Miriam Leonard explicates the contradiction in Hegel's reading of the incompatibility between ethics and politics: "The family is the 'basis' of the 'actuality of the nation', a necessary matrix of sociality on which the state depends for the production of its citizens. And yet, despite this seeming symbiosis the family and the state remain in 'contrast'. Standing 'over and against' each other, the family and state seemed to be locked in conflict. Although Hegel insists on their interdependence, an incipient hierarchy has entered his discourse" (5). "Antigone: Between Ethics and Politics", *Athens in Paris: Ancient Greece and the Political in Post-War French Thought,* Oxford University Press, 2005, pp.5-72.

The relational tension between ethics and politics is pertinent to Saul's insistence on burial rites, which is inseparable from the *right to* in a Nazi death camp. However, this particular parallel between the Greek tragedy and the Holocaust is not pursued by Karakantza. Dehumanization in her study is approached on the basis of posthumanism in Greek tragedy, in which the "non-human" is represented via "speech" from "the realm of the dead" (22). Notwithstanding the delimiting of her analysis, Karakantza cannot avoid touching on the ethical-political tangle in *Son of Saul*: "In the face of a situation in which there is no possibility of hope, Saul's inner voice commands him that he must survive, *to be able to do a thing that bears meaning*. The command was to show respect to a meaningful act that from the very origin of the [human] communities was very sacred" (italics in original Röhrig qtd. in Karakantza 32). Besides the political relevance of Saul's alterity stressed on by Géza Röhrig, there is "already dead", which opens onto the co-relation between ethics and politics from conflicting positions. The claim underscores the political consequences of his paternal mission, is dismissive of the resistance posed by dehumanized slaves and yet demonstrates that the oppressed (already dead) are capable of responding to the excluded. "Already dead" conveys the impossibility of agency, as well as represents a singular possibility of it. The otherness of "already dead" is a means of disclaiming responsibility, as well as a basis for insisting on the other's right to burial. This paradox confronts one with the uncertain relation between sovereignty and death, posited by Heidegger in *Das Ding*. This relation, thought through by Derrida in the Fifth Session, is significant to the film because it counters the reading of burial as "the last thing that can keep [Saul] *human*" (my italics Zacharek 62).

The Fifth Session lays out Heidegger's contention that only humans can lay claim to mortality because, unlike animals, who merely "perish" (Heidegger qtd. in Fifth 121), they "have access to the *as such* of death" (italics in original Fifth 123), which is a "relation to death" (Fifth 122): "Such a power or potency defines the mortal, man as mortal, and this power of as such […] is none other than the relation to […] Being as Being"(Fifth 122-3). The relation to death opens up what comes closest to the self, the question of Being, which humans, if they claim to be mortal, must actively engage in, even though it is resistant to being grasped in any totalizing fashion. According to Heidegger, the potential of Being to question itself sets it apart from animals or beings who cannot conceive of their own death. The double-edged relation between sovereignty in humans and death is already there in Heidegger's writings, in which the power to die confronts the human subject with that which it cannot know about itself. In thinking through the implications of this discourse, Derrida elicits the *impossibility* of "becom[ing] mortal" (Fifth 124), contingent as it is on access to death. This access is not available to the self, certainly not in death, nor with respect to imagining oneself as dead. The inaccessibility of death puts humans at par with animals, thereby undermining the sovereignty that Heidegger attributes to them on the basis of their relation to death (121-4): "[C]ontrary to what Heidegger says, we did remain beasts who do not have the power to die, to whom death as such never appears, dying remaining, as Blanchot often complains, impossible, alas" (Fifth 124). The impossibility of becoming mortal figures as the counterpart of what is argued in *The Gift of Death*, in which immortality, or the possibility of being whole, is said to be impossible. The logic driving both contentions derives from a mortal's inability to have access to death but it is phrased from opposite

ends in the two texts. More to the point, Derrida's positing of immortality on the side of the animal pushes one to reflect on the irony that stalks Saul's responsibility. For Saul owes his mission of burial, the very feature that ensures our humanity and links us to the divine, to his benighted animal self (or other) and yet he looks down on the animality of the survivors! Yet in a concentration camp, where Nazi compulsion (mis)calculates on animal drives linking up with survival in only one way, this unforeseen dimension to burial emerges as a potential gift.

"Already Dead" & Surviving Paternity:

The relation between the animality of humans and immortality links up with Saul's obsession with entrusting his son to the Father. In the film, dehumanization is placed at the heart of paternity via two features: the context of slavery in the camp and the irrationality that conditions the father's mission. Saul, a slave in the camp, decides to bury (and father) a fellow slave, irrespective of whether he is his son or not. The following reading of paternity by Röhrig illustrates that paternity is inseparable from the issue of slavery: "I think he [dead boy] was not his [Saul's] son at all; I think he was his son in a symbolic, Jewish way. He might have just looked like his son. He adopted this boychick, and that's the most mysterious moment of the movie. Saul realizes: 'I can't bury them all, but I'm going to bury this one'" (qtd. in Kilday 4).[83] When compared to the noticeable bias in Antigone's mission of burial, which is undertaken for the purpose of "distinguish[ing] her brother from a slave, for whom, she says explicitly, she would not have violated the law" (Chanter 381), the political relevance that Röhrig gives to the

[83] "Making of *Son of Saul*" by Greg Kilday, *The Hollywood Reporter, Prometheus Global Media* (2015):1-4.

irrationality that conditions Saul's ungrounded claim of paternity becomes even more pronounced.

The uncertainty to Saul's paternity, remaining unaccounted for, lends a novel slant to the possibility of *bearing* secrets. For Saul claims that the dead boy is his *illegitimate* son: "He's not from my wife" (01:22:07) and as an offspring born out of wedlock, the dead boy represents Saul's secret. However, it is a secret he cannot be on the inside of, for his attempt to confirm the boy's identity and Hungarian nationality via the documents left behind by the gassed prisoners turns out to be abortive. His frantic perusal of the documents is cut short by members who are ordered to destroy them. More than one critic has argued that Saul has no son. This claim, presumably based on Avram's skeptical: "You have no son" (01:22:18) comes up against the desperation with which Saul tries to ascertain the boy's identity, which suggests that there is a son in question. That said, his paternity, with respect to the dead boy in the camp, is contingent on a suspicion that he has no means of confirming.

Like Changez's confession of failing to "penetrate" Am[E]rica, Saul's *owning* up to a secret does not substantiate his paternity, or *ownership*, over the boy. Yet, in one respect, he is called to account, unlike Hamid's slippery narrator-protagonist; for he takes responsibility for an illegitimate son who, in his brief lifespan of eleven or twelve years, has in all probability been neglected by his father. Paternity is under trial here, for the irresponsible father is faced with a dead 'son', with whom a relationship is no longer possible, other than an illusory one. The only obligation left is that of claiming his son's corpse, which he carries out under conditions that render his paternal claim a possibility of his belonging to his dead son: "This boy belongs to him [Saul] and he belongs to the

boy" (Röhrig qtd. in Feigelson & Portuges 31).[84] Saul's belonging to his son, which links up with his longing to be dead, deflects from the proprietary course that paternity takes in Abraham's case. In *The Gift of Death*, what renders this dimension to fatherhood even more problematic is that the overlapping boundaries between father(s) and son(s) are as much a possibility of self-sacrifice - "[Abraham] gives to himself the death that he is granting to his son" (93) - as they are an instance of "infanticide" (68). But, as Röhrig's statement illustrates, the inseparability of fathers and sons can work in both directions. With respect to paternity, Saul's decision to sacrifice himself to a dead son poses a glaring contrast to Abraham's willingness to kill his son for God. "Already dead" seeks to downplay the risk burial poses to the other survivors, yet, with all its attendant problems, it is not, unlike Abraham's decision, a possibility of dying vicariously through the son: "[I]t is the sacrifice of both of them, it is the gift of death one makes to the other in putting *oneself* to death, mortifying oneself in order to make a gift of this death as a sacrificial offering to God" (italics in original *GD* 70). In any case, death is a given at Auschwitz. Whether Saul chooses to bury his son or not does not change the fact that he faces imminent death. Whereas death makes an entry in the Biblical narrative via God's command, which Abraham *chooses* to obey, Saul decides to embrace the givenness of death to give his son the guarantee of eternal life.

The secrecy of death, which marks both Abraham and Saul, pertains to responsibility's relation to otherness, to what is inaccessible to the deciding self, about itself and the other(s) responded to. Although respectful of the other's secrecy, the silence of Abraham and Saul exclusively protects the interests of *their* preferred others.

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[84] "Screen Memory: The Jewish Question" by Kristian Feigelson and Catherine Portuges, *HStud* 31.1 (2017): 19-38.

This one-sidedness has a significant bearing on the proprietary dimension to paternity, which plays out differently in the two cases. Derrida's emphasis on otherness as a feature that is exclusively mortal wrests the privilege of inscrutability from God, yet that does not change the fact that Abraham's silence favors the otherness of God, not that of Isaac. For in his response to Isaac's query, to do with "where the lamb is to be found for the sacrifice" (59), what the father chooses to leave unsaid is "the secret between God and him" (60). In saying "God will provide a lamb for the holocaust" (59), Abraham speaks in order not to say anything about the essential thing that he must keep secret [God's command]" (60). This implies that he looks upon his son as his belonging, which he can part with on unconditional terms in the event of God's call. Although "already dead" does a great deal of justice to the secrecy of the *Sonderkommando,* when it comes to the clash between the uprising and burial, the claim works against the Squad's survival, leaning decidedly in favor of the dead. The same can be said of the evasiveness that Saul resorts to in his confession to Avram about his secret son. For what Saul conveniently leaves out is that he has no means of knowing whether the corpse belongs to *his* son. But this not-knowing does not stand in the way of his *becoming* a father.

This possibility of fatherhood, which, paradoxically, comes Saul's way via the death of the boy, bears an element of creativity. One could call it a fiction, not only on account of Saul's not knowing whether the boy is his son or not, but because the boy's death brings the possibility of paternity to an end. Yet the death of this possibility is what gives rise to paternity, in a manner that mirrors the death-survival co-implication and ties in with death's gifting of responsibility to mortals. The fictive aspect of Saul's paternal responsibility, contingent as it is on "already dead", resonates with what the sessions

state regarding the possibility of "making" that falls on the other in the event of one's death: "What is the other – or what are the others - at the moment when it is a matter of responding to the necessity of making *something of me*, of making of me some thing or their thing from the moment I will be […] *departed*, i.e. deceased […] absolutely without defense, disarmed, in their hands?" (italics in original Fifth 126). Saul makes a son of the dead boy by tending to the corpse with intense solicitude, gazing lovingly at it and wiping it meticulously with a wet cloth. This is an exceptional performance of paternity, given that being in the vicinity of a corpse, particularly of a loved one, is typically an unsettling, stifling experience. But the father treats the corpse as if it were alive and perhaps this is not as irrational as it appears, given the scientific evidence cited in the sessions that support the inability to "rigorously" differentiate "between a living body and a corpse" (Sixth 162).[85] The possibility that a "corpse" could be "both a thing and something other than a thing" (Fifth 119) is brought in relation to the "thinging" that is involved in "making something" of the dead. And this "thinging" of the thing one loves forms a parallel between death and love, one that resonates in Saul's adoption of "dead": "We shall be wondering whether, in death and in mourning, things are not the same as they are in love, and whether loving, then, does not mean loving so as to make it one's lovable thing, to the point of having it at one's disposal […] keeping it in oneself, burying or burning it to keep it living-dead in oneself" (Fifth 121). What comes through in the sessions is the paradox that the dead pose to the necessity of respecting the otherness of the other. For "making something" of the dead points to an awareness that what appears merely dead, or a thing, could be other. But, at the same time, this

[85] The possibility of "'deconstruct[ing]'" (Younger qtd. in Sixth) the "concept of death" is attributed by Derrida to the eminent American biologist, Doctor Stuart J. Younger (Sixth 162).

"making" makes a belonging of the otherness of the dead. Because of "already dead", Saul's appropriation of the dead simultaneously speaks of his embracing what is dead, or irreversibly other, about the son. In summation of how the choice to be buried or cremated is left to the other, the Fifth Session contends that a corpse exposes the uncertainty of sovereignty (144). The "already dead" condition of Saul reveals this contention to be as applicable to the other in charge of burying the dead.

Saul's treatment of the dead as living is consistent with his mission of burial, which in Derrida's sessions, is said to make room for the possibility that a dead person may still be living. Cremation, on the other hand, annihilates the corpse with the aim of ruling out the slightest chance of physical suffering in the dead (Sixth 162). This hope and fear, to do with the possible survival of the dead, is projected (another fiction?) by the living onto the unreachable dead. In "making" up the survival of his dead son, Saul's frozen face comes to life. Although contingent on *his* belonging to the dead, this making of a son unmakes the "already dead" identity adopted by the father for the sake of giving everlasting life to his dead son. The 'father's' making of a son is simultaneously a fleshing out of his own paternal identity, the surety of which is attached to an identification ("already dead") that he *owes* the dead boy. Giving rise to responsiveness within the 'father', the dead son undoes the father's belonging to the dead *and* undercuts his privilege to giving life. The unmaking embroiled in making impacts the hierarchy between father and son, the uncertainty of which is already evident in the precedence that "already dead" claims over a condition that has no before or after.

The precedence to do with "already dead" takes one in different interpretative directions. Perhaps it has to do with the *impulsion* and urgency that only death can give,

but which Saul chooses to take. Precedence can also be read in the light of what Levinas and Derrida debate regarding the son's analogical relation to a work of fiction. The credit that Levinas gives to paternity, for giving rise to an otherness (the son) it has no authority over, is not, in his view, applicable to an author's relation to his works of fiction. Derrida disagrees, stating that a work, not only of fiction but also the work of interpretation that makes up a relationship, is invariably cut off from its author because of the movement of signification (*différance*).[86] A word *coined* by Derrida, *différance* is particularly resonant in the metafictional instance of Saul's "making" of the "son". For the *originary* inscription, or proto writing, demonstrates that writing, said to be "dead" because it functions in the absence or death of the author, is the condition for presence (life). "Already dead" Saul not only comes to life on account of his story of fatherhood but makes out as if the corpse is alive to his tender ministrations.

Burial in *Son of Saul*: Giving to, or Projecting Life onto, the Dead?

Despite Saul's insistence on rites, burial in *Son of Saul* is not as religious as it appears, for it involves sacrificing the living to the dead.[87] The "inner God" that Nemes talks about in relation to Saul's mission alerts one to the subjectivity that drives his act of faith, which the spectator cannot be on the inside of: "It's difficult to judge [Saul's] actions from a distance, a theme very central to my film…whereas there is no hope in the camp, and there's no more God, for Saul there might be an inner voice, an inner God,

[86] *In Limited Inc*. (1988), Derrida states that "writing as an iterative structure, cut off from all absolute responsibility, from *consciousness* as the ultimate authority, orphaned and separated at birth from the assistance of its father is precisely what Plato condemns in in *Phaedrus*" (italics in original 8).

[87] In "That Holocaust Feeling", Dan Kagan-Kans dismisses the mission of burial on religious grounds: "[Y]ou don't need a rabbi to bury a Jewish body and you don't need a rabbi to say kaddish. A rabbi is not a priest. Properly tending to a Jewish corpse does not require priestly supervision" (para. 30). According to Kans, although Saul is informed about this by the rabbi amongst the SK, as well as his other fellow members, "the exact reasons" for "just how dispensable his quest is" are left "unarticulated", quite possibly because "then there would be no film"(para. 31).

which would still allow a person to have a choice" (Interview with Quart 39). In the film, burial's return to the Father is highlighted as a reading on Saul's part, one that, in turn, invites a critical response from the reader. The "improvis[ation]" that goes into the making of the protagonist's mission is remarked upon by Chare and Williams, who speak of burial as a ritual "created out of Saul's own compulsions as much as in conformity with a particular law" (11): "Rather than deferring to someone else's knowledge of ritual, Saul seems to be defining the rules of the ritual himself" (10).

This section analyzes this critical dimension to the redemptive in the light of the film's ending. The latter, which confronts the unavoidable *constructedness* of making meaning, implies this very feature as its potential *saving grace*. Amir Ganjavie, who regards Saul's smile as "delusion[al]": "[L]ooking at a boy and deluding himself into thinking that it's his son" (para. 43), is contradicted by Nemes, who views the ending as "hopeful" (qtd. in Ganjavie para.40): "I think any way, any means, and path to the inner voice is a good way" (qtd. in Ganjavie para. 44).[88] The smile is argued in excess of both these readings. The inescapability of immortality in *The Beast and the Sovereign* is brought to bear on my exploration of the implications of the smile that Saul gives, just a couple of seconds before the film ends. These implications tie in with the question of giving: What does giving to the dead give Saul and what does his smile give the viewer?

The climax is described by Posner as a "coda" (87), a term traditionally used in the context of music to denote "[t]he concluding passage of a piece or movement,

[88] From the perspective of Langer's *Versions of Survival*, Nemes' conception of "inner voice" as "inner survival", which he opposes to "physical survival", would be extremely problematic. Langer makes a forceful point regarding Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* (1946), in which, according to Langer, the Holocaust survivor represents "suffering" as "a condition of mind more than a distress of body" (24): "Unfortunately, the gas in the chambers of Auschwitz completely filled the human *lungs*, not the human soul and conscious mind" (italics in original 25).

typically forming an addition to the basic structure" (*OED*). The ending is set apart from the rest of the film in terms of setting, for the action shifts from Auschwitz, with its ghastly gas chambers and dimly lit corridors, to the leafy woods surrounding the camp. Along with focusing on nature, this change in setting features the Polish peasant boy whose mystifying presence brings a smile to Saul's face. Although ostensibly a move from death to survival, this shift uses features redolent with life to heighten the deaths of both missions. The lush greenery, suggestive of irrepressible life, coincides with the rebels desperately trying to flee from the Nazi officials with their bloodthirsty hounds. The shed, where the rebels seek refuge, also unfolds in terms of images that reflect on how hope excludes what can no longer be redeemed. Saul's sitting on his own, silent and utterly despondent because his mission of burial is "already dead", contrasts starkly with the rebels coming up with plans to make contact with the Polish resistance.

What happens to Saul's mission? Firstly, the rabbi who helps Saul dig a grave in the woods turns out to be an impostor. His inability to recite the Kaddish verses gives rise to a silent rage in Saul, who, undeterred, continues to dig furiously. That is, until the sound of approaching Nazis brings it to a halt. Corpse flung over his shoulder, Saul follows the other survivors across the river. But he loses his grip on the corpse, which falls to the bottom of the river. The irony is that Saul's mission falls through because of him! However, this comes up against the irony of the body falling into water. Surely the latter's life-giving connotations are a worthwhile substitute for a burial that has no choice but to take place without its accompanying sanctifying rites? Perhaps not for Saul; in the wake of losing his son's dead body, he loses the will to live and tries to drown himself in the same river. The failure to bury his son is, *for him*, a monumental

one, one that cannot be salvaged by resorting to traditional readings of greenery and water, which, in any case, are played on in an idiomatic context in the film: *we are not out of the woods yet*.

"We are not out of the woods yet" applies to Saul's smile and the predicament it puts the viewer in. The smile is *given* to a Polish peasant boy, who, on peeking into the shed where the rebels are hiding from the Nazis, makes a point of looking in the protagonist's direction. Sitting with his head hanging, Saul looks up, gazing back at the child and then, out of the blue, smiles. The close-up of smiling Saul is our last glimpse of him and, judging from the gunshots that immediately follow it, the last of him. We do not witness his death because the camera switches to the boy. Escaping from the shed in a panic, the child is grabbed by an SS official and released once the armed officers have passed through, presumably, to the shed, where they carry out the execution. The film closes with the boy running through the woods in the midst of piercing gunfire, an image that, in line with the co-implication, gives relief to, as well as weighs the spectator down with sadness.

The peasant boy's run-in with the SS officer establishes the former's reality, which is overlooked in Margaret Gibson and Amanda Howell's reading of *Son of Saul*. Their study (2018) approaches the Holocaust film in terms of Levinas's face to face encounter and the figure of the child, more specifically, the void it represents in Holocaust discourse. The unresolved identity of Saul's "son" is examined in the light of the "anonymity" that dominates "iconic images of the child victim" (156), such as the image of the Warsaw Ghetto boy (1943), and is read in the light of Levinas's stress on the otherness of the other. The representational challenges the film takes on with respect

to child victims are dealt with by Gibson and Howell in a rigorous and engaging manner. However, the ending is shortchanged in the study, which seems intent on representing it as an instance of (unproblematic) grace: “Is this [peasant boy] an apparition of the dead child reborn […] a ghost who has sought Saul and we, the viewers, out? Is this child an angel of death come to release Saul and bring a sacred moment before final execution?” (160). The references to “apparition” and “angel” negate the boy’s reality, which is an important feature because it represents a complete break from Saul’s perspective. Given the latter’s obsession with burial, it is likely that the peasant boy, who elicits the enigmatic smile, ties in - *for Saul* - with the possibility of afterlife. The inaccessible smile, in coinciding with Saul’s death, leaves the viewer on his own with respect to the dilemma of making meaning. The viewer wants to be on the inside of the beatific smile, with regard to meaning but more so in terms of feeling. Unlike Changez’s inappropriate response to 9/11, this is a smile that one would like to be more implicated in.

The resolution that the protagonist apparently derives from glimpsing the peasant boy is the beginning of the spectator’s dilemma. Just as elements associated with vibrancy and unrestrained life are used in the climax to frame what threatens two redemptive missions, the smile simultaneously opens up the costs and rewards of projecting survival onto death. The smile triggered by the peasant boy can be interpreted on a *speculative* basis, based on certain clues. Stuart Liebman does a thorough job of showing how these clues point to a blind spot in Saul, one that is held responsible for the smile. Building on Liebman’s reading, I open up this blind spot to implications overlooked by him, for the sake of demonstrating how *Son of Saul* highlights the instability of making meaning when responding to the other.

With regard to the co-implicating facet to the smile, I turn to Liebman's interpretation of the ending:

> It [Saul's death] is preceded by a curious moment. A young Polish peasant boy resembling his own lost son unexpectedly comes into view. Saul reacts and a smile slowly spreads across his lips. It is as if *his* Lazarus has just returned from the dead, reborn. That the boy has led the Germans to the hiding place, however, ironically transforms the beloved son into the iconic *malakh ha-mavet*, the Jewish angel of death. The ending is both troubling and strangely consoling. Saul's effort has come to naught, even as he, in his madness, believes he has succeeded in his mission. (Italics in original 48)

Lazarus, resurrected by Jesus from the dead, and *Malakh ha-mavet,* an angel who presages death, represent the relation between death and survival but from opposite ends. The juxtaposition of these two references, which accentuates the tension intrinsic to the co-implication, opens up two possible readings of the smile. One of them, pointedly said to belong to Saul ["*his* Lazarus"], yet attributed to him by Liebman, pertains to the resurrection of the dead son. The other meaning, to do with the Jewish angel of death, is held out as authentic, as one excluded by Saul's madness. The resurrection of the dead son, said to pivot on the *resemblance* between the living boy and the dead son, is critiqued as a projection on the protagonist's part: "Saul's effort has come to naught, even as he, in his madness, believes he has succeeded in his mission". Liebman interprets Saul's "madness" in terms of his not knowing that he does not know ("believes he has succeeded in his mission"), but, given the intrinsic unreliability of Saul's narrative of paternity, of which he is *aware* from the start (otherwise why would he seek

confirmation of the corpse's identity?), it is doubtful whether the resemblance bears the kind of significance *for Saul* that Liebman is reading into it. In fact, resemblance, with its intrinsic instability, is at the heart of Saul's decision, which, beyond a point, commits itself to not caring whether the dead boy is his son or not. Saul's "madness" has more to do with his embracing what cannot be known, be it in relation to the dead boy's real identity, or with regard to the peasant boy's entry on the scene.

To me, the smile does not suggest that Saul "believes he has succeeded in his mission". On the contrary, it puts burial in perspective. In the climax, the Lazarus possibility emerges despite Saul's failure to bury his son. This failure is acknowledged through action, for Saul attempts to drown himself in the same river that swallows up his son's corpse. Resurrection of the dead son turns out to be a default option that rears its head in the event of his irrevocable failure to complete his mission. This implies that survival of the dead is not contingent on a particular ritual but is, as Derrida's discussion of burial *and* cremation points out, a mortal's instinctive response in the face of death. Liebman represents the Lazarus possibility as that which Saul, in his blindness, *chooses* to project because it vindicates his mission of burial, but, based on Derrida's reading of immortality, one can read this projection as *imposed* on mortals by the void of death. The illusion of immortality that mortals are stuck with not only renders burial redundant in *Son of Saul* but suggests that it is conditioned by that, namely, the possibility of survival in death, which is not a choice. The possibility of no choice within Saul's choice is touched on by Chare and Williams on account of his "death-fixated desire": "It is an agency without mastery. In this sense, Nemes and Royer found a way of telling a Holocaust story, which relies on a character being able to act, whilst also staying true to

the insight [offered in the diaries]: that the prisoners were essentially powerless" (14). Chare and Williams' unworking of choice by irrationality converges with the monolithic "phantasm" of survival in Derrida's seminars.

The Gift of Death also posits immortality, or the self's non-relation to its death, as that which undercuts the possibility of sovereignty. This unbridgeable distance within the self is that which makes it possible for the self to respond to others, yet this fragmentation simultaneously renders choice questionable, which is why Derrida says, "The other decides in me". Like *The Beast and the Sovereign*, *The Gift of Death* looks at immortality from a mortal perspective. The difference is that immortality in the latter is directly brought to bear on the elusiveness of death, whereas the seminars deal with the illusion of survival that the self cannot rid itself of in its relation to death. Derrida speaks of how a mortal self "cannot fail to imagine" (Sixth 166) itself "present at [its] death and beyond, without however failing to die, to survive [its] death while really dying" (Sixth 148). The co-implication is at work in both these (re)readings. In *The Gift of Death,* Derrida takes eternal life away from God, bringing Him closer to the limit within the self; yet this limit opens onto a relation with death. The sessions demonstrate how life, or inescapable survival, places a limit on one's relation to death.

The failure of burial, tantamount to death (for Saul), reveals itself in terms of survival ever after to him. This unforeseen gain in the expectation of loss elicits an uncharacteristic smile from him, one that times itself in such a way with the gunshots that it simultaneously functions as an unprecedented response in the face of actual death. One could read the smile in terms of Saul giving death the meaning that is given to him by the void of death. That is, if a smile in the face of death cares if it is taking or giving,

if it has to do with choice, or no choice. For being happy in the face of death might be an instance where meaning is not meaning *as such*: “He [Saul] gets this purpose that is not so much a result of his thought process - it’s more enigmatic than that. And that makes him happy. He’s a very happy, fulfilled person to me in the movie - probably the only one” (Röhrig qtd. in Kilday 4).

The timing of the smile is impeccable because its appearance just a couple of seconds before the execution renders it into an instance of “madness” that bears all the meaning in the world. In terms of the value that it gives to senselessness, the smile faces stiff competition from *The Gift of Death*, which teases out the possibility of unconditional giving from Abraham’s “instant of madness”. “[T]he instant of madness” is a description we owe to Kierkegaard, who uses “madness” to speak of what is unmistakably irrational about the near-sacrifice. For Abraham’s attempted slitting of his son’s throat is tantamount to tearing up God’s word and cancelling out his own future of patriarchy. Derrida unpacks “the instant of madness” in terms of *différance*, the (unjustifiable) sacrificial violence that signification involves and which constitutes a “reasonable”, “moral” decision. He does not respond to the inexplicability of Genesis 22 by rationalizing it as a groundbreaking shift from child to animal sacrifice. The divine command has no such meaning in *The Gift of Death*, in which it comes from a “jealous” (63), whimsical God, who has no interest in the sacrifice itself. That is, the sheer senselessness of the command is thought through as the means by which God tests His faithful follower’s capacity for keeping an unthinkable demand a secret between himself and God (Lit. in Secret 122). *According to Derrida*, God not only infers from Abraham’s “madness” that He is loved above all others by His faithful follower, but He gives the

near-sacrifice - which is refused at the last minute - a meaning, one that bears on the necessity of *responding in terms of action* (72-3).

For Derrida, the near-sacrifice, traditionally read as an act of graphic violence that confirms Abraham's limitless faith in God (95), lays bare the problem that, on an everyday basis, mortals face with respect to making sense of each other's demands and responses. The dilemma is that I give death in making sense of what the other wants from me and gives me, for I can only grasp the other's demand and response by giving it a meaning that is accessible to me. The taking that giving invariably involves is applicable even in Abraham's case. Although Derrida is noticeably circumspect when it comes to attributing any possibility of calculation or gain to the near-sacrifice (96), his contention that Abraham dies through his son's death gives Isaac's death a meaning that favors the father. Based on how Christianity speaks of death as a gift from the other, sacrifice (which gives death and is given by death) is uncovered as an act by which the self appropriates the otherness of death for itself: "How does one give oneself death in that other sense where *se donner la mort* also means to interpret death, to give oneself a representation of it, a figure, a signification, a destination for it?"(italics in original 12). The prophet's decision to die vicariously is an instance of incalculable giving that still takes something away from his secret (unknowable) relation to death.

If immortality is one's singular relation to one's own death, then Saul's intervention on behalf of his son is also an act of appropriation, one that, judging from the smile, opens onto a sense of fulfillment. The film's ending with a smile is a stroke of brilliance that upstages the emotionally draining effect of Abraham's performance as understood by Derrida in *The Gift of Death*. In "Literature in Secret", fiction is said to be

a rebellious offspring (a stand-in for Isaac?) that exposes the meaninglessness to the secrecy surrounding Abraham's decision. *Son of Saul* performs this role but in a manner that gives this responsibility a singular touch. For it uncovers the groundlessness of making meaning, following it up with a smile that reflects on what can be *had* through giving meaning. The implications of this having, conveyed through the gunshots that accompany the smile, come home to the spectator. For witnessing this smile involves losing oneself to the possibility of being happy in the face of death.

Unlike Changez's giving of "novel" meanings to terror, which may orchestrate or sidetrack death, and Alex's hypothetical droog son, Saul's giving of meaning, via a loaded smile, coincides with his death. The dilemma of making meaning no longer concerns him. From the viewer's perspective, the smile ends differently. The film gives the spectator the possibility of giving death to Saul's delusion. This gift, which has to do with the obligation of confronting what is unreliable about interpretation, turns out to bear a great deal of irony; for it neither gives nor takes anything away from Saul, but only reflects subversively on the viewer's responses to the film. In that sense, a work of fiction (*Son of Saul*) gives death to the viewer's claim to *making* sense of it.

Conclusion:

In *Son of Saul*, death, imminent for the SK at Auschwitz-Birkenau, is witnessed by Saul via his encounter with the boy, borne at the level of risk through his personal mission and, ultimately, undergone in the event of his execution. Saul's relation to death, underpinned by two potentially fictive claims, as well as the illusion of afterlife, gives rise to a co-implication of death and survival. This co-implication, examined at length in this chapter, impacts the way in which the viewer evaluates the redemptive potential of

Saul's choice. The redemptive connotations of Saul's mission of burial unfold via the film's ethico-political setting, in which dehumanization is opened up to more affirmative readings, but the most uplifting dimension to his choice emerges in the context of paternity. However, the question of redemption becomes subject to the bigger problem of giving value, or interpreting, death and survival. This dilemma is built into the film's conflict between burial and the uprising, which, ostensibly a tension between the "already dead" and the living, emerges as that which draws on different readings of survival. When read through the lens of Derrida's reading(s) of (im)mortality, survival through burial turns out to be an illusory form of the survival (the uprising) Saul sacrifices for the sake of burying his son. This illusion, shown by Derrida to be inescapable, stands in the way of responding to the dead, which is what Saul *chooses* to do. In a sense, Derrida's take on the inevitability of (im)mortality gives death to the possibility of choice in Saul's case. Just as *Son of Saul* tests the stress on mortality in *The Gift of Death*, Derrida's reading of burial gives the possibility of choice in a death camp an unforeseen direction, one that re-turns the film to Holocaust discourse on "choiceless choices" but with a difference.

In a sense, the smile does have the last word. Following the failure of his mission and coinciding with a death not of his choosing, the smile points to an illusory relation with death that is certainly worth having. Saul's smile figures as an interesting counterpoint to the smile given by Changez. While the former holds out the possibility of having, or holding on to, an illusion, the latter erupts in response to an image of death, which the giver of the smile recognizes as the "death" of his American dream. Saul's sense of having, tenable only because he undergoes death, or the End, also contrasts

starkly with Changez's repeated attempts (and failures) to materialize loss (Chris's death) into gain. Saul's smile also gets the better of the viewer, for whom it not only represents a delusion but exposes the illusion of making meaning. The latter illusion reflects on all the responses hitherto offered by the viewer. In effect, the smile functions as a work of fiction that gives death to the viewer's claim of making sense of the film.

Conclusion

Fiction's relation to death, commonly viewed from a Scheherazadian, or life-affirming, perspective, is depicted as more than just giving and is rendered inclusive of violence by the metafictional works examined in this study. This inclusiveness ties in with how "fiction", put to work in more than one sense, is not restricted to what is literary but also refers to problematic claims about the "truth". The problematizing of "truth" is undertaken in these works through the unyielding fact of death. This fact, or "truth", is one we have no access to *as such* but which we relate to by means of interpretation (*giving* meaning). In these works, the possibility of giving meaning is treated from the perspective of death's conditioning of representation. This conditioning, implying death as giving and giving as deathly, is captured by the phrase: giving death, which applies to "fiction" on account of its use in the context of illusory readings of the "truth", mythical worldviews and lies or evasions (*a* fiction).

The giving of death, courtesy of the plurality of "fiction", ties in with the rest of the focus on responsibility: the undermining of choice and the tension between reading and interpretation. Fiction's giving of death derives from the blind spot, the "night of faith", or inaccessibility that conditions representation, which is inclusive of signification and its manifestation in terms of action. The relation between the reader/viewer and text/film is conditioned by the blind spot, which implicates reading in interpretative violence. This implication holds out the possibility of mitigation, which derives from the self-reflexivity that the accent on interpretative violence ("fiction") confers on reading. The mitigation conferred on reading in relation to interpretative violence reflects on the choice- no choice tension that stalks responding.

This three-pronged research focus is reflected on in this conclusion in two main stages. The first stage involves the main theoretical framework (*The Gift of Death*), which is summarized from the perspective of *différance*, its relation to the engagement between fiction, death and responsibility. The give and take relation between *différance* and the corpus is accounted for in the following contexts: fiction's role in the death-responsibility relation, paternity, the politicizing of reading and death's resistance to language. Derrida's re-readings of *The Gift of Death*, included in the theoretical framework, are also recapitulated with respect to how they are taken forward by *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Son of Saul*. In the second stage, I reflect on the sense of progression the research focus acquires via its treatment by the works. The blind spot that conditions self-reflexivity is at work in this process of reflection, which takes into account the "I" (*my* interpretation) which underpins the readings given in this study.

Fiction's giving of death, which insinuates choicelessness and implicates reading in interpretative violence, is grounded in death, in mortal limitations that point to the blind spot, the inaccessibility, or "night of faith", at the heart of representation. The "night of faith" alludes to the role of *différance* in *The Gift of Death*, in which it demonstrates that meaning is contingent on death. *Coined* by Derrida, *différance* is *performed* by *The Gift of Death*, which deliberately disrupts its reading of Abraham's knife-wielding act in order to showcase how the patriarch's act of deciding is subject to the "lights out" mechanism of signification. This *performance*, courtesy of a *construct*, lends itself to fiction's giving of death in the interpretative and empirical sense in the metafictional works.

The corpus draws on signification (*différance*) with respect to its conditioning by death and the relation it suggests between interpretative and empirical violence. The metafictional works also exemplify literature as *différance*. The latter phrase points to how the play on language (literariness) within literature foregrounds *différance*, that is, betrays (re-presents) that the inaccessibility of responsibility is tied to representation. The corpus also gives back to *différance* via its staging of fiction's giving of death, which re-presents what is implicit in *The Gift of Death*. For, in a less explicit fashion, fiction plays out in *The Gift of Death* in all three senses: literary, interpretation and lies and links up with the giving of death from another angle. God's covenant with Abraham, understood in the sense of a pact kept secret from all others, emerges as a fiction in Derrida's reading because it is represented as sacred and secret *within* a narrative. This *within* reflects on inaccessibility as the condition of representation. In rendering divine secrecy open to interpretation, the Biblical narrative does not give access to the "truth" but veers off in multiple directions, ensuring inaccessibility through endless dissemination.

The immutability of "truth" is also undermined within the Biblical narrative via God, who *pretends* to revoke the covenant via His command to sacrifice Isaac and in so doing, instigates readers to make sense of His baffling reversal. Abraham's acting upon God's feint emerges as an exemplary instance of responsibility, one that takes into account the dreadful consequences that could result from acting on such a command. God's pretense takes riveting forms in the corpus. In Hamid's novel, pretending is posited on the inside of responsibility through role-playing, while a story of responsibility invented by God is treated to a flagrantly controversial reading in *A*

Clockwork Orange, in which free will is shown to be gifted by God to mortals He exploits and sucks dry like juicy oranges. In the Holocaust film, the possibility of life after death turns out to be another death-giving story.

God's pretense is the basis of the "filiation" inferred between literature and the Binding in "Literature in Secret".The bond between literature and Genesis 22, considered in the light of *actual* works of fiction, such as Herman Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener", is also constructed by Derrida by means of an invented phrase: "Pardon for not meaning (to say)". The fictive phrase, which performs decontextualization, plays on secrecy in the sense of senselessness (that which has no representable content) *and* evasiveness, thereby highlighting responsibility's relation to irresponsibility. A version of inaccessibility rendered inclusive of evasiveness is shown to have a resounding impact in the corpus.

The responsibility-irresponsibility relation takes on unforeseen implications in "Abraham, the Other" and in Derrida's reading of burial in *The Beast and the Sovereign*. These implications are not foreseen in *The Gift of Death*, which scrupulously highlights the blind spot in relation to its own reading and other seminal interpretations of the Binding. This study, which reflects on the death-signification relation *and* is constituted by it, includes Derrida's re-readings, for the sake of underscoring the value reading and re-reading derive in relation to the problem of interpretation.

The blind spot that goes into the making of *The Gift of Death* has been pinpointed in this study from the perspective of paternity. In some respects, paternity is short-changed by the attention Derrida gives to God and Abraham's relationship at the cost of the patriarch's equation with Isaac. The fleshing out of paternity in *A Clockwork Orange*

and *Son of Saul* has been dealt with in this study from the perspective of its flagrantly fictional context and its re-turn to the hierarchy between Father, father and son with a difference. God is very much at stake in the depiction of paternity in the works. Alex's decision to father a son is shown to partake in a tradition in which fathers give in to heedless sons. Although posited at the head of this tradition, God is displaced from this position on account of the mechanical set-up given to traditional paternity. The mechanics of fatherhood render the Father subject to a pattern of repeatability, which lends itself to *différance* and its movement of iterability. The possibility of afterlife that underpins Saul's mission of burial is all about return to the Father, which is problematized on account of the lives jeopardized by the mission. Return to the Father also emerges more in the sense of a return to Saul, who projects afterlife onto a random boy.

While the affirmative shift in paternity remains at the level of "visions" in *A Clockwork Orange,* Saul risks death, as well as the lives of others, for the sake of realizing his potentially fictive claim to paternity. In these versions of paternity, the blind spot is both shifted in order to shed light on an affirmative possibility and comes up against itself; for the conspicuous role that fiction plays in the construction of paternity does not give access to it *as such*. Both Burgess' novella and the Holocaust film offer "novel" stories of paternity, which feature fathers as more giving towards hypothetical and dead sons. In both cases, the self-sacrificing version of fatherhood involves an exclusion of woman. Highlighted in the novella, this exclusion is not treated as overtly in the film, yet is not only noticeable, but reflects critically on Saul's paternal mission.

Woman is given a central role in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, which does not deal with paternity but gives a forward-looking nudge to the patriarchal tradition via sexual role-playing. The latter figures as a means by which Changez attempts to heal Erica's longing for Chris. The responsibility that Erica takes for enticing Changez through her stories also reflects critically on the inaccessibility that the narrator-protagonist gives to his accounts of responding to Am/Erica.

Kafka's parable "Abraham", given credit in "Abraham, the Other" for uncovering the latent presumption within responsibility, pushes Derrida to account for what is not explicitly looked into by *The Gift of Death*: the "I" in "here I am" and the possibility that Abraham may have imagined God's call to sacrifice Isaac. This uncovering, which renders fiction - *in Derrida's view* - as a more reliable means than philosophy when it comes to representing responsibility, exposes how an unconditionally giving response harbors a fiction, namely, the "I" in "here I am". The doubts that Kafka's Abraham has, about being the One called by God, are unpacked by Derrida in terms of an "I" that could quite possibly have misread, as well as imagined, the call.

The fictiveness of "I" is both laid bare and exploited in Hamid's novel via the stories of belonging that Changez suspects as fictive *and* attempts to re-enact through playing the other. The disquieting implications of uprooting are pushed to their very limits by the feature of role-playing, the theatrical associations of which imply a sense of witnessing the limitations of belonging. As illustrated in chapter two, the deracination-election tension is given a new slant via role-playing, which attempts to sidestep the necessity of "I", yet fails because it involves the violence of substitution. Changez's acquisition of belonging through the other exemplifies the self's constitution on the basis

of others. His embodying of Chris's identity plays up and undercuts the fictitiousness of belonging. The agency that the narrative gives to anonymity also undercuts the value of deracination.

The reading of burial in *The Beast and the Sovereign* shifts attention from what is owed to physically vulnerable others (mortals) towards responsibility to the dead. The decision taken, in one's lifetime, regarding the options of burial and cremation falls on the other in the event of one's death. Responsibility to the dead reflects on "the other decides in me" from a new angle, for the self literally depends on the other to carry out his/her final wish. The sessions dwell on how burial and cremation reflect differently on the possibility of surviving death, which the religious ritual of burial attempts to guarantee and cremation seeks to annihilate it by burning the dead body. This shared preoccupation with survival after death suggests that choosing between burial and cremation may not be a choice after all, but an illusion.

The possibility of choice as no choice, deriving from the co-implication of death and survival, features in a central role in my reading of the Holocaust film. The film's situating of immortality on the inside of mortality coincides with *The Gift of Death*'s deconstruction of God, as well as with what unfolds in the sessions: the implications of imagining oneself dead. The chapter on *Son of Saul* argues that Saul's smile at the end of the film resurrects the life-affirming sense of fiction's relation to death, yet this resurrection gives death to fiction by suggesting that life after death could be a mortal projection. As stated in the conclusion of the chapter, the smile's stupefying effect on the viewer talks back to critical reflections on the fictiveness of eternal life; for the value of

the senseless smile, which gives death in the interpretative sense, is heightened because it figures as a response to death.

The metafictional works' treatment of giving death (the violence that conditions responding) also takes Derrida's readings and re-readings of responsibility forward. In Burgess' novella, the teen-adult indeterminacy and the deconstruction of free will uncover choice as touched by violation. The license to violate others, given to teens, is shown to infringe on teenhood, the boundaries of which are shown to overlap with childhood. The feature of self-violation becomes magnified through the deconstruction of free will, which renders choice a must and speaks of it in terms of a confrontation with inaccessibility. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, responding to the other is shown in terms of deracination that, nevertheless, involves laying claim to the be-longing of others. The suspect role of identity is showcased via role-playing, which, via substitution, points to sacrificial violence, or giving death in the interpretative and empirical sense.The possibility of choice as compulsion, which inheres in the history of the *Sonderkommandos*, is reconfigured in *Son of Saul* by means of a fictional plot. The film, set in the context of an actual uprising organized by the Squad at Auschwitz-Birkenau, depicts a member who *chooses* to bury his dead "son" at the cost of his survival. Ironically, it is this choice that gives implications of choicelessness to responding; for burial links up with the possibility of afterlife, which is suggested as a possible projection on Saul's part, one that ties in with Derrida's take on afterlife as a response that mortals have no choice but to give in the face of death's otherness.

The feature of violence renders the stories of responsibility compelling and, at the same time, relativizes them. Because violence is not restricted to the political conflicts

the narratives are set in but is shown to be at work in affirmative possibilities, that is, within responding or giving, the versions of responsibility emerge as consistent, convincing and insightful. The violence of giving links up with the everydayness of sacrificial violence in *The Gift of Death* on the basis of notable differences.

Firstly, affirmative possibilities in all three works are inextricably associated with the political conflicts that function as their settings: totalitarianism, 9/11 and the Holocaust. In *A Clockwork Orange*, the possibility of free will is in relation to a delinquent who regards his violence as a means of resistance against the oppressive State. Intimacy and healing in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* are rendered inseparable from the 9/11 attacks and the War on Terror. In *Son of Saul*, the mission of burial emerges as ethically problematic because it comes in the way of the prisoners' uprising. This is not the case in *The Gift of Death*, in which the conflict within the ethical is demonstrated by means of random examples that ostensibly have nothing in common with the Binding. The feature of randomness works in *The Gift of Death*'s favour, particularly since a nurturing instance is shown to cut into itself, as opposed to clashing with another. To a lesser extent, this is applicable in the metafictional works, in which containing, or curing violence, healing and redemption are shown to be conflicted from within. But all three of these possibilities are grounded in specifics, such as *how* is violence contained in a dystopian world, who is being healed and why, and, lastly, why is there a need for redemption in the first place?

These specifics relativize the fictional accounts of responsibility, which, via their limitations, emerge as more "real" when compared to the random, abstract examples in *The Gift of Death*. Feeding one's pet cat undeniably leaves innumerable homeless cats to

die of hunger, but these cats, despite being real, are abstract, whereas in the metafictional works, responsibility is shown to affect specific individuals and is performed by protagonists with problematic identities. All three protagonists are, albeit to different extents and not in the same sense, involved (or suspected of being involved) in actually giving death to others. This involvement with death and violence conditions the accounts of responsibility, which are delivered from the point of view of the protagonists.

From the reader's/viewer's perspective, the problematic identities of the protagonists represent the affirmative possibility of reading or responding to marginalized, or demonized, others. However, what is given through reading is implicated in violence in more than one sense. Firstly, the violence of reading is rendered, by means of the implied reader/viewer, inseparable from the construction of "real" violence within the stories. This overlap, set up in the context of political conflicts, bears out, in a literal sense, the political significance that Derrida gives to *différance* for holding out the possibility of mitigating violence through re-reading one's interpretations. Secondly, the reader's/viewer's readings are invariably conditioned by certain preoccupations, values, experiences and limitations, which are taken into account by means of the "I" that inhabits the implied reader/viewer. The "I", with its relativizing effect on the *stories* of responsibility, creates considerable tension between the reader/viewer and his responses.

The role of fiction in Derrida's reading of responsibility is fleshed out by the metafictional works for the sake of giving the solace and consolation of fiction a deathly slant. In the corpus, the engagement between death and fiction is a co-implicating one, but it is also used to establish the gap between the two; for all three works, in employing

encounters with death, give the reader/viewer an unmistakable sense of how different his/her response would be in the face of actual death. As stated in the introductory chapter, the relational gap between fiction and death substantiates death's resistance to language, which in of itself bears a degree of inaccessibility on account of its conditioning by mortal limitations. Metafiction, with its reputation for subsuming reality under language, is pointed in a new direction, one that accounts for signification's tie-in with real violence, by means of the blind spot intrinsic to language.

The blind spot, constructed *and* exposed by the metafictional works, is the basis of the three overlapping concerns reflected on in this study: fiction's giving of death, the choicelessness it insinuates and the tension it gives rise to between reading and interpretation. These interrelated tensions witness a progression by means of the treatment they are given in the metafictional works. This progression pertains to how this interrelational structure plays out in ways that are similar and different.

Firstly, the fiction-death-responsibility engagement unfolds in contexts that reflect on the metafictiveness of this engagement. *A Clockwork Orange*'s embedding of physical violence in a futuristic world is followed by a re-presentation of terror (a real conflict) within a love *story* in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. The 9/11 novel is succeeded by a fictional depiction of a historical event in *Son of Saul*. As demonstrated in the chapter on *Son of Saul*, the Holocaust film employs aesthetic techniques to convey the sense of not-knowing that structures existence in a death camp.

The interweaving of fiction and death, undertaken in all three contexts, has to do with fiction's giving of death. The giving of death undergoes a slight shift from the point of view of literary fiction, the stress on which is more pronounced in Burgess' novella

and Hamid's novel. The dystopian context points to a distinct grounding in literary fiction, which is enhanced via the muse-like role given to art forms, such as classical music. This role, projected by Alex, intersects with fiction in the interpretative sense and materializes as a probable fetish nurtured by the hoodlum. Although the 9/11 novel ostensibly moves from terror (the post-9/11 encounter) to narration, fiction is there from the start on account of suspicion, which, both instigated and cautioned against via the role of bearded lover, is also shown to be conditioned by Changez's readings of popular works of fiction (*Heart of Darkness*). The relation between literary and interpretative fiction is reflected on critically within the narrative, via Erica's admission of entangling Changez in her stories of Chris. She mirrors the narrator-protagonist with respect to her implication in the construction of be-longing, but she accounts for its violence, unlike Changez and the State, which, by means of the Ludovico Technique, also mirrors Alex's reliance on literary fiction.

The literary-interpretative overlap undertakes a slight shift in *Son of Saul*, in which the re-presentation of afterlife (fiction in the interpretative sense) not only comes uncomfortably close to the mortal condition, but is pursued on the basis of another interpretative fiction: a claim to paternity. Literary fiction plays a more subtle, implicit role - *within* the film - in the making of paternity and also makes itself felt on the inside by means of the "outside", as in through filming techniques and sound design. The film's strategy of crafting a confrontation with the fictiveness, or inaccessibility, of death reinforces the fictionalizing of truth by metafiction. However, the inaccessibility of death simultaneously undercuts the role of fiction, that is, when read from a Derridan

perspective, in which this feature of death reflects on the instability of representation and the limitations of language.

The problem of inaccessibility, highlighted in the corpus through the encounters with death and the inscrutable responses they elicit, ties in with the choice-no choice tension. Reading is also implicated in inaccessibility and its implication of no choice, primarily because it is subject to representation and also on account of the implied reader/viewer. The interpretation that this literary device is subjected to by the real reader/viewer renders it challenging to separate reading from interpretation. In any case, reading is on the inside-outside of fictional encounters with death, which arise and are responded to by the protagonists on the basis of a relational tension between interpretative and empirical violence. In making sense of these inscrutable responses, the reader/viewer, partially a construct because of the use of the implied reader/viewer, sinks deeper into the dilemma of "fiction", or giving death. This giving yields a certain return, in that it opens onto a greater awareness of the blind spot with respect to responding to the other.

In the metafictional works, the inaccessibility-no choice liaison opens onto a tension between reading and interpretation. In *A Clockwork Orange*, the sense of not-knowing that undermines the freedom of choice is conveyed through free will, which imposes the necessity of choosing between good and bad without revealing what constitutes good. Alex's choosing, out of ignorance, to undergo the torturous Ludovico Technique offers a grim version of free will. These re-presentations of free will are given courtesy of Nadsat, which gives meaning on the basis of what is fictive and draws heavily on sounds that the reader *senses* in bodily terms. The freedom and pleasure

instigated by the sensuality of Nadsat creates a conflict within the reader, who is faced with the difficulty of separating his/her pleasure in what is literary from Alex's joy in doing violence. For inaccessibility is at work in the construction of violence, which, imagined by the reader via invented words, renders it uncertain whether violence is actually being done, or is being projected onto the text. The fictive argot gives rise to a heightened awareness in the reader regarding the unavoidability and groundlessness of interpretative violence. The fictiveness of mainstream morality is also rendered obvious by Alex's volte-face at the end of the narrative.

The hoodlum's reversal gives inaccessibility an interesting turn from the point of view of accountability. Alex's commitment to marriage and fatherhood involves a betrayal of drooghood, which he conveniently projects as a condition manipulated by the State. That said, this betrayal gives away the blind spot that drives his decision to father a son. This betrayal not only encapsulates the "night of faith" undergone in the act of deciding, but makes it possible to witness the narrative's limitations. This is not the case in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, which absolves itself of accountability via a dangling ending. The non-ending functions as a death-like void that imposes self-reflexivity and its inaccessibility on the reader. This blindness pertaining to the self brings the problem of be-longing home to the reader.

Speaking of identity, the allegorizing of post-9/11 tensions via a troubled romantic equation splits the reader between interpretative possibilities. The simultaneous offering of terror and intimacy in the narrative still leaves the reader with a sense of something being withheld, or excluded. Like Nadsat, the imagery of terror, which disrupts Changez's account of intimacy, also oscillates between the projection of

meaning and actual sexual violence. What gives an edge to inaccessibility in the 9/11 novel is the accent on suspicion, which, on account of its conflation with fiction, foregrounds the constructedness (the agenda's) of the blind spot. Whereas inscrutability in the dystopian novella bears more directly on language itself, which is given a fictive form, the narration in Hamid's novel deals with the problem of otherness with respect to how it is fashioned (and by whom) in the context of what is known (English). This angle of familiarity reflects on how the narrative brings the fictiveness (inaccessibility) of identity to bear on intersubjective violence, as well as problems related to intimacy. Familiarity and intimacy are crucial in a context that raises the problem of interpretative violence in relation to terrorism, which is violence camouflaged as the everyday structure of life; it is not a conventional war, but a domesticated and anonymized form of conflict. Both inaccessibility and choicelessness are conveyed forcefully via the domestic, mundane dimension of terror.

Inaccessibility is also contrived in *Son of Saul*, but this constructedness does not have to do with identity, the "I" and its agendas, but pertains to death. For the strategy in the Holocaust film is subtly provocative, in that Saul's redemptive mission of burial, shown to pose the risk of death, fills the frame to the extent that actual violence perpetrated within the death camp is heard but not seen. In screening the viewer from violence, this technique is far more sensitive than Alex's projection of voyeuristic tendencies on the reader and Changez's implicating deployment of "you". However, the film's strategy, despite the difference in medium, is very similar to the dystopian novella and 9/11 novel; for its exclusion of graphic visuals instigates the viewer's imagination,

implicating him/her in the construction of violence for the sake of deconstructing responsibility.

The viewer's implication also has to do with the poignancy of "fiction", which derives from the making of paternity and the illusion of afterlife. The latter, which reflects on the viewer's mortal limitations, is given an intensely moving rendtion via the smile in the face of death. Saul gives the smile in response to what he imagines is a confirmation of his dead son's survival after death (afterlife). As such, the smile exemplifies the choicelessness of responding, which, in this particular form, gives a sense of relief to the viewer and destabilizes his/her critical reading of Saul's response. For death in the context of joy and satisfaction is irresistable. This particular ending, unlike the exacerbating one in the 9/11 novel, renders the viewer open to the blind spot. In a sense, this openness to a void can be read in the light of the viewer's encounter with free will, the way it is re-presented in *A Clockwork Orange*.

This conclusion has summarized the give and take between the metafictional works and Derrida's readings and re-readings of responsibility. It has also reflected on how the multi-relational research focus undergoes a shift from one fictional context to another. This shift represents a progression, one that offers a version of responding, or giving death, that reflects on the limitations of a critical reading of fiction's giving of death (that is, *my* study). Consistent with the giving of death that conditions representation, the readings that constitute this study would not have been possible without limitations.

The End of this study also opens onto two possible lines of inquiry. Given the potential fictiveness of God's call in Genesis 22, it could be worthwhile to investigate

ways in which religious narratives in the Torah, Bible and the Qur'an employ "fiction", in all three senses, to construct God's Word, or eternal truths. The Qur'anic narrative revolving around the wise man, Al-Khidr, and his demonstration of God's justice is one such instance, as illustrated in the introduction to this study. The second line of inquiry represents the possibility of investigating fictional reconstructions of Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac. It would be interesting to examine works of fiction in which what is deemed to be rigorously patriarchal about the religious narrative features in situations that give this patriarchal sense a new, perhaps progressive, meaning. Such an investigation could be inclusive of fictional works in which this patriarchal sense is radically reconfigured to expose the possibility of conservatism within liberal values.

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